

CLIMBING THE MOUNTAIN OF LANGUAGES: LANGUAGE LEARNING IN GEORGIA

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Abstract

In 2008, CRRC-Georgia and the American Councils conducted a small online census among mostly English-native, engaged expatriates who are either currently living in Georgia, or did so in the past. The questions were about attitudes toward and aptitude for learning Georgian or Russian, and the importance of these languages in Georgia. With 90 completed questionnaires the number of respondents was small, and the findings cannot be generalized to cover the whole expatriate community. However, they provide insight into the incentives to language learning, and the importance of Georgian and Russian for foreigners in Georgia. The results show that Georgian is important for daily life in Georgia, while Russian is more useful in a professional context. On average, the respondents have a better level in Russian than in Georgian. In addition, knowing one language did not keep the respondents from learning the other: 87 percent of the respondents with Russian skills also know some Georgian.

Keywords: Georgia, Language, Russian, Georgian, Expatriates, Tbilisi

Introduction: Language Learning in Georgia

In winter 2008, CRRC together with the American Councils conducted a small online census among mostly English-native, engaged expatriates who are either currently living in Georgia, or did so in the past. The respondents were asked questions about their attitudes toward and aptitude for learning Georgian or Russian, and the importance of these languages in Georgia. With 90 completed questionnaires the number of respondents was quite small. The findings can thus hardly be generalized to cover the whole heterogeneous expatriate community in Georgia. However, they provide interesting insights into incentives to language learning, and the importance of Georgian and Russian for foreigners in Georgia.

The data indicates that while Georgian is very important for living in Georgia, Russian is more useful in a professional context. This could explain why, on average, the respondents – many of whom have worked in different countries – have a better level in Russian than in Georgian. As these languages serve in different domains, knowing one did not keep the respondents from learning the other: 87 percent of the respondents with Russian skills know some Georgian as well.

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Which Language to Speak in Georgia?

According to the respondents, knowledge of Georgian or Russian is very important in all aspects of life in Georgia. While they deem basic Georgian to be more useful than Russian in everyday situations, they have a better level of Russian than Georgian, on average. The gap between Georgian and Russian skills was especially apparent in the higher proficiency levels, as very few respondents have advanced Georgian skills, compared with about a third of the Russian learners. The respective language skills also seem to correlate with the amount of time put into studying: those who learn Russian had invested more time in their language studies than those learning Georgian.

Communicating in Georgia

The majority of the respondents constantly or regularly interacts (or interacted¹) with people who do not speak their first language. Therefore, knowing one of the two predominant local languages – Georgian and Russian – is very important for social life and work in Georgia. Moreover, many of the respondents agree that basic proficiency in either Russian or Georgian is very helpful for performing the tasks of daily life in Georgia. Overall, Georgian was perceived to be more useful than Russian in this regard, although around 20 percent think that either way, some difficulties in communicating remain.

While the teaching of English is on the rise throughout the Georgian educational system, Russian is still the predominant second language in society. As of 2009, data from the CRRC's Data Initiative (DI) show that even in Tbilisi – where most foreigners live – a full 60 percent of the population has no English knowledge at all, whereas only 4 percent do not know any Russian. In the coming years, however, these figures are likely to shift, as young Georgians tend to know English better than the older generation: while only 16 percent of all Georgians over the age of 30 know at least elementary English, 54 percent of those between 18 and 30 say the same.² Therefore, the average foreigner still has a strong need for Russian or Georgian if he wants to communicate with the Georgian population.

About 84 percent of the respondents have to communicate in Russian or Georgian frequently. Forty-seven percent of the respondents say that they “constantly” interact with Georgians who do not speak their first language. Another 37 percent say they do so at least “regularly”. Fourteen percent of the respondents say that they only “occasionally” interact with a Georgian who does not know their first language. Only 2 percent say that they rarely or never do.

¹ At the time of the study, 57 percent of the respondents no longer lived in Georgia. For the sake of readability, however, from now on only the present tense will be used. For more information about the census' population, see respective section at the end.

² The Data Initiative (DI) is an ongoing project by CRRC that aims at gathering reliable quantitative data about public opinion on politics, healthcare, economics and other topics throughout the South Caucasus. It is carried out annually in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

About two-thirds of the respondents say that knowing some Russian or Georgian is crucial in Georgia, and it seems that it is even more important in a professional context than for social life. Nine percent think that local languages are essential for personal and recreational activities, and 60 percent say that they are very important. Another 31 percent of the respondents state that some knowledge of Russian or Georgian is at least moderately important for living in Georgia. No respondent said that it was not very important or entirely unnecessary. For the professional context, 25 percent say that knowing Russian or Georgian is essential. Forty-seven percent think that knowing one of the local languages is very important, and 27 percent deem it moderately important. Only 2 percent think that Russian or Georgian proficiency is entirely unnecessary to pursue a professional career in Georgia.

