CHAPTER 6: FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING POLICY IN GEORGIA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of how closely the foreign language policy currently in place attains its ultimate goal in actual practice at secondary schools in Tbilisi is the major research question of the present dissertation. All the other, more concrete, research questions that are presented and explored in detail in the four analysis chapters that follow (Chapters 7 - 10), are woven around this core question related to the foreign language teaching policy document of Georgia. Hence, to provide the basis and a point of reference for the analysis chapters, the existing National Curriculum for Foreign Languages (NCFL, 2001), its structure, priorities, goals and standards are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Chapter Overview

Section 6.2 is about the stages that led to the creation of the present language curriculum in Georgia. Section 6.3 describes the current NCFL, its goals, teaching organization, and the recommended assessment system (6.3.1). This section also describes the Foreign Language Standards provided in the curriculum (6.3.2) as well the recommended contents of the syllabus for foreign languages (6.3.3). Finally, Section 6.4 provides a summary and a discussion related to the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages: its orientation towards the principles of communicative language teaching (6.4.1), recommended assessment forms (6.4.2), some inconsistencies and issues observed in the NCFL (6.4.3); the last subsection 6.4.4 provides final remarks about the role of the NCFL in transforming the language teaching in Georgia, and the requirements and potential challenges on the way to ultimate success.

6.2 A WAY TOWARDS THE CURRENT NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

As discussed in Section 5.3, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and especially by joining the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia chose an irreversible course towards the Western world. Acknowledging the importance of language teaching as a tool for moving closer to the Western world, and with the goal in sight of preparing multilingual citizens of the country who could appreciate the cultures of and communicate with speakers of other European languages, radical reforms started to be undertaken in the language teaching field in Georgia (Tkemaladze, 2001:14).

The creation and further revisions of the new policy document relating to the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Georgia was one of the efforts made in this direction (for information about other initiatives undertaken in Georgia to reform the field of foreign language teaching, see Section 5.4). The first foreign language policy paper which was based on the principles of communicative language teaching was called State Education Standards in Foreign Languages (1997). It was drawn up by the State National Institute of Pedagogical Sciences in 1997 (Tkemaladze, 2001:18). Discussing the document, Tkemaladze (2001) remarks: "The standards contain the elements of the communicative approach to teaching and represent a comprehensive guide for the transition from a grammar-translation to a communicative approach to teaching" (2001:19). The language teaching/learning standards and the curriculum of 1997 was a landmark in the history of language teaching in Georgia since it was for the first time that not only the knowledge of the form of the language but also the acquisition of practical, communicative skills was an officially declared goal of foreign language teaching. In the State Education Standards in Foreign Languages it says: "A student must be able to realize his knowledge in speech activities" (1997:38).

However, despite an attempt to move closer to Communicative Language Teaching, as Tkemaladze stated in 2001, the actual reality – the communicative nature and quality of foreign language teaching in Georgia – remained far from satisfactory. The issues, such as the teachers' lack of awareness and knowledge of the language policy document; the incompatibility between policy requirement and the classroom practicalities, as well as the lack of competence and skills on the teachers' part to comply with the new standards and requirements laid down in the document, remained critical.

The extent of influence that a new language curriculum exerted on the foreign language testing system used in Georgia was also evaluated by Tkemaladze as unimportant; the issue of assessment formats used at that time were seen even more problematic in the light of the new, more Communicative Language Teaching paradigm emerging in Georgia (2001:18-19). In the exams, Tkemaladze claimed, it was the students' memory that was tested, since it was the knowledge of prepared content that was assessed rather than the learners' ability to produce spontaneous
spoken language. Also, in most of the tests adopted in schools in Georgia, neither speaking nor listening components were included. Thus, Tkemaladze poses legitimate questions in 2001 with regard to the communicative language policy document released in 1997. They may be listed as follows:

- Is the new curriculum for foreign languages of Georgia only an official document or does it truly help prepare students for real-life communi-cation?
- Are the teachers aware of and familiar with the document?
- Do teachers follow communicative teaching requirements outlined in the document?

- To what extent are the new language standards considered while compiling the tests? (Tkemaladze, 2001:19)

These questions seem still relevant today with respect to the current National Curriculum for Foreign Languages (NCFL), issued in 2011, and English language teaching situation today in Georgia.

