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Communicative language teaching in Georgia : from theory to practice

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CHAPTER 5: FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GEORGIA: FROM SOVIET TIMES TO THE PRESENT DAY¹

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Having discussed language teaching history in brief (Chapter 2), Communicative Language Teaching in more detail (Chapter 3), as well as how present-day language teaching can be enhanced by using the resources technology on offer today (Chapter 4), in this chapter I attempt to discuss the history of foreign language teaching in Georgia from Soviet times until the present day. Putting the teaching of foreign languages in Georgia in the socio-historical context of communist and post-communist Eastern Europe is expected to shed greater light on how socio-political trends led to major changes in foreign language policies and teaching methodologies and gave rise to the practices currently in place in Georgia.

Chapter overview

Section 5.2 of this chapter deals with the Soviet era and language teaching in the Soviet States, among them Georgia. It also discusses the socio-historical background and language policies adopted at that time in the Soviet Union. Illustrative examples of language teaching materials used in Soviet days are also presented in this section as a way of providing an insight into the careful and propagandistic approach to language teaching practised in the Soviet Union in those years. Section 5.3 is about Georgia's national transformation process in the post-Soviet period; it provides a description of the developments that took place in the language teaching field and Georgia's move towards Communicative Language Teaching. The section discusses the changes that took place in both the public and the private sectors of language teaching. Section 5.4 looks at the recent history of and current developments in the foreign language teaching field in Georgia, and efforts made by governmental and non-governmental organizations to bring it in line with Western standards. The initiatives undertaken in order to make education in general, and Communicative Language Teaching in particular, more technologically-enhanced in Georgia are described extensively in a separate Section 5.5. Concluding remarks for this chapter are presented in Section 5.6.

¹ Section 5.5 of this chapter is based on an article called "Technology as a Tool Towards Educational Reform: Implementing Communicative Language Teaching in Georgia" (Edisherashvili & Smakman 2013).

5.2 THE SOVIET ERA AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

5.2.1 Socio-historic background

Starting from the late 19th century, during the period of the Tsarist regime in Russia, and continuing through the Soviet period (1917-1991), up until the collapse of the USSR, there were targeted attempts to Russify all fifteen of the non-Russian Soviet republics (Weeks, 2008:16). This policy was dubbed *sbližheniye* or ‘rapprochement’ (of nations) by Moscow. Nations were meant to eventually disappear and replaced by a new species of humankind referred to as *Homo sovieticus*, which was believed to guarantee a life without nationalism in peace and harmony. Russian was therefore, in some sense, seen by the Soviet authorities as a neutral, non-ethnic language, and it remained the most widespread second language or *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union for decades. Unlike other Soviet states, Georgia showed deep-seated popular and even republic-level governmental resistance to the emerging influence of the Russian language, which was practically displacing the public use of national languages in other instances all over the Soviet Union and becoming dominant in virtually all levels of society – social, educational, governmental and military (Slider, 1995:181). Ostensibly pro-Stalinist protests in Tbilisi in the year following Stalin’s death in 1953 also saw much popular outpouring of sentiment yearning for Georgian heritage and linguistic preservation. Later, in 1978, almost alone among Soviet Republics, Georgia (together with Estonia) witnessed language riots when the revised Soviet constitution sought to proclaim Russian the sole official language of the entire USSR (Olson, 1994:247).

The official fear that Soviet social ideals might crumble in the face of Western influences went as far as banning by Moscow of Coca-Cola and Levi-Strauss jeans, for instance – consumer goods strongly associated with the US as symbols of evil influences coming from the ‘hostile world’ beyond the Soviet Union. Many popular songs in English were also banned by the Kremlin. Thus, it was clear that Soviet authorities believed that the cultural-linguistic situation needed to be dealt with effectively in order to preserve “power” in the world (Olson, 1994:247). Hence, in an attempt to keep public opinion under control and to be able to shape popular ideology, the government was very careful in opening up the doors to ways of thinking.

In this regard, knowledge of foreign languages could play an important role: it could be used by members of the public as a means to better acquaint themselves with the values and ideology of people outside the USSR through communicating with them. For this reason, foreign language teaching had to be offered in a very cautious manner to the Soviet population. As Pavlenko (1964) recollects, in those days, foreign language teaching was “permeated with ideology and propaganda”; the English language was associated in Communist times with enemies, spies and imperialistic Britain and the United States (Pavlenko, 2003:313-314). Virtually no private language schools existed at that

time. Language teaching was offered only at state-controlled public secondary schools and institutes of higher education. To this end, teaching materials as well as teaching methods were centrally-mandated and the teaching process was carefully monitored (Pavlenko, 2003:315).

However, unlike the anti-German language teaching debates seen in the US during and after World War I, and in some cases even the prohibition of teaching or speaking German in parts of some Allied countries, in the Soviet Union the study of languages spoken by the enemies, i.e. capitalist countries of that time, was never officially discouraged (Pavlenko, 2003:321). Whereas opponents of foreign-language teaching in the US in the early twentieth century believed in an intrinsic link between language, thought, moral and cultural values, and thus sought to protect American children from undesirable influences through restricting German language teaching, Soviet educators, from the 1920s onwards, on the contrary, saw enormous possibilities in using “the language of the enemy to promote the ideological agenda of socialism and communism” (Pavlenko, 2003:322).

Increased contacts with both enemies and allies during World War I (1914-1918) made the Soviet government realize that the country had a critical shortage of people able to communicate in key foreign languages. By the end of the war, there was a growing awareness of the importance of the study of foreign language for the purposes of national security and for the economic and technological development. This realization triggered a measure of transformation in the foreign-language teaching system in the Soviet Union (Pavlenko, 2003:323).

