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## **Towards the studying of Kodorian Svan speech<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

In terms of general linguistics, the dialectal differentiation problem is particularly important on the late populated areas, especially if localization is in the mountainous region (Serebrenikov 1973: 135-139 (in Rus.)). In this respect, first of all, Kodorian and Cholurian dialects of Svan call the attention of linguists as well as ethnolinguists. The first is Svan of the Svans of Upper and Lower Bal population who moved from the Kodori Gorge (from Svaneti) and settled in the Enguri Gorge (in Apkhazia) a century ago, the second is the combination of Lower Svan dialects (Lashkhian-Lentekhian). I can only say this because the process of fundamental research of both speech is being carried out at the Arnold Chikobava Institution of Linguistics for several years under the financial support of the Rustaveli Foundation at the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Prior to that, there were only separate theoretical expressions or the results of synchronous description of the empirical material in the professional literature fragmentary (Besarion Jorbenadze, Akaki Shanidze, Varlam Topuria, Maxime Kaldani, Mery Gujejiani, Mikheil Kurdiani, Tariel Putkaradze, Lamara Babluani...).

The problem is quite serious and requires not only the linguistic approach but also the use of linguistic geography cartographic methods. After our scientific expeditions in the Kodori Gorge the military-political battles (2008) complicated the situation - we have been taken away from the research object, so we have to work with the refugees who have been rooted out from their housing and who are scattered in the whole territory of Georgia. While we do not have deeply investigated ethnolinguistic research results of dialectal interferences, our request is to avoid the oral and written statements on the properties of the Kodorian Svan speech in separate articles. This study is an attempt to demonstrate the inter-merging of morphonological and lexicological occurrences of the Upper Svan dialects in the Kodorian dialect and its results.

**Key words:** *Kartvelian languages, inter-merging of morphonological and lexicological occurrences.*

At the Humanitarian Faculties of Universities of Georgia (and some of the foreign countries) there are delivered the lecture courses in phonetic and morpho-syntactic analysis of unwritten Kartvelian languages. **Svan language** is also among them, but for almost a century the lecturers

have been grounding only on the traditionally studied four-dialectal materials. As for Kodorian and Cholurian dialects, **almost nothing is taught** about them. In this regard, the Friedrich Schiller Jena University, where the MA and PhD students were taught via Prof. Heinz

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Fährnich and my book ("*Tscholur-swanisch-Deutsches Verbenverzeichnis*") published in 2003 was exception. But now nothing is being done there, too, because at this university the Center for Caucasian Studies was closed.

To make more visible and academic the level of Svan language studying and teaching, we decided to be taken into consideration our work on the Svan language courses where the language is taught. In addition, Kodorian dialect is the focus of the researchers in bilingual, multilingual and diglossia terms due to its geographical location.

Most of local and foreign kartvelologists divide the Svan language into four dialects (Upper Bal, Lower Bal, Lashkian, Lentekhian). In both Upper and Lower Svan, the Kodorian and Cholurian dialects are distinguished by their properties which leave the impression of the transitional dialects – but only the impression, since none of them have fundamentally been investigated by anyone. Naturally, our great teachers – Akaki Shanidze, Varlam Topuria, Maxime Kaldani (and others: Al. Oniani, M. Kurdiani, T. Putkaradze, M. Gujejiani, Sh. Chartolani, K. Margiani) have discussed both dialects in certain articles, but fragmentally.

In this regard the Arnold Chikobava Institute of Linguistics should be mentioned where since 2002 two groups of svanologists have been functioning. The first group investigates the ethnolinguistic problems of Kodorian dialect, and the second one – of Cholurian one (see the thesis of Iza Chantladze's report "*Peculiarities of Defective Verbs in the Kodori Gorge's Svan*" read at the 61<sup>st</sup> Scientific Session of the Institute).

Both groups work in a very difficult condition – in both cases the territories are mostly deserted from the indigenous population, but the difficulty of our work is always alleviated by the Rustaveli Foundation Grant funding, which the groups investigating the Kodorian and Cholurian dialects have won several times.

