

University of Zürich, fall semester 2022

Northwest Caucasian Languages: Grammar and Typology

I. Introduction and overview

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**Universität
Zürich^{UZH}**

1. The Caucasus and its languages



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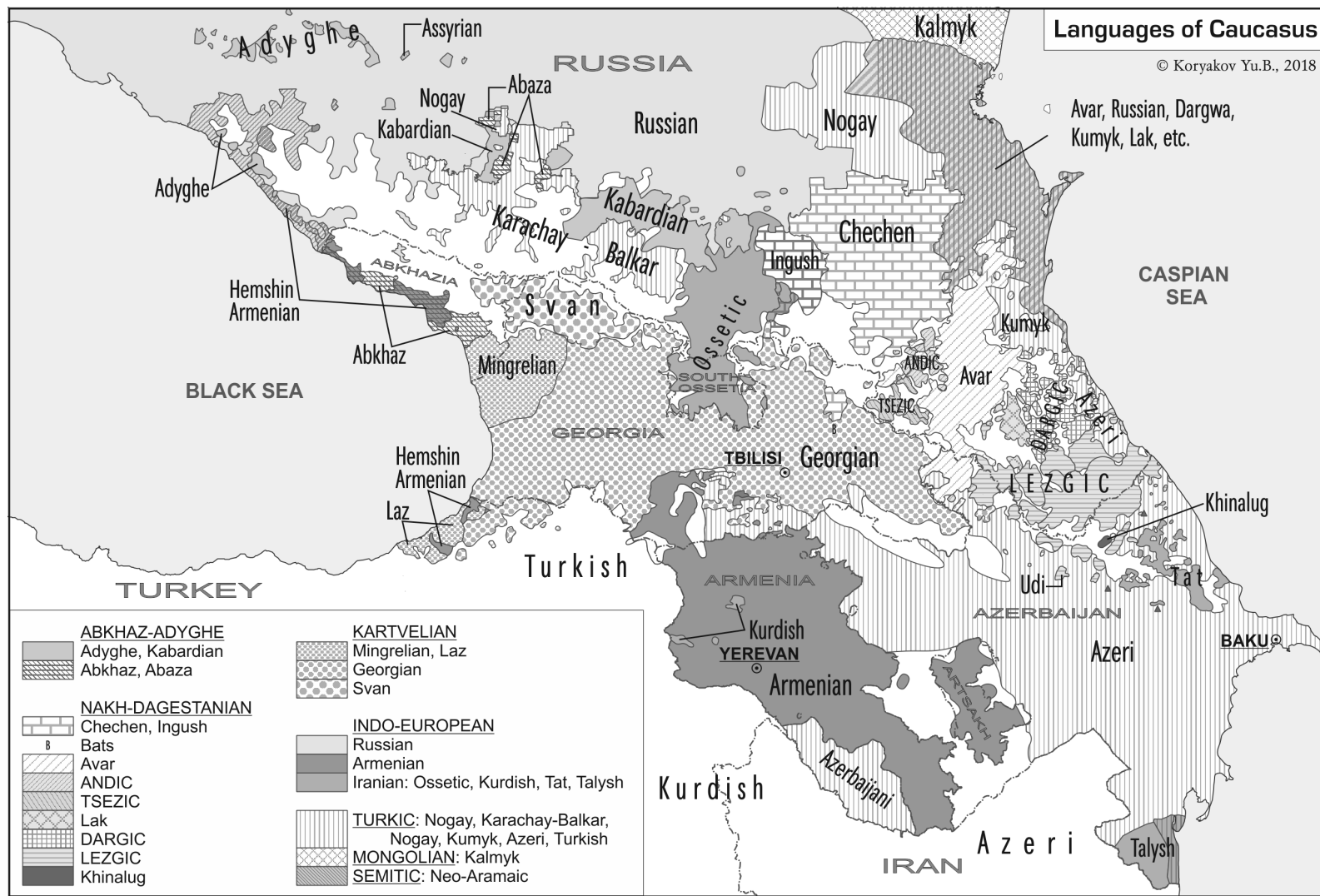
- “The mountain of tongues”, according to the mediaeval Arabic geographers.
- More than 50 languages belonging to several distinct families within a relatively small geographic area.
- One of the hotbeds of linguistic diversity – and of linguistic rarities – in Eurasia and the whole world.