5.2.2 Language teaching methods and aims in Soviet times

According to Ornstein (1958), the study of foreign languages was never underestimated from the very beginning of the introduction of the Soviet regime (1917). However, not until 1927, ten years after the Russian Revolution, were the first real measures taken to improve the quality and intensity of language instruction in the USSR. This was the time when a series of decrees were issued aimed at improving language teaching standards, among which were the Central Committee decree *Concerning the Elementary and Secondary Schools* (1931) and the decree *Concerning the Instructional Programs and the Regimen of Elementary and Middle Schools* (1932). In these documents, the importance of providing every secondary school graduate with proper language teaching was recognized (Ornstein, 1958:382).

As a result of the regulations provided by the new decrees, Soviet children were required to start learning foreign languages – German, English or French – from the fourth or fifth grade (at the age of 11 to 12) until the end of high school, so that pupils were provided with at least six years of exposure to foreign language instruction (Ornstein, 1958:382-383).

Even though efforts were being made in Moscow to promote language teaching, there was criticism expressed by some with regard to the results achieved. As soon as the shadow of Stalin, and of his strong personal convictions on linguistics, had receded, this began to be widely voiced. According to Ornstein (1958:384), even though “[o]fficially, the objectives of language teaching ... are stated as the ability to read, write and *speak* a foreign language”, little attention was paid to developing learners’ communicative abilities. Ornstein tries to explain the failure to develop language learners’ communicative abilities by the existence of the teaching methods which were largely grammar- and linguistics knowledge-oriented, entailing mainly memorizing word lists, grammar rules and doing coursebook exercises as homework, together with rigorous analytical reading done in the classroom. (1958:384). Another reason named was the rigidity of the curriculum and the Iron Curtain dividing the USSR from the rest of the world, giving rise to “a shortage of teachers with first-hand knowledge of modern languages” (Ornstein, 1958:386). The approach to teaching foreign languages at that time was also strongly criticized in some professional journals, such as *Inostrannie Yaziki v Shkolakh* (“*Foreign Languages in Schools*”). As Gokhlerner (1956:99) commented in the year of commencement of the “Khrushchev Thaw”,² “Grammar should not be taught as an end in itself, but as a means of teaching reading and so forth”. The official coursebooks, which language instructors were obliged to use as their sole source of teaching material, also fell under harsh criticism, the main points of dissatisfaction summarized by Ornstein (1958:385) are cited below:

- an excessive amount of material to be covered
- lack of logical transition in the [material] presentation
- vagueness and verbosity of explanations
- dullness of the reading materials

The coursebooks used at schools in the early Soviet-era aimed at preparing two types of language experts: a group that would later deal professionally with the theory of language (theoretical linguists) and a group that would qualify as translators/interpreters (applied linguists). It was expected that later on, Soviet theoretical linguists would find jobs as language teachers, whereas translators would be involved in translating scientific and technical materials and

² “The Khrushchev Thaw is an unofficial name of the period in the history (from 1953-1964) of the USSR after the death of Joseph Stalin”, referring to the relatively less oppressive period of Soviet rule under Khrushchev than was witnessed under Stalin. The term was coined by Ilya Ehrenburg, which he used in his short story published in 1954. Retrieved from <http://territoryterror.org.ua/en/history/1953-1964/> (accessed January 2013).

interpreters would be engaged in translating at congresses and conferences for the Soviet Union's industrial projects (Garrard, 1962:71). Thus, even though improvement of the speaking skill was an officially declared goal for language teaching in the Soviet Union, no efforts were made to provide language learners with much oral proficiency and skills which would enable them to communicate across borders, as this was expressly not in the aims of Soviet language teaching at that time.

However, further initiatives were still taken in the direction of intensifying the foreign language teaching in the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s to mid-1950s, the Ministry of Higher Education initiated the establishment of ten-year 'experimental language schools', where language instruction began from second grade onwards (Ornstein, 1954:388). The Ministry also changed the curricula of institutions of higher education, allocating more teaching hours to foreign language instruction than before, and supported the formation of certain language clubs and special institutions aimed at helping language teachers improve their teaching skills (Pavlenko, 1964:322). However as Pavlenko (1964) further elaborates, "ironically, these developments were taking place almost simultaneously with the adoption of governmental policies which prohibited marriages between foreigners and Soviet citizens and effectively restricting contacts between them" (1964:323). Such a contradictory situation created complicated the circumstances for language policy makers: they had to provide language teaching in such a way that the population's knowledge of foreign languages would empower the Soviet Union by enabling citizens to keep up to date with the developments around the world, but at the same time, they also had to protect the Soviet population from being "contaminated by the languages they were learning" (Pavlenko, 1964:323).

Another noteworthy change in the field of language teaching around that time (1940s-1960s) was the shift from the German, as the most popular foreign language taught at schools in the Soviet Union until the Second World war, to the English language, which was now perceived as the "language of diplomacy, commerce and science" (Pavlenko, 1964:323). The shift of emphasis from the German to the English language was officially confirmed by the decree called *On the Improvement of the Study of Foreign Languages*, which was issued by the Council of Ministers of the USSR in 1961. In the same document the need for "urgent improvement of curricula and teaching materials" was also declared, naming "the poor FL speaking skills of high school and university graduates" as the main reason for such alarm (Pavlenko, 1964:323).

The strengthened emphasis placed on English language teaching was also partly caused by the growing popularity of it as an international language. Even in the city of Berlin (where the wall was built that same year: 1961), two out of the three other occupying powers that the Soviet military had to consult

with were English-speaking. Pavlenko explains the popularization of the English language in the following terms:

The peak escalation years of the Cold War, in particular the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, there was a new global enemy on the scene, whose language children now had to learn. As a result, by 1970, in Soviet colleges, English accounted for 50% of foreign language study enrolments, with 30% in German and the remaining 20% in French. (Pavlenko, 2003:323).