Over the five years a fundamental study "*Kodorian Chronicles*" (Svan texts with Georgian translations and etymology of some roots) has been created; dissertation on the dialect of the Cholurian eco-migrants settled in Kvemo Kartli has been defended; the member-svanologists of both groups have published several noteworthy articles, which were based on the grant topic as well as the reports discussed at all kinds of (institute, university, republic, international)

conferences. Additionally, together with the colleague from Frankfurt, basing on morphology and morphosyntactic problems we have conducted glossal-annotated analysis of the relevant texts (including Kodorian-Cholurian) of all the dissemination territorial data of Svan. The work result is the book *"Tscholurswanisch-Deutsches Verbenverzeichnis"* (2003), published in Jena co-authored by a great kartvelologist Professor Heinz Fähnrich. At present MrH. Fähnrich is a member of our grant group and is responsible for implementing a significant project ("*Place of the Kodorian Dialect in the Svan Language System*") in 2016-2019.

Therefore, unless the key aspects of the Kodorian and Cholurian dialects are not investigated fundamentally, it would be good if we avoid ungrounded statements which occurred in professional literature even before. But this time I'll discuss the book that has been published in recent times. It is M. Sagliani's "*Issues of Svan Language Structure*" publication of which is naturally an important fact, but it is unclear (at least so far!) why the author introduces some new terms. Since the analysis of relevant data is not monographically processed, perhaps it will be very uncomfortable to establish the following terms in scientific circulation:

### **Kodorian dialects, Cholurian subdialect**

(It has been already determined that the dialects of the villages in Cholurian community form an independent Lower Svan dialects ?!), **Lakhamulian dialect**, etc.

Both the Kodorian and Cholurian dialects are interferenced ones, two dialects are merged in both: in the first – Upper Svan (Upper Bal, Lower Bal) dialects, and in the other – Lower Svan (Lashkhan-Lentekhan) ones. That is why we cannot call them either **Kodorian**, or **Tskhenistsqurian** (probably, better **Tsenistsqurian**, cf. the toponym **Tsena**, from where this beautiful river is sourced) and **Engurian**, etc. (everything what can be remembered !!!) dialects. To illustrate this, I'll bring two facts:

In 1917, the ancestors of 54-year-old narrator Marika Devdariani-Akirtava moved from Lower Bal village Pari (Lamkheri) to the village Omarishali of the Kodori Gorge, where their neighbors were historically Upper Bal Svans (Jachvliani, Dadvani, Margiani, Gasviani, Gulbani, Kaldani). Notwithstanding that Mrs. M. Devdariani-Akirtava's father and mother (Dziba Argvliani) are originally Lower Bal, her grandmother Mati Khojelani was from Mestia. Due to the birth and upbringing in

the abovementioned surrounding, it is absolutely natural that she often used Upper Bal lexemes and grammatical forms in parental language. What should we do?! What can we call her Svan (according to M.Sagliani)? – Kodorian Lower Bal or Kodorian Upper Bal?! In the Kodori Gorge, among the refugee population there occur many similar facts that do not fall into the idiolect frame, but in some cases the latter cannot be excluded. For example: daughter-in-law of (historically!) Lower Bal Gujejianis, Lashkhian Irma Kochbiani uses the unlauded form (**wäj** – “Woe!”)<sup>2</sup> only once (see “*Kodorian Chronicles*”, 2007-2010:30) in a half hourly dialogue. It is, naturally, an idiolect occurrence. But if she uses a plural formant either **-əl** or **-ol**, this fact must have been conditioned by some other process. If we ground on M.Sagliani’s logic, then we can say, that Irma Kochbiani’s speech turns out to be “Kodorian-Lashkhian”?!

It is obvious that, when historically Lower Bal Shalva Argvliani, MarikaDevdariani and Zhana Tsalani use

<sup>2</sup>Later (2016: 695) on M. Sagliani mentioned this fact, but somehow she forgot to cite our article!

