

DISCOURSE FILLERS IN THE SPEECH OF FEREYDAN GEORGIANS

Eka Dadiani

*PhD in Philology, Associate Professor,
Akaki Tsereteli State University,
Head of the Scientific-Research Center of Kartvelology
named after Professor Tariel Putkaradze
e-mail: eka.dadiani@atsu.edu.ge
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-82>*

Giorgi Muliani

*PhD in Philology,
Akaki Tsereteli State University
e-mail: mulianisaid2@gmail.com
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8652-1006>*

Abstract. Fereydan Georgians, who have resided in the Fereydunshahr province of the Islamic Republic of Iran for over four centuries, frequently employ various types of discourse fillers in their speech (including sounds/syllables, pronouns, interjections, particles, words, phrases, pauses, etc.). The diversity and frequency of such fillers are primarily determined by the local bilingual environment and, respectively, Fereydan Georgians' low level of linguistic proficiency in their native language/dialect. Generally, fillers are common among the speakers lacking full mastery of their mother tongue, who use them to bridge conversational gaps through various means. In addition to linguistic competence, there are other factors (such as education level and psycholinguistic factors) that must be considered.

The Fereydan dialect actively utilizes Georgian lexical fillers. However, the long-term existence in a foreign linguistic environment led to the integration of foreign word forms (predominantly of Persian and occasionally Arabic origin). This phenomenon naturally occurs through the displacement and restriction of corresponding Georgian linguistic material.

Premised on the existing dialectological data and scholarly literature, this research analyzes the mechanisms of "pause-filling" in the speech of Fereydan Georgians, examining their formal, semantic, and functional properties. The Fereydan material is evaluated as opposed to the data from other Georgian dialects.

The empirical basis of this study consists of dialectal texts recorded by the authors in Georgian settlements of Fereydan during various periods. It also incorporates Fereydan speech samples recorded by other Georgian researchers, which have been published and integrated into the Georgian Dialect Corpus (corpora.co).

The analyzed material illustrates the current linguistic situation caused by the Georgian-Persian linguistic interference in Fereydan and highlights general trends of ongoing changes in the speech of Fereydan Georgians.

Keywords: Georgian dialects, Fereydan dialect, fillers.

Introduction. Fillers (an English linguistic term for sounds and words used in spoken conversation to bridge pauses) occur during the spontaneous speech process and are characteristic of oral discourse. Various linguistic means employed to fulfill the function of a filler contain: sounds/syllables, demonstrative pronouns, interjections, particles, words, phraseological units, jargon, and silent pauses (Turkia 2006: 118).

Adverbs are also found serving the same function. Additionally, the repetition of words and phrases is established, through which the speaker attempts to maintain communicative continuity and add naturalness and credibility to their speech. This functions as a strategic mechanism to mask disfluencies in speech production (Dadiani 2013: 18).

From the perspective of filler usage, different dialects present varying patterns. In this regard, the Fereydan dialect is of particular interest. The diversity and frequency of fillers in this dialect are substantially determined by the prevailing bilingual environment and the resulting low proficiency of Fereydan Georgians in their native tongue/dialect. As a general rule, fillers are more prevalent among the speakers who lack full mastery of their mother tongue and seek to bridge conversational pauses by various linguistic strategies. Alongside linguistic competence, there are other variables (such as educational background and psycholinguistic factors) that must be taken into consideration.

Studies regarding fillers in Georgian academic literature remains scarce. General discussions regarding the fillers characteristic of the Fereydan dialect have been presented in recently published works. D. Chkhubianishvili refers to **eme** as a hesitation particle (literally, “inability to recall” particle) (Chkhubianishvili 2012: 105). Cf. **emeni** – the notion of being unable to recall a word (Orbeliani 1991) in the monograph *The Fereydan Dialect of the Georgian Language* (2020) by M. Beridze and L. Bakuradze, where it states the following: “The primary reason for filler usage in Fereydan Georgian is a psycholinguistic factor. In a bilingual context, when the speaker's linguistic competence is limited, they attempt to fill the delay caused by inability to recall the following word with a filler. While searching for a word, the speaker may repeat the preceding word, prolong time with elongated vowels, or insert specific particles to avoid conversational awkwardness” (Beridze et al., 2020: 669).