In concert with efforts undertaken at the policy level, attempts were made to find an alternative to the existing language teaching method, which was mainly Grammar Translation at that time. Thus, the search for a better alternative commenced, the emphasis starting to move steadily towards more oral approaches to language teaching. The coursebook by the British author H.E. Palmer (1877-1949), *The Oral Method of Teaching Languages*, became widely acclaimed by many teachers of foreign languages in the Soviet states at that time (Ornstein, 1954:387). The Audio-Lingual Method (see Section 2.2) was actively proposed as a framework for teaching languages by Professor of Leningrad University I.E. Anchikov, as it was an approach believed to be capable of providing quicker ways of attaining in learners the required oral proficiency in a foreign language; However, Anchikov's attempts resulted in not only the approval of his followers but strong dissatisfaction on the part of the proponents of the Grammar Translation method (Ortstein, 1954:387).

As for the official regulations with regard to the use of language teaching methodology, according to Rismene, "the teachers of foreign languages had to follow the centralized curricula set by Moscow, which determined the use of the Audio-Lingual Method in language laboratories" (2008:4). The Grammar-Translation Method could also be used as a supplement to the Audio-Lingual Method. The Audio-Lingual Method remained popular in the Soviet Union throughout the 1970s and 1980s; however, later it was proven that this method provided learners with little beyond the ability to know "how (grammar) to say what (vocabulary)" in a foreign language, and resulted only in a passive process of language acquisition (Rismene, 2008:4).

Some innovative, attempts were also made at that time to replace the Grammar Translation Method, and some alternative methods started appearing, one of the most popular in the early post-Soviet period, in the 1990s, being the so-called "Express-Method" by Ilona Davidova. The author's comments, as presented on the back cover of the book are quoted below:

Express train – method is the unique method of training entirely constructed on knowledge of laws of human memory and psychology constructed on system. "Express train - method" is specially developed program of studying of the English language, intended for people it is no time to them sit in classes, pore over textbooks.

The faulty, stilted English used in the description of the method by the author herself suggests that the students of this book were not exposed to an adequate language model and were destined to failure from the very outset. Even though this book was accepted with much enthusiasm in the beginning, as it seemed to offer ‘innovative’ – quick, and learners’ practical needs-based – way of learning a foreign language, its popularity waned soon afterwards, leading to a realization that it was nothing but another unsuccessful attempt at riding the language teaching revolution bandwagon. It was the tried and trusted Grammar-Translation Method that never stopped being practised by large numbers of language teachers while all the other innovative fads came and went in language teaching. Moreover, Grammar-Translation still continues to be one of the most widespread methods in language classrooms in the former Soviet nations, especially popular among those teachers who do not feel the urge to employ more communicative alternatives or who are incapable of doing so.

5.2.3 Language teaching material in Soviet times

To better illustrate the language policies implemented in Soviet times, a discussion of teaching materials used in the Soviet period is also provided in this section. As mentioned above (Section 5.2.2), in order to ensure that children would not be “contaminated” by the “bourgeois” languages they were learning, the “special educational establishment” created teaching materials and curricula that were held to be of “ideological value” (Pavlenko, 1964:323). According to Pavlenko, the Soviet teaching materials offer the descriptions of “imagined” situations and interactions, which, for most Soviet language learners who were not allowed to travel abroad and were discouraged from having any contact with foreigners, would never take place in actual practice (Eerde, 1954:401).

It was through these artificial contexts that carefully selected language input was provided (Pavlenko, 1964:323). The choice of vocabulary (often military e.g. a tank, a machine gun), as well as the topic of the sentences illustrated mostly military objects and situations. For example, in the English grammar book by Markova (1972), the language rules were often illustrated by the examples such as “We were to launch an offensive at night” (Markova, 1972:8) and “The losses inflicted on the enemy were heavy” (1972:128; cited in Pavlenko, 1964:323). It is also interesting to note that most of the language teaching materials were published by *Voennoe Izdatel'stvo* (“The Military Publishing House”).

The ideals and values inherent in Russian culture were the dominant components of the material, collectivism or equalitarianism, for instance. Consequently, many texts were replete with the sentences written from the collective “we” perspective – “we suffer together” (cited in Chipauline, 2001:20) as well as emphasizing collective moral values – “you should not despise people less fortunate than you” (Shakh-Nazarova, 1995:11), or “The young man helped his friend in trouble and in this way showed to everybody what was the right thing to do” (Bonk et al., 1973:19). According to Chipouline (2001), taking a look at the Soviet-published materials, it becomes obvious that “paradoxically, in trying to create the learning materials for the students of English, the authors of these texts focus on the values inherent in their own culture...[and while] looking in the mirror of another language, see themselves” (2001:17).

Not until its independence from the Soviet Union did the Soviet language teaching material written by Soviet authors, affected by internal as well as external political and socio-cultural realities, gradually start being replaced by British- or/and American-published teaching resources. However, even today, there are still certain teachers in ex-Soviet countries who remain loyal towards the ‘traditional’ type of coursebooks, discussed in the preceding paragraph, characterizing them as better serving the learners’ ‘academic’ needs than modern teaching materials do, which they sometimes describe as focusing mainly on ‘colloquial’ language knowledge.