Comrie 2008, Polinsky (ed.) 2020, Danylenko 2021, Arkadiev 2022

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 - Northwest Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghean)
 - Northeast Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian)
 - South Caucasian (Kartvelian)

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- Autochthonous language families:
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 - South Caucasian (Kartvelian)
- “Immigrants” from the outside:
 - Indo-European (Armenian, Ossetic, Kurdish, Tat, Greek; Russian, Ukrainian)
 - Turkic (Azeri, Karachay-Balkar, Kumyk, Nogai)
 - Semitic (Neo-Aramaic)

1. The Caucasus and its languages

- A classic “residual” or “accretion” zone à la Nichols (1992, 1997):
 - geographical isolation due to mountainous terrain
 - high (and growing) degree of genealogical and typological diversity of languages
 - no replacement of old language families by the newcomers
 - no single centre of innovations
 - local multilingualism rather than a single *lingua franca* (has changed with the introduction of schooling in Russian in the 20th century)

1. The Caucasus and its languages

- Hardly a single “linguistic area”, since most isoglosses encompass just a subset of the languages (even if the newcomers like Turkic or Russian are not counted).
- Evidence of long-standing language contact between individual families / branches / languages.
 - Lexical borrowing as well as morphosyntactic convergence.
 - Fostering, rather than evening out, diversity.

Tuite 1999, Alekseev 2005, Chirikba 2008, Daniel et al. 2020

2. The Northwest Caucasian family



2. The Northwest Caucasian family

- Northwest Caucasian (Abkhaz-Adyghean):
 - Abkhaz-Abaza:
 - Abkhaz
 - Abaza
 - †Ubykh (extinct since 1992)
 - Circassian (Adyghean):
 - West Circassian (Adyghe)
 - Kabardian (East Circassian)