Formal and functional-semantic analysis of the pronoun/filler **eme** in the Fereydan dialect is conducted in an article by E. Dadiani (Dadiani 2023). Based on both published and newly collected dialectal material, the author examines instances of the **eme** pronoun in Fereydan Georgian in comparison to other Georgian dialects (such as Ingilo, Imerkheuli, Taoan, etc.).

The present research aims at analyzing the mechanisms of pause-filling used in the speech of Fereydan Georgians, based on dialectal data and scholarly literature. It examines their formal, semantic, and functional characteristics and demonstrates the context and frequency of both indigenous Georgian and loanword fillers.

The research material includes dialectal records produced by the authors in the Georgian settlements of Fereydan during various periods. Furthermore, the study incorporates samples of Fereydan speech recorded by various Georgian researchers at different times, which are published and integrated into the Georgian Dialect Corpus (corpora.co).

Methods. In addressing the research objectives, several methodological approaches were exercised. Considering the specific nature of the subject, fieldwork method was employed to create direct audio and video recordings in the Georgian settlements of Fereydan during different periods. These recordings were subsequently transcribed into print format. The dialectal data were processed; the word forms relevant to the analysis were identified and classified. By applying the descriptive method, instances of usage and positions of fillers were registered; The systematized material was examined against the data from other Georgian dialects. Moreover, the comparative method facilitated the identification of points of convergence and divergence with the Persian language. Ultimately, by means of the analytical method, the study characterized the present state of filler usage in the Fereydan dialect.

Discussion. Based on their origin, we have categorized the fillers used in the speech of Fereydan Georgians into two groups: **1. Georgian** and **2. Foreign**.

1. Georgian Discourse Fillers

In the Fereydan dialect, **Georgian** words and phrases are frequently employed as fillers: **ra hkian / ra-ykian** (“what is it called”); **ra-aris tais** (misi) **sakheli?** (“what is its [his/her] name?”); **me ro gitkhra / me ro ken gitkhra’qe** (“if I tell you / as I told you”)/ **ra vibna** (“what should I say”); **ra vitsi / ar vitsi** (“I don’t know”), among others.

Adverbs such as **ekhla / akhla** (“now”) and **imashi / imashin** (“then/at that time”) are also used as fillers, as is the **particle** **kho** (“right/yes”).

During the speech process, while searching for the necessary word, speakers frequently resort to **the repetition of a word or phrase**.

In the Fereydan dialect, the pronoun **eme** is a prevalent pause-filler. It differs from the third-person demonstrative pronoun **es** (“this”) in both its morphological form and its functional-semantic purpose.

The declension paradigm of the pronoun **eme**:

Singular: **eme** (Nom.), **emem** (Erg.), **emes** (Dat.), **emes(i)** (Gen.), **emeyt/emet(i)** (Inst.), **emed** (Adv.), **eme** (Voc.).

Plural: **emeebi/emebi** (Nom.), **emeebma/emebma** (Erg.), **emeebis/emebs** (Dat.), **emeebis/emebis** (Gen.), **emeebit/emebit** (Inst.), **emeebad/emebad** (Adv.) (Dadiani 2023).

Cf. the declension forms of the demonstrative pronoun **es**:

Singular: **es/esa/ese** (Nom.), **eman/emam/emen** (Erg.), **emas** (Dat.), **emis** (Gen.), **emit(a)** (Inst.), **emad** (Adv.).

Plural: **eseni, emat; esebi, esebma, esebis(a), esebit...** (Beridze et al., 2020: 425-441).

In sentence construction, the filler-pronoun **eme** can be syntactically linked to both nouns and verbs.

a) Eme occurs in various syntactic positions. In the **singular**, it takes the corresponding case markers. It commonly attaches postpositions: **eme-chi, eme-chiga, eme-china** (in/inside), **eme-ze** (on), **eme-stan** (with/at), **eme-savit** (like), **eme-sqen** (towards), **eme-idan** (from).

The pronoun **eme** primarily forms the **plural** with the **-eb** suffix: **emebi / emeebi, emebma, emebis(a), emeebis(a), emeebit(a), emebad, emebo**.

Occasionally, archaic **n-type** (nartaniani) plural forms are also produced: **emeni, ement, emeno**.