Most respondents thought that without basic Russian or Georgian, performing the tasks of daily life in Georgia is rather difficult. Knowing elementary Russian and especially Georgian, however, makes it much easier to get by.

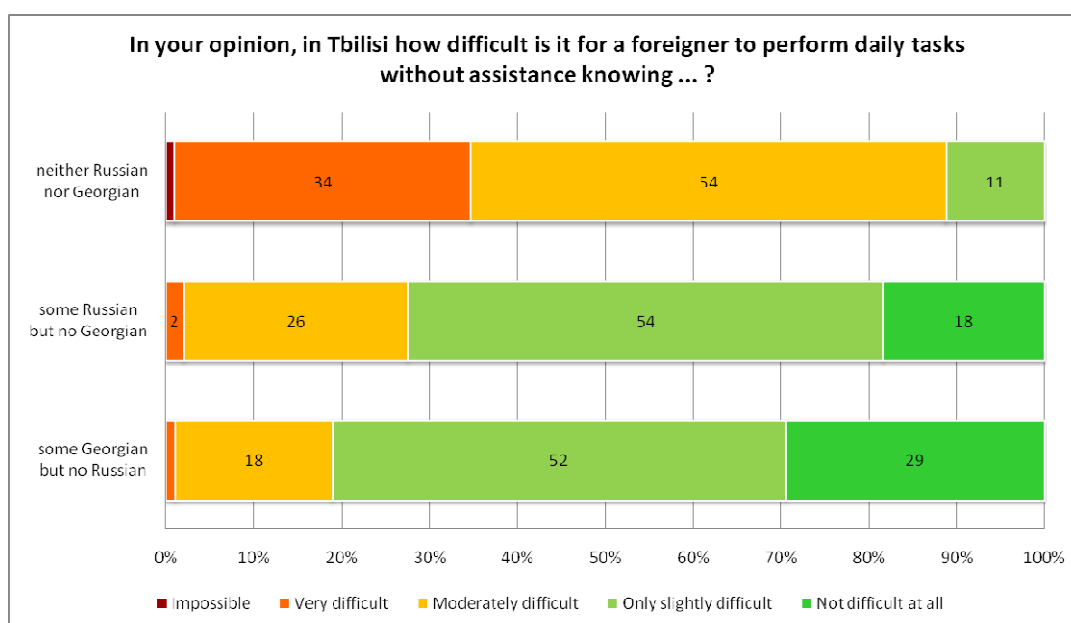


Figure 1: Daily life in Georgia and language abilities

Without Russian or Georgian skills, most agree, daily life in Georgia is difficult. One respondent thinks that it is impossible to get by without any knowledge of these two languages. About a third deem it at least very difficult (34 percent). Fifty-four percent think that it is moderately difficult to perform the tasks of daily life without any Russian or Georgian. About 11 percent of the respondents say that it is only slightly difficult, and no respondents said that it is not difficult at all.

According to the respondents, knowing basic Russian is very helpful when performing the tasks of daily life in Georgia. Eighteen percent think that basic Russian helps to an extent that daily life in Georgia is no longer difficult at all. Fifty-four percent say that it is only slightly difficult. Another

twenty-six percent say that with some Russian, it is still moderately difficult to get by in Georgia. Two percent say that it remains very difficult. No respondent thought that performing the tasks of daily life in Georgia is impossible for those who speak no Georgian, but some Russian.

Basic knowledge of Georgian was perceived to be even more helpful than Russian in daily life, and most respondents think that only some obstacles remain once Georgian basics are acquired. About a third (30 percent) say that for someone who knows some Georgian, there are no more difficulties in getting by in Georgia. Over half of the respondents say that daily life is only slightly difficult under these circumstances. Eighteen percent think that it is still moderately difficult. One respondent says that performing the tasks of daily life is very difficult, even with some Georgian skills.

Most respondents regularly communicate in languages other than English, and Georgian was generally perceived to be more useful than Russian for daily life in Georgia. Does the language learning patterns, and the respondents' achieved proficiencies, reflect this?