6.3 THE CURRENT NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

In 2009, the State Education Standards in Foreign Languages (1997), briefly discussed in the previous section, was replaced by a new document – the Natinal Curriculum for Foreign Languages (NCFL), which was further revised into its current form in 2011. It is stated in the NCFL (2011) that "*[p]roviding proficiency in foreign languages constitutes the main goal of the National Education Curriculum, serving the State's national as well as international interests…it is linguistic proficiency through which the process of approximation to the culture and the values of the western world becomes more tangible and realistic"* (NCFL, 2011:548). It is also claimed in the document that it is based on "three key pillars: information, skills and attitudes" provision (TLG: Annual Report, 2011:7). Thus, it can be observed that today the emphasis is put on broader goals of foreign language teaching in Georgia, which go beyond teaching foreign languages for academic purposes only and encompass socio-political and cultural value as well.

The NCFL comprises three sections: 1. A General Introduction; 2. Language Standards; and 3. Recommended Syllabus Contents. Figure 6.1 below outlines the structure of the document.

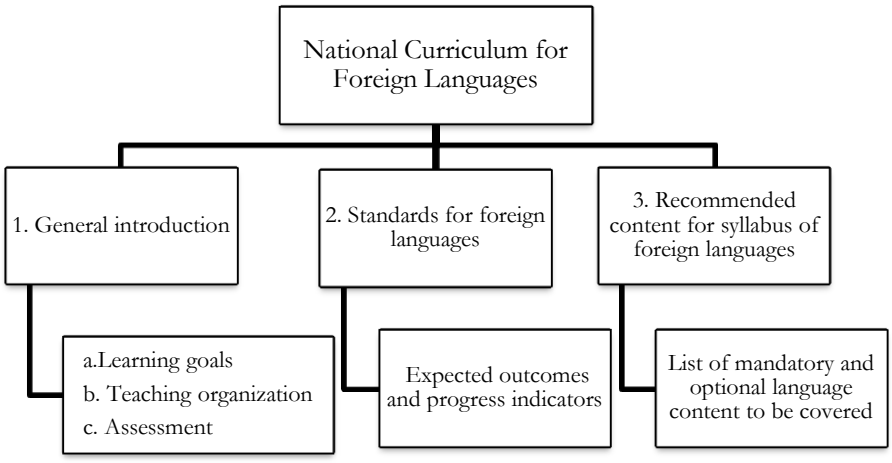

Figure 6.1 Structural organization of the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages

Each of the sections as well as the sub-sections presented in the above graph will be summarized below.

6.3.1 General introduction to the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages in Georgia

The general introduction to the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages describes the new goals of foreign language learning in Georgia, as well as the organization of teaching and assessment formats, which are shortly summarized in Subsections (a), (b) and (c) below.

(a) Learning goals

This section of the NCFL (2011) describes general goals of foreign language learning in Georgia. These goals are categorized into three thematic groups: (1) the knowledge of language form: of grammar, lexis, pronunciation; (2) language skills (speaking, writing, listening, reading) and Communicative Competence (linguistic, socio-cultural, strategic) acquisition; (3) the development of positive overall attitudes towards the target foreign language (NCFL, 2011:1-12).

All the above discussed goal areas are constituent parts of the wider concept of Communicative Competence (for more information about Communicative Competence, see Section 3.3.3); this fact is indicative of the call for a shift from an entirely form-focused to a more skills- and communication-oriented teaching practice. This assumption can further be reinforced by looking at the end-of-the-year goals presened in the document: they are outlined in the form of competences rather than grammatical structures and vocabulary lists. The learning goals section for each school cycle (primary, secondary, high) is concluded with the following statement: "At the end of this cycle, the learner *must be able to* —", followed by the communicative skills that pupils are expected to demonstrate in actual practice, rather than demonstrating atheoretical, form-based knowledge (National Curriculum for Foreign Languages, 2011:550).