5.3 THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD AND THE MOVE TOWARDS COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GEORGIA – EARLY 1990s

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new socio-cultural and political paradigm was created in the post-Soviet countries: traveling, doing business or studying abroad became a real possibility, as the doors to Europe and the US opened up. Suddenly, many things had to be reconsidered by each ex-Soviet country in order for it to form a new state, one that would be independent, democratic and visible in the international arena. Consequently, numerous reforms had to be undertaken and priorities had to be redefined (Karakhanyan, 2011:17). Pavlenko comprehensively summarizes the situation at that time:

The status quo in foreign language teaching changed drastically with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and dissolution of Eastern European socialist governments. In order to align themselves with the Western powers and gain an entry into the global market, there were strong tendencies observed in the Eastern European democracies to refashion themselves as democratic and westernized. This sociopolitical and economic change involved language teaching reforms, which stripped Russian of its privileged status and offered learners a freedom of choice between a number of languages (Pavlenko, 2003:327-328).

As language teaching became one of the preconditions for a more successful future for individuals, language policy makers as well as the population in the post-Soviet countries became aware of the need to know more foreign languages than just Russian, and to learn these languages not only for scientific or scholarly reasons, as before, but also for real-life, practical purposes. This realization certainly applied to Georgia as well – a small state with a national language³ spoken only within its boundaries. However, in the newly-independent post-Soviet countries, including Georgia, despite clearly identified needs and directions in the language teaching field, the transition from the grammar-driven teaching practice towards a communicative one “led to the crisis” in the system (Rismane, 2008:6). Rismane tries to explain the cause by the absence of a clear methodological scheme and of an action plan for finding proper ways to integrate novelties in language teaching field in these countries. Still under the influence of Soviet living and mentality, the generation active at the governmental level in the 1990s was incapable of altering systems deeply rooted in the Soviet tradition (Rismane, 2008:6). This might explain why no significant progress was witnessed in that decade.

It was not in the governmental but in the private sector that the first attempts were made to align the post-Soviet language teaching standards then existing in Georgia with those of Europe, of which the country had started trying to become an integral part. The first private language schools began to appear in Georgia in the early 1990s, such as the International House Tbilisi, an official affiliate of International House London, followed by a number of smaller-scale language centers. At such schools, for the first time, foreign-, mainly, British-published coursebooks were introduced, one of the first of its kind being the *Headway* series by Oxford University Press, followed by other Cambridge, Longman and Macmillan publications and other internationally popular resources. Below Figure 5.1 provides an image of one of the *Headway* series coursebooks.

³ The Georgian language is believed to belong to the group of Kartvelian, or South Caucasian, family of languages. The Georgian language has a unique alphabet, one of the fourteen original alphabets in the world, and a graphically independent alphabetic writing system, which is in no way related to the Cyrillic (which is a common misconception), or any other scripts in the world. The above explains why the studying of foreign languages might be a more difficult experience for Georgian language learners than for nations whose native tongue and script shares some commonalities with certain other languages of the world.

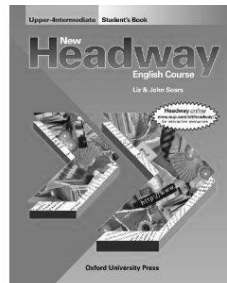


Figure 5.1: Headway Student Book⁴

These coursebooks were claimed to be based on a communicative teaching approach and to offer more interactive teaching material. Younger, more innovative, creative and motivated teachers were employed; for the first time, native-speaker language teachers were hired, which was a good start in laying a solid basis for transforming the existing form-focused language instruction into communicative language teaching. In contrast to the private language schools, not many changes or even efforts were made in language teaching at public schools and institutions in the early 1990s, and not many private secondary schools existed at that time. Private secondary schools started to emerge at the end of the 1990s - early 2000s as a result of the obvious dissatisfaction with the quality of education offered at the public secondary schools.

Attempts at changing the teaching methodology, as well as setting new learning/teaching goals for foreign language teaching at public schools in Georgia, were first made at the policy level when the Ministry of Education of Georgia issued the first communication oriented language curriculum, *State Education Standards in Foreign Languages*, in 1997. The document aimed at making language teaching in Georgia more communicative in nature and more targeted at providing the learners with more pragmatic language skills, instead of the sole knowledge of language rules and theory (State Education Standards in Foreign Languages, 1997:37). However, not much was done beyond the declared intent in this policy document to transform Georgia's language teaching system (for more discussion of the document, see Section 6.2). The situation was one where no new teaching materials, no infrastructure and no efforts on the part of the government to equip teachers with skills for adopting more innovative teaching methods were in place. Furthermore, having a generation of practicing teachers who had themselves been exposed to the traditional manner of language teaching and had never had the opportunity of target foreign language exposure (TLG: *Annual Report*, 2001:35) made it very

⁴ Retrieved from <http://www.andrewbook.sk/andrewbook/eshop/3-1-JAZYKY/0/1/9/1/> (accessed October 2012).

hard, if not impossible, to break away from the language instruction traditions in Georgia (Tkemaladze et al., 2001:36).

The creation of the Council of Europe document *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* (CEFR) in 2001 was another achievement in further developing language teaching worldwide. This also played some role with regard to Georgia: when Georgia joined the Council of Europe in 1999, the necessity to follow Europe's example in many areas, among them language teaching standards, became obvious.

5.4 FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTION EFFORTS

After the Rose Revolution in 2003,⁵a new government, largely comprised of young, western-educated leaders came into power and initiated a process of reforms in Georgia, taking Europe and the US as a model of development in various spheres, amongst them education. Seeing foreign language proficiency as a means of bridging the gaps between Georgia and the Western world, the government saw to it that language teaching found its way to the top of the priority list of the reforms to be implemented (Teach & Learn with Georgia (TLG): Annual Report, 2011:6). However, not until 2009, well into the government's second term of office, were visible efforts made to dramatically reform the field of language teaching in Georgia. "Every school child in Georgia should become an English speaker in the next four years, as part of an educational revolution", President Saakashvili declared in August 2010 (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:12). Initiatives were undertaken in various directions and will be discussed in turn in the following subsections.