Closing the Language Gap

All of the respondents know either some Russian or Georgian, and three quarters have skills in both. About the same number of respondents say they have started learning Georgian (88 percent) or Russian (84 percent), but there are much fewer advanced Georgian than Russian speakers among them. This correlates with the amount of time invested in focused study of the respective language, which is on average much higher for those studying Russian than for the Georgian learners.

While about one third of the Russian learners fall in each of the proficiency categories – beginner, intermediate, advanced – only very few of the Georgian learners have attained the highest level. All of the respondents know either some Russian or Georgian, and 73 percent have at least a basic proficiency in both languages. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents have some skills in Georgian, and 84 percent know some Russian. To make comparisons easier, the respondents were grouped into three proficiency categories, according to their skills in each language:

- **Beginners** are those who have achieved at least an elementary proficiency in either spoken or read Georgian or Russian. Thirty-two percent of the Russian learners and 53 percent of those who are studying Georgian are on this level. Of all participants, 47 percent are beginners of Georgian, and 27 percent are beginners of Russian.
- Respondents qualified as **intermediate** learners of a language if they have at least a limited working proficiency in spoken or read Georgian or Russian. This group makes up 35 percent of all Russian learners and 42 percent of all Georgian learners. Twenty-nine percent of all respondents fall into the intermediate category when it comes to Russian language skills, and 37 percent of them have an intermediate knowledge of Georgian.

- The **advanced** group comprises those who speak or read the respective language at a superior professional proficiency level. While 33 percent of all Russian learners have attained this level, only 5 percent of the students of Georgian can say the same. Of the census population, 28 percent fall into the advanced category with regard to their Russian skills, and 4 percent master Georgian on the highest possible level.

People learning Russian have spent considerably more time on focused study of their language than those studying Georgian, and they are four times as likely to have invested 1,000 hours or more in acquiring their language skills.³ On average, the respondents say they logged 1,446 hours on either self-study or taught courses for Russian (median: 300 hours), compared with an average of 310 hours for those who study Georgian (median: 100 hours). At the top end the difference in investment is especially striking: forty percent of all Russian learners have studied for 1,000 hours or more, and only 9 percent of the Georgian learners say the same.

**How many HOURS in total would you say you have spent studying ... (either taught or focused self-study)?
 (One week of intensive full-day study - in places like Indiana or Middlebury - counting as 30 hours.)**

		Georgian			Russian		
		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	6	7.0	7.0	2	2.5	2.5
	Up to 50	21	24.4	31.4	13	16.3	18.8
	Up to 200	26	30.2	61.6	15	18.8	37.5
	Up to 1000	25	29.1	90.7	18	22.5	60.0
	More than 1000	8	9.3	100.0	32	40.0	100.0
	Total	86	100.0		80	100.0	
Missing	Native speaker	0			1		
	System	27			32		
	Total	27			33		
Total		113			113		

Table 1: Respondents' study efforts for Georgian and Russian

Even though Georgia's national language is Georgian, and it is thought to be more helpful in Georgian daily life, a majority of the respondents seem to have made a greater effort to learn Russian. Which are the factors that facilitate this decision?

³ These numbers are approximate. Due to a configuration error in the survey software, the respondents were not only able to enter numerals, but also strings in response to this question. For more detailed information on the conversion applied, please see the *Methodology* section in the Annex.

The Role of Russian and Georgian for Foreigners

The data indicate that differences in both supply and demand for language skills can explain the respondents' lower levels of proficiency in Georgian. On the supply side, many respondents had prior knowledge of Russian when they came to Georgia. Furthermore, Georgian might be harder to acquire, both in terms of language difficulty and the availability of opportunities to learn in a structured environment. With regard to the demand, it seems likely that Georgian is frequently chosen to improve social and everyday life in Georgia, whereas Russian is often seen as an asset in professional life, and is also valuable outside Georgia.

Acquiring Languages

A majority of the respondents had prior professional experiences in post-Soviet countries before coming to Georgia. Therefore, it is likely that many already had some Russian skills when they arrived, especially since there are numerous programs abroad that teach Russian, but relatively few that teach Georgian. Georgian also seems to be harder to learn than Russian, as learners of Georgian assessed their language skills on average lower than Russian speakers with a comparable amount of prior study.