(b) The organization of foreign language teaching across school education cycles

Three foreign languages are included in the NCFL: two compulsory and one optional (NCFL, 2011:1). Figure 6.2 shows at which stage of school education the first, second and third (optional) foreign language instruction must/may start. The figure also reveals how attempts are made to calibrate the national

standard levels of language proficiency with those of the CEFR[1], thus promoting a standardized and internationally recognizable assessment format (NCFL, 2011:553). Unlike CEFR, the nationally-determined levels show not only the proficiency indicators, but also provide learner age-related information. This is done by indicating the school cycle[2] – primary (p): 6-13-year-old, secondary (s): 14 -15-year-old; high (h): 16-17-year old learners.

		Primary (P)						Secondary(S) / High(H)					
Target Foreign Language	**Grade**	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Foreign language 1	Standard Level	P-01	P-02	P-I	P-II	P- III	P-IV	S-II/ SIII	S-III/ S-IV	S-IV/ S-V	H-V/ HVI	H-VI/ H-VII	H-VII/ H-VIII
	CEFR Level			A1.1	A1.2	A2.1	A2.2	A2/ B1.1	B1.1/ B1.2	B1.2/ B1.3	B1.3/ B1.4	B1.4/ B1+	B1+/ B2
Foreign Language 2	Standard Level							H-I	H-II	H-III	H-IV	H-V	H-VI
	CEFR Level							A1	A2	B1.1	B1.2	B1.3	B1.4
Selective Foriegn Language 3	Standard Level									H-I		H-II	H-III
	CEFR Level									A1		A2	B.1.1

Figure 6.2: Language teaching organization at schools in Georgia (NCFL, 2011:552)

[1] *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* was created by the Council of Europe in 2001 with an aim to provide "a means of developing language teaching in Europe by finding a way to compare the goals and achievement standards of learners in different national (and local) contexts (Morrow, 2004: 6).

[2] In Georgia, schools are comprehensive, and all three cycles of school education – primary, secondary and high – can be received by attending the same school. The first 9 years of school education are compulsory. Learners willing to go to university need to complete 12 years at school. There are public as well as private schools in Georgia. The education system in Georgia is decentralized; public schools are autonomous and publicly funded, whereas private schools are privately owned and funded by privately paid tuition (for more information about the schools in Georgia, see Chapter 7, footnote 3).

This information presented in the figure above is useful for choosing appropriate teaching material (and is also widely used for coursebook approval procedures; for more information see Section 5.4.2), as well as for the purposes of determining teaching and testing methodology. The NCFL and its requirements apply to public as well as private schools where language profi-ciency goals are concerned; however, there is more freedom of action with regard to when language teaching should start, and how many foreign languages should be introduced, at private schools.

(c). The recommended language proficiency assessment system and its constituent components

As mentioned above, the current foreign language curriculum sets out to define not only what students need to know in a foreign language, as earlier curricula did, but also stresses primarily what learners have to be able to do with the language in order to be considered linguistically proficient. Consequently, the system of assessment of foreign language proficiency proposed in the NCFL is also considerably different from that of its predecessor. The section of the NCFL called Assessment of Foreign Languages (2011:559-564) deals with this area. The assessment proposed in the document is subdivided into two components: ongoing assessment – assessment of homework and class work, and final assessment – assessment of the end-of-semester/year progress (2011:561).

In the NCFL, for the ongoing assessment all the components of Communicative Competence (for more discussion, see Section 3.3.3) are suggested to be checked: linguistic, discourse, cultural as well as strategic. The recommended testing formats include discrete tests (e.g., fill-in-the-gaps and multiple choice exercises) as well as integrative testing (checking learners' overall language proficiency through language skills, predominantly speaking). For further discussion on testing formats, see Section 10.2.3.

As for the final assessment in a foreign language recommended in the NCFL, learners are required to demonstrate language skills and competences which must correspond with the requirements defined by the Language Standards presented in the second section of the curriculum (see in the following section). Hence, learners' proficiency is recommended to be assessed through language skills only, using communicative tasks, such as role plays, discussions, and presentations. The pre-defined criteria are also provided in the NCFL for the final assessment purposes (NCFL, 2011:563; see the sample assessment schemes in Appendix 6.1).