5.4.1 The National Curriculum for Foreign Languages of Georgia

First, the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia, under the auspices of its National Curriculum and Assessment Center (NCAC), which was established within the Ministry, developed a new language curriculum, the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages (NCFL) in 2009, in consultation with external experts from a range of fields: psychologists, linguists, teachers, teacher trainers and foreign consultants. The document is based on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching and is oriented towards preparing learners to be citizens equipped with practical language skills and capable of communication across borders. The first draft of the curriculum was

⁵ The Rose Revolution, which took place in Georgia in November 2003, was triggered by the widespread protests over the disputed parliamentary elections. As a result of this revolution President Eduard Shevardnadze was forced to resign and new, pro-western government came into power (Teach & Learn with Georgia: Annual Report, 2011: 6).

revised, with minor changes introduced, into the present form of the document in 2011 (For a more detailed discussion on NCFL, see Chapter 6).

5.4.2 New teaching materials

Before 2010, most of the coursebooks used as compulsory teaching material at all public schools in Georgia were locally-published and compiled by Georgian authors. These coursebooks were harshly criticized by the native-speaker instructors teaching in Georgia (see also Section 5.4.4 below), who considered the poor quality of these teaching materials as a major challenge, making the teaching process almost impossible. “These coursebooks are awful, dull and full of mistakes,” one of the teachers remarked, while others criticized the old coursebooks for being faulty as well as totally focused on grammar and in no way promoting learners’ real-life language skills (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:47).

According to the Ministry, native-teacher reports and assessments as well as the publication of a new National Curriculum for Foreign Languages made the necessity of introducing new standard coursebooks obvious. Since 2010, coursebooks, to be allowed to be used in schools, have to go through an approval procedure (known in Georgian as *grifireba*) at the Ministry of Education’s National Curriculum and Assessment Center, according to a predetermined set of criteria. The list of the Ministry-approved coursebooks are now available on the website of the Ministry, and public school teachers have to choose one of these coursebooks as their teaching material.⁶

The teaching material approval requirement contributed to the opening-up of the coursebook market in Georgia to international publishing houses that produce high quality materials (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:11) as well as to providing a guarantee that language teaching resources are compatible with the methodological principles and goals outlined in the national language curriculum. Consequently, today, only those coursebooks which are based on the modern communicative teaching methods and are claimed to be targeted at improving learners’ communicative competence in a foreign language are approved for classroom use. The main supplier of the coursebooks currently on the scene in Georgia is Macmillan Publishing, and the coursebook offered by them is *English World*.⁷

⁶ See <http://ganatleba.org/index.php?m=149&pbooks=6> (accessed September 2012).

⁷ See <http://www.macmillaneducation.com/MediaArticle.aspx?id=1652> (accessed September 2012).

5.4.3 Priorities in teaching foreign languages

It should also be noted that all the efforts made with regard to language teaching reform and refinement, even though the importance of teaching and learning of foreign languages has also been duly recognized, have predominantly been concerned with the English language, perceived as it is as a lingua franca of social communication, diplomacy and business today. English started gaining more and more popularity among Georgians since 1991 (Tkemaladze, 2001:14) and became the primary foreign language taught at secondary schools in Georgia in 2009. According to the present language policy document (NCFL, 2011), English is a compulsory subject from the very first grade (TLR: Annual Report, 2011:11); exceptions to these requirements can be made only on special request and provided that clear explanations are given regarding why a different decision with respect to the foreign language choice or starting grade has to be taken by a concrete school (NCFL, 2011:551).

Other evidence that can be used to back up the claims made with regard to the growing popularity of English in particular, standing out among the other traditionally taught foreign languages, is the set of statistical figures cited by Tkemaladze (2001). According to Tkemaladze's study, 90.2% of school directors in Georgia consider English more popular than any other foreign language taught in schools at the moment, while 90.5% of parents and 97.1% of high school students find English to be the most useful foreign language which will help them (or, as the case may be, their children) find a decent job (2001:15).

5.4.4 The project Teach & Learn with Georgia

In order to foster the educational reforms already underway in the field of language teaching in Georgia, an ambitious initiative was undertaken in 2010 by the Ministry of Education and Science to develop a program Teach & Learn with Georgia (TLG), which would help Georgians “develop their foreign language skills and foster their communication with the rest of the world”. Within the framework of the project, language teachers from various, predominantly native English-speaking countries, were recruited all around the world and tasked to help Georgian schoolchildren learn languages for communication by exposing them to authentic language use as well as to cultural experiences through their language (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:12). It should be noted here that there has been no particular requirement adopted or preference shown with regard to the nationality of the teachers recruited, neither has such a norm been adopted in the official language policy document (more discussion on the language policy document, see Chapter 6). For the purposes of teaching English, British, American, Australian, and even non-native teachers fluent in the English language were equally welcome to come

and teach in Georgia. Such an approach, eventually, results in the teaching of the so-called ‘international English’, with no consistency or norm observed with regard to the use of any particular form of English.