<sup>3</sup> It should have been **mërm’lšāl** but the text recorder

native dialect to say the toponym populated by Upper Bal population (e.g., instead of **omarišāl**‘ they say **omarišār**‘ in every case form – see, “*Kodorian Chronicles*”, 491-493, 521-525 , 547) it means that in this sense in their speech the interference has not yet taken place, and when a family member of the migrants who moved from the village Mulakhi, born and grown up in the Kodori Gorge Ketevan Margiani-Dadvani in the dialogue with one of them talks about the derivation of a compound numeral, a Lower Bal individual born and grown up among Upper Bal population provides the following information (ibid: 521):

– *lušnud imži ṭuli „atas cxraas ormoc-dacameṭs?“*

– *atūs i čxarašir i woxušdešdisemi. woxušdešdiwoštṭw ləzäj xwi.*

– „*jurinerwešdiešdioštṭxws*“ *mām ṭulia mermälšāl?*<sup>3</sup>

– *amži xošil üdwil mar, ali xošil lu-žabru li, üdwild lekwišg li.*

–How can you say in Svan "1953"?

is a representative of middle generation and pronounces long vowels relatively rare. Perhaps this fact is due to the conversation with a Lower Bal narrator.

(textrecorder).

– thousand and nine hundred and five tens and three. I am five-tens and four years old (narrator).

– Do you say „fifty-four (“two-tens-two times and ten and four”) like other? (text recorder)

– It is easier for me. It is easy to say it Upper Bal way (narrator).

Of course, vigesimal system of the derivation of compound numerals, which is dominated in the Lower Bal (and Lentekhian) dialect, is much more difficult than the Upper Bal and Lashkian decimal system, but a narrator does not use it only because it, but because a narrator lives in the village of historical Upper Bal population.

It is noteworthy that the majority of our narrators belong to the category **utwra lutwer** (“uneducated educated”), and rightly assess the ongoing and expected political as well as general-linguistic facts in the Kodori Gorge. Here's what one of them narrated us:

– *mišgomu xošil supta ləčabrus gārgālda, mare mišgu amži lənčəde (ləčəbru–ləžabru)gargle sopliš gawləna bedšw li. Eši libopš xom amču mar lətare i*

*klass i amēču<sup>4</sup> xwizelaldäs. Mi twiton deš xwaterdas, mare esyurdäs, magalitä, nanagärte, ečka ejär maṭulidax: „wu, imži məžabrer eser ragdi!* – “My father spoke more pure Lower Bal but my **mixed (Lower-Upper)** speech is due to the influence of the village (i.e. populated with Upper Bal population. I.Ch.). I have spent my childhood here and I went to school here. I did not notice it myself, but when I went to my mother's native village, they told me: "Wow! You speak in an Upper Bal way" (ibid. 521-526).

However, some narrators consider an interference process of dialects exaggeratedly. The descendant of the migrants migrated from Lower Bal village Pari to the Kodori Gorge (in Ptishi), a grandchild of Upper Bal Navrianis from mother's side, 67-year-old Chepkhan Tsalani notes:

– „*mišgwadi mänku ləžabrud ragdiw, mare ečkanywe demeg, gadaáčwies... šoma laṭlärcaxän xwäri, ləṭalud rwagdi; čwabärcaxän lax xwäri, ləčabrud rwagdi; šoma žabärcaxän miwews lirde, ləžabrud*

<sup>4</sup>In the same (fused) sentence one and the same narrator uses either a non-reduced (**ameču**) or

reduced form (**amču**) of the same word.