6.3.2 Standards for foreign languages

Section 2 of the NCFL (2011:564-663) provides a list of standards for each level of language proficiency, and for each school cycle (from P-01 to H-VIII)[3]. The proficiency standards, or teaching goals, are generic in nature in order to encompass all foreign languages included in the language curriculum of Georgia: English, French, German and Russian. Language-specific guidelines are provided in the curriculum with regard to syllabus content only. The language proficiency standards define which language competences have to be met by the end of the academic year in seven different goal areas: 1. listening; 2. reading; 3.writing; 4. speaking; 5. Learning to learn; 6. inter-cultural dialogue; 7. language use.

So-called Goal Areas 1, 2, 3 and 4 – which deal with language skills – address issues such as what teaching approach should be adopted, what kind of teaching material should be used and what kind of classroom procedure should be followed in the lesson during each school cycle in order to achieve the required competences in the areas of speaking, writing, listening and reading.

Goal Area 5, Learning to learn, is concerned with the learning process itself: developing learning strategies, independence, creativity and efficient study management, and analytical skills in learners; the goal of this area is to develop the potential for lifelong learning in pupils. Producing self-assessment grids and personal diaries are suggested as one of the means to serve the aforementioned purposes.

Goal Area 6, Inter-cultural dialogue, focuses on the importance of learning about the culture of the target language and the interconnection between the two. Through comparison of different beliefs and cultural experiences, learners are believed to acquire better understanding of themselves as well as of others. This type of awareness, according to the document, will help learners understand the underlying values and norms of the target foreign language, which constitutes an essential part of effective communication (Bhabha, 1992:57-64).

Finally, Goal Area 7, Language use, addresses the social aspect of language learning, namely, equipping learners with communicative skills which will enable them to interact efficiently with individuals of different nationalities and social backgrounds (NCFL, 2011:558-559).

Each goal area contains from 16 up to 36 language standards, which outline communicative, linguistic and strategic language goals to be achieved in each goal area during each study cycle. Each standard is accompanied by progress indicators, defining the form in which a given language competence can be manifested (see NCFL, 2011:565). Also, one of the major observations that can be made with regard to the Language Standards is the shift in focus

[3] P=Primary school cycle; H=High school cycle (see also Section 6.3.1, Figure 6.2).

from "learner knows about" towards "the learner can…" or "the learner has necessary skills to…". This is a positive indicator of the attempt being made in Georgia to move from form-focused towards a more competence-based, pragmatic approach to foreign language teaching. This is also a sign that the country is trying to move closer to the CEFR standards, and thus to more communicative ways of teaching. After all, it is the assessment system offered in CEFR, which is entirely based on "the learner can…" statements as their proficiency assessment criteria, which is claimed to have greatly contributed to the transformation of the language learning/teaching experience from a "what do I know about the language" to a "what can I do with it" paradigm, leading to the further development and elaboration of the communicative methods of teaching as well as assessment (Maes, 2012:112). Other assessment organizations that likewise take "can do" statements as the main criteria for their assessment include ALTE (Association of Language Testers in Europe), and DIALANG, which is "an online diagnostic language assessment system designed to assess language proficiency in 14 European languages".[4] So, in this sense, Georgian language teaching policy can be perceived as sharing the principles adopted in foreign language teaching and testing in Europe.

When comparing the Language Standards presented in the Georgian language policy paper with those found in other Western language curricula, certain similarities as well as differences can be identified. In the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning of the United States (1995), for example, it is stated that the Goal areas focus on "what learners can do with the language" (Schwartz, 2002:115), which, as we have already seen, is also true for the Goal areas of the Georgian document; however, in the US curriculum, it is further emphasized that progress along the path of teaching method improvement can be witnessed in the document through the obvious shift it entails from the representation of language ability as consisting of language skills (listening, writing, speaking and reading) and linguistic components (grammar, lexis and pronunciation) to an encouragement instead to focus on the "discoursal and socio-cultural features of language use" (Schwartz, 2002:115).

As for the Goal areas in the Georgian document, these still include language skills; however, socio-cultural, strategic as well as practical aspects of language learning are also covered (see the seven goal areas described above). The multiplicity of the Standards goals and indicators is also a feature that distinguishes the Georgian curriculum from its Western counterpart: whereas only up to twelve Standards per goal area are presented in the US curriculum, the Standards in the Georgian one, as mentioned above, range from 16 to 36 each, and are very detailed and explicit. This can potentially be confusing to the end-users of the document – language teachers.