The project was based on the Peace Corps model, with certain elements of the Japanese JET (Japan Education and Training) and South Korean EPIK (English Program in Korea) programs, which were adapted to the local Georgian needs (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:14; Wada, 2002:33). This project, which started in early 2010, had by 2011 already recruited one thousand native-speaker language teachers to Georgia. From the very start, the program was evaluated as being “of extremely high priority and a large step forward towards the improvement of English language teaching and learning” (TLG: Annual report, 2011:6):

As we strive towards globalization and acknowledge the advantages of new technology, we still consider that human interaction and people-to-people communication are irreplaceable and have far more tangible or intangible benefits than any other means of communication. This is why “Teach & Learn with Georgia” is so important for a small country like Georgia that has exceptional customs and traditions and is willing to share them with the rest of the world.

The value and importance attached nationally to TLG is revealed by the fact that not only the Minister of Education at that time, but also the then President of Georgia himself, Mikheil Saakashvili, assessed the project in the following terms in August 2010:⁸

The arrival of 10,000 English language teachers in Georgia is an event of exactly the same magnitude as when [King] David the Builder resettled 50,000 Kipchaks and the Georgian state’s modernization gained an irreversible nature. If during the times of David the Builder competitiveness was measured by a military criterion, today’s criterion is education. What we will do within the next few years in Georgia is a real educational revolution and nothing of this kind has been done in any of the post-Soviet states before. In the next four years, we will achieve a situation wherein every school-age child speaks English, and English will become their second language after Georgian. This will give us an opportunity to make a major breakthrough in the coming decades [unique] in the entire post-Soviet space, and that is the greatest contribution we will make to the future development of the country (Teach & Learn with Georgia: Annual Report, 2011:12).

Alongside its goal of improving foreign language proficiency, TLG was also designed to involve program participants in the monitoring procedure for

⁸ Retrieved from <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=22601> (accessed October 2013).

newly-introduced curricula and textbooks, which it was believed would help governmental authorities assess how language teachers and learners were coping with and implementing the novelties introduced in language teaching in Georgia (TLG: Annual Report, 2012:48).

The achievement of TLG is summarized in the *Annual Report: 2010-2011*, according to which, out of 4,200 local English teachers, up to 3,000 had a chance thanks to the program to interact with native English speakers and get to know modern teaching methods and technique; up to 50,000 local students have improved their English. The report adds that “enormous impact” has been witnessed with regard to teaching methodologies as revealed through their effect on “students’ mindsets and speaking skills” (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:13). In the document, it is concluded that all of the main goals of the project in terms of local teacher development have been achieved and that “TLG was an absolute success and a true language and culture revolution” (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:28, 40). As for the external evaluation of the project, some testimonials presented in a *New York Times* article, “American Voices, Far from Home” (January 23, 2011), by young American teachers teaching in Georgia provide interesting insights as well. Rhonda Gibson, aged 24, from New Orleans, reports:

The program is a work in progress. I won’t say there aren’t holes in the foundation and cracks in the ceiling. But there is an evolution within the program as they learn how to adapt to us, the Westerners (*New York Times*, Rhonda Gibson, January 23, 2011).

Another 23-year-old American teacher in Georgia, James Norton, comments:

Teach & Learn with Georgia is a good program, and I hope it’s a worthwhile investment in Georgia’s future. It’s a relatively inexpensive way to bring an outside perspective on the education system – like hiring a consulting firm but without the cost – as long as the Ministry of Education will listen to feedback from the teachers.

This program, however, also necessitated a number of improvements to, as acknowledged by Norton in the same *New York Times* article:

We have awful facilities, no materials and, most importantly, no culture of academic accountability or expectations [...]. In a way, though, it’s like buying an espresso machine before you’ve built a kitchen. There are so many obstacles preventing this cadre of foreign teachers from doing their jobs effectively, and I often wonder whether the government would be better off focusing on fundamentals first – buying books for all students, training teachers in modern techniques (as opposed to the translation-and-memorization doctrine that is currently rampant. (*New York Times*, Norton, January 23, 2011)

With another change of government in Georgia in 2012, the TLG project was suspended. However, the claimed positive effect of this program on the language teaching situation in Georgia was one of the motivating factors for me to explore the real state of affairs of language teaching in my country today and assess how efforts made have reached its final target.

5.4.5 Professional development of language teachers

The realization that the introduction of new approaches and methods necessitated appropriate teacher preparation prompted the government of Georgia to start making efforts in this direction. The National Center for Teacher Development (NCTD) produced a document, *Language Teacher Professional Standards*, in 2009, that outlines the theoretical knowledge as well as practical teaching and interpersonal skills which a language teacher has to possess to be eligible for language instruction in the state sector (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:10).

To further contribute to the improvement of teaching quality, the passing of the Teacher Certification Exam was also made obligatory by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia in 2010. Policymakers justified the reasons for introducing such examinations for teachers in the following way: “The Teacher Certification process will support the regulation of the teaching profession, support the planning of Continuous Professional Development and trigger significant improvements in the teaching and learning process overall.”⁹

Government-accredited language teacher training centers were set up soon after to help teachers prepare for the exams and improve their practical teaching skills. The institution Teachers’ House was also opened in Tbilisi in October 2011 for the same purpose.¹⁰ As mentioned above, Macmillan Education, besides providing the biggest share of coursebooks to the Georgian schools at that time, was also involved in teacher training provision to Georgian teachers. According to TLG: Annual Document (2011), beginning from June to August 2011, Macmillan trained around 4,200 Georgian teachers of English in the new methodology of working with their coursebooks, such as *English World* (2011:12).

⁹ Retrieved from http://tpdc.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=439&lang=geo. (accessed October 2012).

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://mes.gov.ge/content.php?Lang=eng&id=2883> (accessed 2013 October).

