Georgian

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Georgian is spoken in the Republic of Georgia, the Zakatala district of Azerbaijan, the historical Georgian regions of N.E. Turkey, by descendants of Georgians transplanted to Fereydan in Iran by Shah Abbas (17th century), and by émigré-communities, established in such countries as France following sovietisation but growing in Russia and beyond since the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

The Georgian language (*kartuli ena*) belongs to the Kartvelian (South Caucasian) family (see *Caucasian Languages*). Georgian possesses a number of dialects, which can differ sharply from both one another (e.g. western Gurian versus north-eastern Khevsurian) and the literary standard. The latter is in some respects still in process of regularisation but is based on the central Kartlian dialect, in which region lies the capital, Tbilisi (formerly T'pilisi).

The language is customarily periodised as: Old Georgian (5th-11th centuries) ⇒ Mediæval (12th-18th centuries) ⇒ Modern (post-1800). Iranian, more recently Russian, and now English lexical influences are marked; Greek, Armenian, Arabic, and Turkish loans have also penetrated.

The oldest inscription dates from circa 430 AD at a site near Bethlehem. Within Georgia, the church at Bolnisi boasts an inscription dated to 494. Iak'ob Tsurt'aveli's 'Martyrdom of Shushanik', apparently composed between 476 and 483, represents the first work of native literature, whilst the oldest dated manuscript (the Sinai Polycephalon) hails from 864. The earliest survivals exhibit peculiarities in the marking of the 3rd person indirect object/2nd person subject, from which they are styled *xanmet'i* 'with extra *x*' or *haemet'i* 'with extra *h*'; the nature of this distinction (diachronic versus dialectal) has been hotly debated. Little seems to have been written during the centuries of Mongol and Tatar depredations.

Georgian is written in a unique, wholly phonemic alphabet with 33 characters from left to right without any upper- versus lower-case distinction. The modern script

mxedruli 'military; secular' evolved in the 11th century from its precursor *k'utxovani* 'angular'. This in turn developed in the 9th century from the oldest variant *mrg(v)lovani* 'rounded', which was probably devised in the 4th century AD on the model of Greek to facilitate the spread of Christianity, adopted as the official religion by King Mirian of Kartli during the 330s. Even after the 11th century, religious texts continued to be written in a combination of the two earliest scripts, called *xutsuri* 'ecclesiastical', such that the oldest served as the majuscule (*asomtavruli*) to the minuscule (*nusxuri*) of its successor.

Modern Georgian has 28 consonants plus 5 vowels:

Consonantal System

b	p	p'							m
						v [v/f/w]			
d	t	t'							n
			dz	ts	ts'	z	s	l	r
			dʒ	tʃ	tʃ'	ʒ	ʃ		
g	k	k'							
		q'				ʁ	χ		
						h			

Vowel-system

i			u
	e	ɔ	
		a	

Old Georgian additionally had the voiceless uvular plosive /q̇/, which in standard Georgian has merged with the voiceless back fricative, plus the palatal glide /j̇/, sounds retained in Svan. Circumfixes abound. Verbs divide into transitives, intransitives, 'medials', indirects (with logical subject in the dative), and a small stative class; 'medials' often appear intransitive but largely behave morphosyntactically like transitives because the relevant forms are borrowed from corresponding transitive paradigms. Georgian (with Svan) preserves the feature, assumed to have characterised

Proto-Kartvelian, whereby a transitive verb's arguments are case-marked in one of three ways determined by which of three tense-mood-aspect (or *screeve*) series the given form displays. Verbs can agree with up to three arguments by virtue of the presence of two sets (A and B) of pronominal agreement-affixes. The patterns of morphosyntactic behaviour (with sub-scripts indicating affixal agreement) are:

Patterns of Case-marking & Verb-agreement

Grammatical role	A/S	O(/P)	IO
Pattern α	ERG_A	NOM_B	DAT_B
Pattern β	NOM_A	DAT_B	DAT_B
Pattern γ	DAT_B	NOM_A	GEN + /-tvis/ 'for'

which are distributed as follows (where the transitives and 'medials' are combined as Type I verbs, whilst intransitives, indirects and statives are subsumed under Type II):

Correlation of Agreement-pattern, Verb-type and Verb-series

	Series I	Series II	Series III
Type I	β	α	γ
Type II	β	β	β

The examples below demonstrate that, whilst case-marking in Series II follows ergative alignment, affixal agreement is accusative, creating a split-ergative configuration. Although the Series III pattern might appear to be a better candidate for illustrating ergativity, this inverted construction developed relatively late across Kartvelian out of a past (essentially intransitive) resultative. No unique Ergative morph can be reconstructed for proto-Kartvelian. The system is illustrated by the transitive 'The shepherd (a) will toss$_\beta$, (b) tossed$_\alpha$, (c) (has) apparently tossed$_\gamma$ food down for his flock' vs the intransitive 'The priest (d) will drown$_\beta$, (e) drowned$_\beta$, (f) (has) apparently drowned$_\beta$', where (a/d) represent Series I, (b/e) Series II, (c/f) Series III:

a. mtʃʼqʼɔ̃ms-i   sa.mtʃʼqʼsɔ-s   sa.fʃʼmɛl-s   da-ø-ø-u-qʼr-i-s

    shepherd-Nom$_A$ flock-Dat$_B$ food-Dat$_B$ Prev-it$_B$-it$_B$-OV-toss-TS-he.Fut$_A$

b. mtʃʼqʼɔ̃ms-ma   sa.mtʃʼqʼsɔ-s   sa.fʃʼmɛl-i   da-ø-ø-u-qʼar-a

    shepherd-Erg$_A$ flock-Dat$_B$ food-Nom$_B$ Prev-it$_B$-it$_B$-OV-toss-he.Aor$_A$

c. mtsʼqʼəms-s   sa.mtsʼqʼs.ɔ-s-tvis   sa.tʃʼməl-i   da-ɣ-u-qʼr-i-a

shepherd-Dat$_B$ flock-Gen-for   food-Nom$_A$ Prev-he$_B$-OV-toss-Perf-it$_A$

d. mɐvdəl-i   da-i-χrtʃ-ɔb-a

priest-Nom$_A$ Prev-Pref-drown-TS-he.Fut$_A$

e. mɐvdəl-i   da-i-χrtʃ-ɔ

priest-Nom$_A$ Prev-Pref-drown-he.Aor$_A$

f. mɐvdəl-i   da-m-χrtʃv-al-a

priest-Nom$_A$ Prev-Pref-drown-Suff-he.Perf$_A$

The languages to have undergone most Georgian influence are naturally its congeners, Mingrelian and Svan, plus other Transcaucasian neighbours, notably Bats, Iranian Ossetic, Indo-European Armenian, and Northwest Caucasian Abkhaz. As a feudal power throughout the Caucasus and source for the spread of Christianity to the north Caucasus before the coming of Islam, Georgian has left some lexical traces here too.

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