The filler **eme** is well-known across various dialects of the Georgian language: Taoan, Imerkheuli (Dadiani 2013; 2015), Ingilo (Abashvili 2009: 177), Meskhetian, Upper Adjaran, and Tushetian (Ghlonti 1984).

Plural production using the **-eb** suffix has been noted in Imerkheuli, while **n-type** plural forms are attested in Ingilo, Taoan (Dadiani 2013; 2015), and Meskhetian (Ghlonti 1984).

Cf. In standard Georgian oral speech and other dialects, the pronouns **is(a) / igi** (“that”) are primarily used as singular fillers, while **isini / igeni** (and their oblique cases: **imat/igenma/imgenma, imat/igens/im-gens...**) are used in the plural (Dadiani 2020: 54-60).

b) In the Fereydan dialect, the pronoun **eme** is frequently used in combination with a verb. Particularly, **eme** links with the verb **kna** (“to do/make”), which appears in various persons, numbers, and screeves. With Series I (present/imperfect) forms, the pronoun **eme** takes the Dative case (marked by **-s**): **emes iks** (“does ‘this-filler’”), **emes ikmen** (“they do ‘this-filler’”). With Series II and III (aorist/perfect) forms, it stands in the Nominative case: **eme kna** (“did ‘this-filler’”), **eme knan** (“they did ‘this-filler’”), **eme giknia** (“you have done ‘this-filler’”).

From the cases examined, it is evident that the scope of usage for the pronoun-filler **eme** in Fereydan Georgian is quite broad. Similar patterns are attested in other Georgian dialects (Taoan, Imerkheuli, Meskhetian, Ingilo, etc.).

2. Foreign Discourse Fillers

Alongside Georgian words and phrases, the speech of Fereydan Georgians contains foreign linguistic material (primarily of Persian origin, and less frequently of Turkish and Arabic origin) serving as fillers. For example:

Yani – Entered Persian via Arabic. It means: 1. that is to say, i.e., namely (Elerdashvili 2012: 765).

Masalan / Masan – of Arabic origin, meaning: “for example” (Todua 2016: 210).

Khob – a Persian word with several pragmatic functions: confirming the audience’s opinion, expressing curiosity, or signaling a pause while waiting for a conversation to continue. It is used to seek affirmation or attract attention, to silence a speaker or halt an action. In some Persian dialects, it is also used to mean “good”, “fine”, or “okay” (Dehkhoda 1998, 6: 9487-8).

Kholasa – a loanword from Arabic (Dehkhoda 1998, 3: 9903). It means: 1. summary, abstract. 2. the main idea or essence. 3. in summary, generally, in a word (Elerdashvili 2012: 272).

Belakhara – an Arabic word meaning: “finally, at last, eventually” (Todua 2016: 31).

Be estelah / Bestelah – It consists of two parts: **be** (a Persian preposition) and **estelah** is an Arabic “word that, along with its basic meaning, has a specific technical or artistic meaning” (Amid 2010: 137). In the Persian-Georgian dictionary, **be-estelah** is defined as: 1. as they say, as is commonly said. 2. so-called; “in quotes” (Elerdashvili 2012: 78).

Arz mishad / Arz mishavad / Arz mishod – **Arz** is an Arabic loanword meaning “statement” (Dehkhoda 1998: 15807). It conveys several meanings: 1. oral statement; 2. request; 3. demonstration; 4. origin (Elerdashvili 2012: 467). In Fereydan Georgian, this expression is used as a filler meaning: “I am saying/stating.”

Arz konam / Arzi fkna – **Konam** is derived from the root **kardan**, meaning “to do” or “to make” (Elerdashvili 2012: 537). In Fereydan Georgian, it means “I am saying/stating.”

Farz kon – a Persian expression meaning: “imagine...” or “suppose...”

Folan/Felan – an Arabic word functioning as an ambiguous pronoun (Dehkhoda 1998, 11: 17203). **Folan** 1. unknown; 2. so-and-so / such-and-such (Elerdashvili 2012: 499).

Albatta/Albatte – an Arabic word meaning “of course” or “by all means” (Elerdashvili 2012: 52).

Bad/Ba’d – a loanword from Arabic. It means: “next,” “then,” or “afterward” (Todua 2016: 38).