5.4.6 Efforts of non-governmental organizations in Georgia

Some of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in developing the language teaching, and particularly English language teaching (ELT), field in Georgia are ETAG (the English Teachers' Association in Georgia) and the British Council. ETAG, registered in January 1995 as a non-governmental and non-profit organization in Georgia, which now has representatives in nine cities in the country. Their members are school and university teachers of English from the state and private sectors. ETAG's declared goal is to improve the standard of English teaching in Georgia through the provision of professional consultancy and training, as well as through supporting the introduction of more effective teaching methods and materials. In close cooperation with the British Council, the US Embassy, the Open Society – Georgia Foundation, the Know-How Fund, the Eurasia Foundation and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), ETAG has been very active in contributing to ELT development by organizing various teacher training, conferences, seminars and presentations for its member teachers. They have published a coursebook for trainee teachers, *A Pre-service Teacher Training Course. Becoming an English Teacher: Theory and Practice of Teaching English in Georgia*, as well as a 45-page Trainer Manual which provides many communicative activities for teachers to use in the classroom (Tsitsishvili et al., 2006), and aims at making teachers aware of the theories behind EFL teaching while preparing them for their initial teaching experiences in the classroom. The publication of English language coursebooks and the provision of some teacher training courses, in cooperation with the British Council and the US Embassy, have also been among ETAG's professional activities (More information about this organization can be found on <http://etag.ge>).

Another extensive research project in the field of English language teaching in Georgia conducted by the ETAG team was *A Baseline Study in English Language Teaching and Learning in Georgia* (Tkemaladze et al., 2001), widely referred to in this dissertation. ETAG, in cooperation with the British Council, carried out a survey to find out the current state of English language teaching in Georgia in order to draw up a detailed description of the situation and to provide policymakers with an objective account of key aspects of English language teaching in the country. The findings of this research, which dealt with school directors, English teachers and students, first-year university students, parents, in-service and pre-service teacher trainers, helped identify the areas in foreign language teaching which needed urgent intervention at that time.

With regard to the professional development of language teachers, a positive change observed in the private sector is the in-country availability of the Cambridge University administered CELTA (Certificate of English Language Teaching) course since 2010, offered by the International House

Tbilisi. CELTA is an internationally-recognized teacher training course, a very sought-after qualification in the field of English language teaching worldwide.

5.5 TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GEORGIA

In Georgia, the need to keep up with the progress in technology-enhanced teaching and the modern tendencies of the Western world (discussed in Chapter 4) has been widely recognized. The Georgian educational magazine *The Teacher*, which aims at supporting Georgian teachers' professional growth and help them stay up to date and informed about the modern theoretical as well as practical developments in the field of education, has been actively offering its audience at least one article about computer use in teaching in almost every one of its issues since 2010.¹¹ Thus, in the subsections that follow, the initiatives and efforts made by the Government of Georgia in this direction will be discussed.

5.5.1 Developments in Technology-Enhanced Language Teaching

Integrating new technologies in teaching in Georgia has been one of the priorities of the education policy makers in the past few years. The language teaching field, and particularly if communicative language teaching is the aspiration in Georgia, is believed to strongly benefit from wider scale integration of technology and the resources it offers (Nafetvaridze, 2012:55). Georgia might not be very far advanced in the area of technology-enhanced teaching at this point, but much progress can be observed in this direction (Asatiani, 2011:38).

An early sign of the awareness of the need to enhance the efficiency of the education by the technology use surfaced when the Government of Georgia initiated a project aimed at providing first-grade pupils of public primary schools with locally produced mini laptops called Buki, which have also been exported to some countries abroad (Tabula, 2012:1).

¹¹ See the website of the Ministry of Education of Georgia: <http://www.tpdg.ge> (accessed December 2013).



Picture 5.1: First-graders at a public school in Georgia, using mini computers called Buki¹²

This initiative was widely welcomed by schools, as well as by pupils and their parents; starting from 2011, within the framework of the National Program, *My first Computer*, “Buki” laptops (a name which refers to the English word “book”, with the Georgian suffix ‘i’, at the end) have been provided to all first-graders in Georgia. The computers offer pupils language practice programs together with other educational teaching resources, some of which are already installed on the computer, while others can be downloaded from the website specifically created to provide additional study materials for the “Buki” laptop¹³. The Internet connection on these laptops enables learners to connect with more resources and learning opportunities available online, most of which are in English.

Schools need to prepare the students for present challenges by exposing them to new technologies (Tabula, 2012:2). The introduction of laptops is not the only sign of the efforts made towards implementation of technology-enhanced teaching in Georgia. Since 2011, the so-called “Future Classes” – high-tech computer labs – have been installed in eighty schools around Georgia. These classrooms, which are equipped with the latest technology resources, make the use of pens, pencils or books redundant. Interactive White Boards and monitors are used instead, which makes things like saving and retrieving electronic versions of earlier lessons possible for the teachers as well as the learners. All the Future Classes are connected digitally, and students can collaborate in the learning process in many ways (Tabula, 2012:2). The project aims at preparing young learners for a full integration and functioning in the computer-dominated world, where they will need to have computer skills and computer literacy (Tabula, 2012:1). Below, a picture illustrating a lesson held in one of the “Future Classes” is presented.

¹² Image retrieved from <http://www.buki.ge> (accessed September 2014).

¹³ For more information about “Buki” laptops and “Future Classes”, see the video at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6y9aC5LHb6k> (accessed September 2014).