Chirikba 1996, Lucassen 1997

2. The Northwest Caucasian family

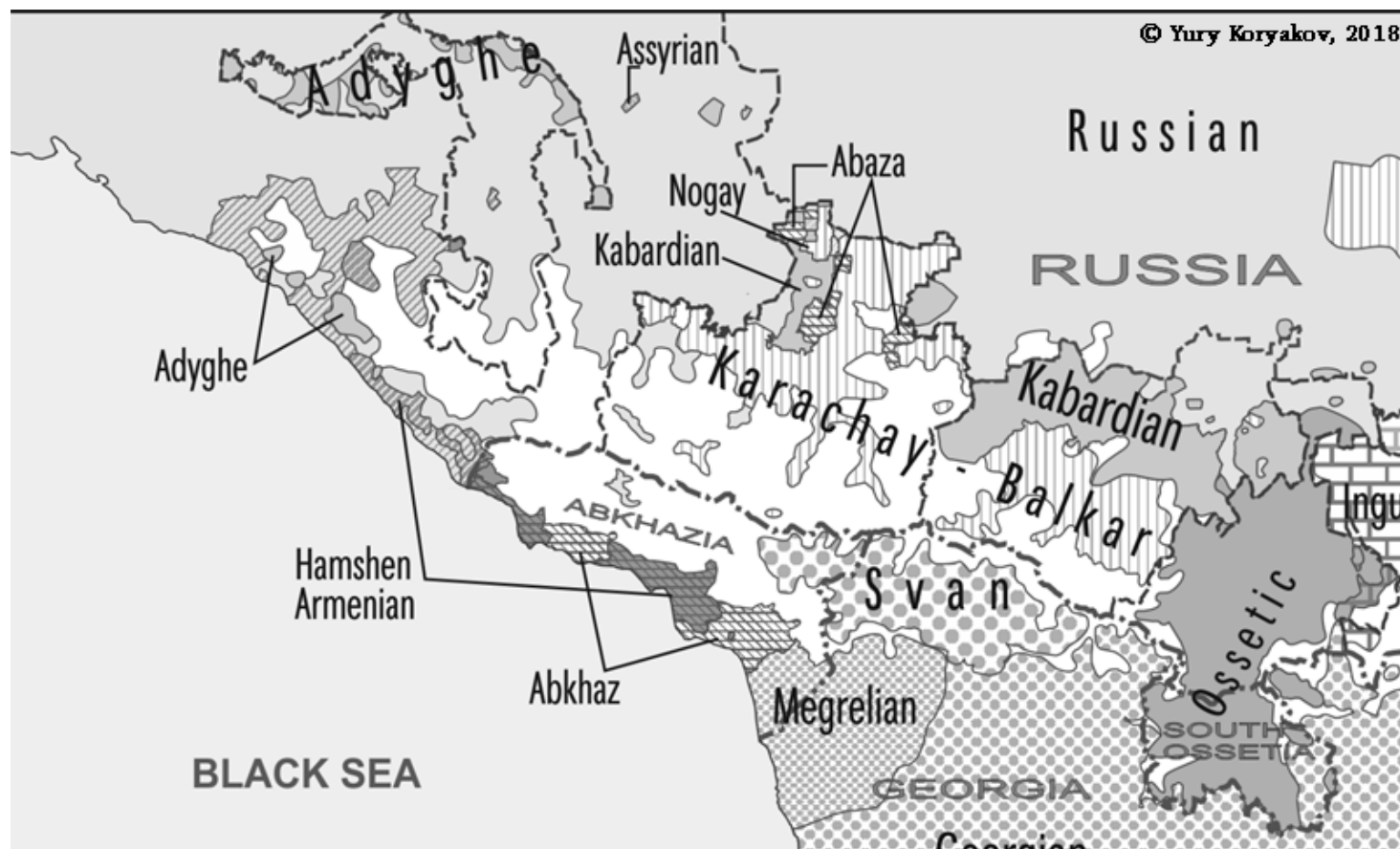
- External connections of NWC are disputed.
 - Possible genealogical relations with Nakh-Daghestanian
 - initially proposed by Trubetzkoy 1926;
 - substantiated by Nikolaev & Starostin 1994;
 - criticised by Nichols in 1997;
 - upheld by Chirikba 1999, 2016.

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 - substantiated by Nikolaev & Starostin 1994;
 - criticised by Nichols in 1997;
 - upheld by Chirikba 1999, 2016.
 - Alleged genealogical relations with Kartvelian
 - the so-called “Ibero-Caucasian” family encompassing all autochthonous languages of the Caucasus proposed by the leading Georgian linguist Arnold Chikobava (1898-1985) and still mainstream in Georgian linguistics;
 - hardly substantiated by real comparative evidence;
 - see Tuite 2008 for an assessment.

2. The Northwest Caucasian family

The modern geographical distribution:



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The modern geographical distribution:



2. The Northwest Caucasian family

The geographical distribution in the end of the 18th cent.:

