

SOME PHONETIC FEATURES OF THE SPEECH OF GHORJOMI GORGE

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Abstract: Observing and studying active linguistic processes in dialects is always necessary and innovative for linguistics. Dialects often preserve elements that appear to be forgotten in literary Georgian. In this regard, local research on a dialect is of particular importance, as it provides a more complete picture of its linguistic characteristics.

This paper discusses the phonetic features of the speech of the inhabitants of Ghorjomi—one of the most interesting and characteristic gorges of the Upper Adjarian sub-dialect—focusing on its phonetic inventory and certain sound changes. The research subject consists of authentic oral speech samples recorded during direct fieldwork in the Ghorjomi Gorge. The features identified through observation and analysis of these samples are comparatively analyzed alongside data from other Southern dialects and Kartvelian dialect groups.

The paper investigates phonetic units such as α , $\hat{y}$ [u], the neutral sound $\mathfrak{z}$, and the pharyngeal y [q] as a fricative allophone of the abruptive y [q]. Attention is focused on their position and patterns of usage. The research reveals that in oral speech, the full vowels α and $\hat{y}$ [w] are more frequently used compared to the sounds i and u .

Key words: *phonetic inventory, phoneme, semi-vowel, full vowel, $\mathfrak{z}$ (neutral vowel), pharyngeal sound, assimilation.*

Methodology: Taking into account the specificity of the research topic, various research methods have been used in the working process. Among them, the fieldwork method; the study is based on the live speech samples recorded by us during field expeditions in the Ghorjomi Gorge. The material is obtained through interviews and targeted dialogues. The method of processing, analysis, description, evaluation, and comparison of empirical material is also used in the work.

Similar to other dialects of the Georgian language, the speech of the Ghorjomi Gorge within the Upper Adjarian sub-dialect contains the semi-vowel α [y], the non-syllabic $\hat{y}$ [w], the neutral sound $\mathfrak{z}$, and the pharyngeal y [q].

As is well known, historically, the semi-vowel α constituted a phoneme in the sound system of Old Georgian. In the modern Georgian literary language, α [y] is no longer a phoneme; however, it is preserved in dialects and functions primarily as a reflex of the vowel i . The sound α [y] is found in the Adjarian dialect of Ghorjomi speech in the following positions:

In the nominative case, following stems ending in the vowels a , e , o , and occasionally u .

According to our observations, the semi-vowel α [y] is acoustically close to the full vowel i , making them very difficult to distinguish. Based on the recorded material, we observe that in Ghorjomi speech, the full vowel i is more widely used in the nominative case of vocalic stems compared to α [y]. Establishing a strict phonetic rule governing the parallel distribution of i and α [y] is challenging.

In the Adjarian dialect, specifically in the Upper Adjarian sub-dialect, the use of *i* parallel to α [y] as a nominative case marker for vocalic stems is also discussed in Georgian linguistic literature. "The α [y] preserved in Georgian dialects is not very far from the full vowel *i*, whereas the Chan α [y] is a sharply pronounced semi-vowel" (Nogaideli, 1960, p. 10). M. Khubua identifies the full vowel *i* as the nominative case ending in Upper Adjarian (Khubua, 1932, p. 7).

Several cases were identified where *i* || [y] is used instead of the dative case marker. A similar phenomenon is characteristic of other Georgian dialects as well. As is known, α [y] occurs in a similar position in the Klarjeti dialect (Paghava M, M., & m., 2023, p. 9). The use of α instead of the dative case suffix is also characteristic of Kartlian and the Qiziqi sub-dialect of the Kakhetian dialect (Jorbenadze, 1989, pp. 292, 316).

The sound α [y] occurs in vocalic, non-truncating stems as a result of the weakening of the vocalic part *i* of the genitive (-is) and instrumental (-it) case suffixes. Among the Southern dialects, the sound α is also found in this position in Taoan and Klarjetian. In vocalic stems, α appears as a reflex of the vowel *i* in the genitive and instrumental cases in Gurian, Lechkhumian, and Rachian, whereas Kartlian exhibits this feature only in the genitive case (Jorbenadze, 1989, p. 292).

In Ghorjomi speech, as in all Southern dialects, α [y] is preserved in loanwords of foreign origin, forming an ascending diphthong. A similar feature is also characteristic of other Southern dialects.

Ghorjomi speech naturally replicates the general phonetic characteristics of the Adjarian dialect. Often, α [y] is a phonetic variant of the verb-final vowel *i*; the dialectal variants of the verbs *modi* (come) and *tsadi* (go) are represented as *moi* || *mo α* [*moy*], *tsai* || *tsa α* [*tsay*], *gada α* [*gaday*], and *gadmo α* [*gadmoy*] forms.

As noted, establishing a strict rule for the distribution of the *i* and α [y] sounds is challenging. However, our observations suggest that the use of α [y] is significantly less frequent compared to the full vowel *i*.

The non-syllabic $\hat{\gamma}$ [w]. Similar to other Southern dialects, the Ghorjomi speech of the Adjarian dialect has preserved the non-syllabic $\hat{\gamma}$ [w], which occurs infrequently and appears to be the result of phonetic transformation. The sound $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] is attested in Ghorjomi speech in environments predicted by Old Georgian phonology. Specifically, $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] does not occur word-initially; it follows a consonant and can appear word-medially or word-finally (Shanidze, 1976, p. 20).

The sound $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] appears as a reflex of the consonant *v* when *v* is positioned between a vowel and a consonant.

In individual cases, $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] is derived from the narrowing of the vowel *o*.

The variation $\hat{\gamma}$ || *u* in Ghorjomi speech is frequently the result of changes in the "oa", "ov", and "ova" complexes.