Throughout the post-Soviet space, Russian is still widely used as a commercial and professional language, and 69 percent of the respondents had prior experiences of living in this region for professional reasons and for more than two weeks. Russia had been the main destination, with 49 percent of all respondents having been there. It is followed by Armenia and Azerbaijan (together 40 percent). Twenty-six percent had been to Central Asia, and 21 percent had experiences in Belarus, Moldova or Ukraine. The Baltic countries were a prior destination for 10 percent of the respondents. Since demand for Russian tends to be higher than for Georgian in the professional world, supply for Russian courses is also much more developed. The teaching of Russian has a long-standing tradition amongst Western universities, even outside linguistics classes, as it is important for a variety of disciplines. Georgian, however, is primarily taught in the context of linguistics or specific language courses. For example, according to the University of Minnesota, there are currently only three US universities (University of Chicago, Indiana University and Columbia University) that offer Georgian courses in the classroom.⁴

Moreover, once someone decides to learn Georgian and finds an appropriate learning environment, it becomes apparent that Georgian can be a difficult language to learn. According to the U.S. Department of State's language service, it is even more difficult than Russian. They classify both languages on the same difficulty level (the second highest), which includes languages that require in average 1,100 hours of class work to attain an intermediate proficiency. Georgian, however, is additionally marked as

⁴ See the University of Minnesota's database at <http://www.carla.umn.edu/lcl/db/?menu=006>. Accessed on April 13, 2010, search keyword: "Georgian".

more difficult than the other languages of this category. Thus, it is effectively placed between the second-highest and the highest difficulty level, which includes languages like Mandarin and Arabic.⁵

Overall, respondents who learn Georgian have less confidence in their language skills compared with those who have studied Russian for a comparable amount of time. While 9 percent of the Georgian learners have invested more than 1,000 hours, none was confident enough to claim an advanced proficiency. Instead, their responses place all of them into the intermediate category. Of those who have studied Russian for 1,000 hours or more, 66 percent claim an advanced proficiency, and a further 31 percent have achieved an intermediate level. One respondent with 1,000 hours or more of Russian studies says he is still on a beginner's level. Among those who have invested between 200 and 1,000 hours into their Georgian studies, 12 percent deem to have achieved an advanced proficiency. Again, those who have studied Russian for a comparable amount of time seem to be more confident in their skills, as 28 percent of them are in the highest category.

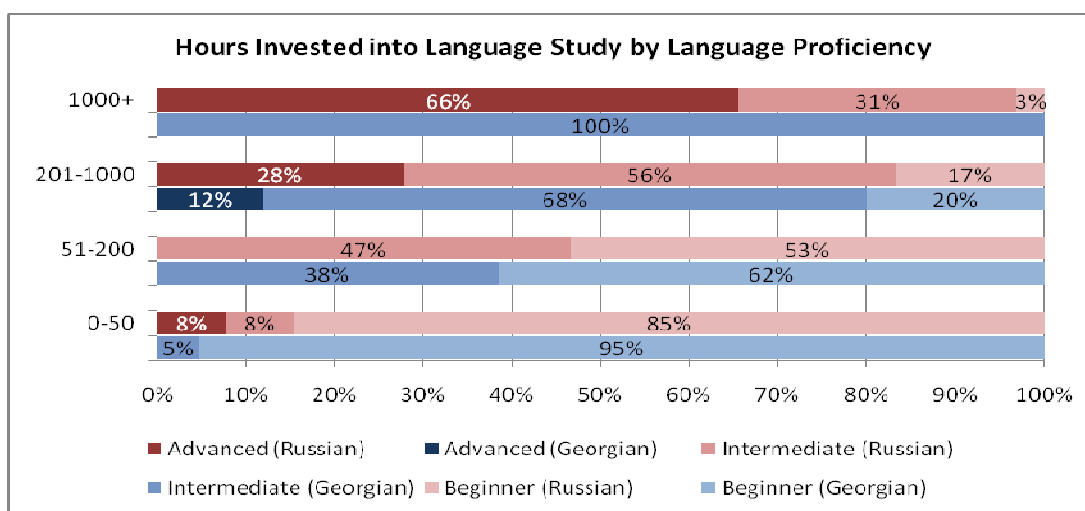


Figure 2: Hours invested into language study by language proficiency

While a high proficiency is rarely attained, some respondents were able to pick up basic Georgian without formal study. About 7 percent of all respondents knowing some Georgian state that they have not invested time into focused study. Learners of Russian arguably do not have equal possibilities to pick up their language in Georgia, and only 3 percent of them said the same.

Many respondents probably knew some Russian when they came to Georgia, and Georgian is more difficult to learn. So what are some of the incentives for studying Georgian nonetheless?

⁵ See the Foreign Service Institute's classification at <http://web.archive.org/web/20071014005901/http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/months/november/learningExpectations.html>. (Accessed on April 15, 2010).