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[4] *Software Dialang.* (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/iss/software/page/index . p hp ?softwaretitle=Dialang&instance=1_br (accessed September 2013).

6.3.3 Recommended contents of syllabus for foreign languages

The National Curriculum for Foreign Languages comes with a detailed syllabus for each foreign language taught at schools in Georgia: a detailed inventory of grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation recommendations. For each area of language, the "recommended" materials and structures are presented, normally in a form of a list (for samples of the recommended contents, see Appendix 6.2).

The syllabus also includes recommendations with regard to the contents that deal with the cultural and social aspects of language learning, as well as phonology and orthography practice. Some teaching-related guidance and instruction tips are also included in this section of the document.

In providing the suggested contents, some recommendations regarding the form of teaching is also given, namely, in the document it is emphasized that teaching of all aspects of a foreign language should be based on communicative teaching principles. For example, in the NCFL, in the section dealing with grammar instruction, while discussing ways of presenting grammar, we read: "Memorizing rules is to be discouraged; grammar rules always have to be presented in context and students have to be given a chance to guess the meaning and function of a structure themselves and be provided with an opportunity to use new structures in a communicative way" (NCFL, 2011). The quote reveals that the teaching of language grammar and forms still is remains important, however, it is equally significant that communicative principles are applied while presenting, explaining and practising new forms and structures.

6.4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

6.4.1 Communicative basis of the NCFL of Georgia

Having looked at the Georgian National Curriculum for Foreign Languages and having described its constituent parts, I will now attempt to summarize and draw conclusions with regard to how compatible the Georgian language curriculum is with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching and to assess the quality of the document. The importance of identifying the links between a language curriculum and theories of language teaching is emphasized by Hall, as well as Schwartz (cited in Savignon, 2002:117-118). According to Schwartz (2002), "if the standards are to promote long-lasting reform, the underlying theory, which is the glue connecting the [learning goals], must be clarified and conveyed" (2002:118). Orientation of a given language curriculum can be easily identified through the contents and pedagogy adopted in it (Schwartz, 2002:115); as Breen and Candlin (1980) put it:

> The content of a communicative curriculum is specified by first designating a selected repertoire of communicative performances that ultimately will be

> required of the learners. Based on this repertoire, specific competences assumed to underlie successful performance are identified (cited in Savignon, 2002:115).

In the Georgian language curriculum, the communicative performance repertoire is designated as Goal Areas, whereas more specific competences are designated as Language Standards. A quick scan of the Goals and Standards presented in the Georgian language curriculum makes it clear that they support the communicative competence-based teaching model, as they cover all of the constituent components of what is known as Communicative Competence: linguistic, socio-cultural, strategic and discourse. This assumption is further confirmed by the fact that presenting Goal Areas as language learning objectives, instead of as lists of certain language forms and structures as was done previously, is considered by many to be "reflective of a new and therefore innovative proficiency paradigm" (Schwartz, 2002:119).

The adoption of CEFR language proficiency level indicators, as well as a standardized language skills assessment format, can be considered as an attempt made in Georgia to calibrate the country's national foreign language standards with the CERF language proficiency levels. This means fully supporting the principles of CLT and in this way trying to make the NCFL of Georgia more congruent with European standards of language instruction.

6.4.2 The recommended assessment format for foreign languages in Georgia

The assessment system is another important part of the curriculum, one that largely reveals the theoretical underpinnings of the document. The evidence of the underlying communicative theory that the present Georgian language curriculum provides can be summarized as follows: a shift from exclusively written, form-focused language proficiency evaluation, which was mainly aimed at revealing the learners' linguistic knowledge, to a more comprehensive one, the declared aim of which is to test both the linguistic and the communicative aspects of students' language competence (see Appendix 6.1). The existence of progress indicators which accompany the Language Standards, formulated in "the learner can…" statements against which the proficiency level should be measured, is also a clear indication of a declared will to move towards Communicative Language Teaching in Georgia.