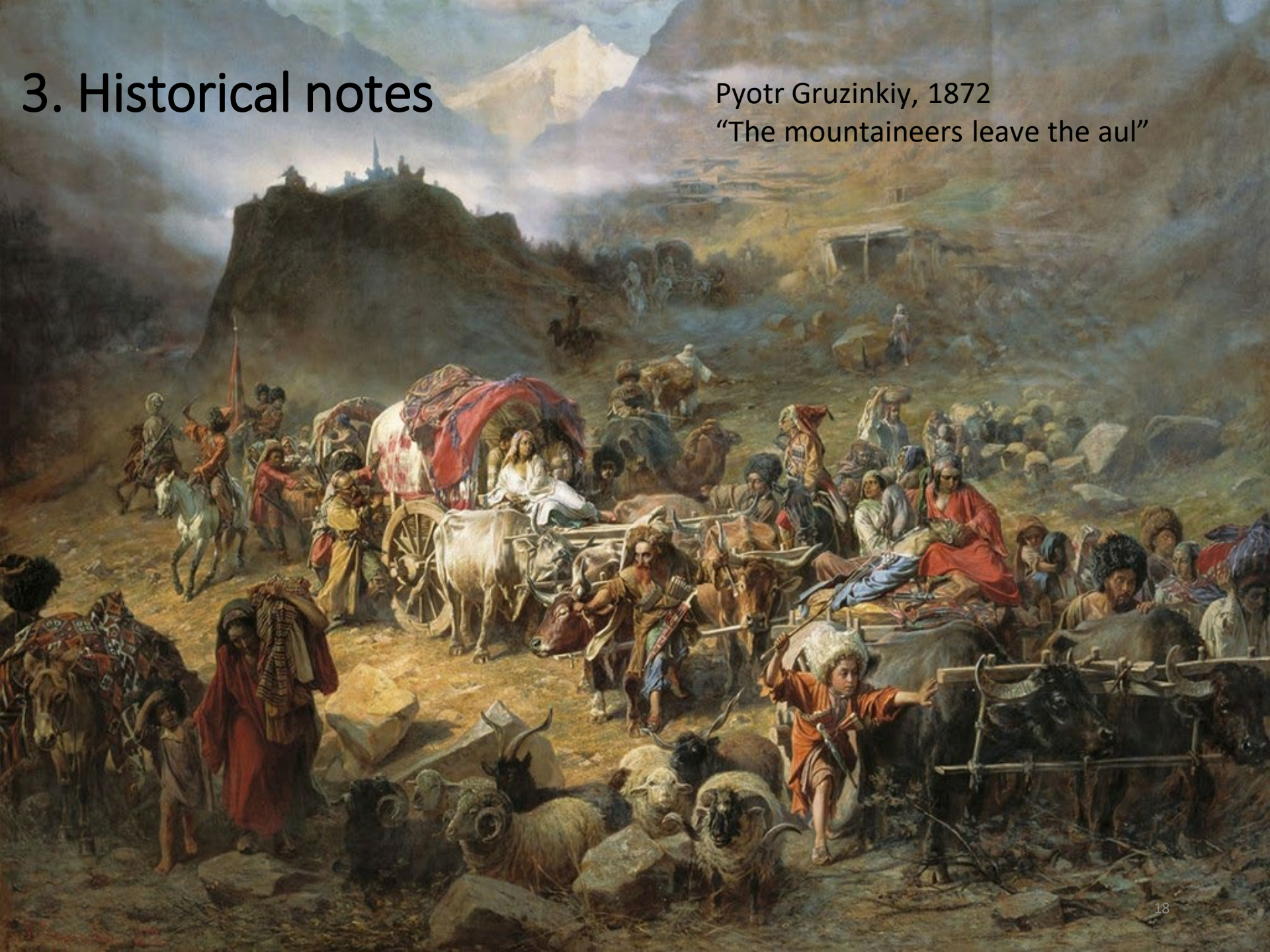


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<https://abkhazworld.com/aw/publications/e-library/1783-studies-in-west-circassian-phonology-and-morphology-by-rieks-smeets>

3. Historical notes

Pyotr Gruzinkiy, 1872
“The mountaineers leave the aul”



3. Historical notes

- No reliable evidence on the ancient history of the Northwest Caucasian peoples.
- Links between the early archeological cultures of the region (Maykop, Dolmen, Maeotian etc.) and the putative ancestors of the modern NWC peoples are hypothetical and disputed.