*rwagdi... atxe am sopeliswa pišir gwär äri – žabär i čwabär mäg žilupurține lix. Klissi amži li, mare ečži xočamd xwarid mäg ušxwärensga, ere imži ešxu gwär... mečjür „suptad“ ragdix: mälüli lälalud ragdi i mučabir– ləčabrud; ejärs xošil ləgiy xarx eji nin i wesür, xedwäj žibe šwäns xuGwandax, mare atxe xoxrilärs, aljür ukwe ašxudgar raxan ärix, ləžaburu i ləčwaburu ragäd čulupurține xarx, imži čxaṭwra li”* - “Firstly my mother spoke Upper Bal but afterwards she was given up to ... When I am with Latalians, I speak Latal<sup>5</sup>; If I’m with Lower Bals I speak Lower Bal, When I’m with Upper Bals I speak Upper Bal, ... Now there are many surnames in this village – the **Upper Bals and Lower Bals and all are mixed with each other**. Even in school ("class") we are all very well together, as one family... Elder people speak "pure" language: Latalians speak Latal and Lower Bals – Lower Bal. They have maintained the language and the rules that existed in Upper Svaneti, but now the children as they are together, speak both Lower Bal and Upper

Bal. They mixed Upper Bal and Lower Bal speech each other like *chkhatvra* (*kneaded each other maize-bread and cheese – I.Ch.*) (ibid., p.376-395).

Omarishaian Kolya and Gocha Gerlianis are originally Lower Bal, but in their speech there is larger vocabulary reflecting the morphonological processes of Upper-Bal dialect, than of Lower Bal because both mothers (Metia Kaldani and Mariam Gigani) are from the village Mulakhi of Mestia region. So, the influence of mothers’ Svan on the speech of a father and son is absolutely indisputable without special research.<sup>6</sup>

According to Prof. M. Kaldani’s observations conducted in 1959, in the Bechoian, Etserian and Tskhumarian (partially!) subdialects **o** vowel is not umlauted (**mindor** “field”, **kibdon** "ark", **lamton** "Teach me", **lampotin** "Load me on your back", ...).<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that in the speech of Bechoian and Etserian narrators migrated in the Kodori Gorge, M. Sagliani confirmed an umlauting of **o** rarely (Sagliani 2016: 681): **mindwers** ("field"), **warmošwebit**<sup>8</sup> ("by origin"). The latter form

<sup>5</sup>Latal is a transitional subdialect of Upper Svan.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. M. Sagliani, 2016:680.

<sup>7</sup>See Kaldani 1959:219.

<sup>8</sup>Obviously, the complex **we** does not have any connection with the loss of the nominative case morpheme, as M. Sagliani considers (see, ibid, pp 681).

is noteworthy from other aspect: in this case we are dealing with mutual interference – lexicological (Georgian word with Georgian formation!) and phonological (**o>we**); **mindwers** as well as **warmošwebit** forms are conditioned by residing of Etsarian and Bechoian narrators in the surrounding of the emigrants migrated from Upper Svan.

It is also noteworthy that some Kodorian narrators use the lexic characteristic of either Upper Bal or Lower Bal dialects for one of the same lexeme and sometimes its interferenced variant:

**ṭob|| ṭōmb|| ṭombare** the characteristic forms of BavchiGurchiani<sup>9</sup> who originally is from Etsera and resided in Sakeni before the **military battles in 2008**. It means that his speech reveals the specificity of the transitional dialect.

M. Sagliani specially investigated the speech of the resident of the village Gvandra of the Kodori Gorge, a daughter-in-law of historically Lower Bal family, originally Lashkhian narrator Irma Kochbiani (40 year-old) and discussed it in her monograph "*Issues of Svan Language Structure*", which is welcomed, but, I think, her assess of Svan to be Lashkhian-Lower Bal interference

dialectal data is exaggerated. If a representative of unumlauted dialect once used umlauted form (**wäj** "Woe!") and Lower-Bal **tam-tamašd** "in playing" instead of Lashkhian **neb-nebašd** "slowly" composite, obviously, this is an **idiolectic (and not interference!) occurrence**. She has been living in the family of Lower Bal Gujejianis over ten years and has been well mastered the speech of her husband, her mother/father- in-law and sister-in-law, and perhaps because she uses the lexemes characteristic of their Svan and the forms reflecting certain morphonological processes to please them. As for the fact that Mrs. I. Kochbiani prefers the **xaṭulidax** ("were calling ") form than **xaṭuliwx** one it is the result that the imperfect with **-w** morpheme occurs only in Lower-Bal dialect, with **-da** – it is originated from Common Kartvelian stem and occurs in all Kartvelian languages (including the Lashkhian dialect, as well!).