6.4.3 Some inconsistences and issues observed in the NCFL

Despite the clearly communicative nature of the present Georgian language curriculum, some inconsistencies can be observed as well with regard to its communicative nature. For example, in the speaking assessment scheme, under the Communicative Skills assessment area (see Appendix 6.1, Table 6.1a), the following progress discriptors are included: "The learner can describe/report the sequence of events appropriately", as well as "The learner is able to specify the

exact time of events", areas which should be assigned rather to the linguistic ability category. So it becomes unclear how communicative proficiency can be assessed by looking at these aspects of learners' performance only. According to CLT theory, oral communication ability is comprised of competence indicators such as an ability to use communicative strategies: paraphrasing, body language, clarification, an ability to take account of the socio-cultural aspects of the language learning, all of which are largely ignored in the sample tasks provided in the NCFL of Georgia. Also, if it is learners' communicative competence that is prioritized, why does the linguistic knowledge assessment component get a higher share of points in the scheme than other more-communicative language aspects do?

The progress indicators included in the speaking assessment scheme also demonstrate a course-determined rather than real-life communication-oriented character: "Uses the grammatical constructions *covered in the course*". This might well be suspected of being conducive to a situation in which teachers assess learners' language proficiency according to how well they have memorized and studied whatever was presented in the course, rather than evaluating their general communicative proficiency.

As for the sample language task provided for learners' writing skill assessment (Appendix 6.1b), it also suffers from somewhat non-communicative characteristics. The task imposes certain artificial restrictions upon learners, and dictates the grammatical forms that have to be used. This hinders the communicative, spontaneous character of the task to be performed, the approach which is against the principles outlined in the Language Standards section of the NCFL, where it is explicitly stated that writing tasks need to be free and content-driven (2011:563).

The document section called *Recommended contents of syllabus for foreign languages* (see Section 6.3.3) provides the lists of concrete language items that are expected to be taught at each level of language teaching (see examples in Appendix 6.2). Even though in the document it is stated that the provided contents needs to be taught in a communicative manner, the provision of pre-packaged, predetermined language items does not seem to chime in with CLT theory either (see Section 3.4). According to Wada (2002), "sequencing of grammatical and syntactical structures" does not provide much "flexibility" and restricts teachers' freedom of teaching a language in a communicative manner (2002:33). Moreover, further analysis is required in order to determine how closely each and every Goal Area, together with its constituent Standards, is actually compatible with the theories of CLT – how consistently they each cover CLT principles and how clearly they are presented. However, such a task would go beyond the scope of the present chapter.

Another issue to be discussed when looking at the quality and accuracy of the theoretical principles that the present language curriculum of Georgia is based upon is that of assessing how clearly articulated, consistent and accessible

these theories and recommendations are for ordinary, practising language teachers. Curricular reform cannot take place in the absence of a clear underlying theory and an understanding of it on the part of practising teachers. According to Schwartz (2002):

> A look through the history of curricular reform and innovation reveals a continual failure to establish true change when methods and materials are disseminated without an understanding of basic theoretical issues. In the absence of a well-articulated underlying theory, the extent to which the foreign language standards can be said to represent significant redefinition of curricular goals remains unclear (2002:118).

In this sense, as one reads through the NCFL of Georgia, replete as it is with linguistic terms and theoretical references, with explicit details and recommenddations, it seems quite legitimate to speculate that the document might become the cause of some confusion for the language teachers in Georgia, unless they happen to possess a remarkably comprehensive understanding of linguistic theories as well as extensive teaching experience.

6.4.4 Final remarks

Ultimately, despite some unintentional inconsistencies that can be observed in the document, it is obvious that the National Curriculum for Foreign Languages aims to transform the traditional form-focused language instruction that Georgia has known heretofore into a communicative language learning experience for future generations of school students. The declared goal of the document, in line with the national government's European and modernizing tendencies, is to create a framework which will help equip Georgian learners with the language knowledge, competences and values they will need to be successful citizens in the twenty-first century (NCFL, 2011:548). In this respect, progress is obvious at the language policy level.

However, the challenge always remains to build upon this framework, offering teachers clear and realistic teaching recommendations and learners effective and engaging learning opportunities. The question, now, is how big the gap is between the Georgian government's initiatives as expressed in the NCFL, on the one hand, and actual English language teaching practice and its communication outcomes, on the other. The first of the analysis chapters that follows, Chapter 7, explores the situation in Georgia in this direction, and provides a certain degree of clarity about where exactly the teachers of English stand as far as their informedness about the official language requirements, their understanding of the theoretical underpinning of CLT as well as their approval of this method is concerned.