Conclusion. In closing, fillers occupy a significant place in the speech of Fereydan Georgians. Georgian word forms, both standard and dialectal, are widely used in the dialect. However, as a result of long-term existence within a foreign linguistic environment, foreign/borrowed filler words (of Persian and Arabic origin) have emerged and are gradually becoming established. Naturally, this process occurs at the cost of restriction and displacement of comparable Georgian linguistic material. The analyzed data clearly reflects the current linguistic situation arising from Georgian-Persian linguistic interference in Fereydan and highlights the general trends of ongoing evolutionary changes in the speech of Fereydan Georgians.

Reference and Sources

- Abashvili, V. (2009). Ingilo dialect of the Georgian language. Tbilisi. Publishing House “Meridiani”.
- Amid, Hasan. (1389) 2010: Farhang-e Amid, Tehran: pres. Rah-e roshd.
- Beridze, M., Bakuradze, L. (2020). A Fereydani Dialect of the Georgian Language. Tbilisi. Publishing House “Meridiani”.
- Dadiani, E. (2013). Pronoun *eme* in Imerkhevan and Taoan. XXXIII Dialectological scientific session. Gori. P. 18-20.
- Dadiani, E. (2015). For peculiarities of III person (demonstrative) pronouns in Tao dialect. Annual of Kutaisi scientific Library, VII. Kutaisi.

- Dadiani, E. (2023). The pronoun *eme* in the Fereydani Dialect (Formal and functional-semantic analysis Materials of the International Scientific Conference - Black Sea Region at the crossroads of civilizations, II. Batumi. p. 121-133. <https://nbi.openjournals.ge/index.php/nbi/article/view/7861/7819>
- Dadiani, E. (2020). Pronoun-fillers in Lower Imereti (according to Okribul speech). Proceedings of the XL Republican Dialectological Session. Tbilisi. TSU Publishing House. pp. 54-61.
- Dehxoda, Ali akbar. (1998). Loqat name (Dictionary). vol. . 3. Tehran: pres. University of Tehran.
- Dehxoda, Ali akbar. (1998). Loqat name (Dictionary). vol. . 6. Tehran: pres. University of Tehran.
- Dehxoda, Ali akbar. (1998). Loqat name (Dictionary). vol. . 11. Tehran: pres. University of Tehran.
- Elerdashvili, A. (2012). Persian-Georgian Dictionary. Tbilisi. Publishing House "Universal".
- Fereidani material (2016-2023). material recorded individually by the authors of the article during the dialectological expedition in Fereidan (stored at the Prof. Taniel Putkaradze Scientific and Research Center of Kartvelology of the Georgian State University and in their personal archives).
- Georgian Dialect Corpus. <http://corpora.co/#/corpus>. 22.07.2023.
- Chkhubianishvili, D. (2012). Linguistic Letters. Tbilisi. TSU Publishing House.
- Glonti, A. (1984). Dictionary of Georgian Dialects. Tbilisi. Publishing House "Education".
- Martirosov, A. (1964). Pronouns in the Georgian Languages. Tbilisi. Publishing House of the Academy of Sciences of the Georgian.
- Orbeliani, S.-S. (1991). Georgian Dictionary, t. I. Tbilisi. Publishing House "Merani".
- Paghava, M., Tsintsadze M., Makaridze E., Diasamidze R., Tandilava, L. (2005). Taoian speech samples. Collection of Batumi University, IV. Batumi: "Batumi University Publishing House".
- Putkaradze, Sh. (1993). Georgian of Our Time, Book One. Batumi. Adjara Journal-Newspaper Publishing House.
- Todua, M. (1975). Georgian-Persian Etudes, Vol. II. Fereydnian texts (pp. 29-111) Tbilisi. Publishing House "Metsniereba".
- Todua, Kh. (2016). Persian-Georgian Dictionary. Tbilisi. Publishing House "Intellect".
- Turkia, T. (2006). Means of Filling text pause. Journal Kartvelian Heritage, Vol. X. Kutaisi. "Akaki Tsereteli State University Publishing House".
- Turkish-Georgian Dictionary (2001). Turkish-Georgian Dictionary, edited by L. Chlaidze. Istanbul.