The dolmen from Guzeripl, Adygheya
2nd millenium BC

<https://prokurorti.ru>

3. Historical notes

- Strabo (64 BC – 24 AD) and Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD):
 - *Zygii* or *Zyxs*, later identified with Circassians
 - *Abasgoi* and *Apsilae*, believed to correspond to Abaza and Abkhaz (Abkh. *Apswa*)
- Note that in the later sources it was common to apply the xenonym “Circassians” or “Cherkess” to all NWC peoples.

Boz 2021

3. Historical notes

- The region, in particular Abkhazia, was under Byzantine influence between the 4th and 8th centuries AD.
 - Christianisation, however, without any recorded attempts to translate the Scripture into the local languages instead of Greek.
- Abkhaz Kingdom (8th – 10th centuries):
 - An alliance with the Catholicate of Mtskheta, thus shift of the language of the church to Georgian.
 - Unification with the Georgian kingdom in 978 under Bagrat III.

Mokva cathedral, 10th cent.

wikipedia



3. Historical notes

- The Circassians, also adopting Christianity, never created a unified state, local rulers and chieftains strongly opposing any such attempts.
 - Circassians have suffered quite a lot from invasions of Turks and Mongols between 5th and 14th centuries AD.
 - Circassian slaves were valued by Arabs and Ottomans; between 1382 and 1517, the Mamluks (slave soldiers) of Circassian origin ruled the Sultanate of Egypt.
 - Inal Nef (“the Blind”, ?-1458) is believed to have unified Circassians from 1427 till 1453, again dividing his kingdom between his sons and grandsons before his death; however, the reality of this story is not undisputable.

3. Historical notes

- From the 13th till the 17th century the Abaza tribes were gradually resettling from their former lands in Abkhazia to the regions north of the Great Caucasian range.
 - Extensive contact with Circassian peoples

3. Historical notes

- From the late 15th century on, Circassians and Abaza were under the influence of the Crimean Khanate and the Ottoman Empire.
 - Circassian lands were a major source for Ottoman slave trade, hence no peaceful relations, cf. the battle of Kanzhal in 1708, where the Circassians defeated the army of the Crimean Khan Kaplan-Giray;
 - gradual conversion to Islam;
 - regardless of Christianisation and subsequent Islamicisation, local beliefs and customs (e.g. the ethics code *adəye habze*) retain their importance for the NWC peoples (e.g. Chirikba 2015).

3. Historical notes

- Relations with Russia started in mid-16th century, when a military alliance against the Crimean Khanate was established between Moscovia and Kabarda (the eastern part of the Circassian lands).
 - The Russian tsar Ivan IV the Terrible married a Kabardian princess in 1561.
 - Some of the Circassian and Abaza nobles entered the Russian military and civil service and became members of the Russian aristocracy.

Prince Alexey Cherkassky (1680-1742),
governor of Siberia and Chancellor
of the Russian Empire



3. Historical notes

- The Russian expansion into the Caucasus resulted in the Caucasian War (1763-1864) against the NWC peoples, who were at some point backed up by the Ottoman and British empires.
 - The atrocities of the war, especially the cruel actions against civilian population, amounted to what is dubbed “Circassian genocide”, with estimated hundreds of thousands victims.
 - As a result of the war, the majority of the surviving NWC population was either forcefully moved to the plains and interspersed with Russian or Kossack settlements or expelled into the Ottoman Empire.