Picture 5.2: “the Future Class” in Tbilisi¹⁴

The introduction of modern technologies into teaching since 2011 has been accompanied by teacher training sessions in general computer use (Ingorokva, 2011:15). However, it seems that teacher preparation and the quality and quantity of the technologies available presently at schools in Georgia are still an issue. As the integration of computer-based teaching is a recent change in the education system in Georgia, not much research is available to answer the question whether teachers and learners are adapting to the change. However, some anecdotal evidence is available provided by foreign language teachers who taught at public schools in Georgia (More information about foreign language teachers teaching in Georgia is available in Section 5.4.4). One American teacher comments on his experience in teaching English in Georgia. He says that he faced considerable obstacles in his teaching practice, which was mainly related to the lack of classroom equipment and material (Heyn, 2011:1).¹⁵ “Classrooms are ill-prepared, the only tools being a chalk and a book. Printers are non-existent. As for the visual aids – well, only if the teachers want to carry their laptops to school every day,” another English instructor remarks. Even though the schools that these teachers are referring to are located in the rural areas, and the comments cannot be automatically applied to the schools in the bigger cities of Georgia, the examples provided illustrate the fact that there is still much to be improved in order to support technology-enhanced teaching throughout the whole country.¹⁶ Yet, another teacher makes the following comment regarding the situation at schools in the capital: “Computers and the Internet may be in schools but teachers do not

¹⁴ Image retrieved from http://primetimenews.ge/?page=14&news_id=361 (accessed September 2012).

¹⁵ Teach and Learn with Georgia produces results but faces obstacles, 2011, January 25, *NYTimes*.

¹⁶ American Voices, Far From Home, 2011, January 23, *NYTimes*.

know how to use them. And not every school is as well equipped as School No. 51” (TLG: *Annual Report*, 2011:15).

5.5.2 Proliferation of computer literacy in Georgia

It is important to note that, before a modern technology progress reached the schools, dramatic changes have been made in terms of overall Internet availability and accessibility in Georgia in recent years, leading to numerous societal transformations and, eventually, making the above-mentioned technological advancement in the field of education of Georgia possible. Tsitsishvili (2001), who investigated the situation related to English Language Teaching (ELT) material and technology use in Georgia in 2001, reported that the cassette recorder was the only piece of technology used, if at all, by Georgian teachers in those days (Tsitsishvili, 2001:55). In 2002, there was one computer per 707 students in Georgian schools with an average of 0.3 computers per school. As a result of the Deer Leap Project, by 2007, 800 schools were connected to the Internet, with 7,000 computers installed and 70% of teachers receiving training in technology applications.¹⁷ Thus, there has been some progress witnessed in terms of modernization of educational institutions with technologies in Georgia since those days, naturally making application of technology in language teaching more realistic than before.

Further steps were taken in this direction when the Georgian Internet service company, Magti, signed a contract with the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia to connect 2,000 public schools (including schools in rural and high-mountain areas) to the Internet by the end of 2011. In addition, the Ministry of Justice of Georgia initiated the establishment of the “*Society of Computer Knowledge Proliferation*”. The organization was officially launched on May 10, 2012 at Ilia Chavchavadze House-Museum in Kvareli; the venue of the launch was of symbolic importance, as it was exactly at this place where the “Society of Literacy Proliferation” had been established in the 19th century by the famous Georgian writer and a political figure, Ilia Chavchavadze (1837–1907).¹⁸ This fact underlines the significance of the event and the acknowledgement of the need to promote computer literacy among Georgian society in the 21st century in the same way as the importance of proliferating literacy was acknowledged in the 19th century.

Teaching languages, especially English, and trying to make learners computer literate, are well-interconnected: language proficiency contributes greatly to being better at, for example, using the Internet and navigating the web more efficiently. At the same time, having computer-based resources

¹⁷ Retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/countryofgeorgia/it-skills/> (accessed September 2012).

¹⁸ Retrieved from http://cida.ge/news_eng.php?id=729&page_name=ar (accessed September 2012).

available provides a sea of opportunities for learning languages (Son, 2008:34). So, language teaching and improvement of computer literacy go hand in hand and many efforts can be observed in both of these directions in Georgia¹⁹.

The discussion in this as well as in the previous section, illustrates that both governmental and non-governmental sectors involved in language teaching have been taking initiative and making efforts to transform the post-Soviet language teaching tradition in Georgia into a Western, communicative and more pragmatic form of language instruction.

5.6 CONCLUSION

As the information discussed in this chapter reveals, many changes have been taking place in the ELT field in Georgia since Soviet times up until today, and the situation is still in the process of transformation. The importance and priority of providing Georgian language learners with a proper quality language education, however, has never ceased to be prioritized since Georgia's independence. The need to increase the number of people in the population who can communicate effectively in foreign languages, particularly in English²⁰ has never been underestimated. It has been duly realized that for a small country like Georgia, whose national language, Georgian²¹, is spoken only within its borders, knowing foreign languages becomes a means for cross-border communication and for stronger integration into the rest of the world; certain governments, as well as private organizations and institutions have been able to contribute more to the process of language teaching improvement than the others. To what extent the efforts made so far have been reflected on the overall situation in the language teaching field in Georgia is an area that has been investigated and is described later in this dissertation (Chapters 7 - 10). Before moving to analysis of the practical situation, I look in the following chapter into the official requirements with regard to foreign language teaching adopted in Georgia today. For this purpose, the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages of Georgia (*Erovnuli Sastsavlo Gegma Uckho Enebsi*, 2011) is analyzed in detail.

¹⁹ For more discussion about Georgian experts views on technology-enhanced education, see the article by Edisherashvili & Smakman (2013).

²⁰ As mentioned in Section 5.4.4, no special emphasis has been placed neither on teaching British or American English in Georgia. It can be observed that the adopted teaching materials tend to be more British-published than American. However, the teachers who were hired in the framework of TLG program were from Britain as well as the US and other English-speaking countries.

²¹ For more information about the Georgian language, see Chapter 5, footnote 3.