Incentives for Language Learning

According to the data, Georgian is often chosen to facilitate the daily life in Georgia, and Russian is more frequently seen as a professional asset. While achieving an advanced proficiency for professional and personal use is a goal more common among the Russian learners, those studying Georgian are often satisfied with mastering informal conversations, or have no specific long-term goals at all. Family ties also play a role, as respondents with a Georgian partner have invested more time in their study, have higher ambitions and, overall, a slightly higher level of proficiency. In addition, presumably because they serve in different domains, knowing one language did not prevent respondents from learning the other one as well.

Many of the Georgian learners had no long-term goals with regard to their abilities, or said that mastering informal conversations would be sufficient, whereas many Russian learners intended to achieve higher levels of proficiency. Of those who are learning Georgian, 36 percent said they intend to achieve near-native or an advanced proficiency. Sixty-one percent of the Russian learners said the same. Developing their skills for use in their personal life seemed to be more common among those studying Georgian: being able to have regular informal conversations in public and with friends, co-workers or family was the main goal for 27 percent of the Georgian learners and 17 percent of those studying Russian. A full 30 percent of those learning Georgian said that they have no long-term goals with their language ability, while only 11 percent of the Russian learners said the same.

The data show that respondents with exceptionally strong social ties to Georgia, as indicated by the presence of a Georgian significant other, tend to be more ambitious with regard to their Georgian-language skills. Twenty-five percent of the respondents actually had a Georgian significant other at the time of the study. Thirty-eight percent of them said that they intended to gain an advanced or near-native proficiency in Georgian, compared with 28 percent of those without such a partner. Regular informal conversations were the goal for 33 percent of all those respondents with a Georgian significant other, and for 22 percent of those without one. About 29 percent of those with a Georgian partner either have no long-term goal for their Georgian-language ability or do not intend to engage in more than the occasional interaction in shops and public venues. Amongst those who do not have a Georgian significant other, 50 percent said the same.

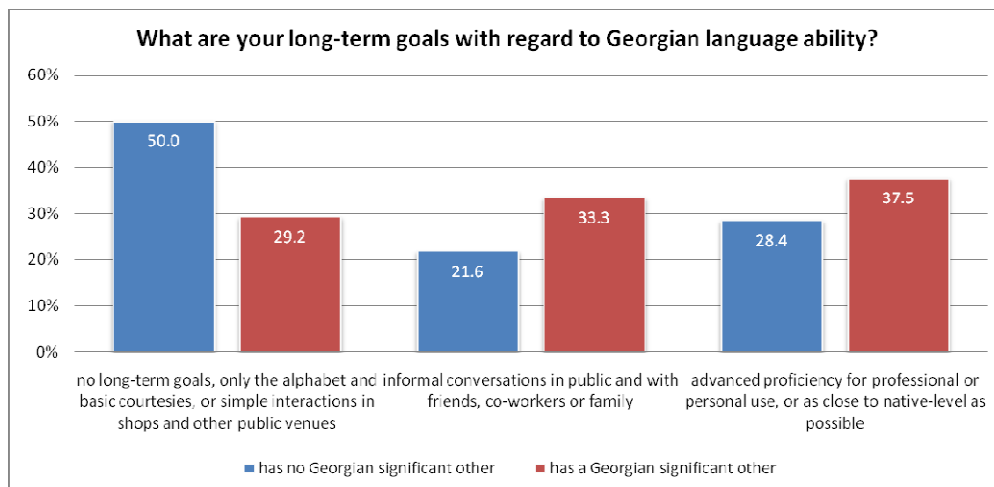


Figure 3: Long-term goals with Georgian abilities by presence of a Georgian significant other

Those with a Georgian partner had also invested more time in their focused language study than other respondents. On average, they had studied Georgian for about 374 hours, compared to 288 hours for those without a Georgian significant other (median: 100 hours for both groups). They were three times as likely to have invested more than 1,000 hours in their language skills (18 percent compared to 6 percent). About 5 percent of those with a Georgian significant other, and 8 percent of those have not engaged in formal study of the language.

The overall higher effort in language learning among those with a Georgian partner compared with the others correlates to a slightly higher proficiency in Georgian. Regarding advanced speakers, both groups (those with Georgian partners and those without) were about the same, with 4 percent falling into this category. About 42 percent of those with a Georgian partner had an intermediate proficiency, compared with 35 percent in the other group. Respondents with at least a beginner's level of Georgian were also slightly more common among those with a Georgian partner, with 50 percent compared with 47 percent of those without one. Furthermore, only 4 percent of those with a Georgian partner had no Georgian skills at all, whereas of those without such a partner, 14 percent said the same.