The loss of a consonant element of the relative case morpheme **-iš** in the speech of Lower Bal population is unexpected. But in the speech of the descendants of those who migrated in the upper part of the Kodori Gorge and who now live in the surrounding

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<sup>9</sup>Sagliani 2016:683.

of the Upper Bals (family member, neighbors), this is quite normal:

*Mišgu dadašers xažxax peṭwi (<peṭw-iš) qwabär* (p. 521).

– My mother’s (“grandma’s”) native village is called “millet balls”.

This fact does not reflect only the current situation, it has its own history: in 1923 Akaki Shanidze recorded from Etserian (Hebudelian) Vladimer Subeliani (50-year-old) the text illustrating the life in the Dali Gorge, which could be used as a historical document or ethnographic material:

*xwarü qarq mermaxenču li xoša šwän... xwarü qarqxen li läzelal lintwisgäš mengzäriš, däleš i šwäneš mengzäriš. adüid li merme sanzäw Jeriläš qarq, amzawäš läzelal mengzäriš däleš i šwäneš* (Svan Chrest. 1978: 187). – “On the other side of the Khvarash Mountain Pass (Old Geo. **qorq-**) there is Great Svaneti... From the Khvarash Mountain Pass there is a winter road to Dali and Svaneti. There is another mountain pass Jerilash for summer walkers in Dali and Svaneti. ”

The interference process of Upper Svan dialects is still evident from the Lower Bal text recorded in 1923. In it the name of the mountain pass **xwaräš** (located between

Chuberi and Sakeni) is given severally, but in a Upper Bal way – without a consonant element (-š) of a relative case morpheme. Similar form (**xwarä qarq**) occurs in the text four times and the Lower Bal dialectal character – only once (**xwaräš qarq**).

**In the analyzing material the term “Dali Gorge” opposes Great Svaneti i.e. the Enguri Gorge.** Kodorians have been calling themselves neither Svans nor Apkhazians since the period they settled there (1879) to date – they are **Dalians** according to the name of beautiful Goddess of hunting Dali, but there are oral narratings about ancient settlement of Svan on these places.

Here's what 68-year-old woman Arna Kaldani told us: *mi xwi lætne məžäls, šwäns. Ečxän ode kluxorte, ečej mičda ešdjwōštṭw zäjs. Ečxän k'ōxwwilän dälte (dalre telyəra xwi); ečkanyo apxzēts wōštṭwēšdjwōštṭw zäjs xwizgäs, wočamčirē räjons, kočaras. 1994 zäunyo ḷolwilärd xwärid bolniss, saberznette lälzigäld kamečde berznale korisga*” – “I was born in Muzhali, **Svaneti**. From there I went to Klukhori, where I spent fourteen years. From there I got married in **Dali** (I am a daughter-in-law of **Dalians**); Then I lived

in Apkhazia, in the village Kochara, Ochamchire region for forty-five years. **Since 1994 we have been refugees in Bolnisi**, in the house of Greeks who had moved to Greece“ ("Kodorian Chronicles" 2007-2010: 18).

Gradually interference is getting a footing in Kodorian Svan so that sometimes even archaic lexemes (toponyms, anthroponyms, ...) obey them. Thus, for example, a narrator from Lower Bal likely not to say the toponym **omarišäl** (*lit.* "of **Omari**'s family") (i.e. according to the morphonological structure of the Upper Bal dialect), but in accordance with Lower Bal system of formation of the names denoting family branch (*root of a name + plural morpheme*):

“gənwišunywe li **umarär**<sup>10</sup>, – *“Towards **umarär**, after Gentsvishi there is Umarebi* (the narrator should say **omarišäl**, official terminology - I.Ch.), *after Umareshi – Sakeni”* (ibid. 80-81).