Observation of these examples suggests that the mid-vowel *o* within the "oa", "ov", and "ova" complexes undergoes further narrowing, transforming into the non-syllabic $\hat{\gamma}$ [w]. Our recorded dialectal data and its analysis allow us to identify this phenomenon and compare it with both Adjarian and other Georgian dialects. In his linguistic review of Upper Adjaria, M. Khubua argues that the "va" complex yields *u*. A similar phenomenon is confirmed by Sh. Putkaradze in the speech of Adjarian Muhajirs. Numerous opinions have been expressed in Georgian linguistic literature regarding the tendency of the *oa* || *ova* complex to transform into $\hat{\gamma}$ || [wa] in both Eastern and Western dialects.

According to our observations, $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] is rarely heard in the speech of Ghorjomi residents, whereas the use of the syllabic *u* is systemic. Thus, it can be concluded that $\hat{\gamma}$ [w] is on the path to extinction in Ghorjomi.

The neutral sound γ . As is known, the neutral vowel γ is documented in several villages of Upper Adjaria and, based on our field data, was recorded in only a couple of instances in the speech of elderly residents in the Ghorjomi Gorge.

In the foundations of general phonetics, G. Akhvlediani calls ɔ a neutral, irrational sound and classifies it as a central vowel. Linguistic literature notes that ɔ appears when harmonic consonant clusters characteristic of Georgian are not formed, serving to simplify pronunciation (*ghorjɔmuli, tsxɔra...*). In Adjarian, M. Khubua identifies ɔ in words where consonant clusters occur in close succession; during such instances, the sound ɔ emerges between the consonants (Khubua, 1932, p. 7).

Among the Southern dialects, the sound ɔ is identified in Shavshetian and Adjarian. "It is either an anaptyctic vowel or an allomorph of another sound" (Pagava M., 2017, p. 14)

It is widely believed that the presence of the ɔ sound is one of the features that facilitates the general trend toward vocalization, which is clearly noticeable in Ghorjomi speech.

The pharyngeal y [q]. From an acoustic-articulatory perspective, the sound y [q] in the speech of elderly Ghorjomi residents attracts significant interest. Observation of live speech shows that the sound y [q] is pronounced in the pharynx not as an abruptive/stop, as would be expected, but with a spirant-like friction. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable when the sound y [q] is positioned word-initially.

There is no consensus in scientific literature regarding the occlusion of the y [q] sound. In the foundations of general phonetics, it is stated that "during the onset of y [q], a spirant-like friction is produced, and it appears that y [q] is spirantoid" (Akhvlediani, 1999, p. 90). However, the author ultimately places y [q] in the category of stops in the consonant chart. S. Zhghenti, T. Gamkrelidze, and T. Uturgaidze also consider y to be a spirantoid. Conversely, some linguists class this sound as a stop (A. Shanidze, G. Dolidze, H. Vogt, etc.), though some among them believe that y [q] attested in intervocalic positions is a fricative/spirantoid allophone of a stop. T. Putkaradze considers y [q] to be a glottalized and simultaneously occlusive sound. In his view, y [q] is pronounced like the aspirate consonant â [kh] on the posterior pharyngeal wall with the release of occlusion upon the approximation of the tongue root (Putkaradze T., 2014, p. 77).

Our observations of Ghorjomi live speech clearly highlight cases where the y [q] sound is pharyngeal and represents a fricative/spirantoid allophone of the glottalized abruptive y [q].

Ghorjomi speech does not exhibit any specific phonetic transformations that differ significantly from other Southern dialects; therefore, we will not dwell on them at this time. Instead, we will focus on a specific view expressed in modern linguistic literature concerning the process of assimilation in Southern dialects.

It is well established that the transformation of vocalic complexes in Southern dialects proceeded as follows: $\text{au} > \text{uu}$, $\text{dau} > \text{duu}$, $\text{gau} > \text{guu}$, $\text{chau} > \text{chuu}$, $\text{tsau} > \text{tsuu}$, $\text{sheu} > \text{Shuu}$, $\text{mou} > \text{muu}$ — this transformation is based on complete regressive assimilation (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University Faculty of Humanities Centre for Kartvelian Studies, 2020, p. 710). It has been noted that in Southern dialects, particularly in Taoan, this transformation goes further — the complex simplifies, yielding a monophthong: $\text{uu} > \text{u}$ (*duutsera > dutsera*). This simplification is attributed to the dissimilative loss of the vowel. According to our observations, in Ghorjomi speech, this process halts at the double-vowel stage, and the following types of transformations are recorded: $\text{au} > \text{ou} > \text{uu}$ (*gauchina > gouchina > guuchina*); $\text{eu} > \text{ou} > \text{uu}$ (*sheurchevdi > shourchevdi > shuurchevdi*); $\text{iu} > \text{uu}$ (*miutandit > muutandit*); $\text{ou} > \text{uu}$ (*mougeb > muugeb*).

Conclusion: Observation and analysis of the phonetic features of Ghorjomi speech have shown that the semi-vowel ɔ [y] and the non-syllabic ɟ [w] are still active, though they are used less frequently compared to the full vowels i and u . In the speech of elderly residents, the neutral vowel ɔ was documented in only a couple of instances as an anaptyctic sound. The pharyngeal y [q] was confirmed, representing a fricative/spirantoid allophone of the glottalized abruptive y [q]. The process of vocalic complex assimilation ($\text{au} > \text{uu}$, $\text{dau} > \text{duu}$) stops at this stage in Ghorjomi speech, and further transformation (monophthongization) is not observed.

The analysis of phonetic features and comparison with other dialects reveal that Ghorjomi speech, along with Upper Adjarian, is closely linked to the Southern Georgian dialects. At the same time, due to the presence of similar phonetic transformations, it converges with both Western and Eastern Georgian dialects.

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