As there seem to be different incentives for learning Russian or Georgian, knowing either language generally did not prevent the respondents from learning the other one as well. The original assumption had been that some knowledge of Russian would practically eliminate the necessity and therefore the incentives for learning Georgian. Contrary to these expectations, 87 percent of those knowing some Russian had also started learning Georgian. Thirty-five percent of those respondents with intermediate or better Russian skills also had intermediate or better proficiency in Georgian. Even more (49 percent) of the respondents with intermediate or better Georgian spoke Russian on a comparable level.

Russian abilities, categorized * Georgian abilities, categorized - Crosstabulation

			Georgian abilities, categorized			Total
			No knowledge	Beginner	Intermediate or better	
Russian abilities, categorized	No knowledge	Count	1	6	9	16
		% within Russian abilities	6.3%	37.5%	56.3%	100.0%
		% within Georgian abilities	8.3%	12.8%	22.0%	16.0%
	Beginner	Count	2	13	12	27
		% within Russian abilities	7.4%	48.1%	44.4%	100.0%
		% within Georgian abilities	16.7%	27.7%	29.3%	27.0%
	Intermediate or better	Count	9	28	20	57
		% within Russian abilities	15.8%	49.1%	35.1%	100.0%
		% within Georgian abilities	75.0%	59.6%	48.8%	57.0%
Total	Count	12	47	41	100	
	% within Russian abilities	12.0%	47.0%	41.0%	100.0%	
	% within Georgian abilities	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Table 2: Russian abilities by Georgian abilities

Conclusion

The data indicates that for a foreigner in Georgia, there are distinct reasons to learn either Georgian or Russian. The overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that knowledge of one of these languages helps one get by in daily life in Georgia. However, it also became apparent that Russian skills alone are rarely perceived to be sufficient. Apart from being more useful in everyday situations, Georgian seems to be especially important for social and family life. Russian, on the other hand, seems to be the better choice for professionals. Two languages that serve in two different domains – this could explain why 87 percent of the respondents who know Russian still attempted to learn Georgian.

This effort was preliminary research, conducted at short notice as an add-on to another project. There is a rich research field here that could become a comprehensive topic for dedicated researchers or groups, including research students. This research would have significant practical application, both for learners to understand what learning Georgian entails, and for teachers, to better target their efforts. Among questions to be investigated is that of obstacles to learning Georgian – given how highly it is valued, it may be that the supply of teaching right now is not sufficiently flexible to accommodate the demands of learners with complex schedules. Another fruitful field of inquiry, linked to obstacles, is at what specific point students give up actively studying Georgian. Understanding that point better might help learners navigate across and over it. However, these are just some of the potential topics to be explored, since in learning Georgian there are a range of cultural and sociological themes as well.

Annex

Methodology

The population of this census was recruited from the popular, long-running, English-language mailing list “megobrebs” for expatriates who either lived or still live in Georgia, mostly in Tbilisi. Most of the people on this list have deliberately chosen to stay in Georgia, or engaged with Georgia in one way or another, which is reflected by their self-selection for the census. This particular research design has some constraints, but can also provide special insights:

- The mailing list is in English and, therefore, the majority of its participants are either native English speakers or at least expatriates with a strong command of this language. Consequently, the sample does not represent the whole expatriate community in Georgia but only an Anglophone selection.
- People on the mailing list are not necessarily still in Georgia, nor did they in each case stay there for a prolonged time. Instead, the voluntary membership in the list and self-selection for participation in our research is a strong indicator of some kind of personal relationship to the country. Most of the participants, however, have indeed been to Georgia for a long period of time.
- By selecting mainly those expatriates who deliberately chose to stay linked to Georgia, we focus on a special group of people. They tend to have motivation-driven attitudes toward the issue of language learning (as opposed to short-term instrumental attitudes of those on rotating posts), and show different patterns with regard to factors like age and profession.

The link to the questionnaire was sent to 224 e-mail addresses taken from the “megobrebs” mailing list. One hundred twenty-four people, 55 percent of the 224 addressees, viewed the online questionnaire. Two reminders were sent, and in total, 104 individuals started and 90 completed it, accounting for a response rate of 40.2 percent for completed questionnaires. (As some e-mail accounts no longer were active, the real response rate was a little higher.) A log-in process requiring identification with a valid e-mail address helped to avoid double-entries. Given that the survey asked about attitudes to the August 2008 conflict, participation was the criterion for self-selection into the pool of people that feel engaged on Georgian issues.