I especially focused on the use of the same toponym in the speech of the descendants who had migrated from various villages of historically Lower Bal territory in

the Kodori Gorge: Zhana Tsalani (Becho>Ptishi), Marika Devdariani (Pari>Ajara) and Shalva Argvliani (Tskhumari>Khutia) pronounce plural **-är** suffix in a Lower Bal way (in all positions, i.e. in their speech a dissimilated allomorph **-äl** of a **-är** morpheme does not occur . Due to this **omarišär** is ordinary for them), Etserian (Hebudian) Vladimir Subeliani does not discuss only phonetic difference between Lower Bal and Upper Bal dialects, and goes further – he knows that the name of one of the villages of the Kodori Gorge is originated from an ethnonym – the local population is a descendant of someone Omari and he uses a filiation formation , but in a Lower Bal way, since he is historically Etserian. The result gave different data – it is **umarär** (and not **omarišäl**, i.e., official name of the village on the map of Georgia).

As it is known, mother's speech greatly influences on child's speech. Here is the dialogue with a historically Etserian (LB.) 73-year-old Tamar Gerliani-Tsipiani who resides in Gentsvishi:

– *Si mučwaburi xi, mare čašwem  
ləžaburu hedurd demeg ajreka dej*

<sup>10</sup>In the Kodori Gorge's Upper Bal an anlaut vowel of the anthroponym **Omari** remains unchanged, but in

the same dialect of Lower Bal in the postposition of a labial **m** phoneme **o > u** takes place.

*largüdiisga, dej..*

– *Mi madej, mišgu gezlirs däs  
xoxalx.*

“ – You are from Lower Bal but you have not your husband’s any Upper Bal feature either in your speech or...

– I do not, but my children do“  
("Kodorian Chronicles": 362-369).

We specifically observed the speech of SilevanTsipiani and Tamar Gerliani's eight children, and it really proves that their speech is basically of Lower Bal (according to the mother's speech).

The study of the interference of the language is involving character, so each morphonological or morphosyntactic occurrence should be studied comprehensively **on the basis of the speech of many narrators**, mainly in the form of live dialogues.

It's welcome that during our linguistic expedition in the Kodori Gorge in the speech of Lower Bal migrants settled in the village Gvandra and Sakeni M. Sagliani noticed Upper Bal dialect-like -j ending in singular nominative case of a certain group of nominals in parallel with the auslauts with elided -äj, which she explains to be interference of Upper Svan dialects (Sagliani 2016: 686). Of course, this assumption is

totally permissible, but it is necessary to verify this occurrence – if the elderly Lower Bal narrators used to say the forms similar to **zä-j** "a year", **čälä-j** "river", **məšä-j** "worker"... then it is expected that a nominative diphthongized ending -äj has been inherited from their original habitat – i.e. from the Enguri Gorge (entirely possible from the village Becho which is under the influence of Upper Bal dialect), as for young people’s speech in this case we deal with the interference of speech of Upper Bal population residing in the Kodori Gorge. In 2007-2008 we worked there with 104-year-old Upper Bal narrator Mina Kochkiani and 106-year-old Lower Bal Areta (Dianoz) Parjveliani. The speech of none of them had any trace of interference.

So I repeat again: **we should take special care to interference speech study in Kodori and Tskhenistsqali gorges!**

**The problem is quite serious and requires not only the linguistic approach but also the use of a cartographic method of linguistic geography.** There are lot of things that complicate the situation – after our scientific expeditions in the Kodori Gorge the military-political battles (August, 2008) actually distanced us from the research object. So we have to work with the refugees

residing in different parts of Georgia. While we do not have deeply thoughtful ethnolinguistic research outcomes of dialectal interference occurrences, I request to avoid the oral and ungrounded statements on the specifics of the Kodorian Svan speech

in articles. The present study is an attempt to demonstrate mutual-merging of morphological and lexicological occurrences of Upper Svan dialects in the Kodorian speech and its consequences.

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