Converting Prose into Numbers

Due to a configuration error, the participants were able to enter text instead of numerical values in response to the questions on how many hours of focused study they had spent on their Russian and Georgian skills. While some strings were easily converted into numerical values, others had to be estimated.

The following rules have been applied when converting strings to numbers:

- Where a minimum was entered ("1000+"), the value plus one-third was taken ("1333") – 11 instances
- Where “thousands” was entered, a numerical approximation was calculated, based on the minimal value semantically associated with the expression plus one-third (“thousands” becomes “2000+” becomes “2667”) – 2 instances
- One year was calculated as 51 weeks times 6 hours – 3 instances
- Where a range was entered ("30-50"), the average was taken ("40") – 2 instances
- One respondent with high proficiency in Russian entered “many”, the same calculation as for “thousands” was applied – 1 instance

The Census Population

The respondents are predominantly male (57 percent) and tend to be rather young: 78 percent are in between 20 and 39 years of age. Only 21 percent are older than 40 years. Eighty-nine percent said that English is their first or native language. The second sizable language group consisted of native German speakers (5 percent). Dutch, Danish, French or Russian speakers, and people with one of the Scandinavian languages as their native tongue, accounted for the remaining 7 percent.

Although only about half of the respondents gave information about their professional background, the data shows that the respondents work in a great variety of sectors. Apparently, the answer options were not sufficiently exhaustive, as 44 percent of the respondents did not indicate that they worked in one of the sectors enumerated. Of those who did, the largest group consisted of students, who made up 17 percent of the total number of respondents. They were followed by those working in international, non-governmental or non-profit organizations (14 percent). Thirteen percent said that they are researchers, and 9 percent identify themselves as teachers. The smallest groups were people affiliated with government or diplomatic service (5 percent) and businessmen (4 percent). Consultancy, journalism, medical and legal services were other sectors mentioned by the respondents. Forty-four percent gave no information about their professional background.

Those respondents who identify themselves as students are more proficient and more ambitious than the rest with regard to language learning in Georgia. Students generally have a much higher proficiency in Georgian, and a slightly lower Russian proficiency (see Figure 5: Student hours of focused language study). They have invested more time both in their Russian and Georgian language studies (see Figure 5). Sixty-five percent of the students aim for advanced or near-native proficiency in Georgian, while only 24 percent of those who are not students say the same. For Russian, the

difference is lower: 63 percent of the students want to master this language at advanced or near-native levels, compared with 49 percent of the rest.

Figure 4: Student overall language abilities

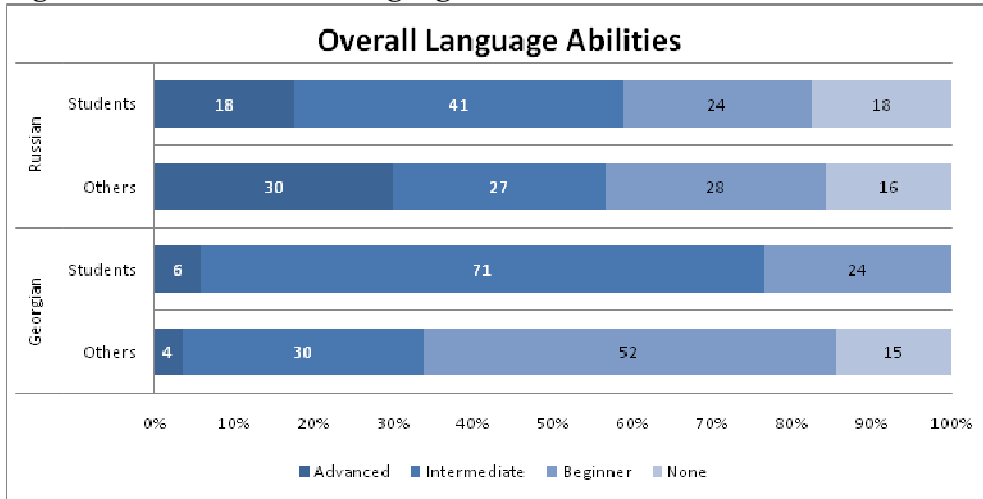
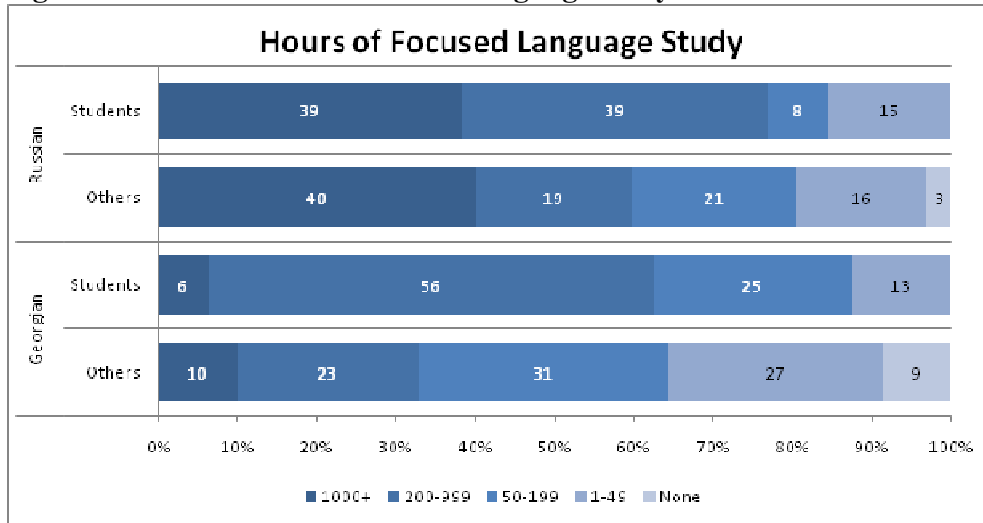


Figure 5: Student hours of focused language study



While in Georgia, the respondents' engaged in a variety of full-time activities, with the most mentioned being NGO work, research and education were the most mentioned. Forty-three percent said that they worked in a non-profit, international or non-governmental organization, while 31 percent were engaged in research. Education was also a major field of activity, with 19 percent of the respondents teaching in Georgia and 13 percent studying there. The smallest groups were journalists

(11 percent), those engaged in diplomatic or government missions (9 percent), doing business (4 percent), or tourism and sport (4 percent). Personal affairs and volunteering were mentioned by less than 2 percent of the respondents. Five percent did not answer the question on their full-time activity while being in Georgia.

At the time of the census, around 43 percent of the respondents were living in Georgia. Thirty-seven percent had moved to North America, and 15 percent were living in the European Union. Four percent of the replies came from non-EU Eastern Europe or CIS countries (without Georgia), and two percent of the respondents were living in other countries.

Many respondents had spent a longer time in Georgia, as two-thirds of them had an experience of more than one year there. Almost a third (32 percent) had lived in Georgia for more than three years. Another 36 percent had been there between one and three years. Respondents who had stayed in Georgia between seven and twelve months accounted for 17 percent of the responses, and those who only visited Georgia for up to six months made up another 17 percent.

Experimental Question and Further Research

In an experimental question, the respondents were asked for how much money they would be ready to sell their language abilities. This “economic value” attached to the respective language skills varied greatly across and within proficiency groups, but those who had achieved an advanced level of Georgian valued their skill overall much higher than their peers with an equivalent proficiency in Russian. The mean for respondents with advanced Georgian skills was 1,836,667 USD (median: 500,000 USD). In the Russian advanced group, it was considerably lower (231,619 USD, median: 70,000 USD). On the intermediate level, the difference was less pronounced, with Georgian scholars averaging at about 176,935 USD (median: 10,000), and Russian learners at 257,394 USD (median: 2,750 USD). In the beginner group, language skills in Georgian were once again higher valued, with the mean at 1.857 USD (median: 100 USD) compared to 827 USD (median: 100 USD) for Russian. A total of 7 Georgian learners said that they would not exchange their language abilities for money, and 5 Russian learners said the same.

Please note that the data on this question was at times inconsistent, and many respondents chose to enter extremely low or extremely high numbers. In order to calculate meaningful means, it was decided to cut two outliers: a Georgian intermediate speaker who valued his language skills at 10 million USD, and one Russian intermediate speaker, who said he would sell his abilities at 1 billion USD.

Possible hypotheses:

- The higher averages among the Georgian speakers indicate a higher emotional attachment to the language skills, which is very difficult to measure in monetary terms.

- The higher averages among the Georgian speakers indicate a higher economic value of the language skills, presumably because there are so few others who can field such skills.
- The categories of Georgian language ability represent real-life proficiencies that differ from the Russian ones: the Georgian speakers are generally more advanced than their Russian peers in the same group. This could be due to extensive everyday training as opposed to the effort of focused, formal studies. Furthermore, the ubiquitous comparison to native speakers in Georgia might lead to an underestimation of language proficiency, compared to Russian speakers who often compare their abilities with other non-native speakers.