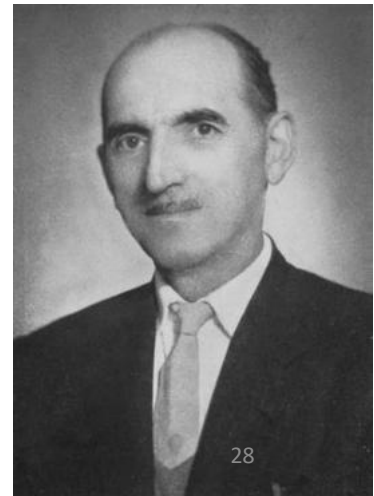
3. Historical notes

“In a series of sweeping military campaigns lasting from 1860 to 1864... the northwest Caucasus and the Black Sea coast were virtually emptied of Muslim villagers. Columns of the displaced were marched either to the Kuban [River] plains or toward the coast for transport to the Ottoman Empire... One after another, entire Circassian tribal groups were dispersed, resettled, or killed en masse.” (King 2008: 94-95)

“A decade prior to the expulsions, there were perhaps 145,000 people living in the Abkhaz lands and another 315,000 Circassians belonging to various tribes, plus tens of thousands of other coastal and highland peoples. Yet at the time of the first general imperial census in 1897, there were only about 60,000 people living on the coasts of Circassia, and of those only 15,000 had been born there.” (King 2008: 97)

3. Historical notes

- The resettlement and expulsion resulted in the disruption of the ethnic and linguistic landscape.
 - Whole tribes have either emigrated from the Caucasus in their entirety or disappeared.
 - In the diaspora, the Northwest Caucasian peoples lived in small communities isolated from each other and often ethnically and linguistically mixed.
 - *Inter alia*, this has led to the demise of Ubykh, whose ethnic population, scattered across Anatolia, has largely shifted to either Turkish or West Circassian by mid-20th century, the last fluent speaker, **Tevfik Esenç** dying in 1992.



<https://pangloss.cnrs.fr/>

3. Historical notes

- During the Soviet period, the extant NWC languages were granted a degree of recognition:
 - creation of autonomous regions and republics, where the NWC ethnic population enjoyed (at least *de jure*) certain privileges;
 - official languages in the republics of Abkhazia (within the Soviet Georgia), Adygheya, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, and parts of the Krasnodar and Stavropol regions of Russia;
 - development of alphabets, written standards, formal education, local literature and media, as well as linguistic studies;
 - the autonomies were partly or completely curtailed in mid-1930ies, with the local intelligentsia subjected to purging and repression;
 - partial restitution in the 1950ies.

3. Historical notes

- The policy of Georgianisation and, to a lesser extent, Russification, of Abkhazia, started already in the Tsarist era and particularly prominent during the Stalinist period (in 1940-1953 Abkhazians had schooling only in Georgian), has resulted in the dramatic drop of the share of Abkhaz ethnic population in the region from 85% in 1886 to just 18% in 1989 (Chirikba 2012a: 8).
- Such policies and the ethnic tensions they ignited have eventually led to the Abkhazian war of independence (1992-1993), after which Abkhazia has gradually become a Russian protectorate.
- Even after the forced expulsion of the Georgian population, the ethnic Abkhaz constitute just about 50% of the country's population according to the 2011 census.

4. Sociolinguistic profile



4. Sociolinguistic profile

- Numbers of speakers in Russia (2010 census) and Abkhazia (2011 census):
 - West Circassian: ca. 117.500
 - Kabardian: ca. 515.600
 - Abaza: ca. 37.800
 - Abkhaz: ca. 100.000 in Abkhazia + ca. 6.800 in Russia

4. Sociolinguistic profile

- The numbers of speakers in the diaspora are hard to estimate due to lack of reliable censuses and the policy of assimilation in Turkey:
 - Abaza in Turkey: ca. 10.000
 - Abkhaz in Turkey: ca. 48.000
 - Circassians
 - in Turkey: probably between 1 and 2 million of ethnic population, number of actual speakers unknown but surely much lower;
 - in other countries of the Middle East (Israel, Syria, Jordan, Iraq etc.): more than 300.000, number of actual speakers unknown

Chirikba 2012b, Boz 2021

4. Sociolinguistic profile

- All extant NWC languages and varieties are vulnerable:
 - most speakers are fully bilingual;
 - in Russia, the languages are mainly spoken in rural areas; despite the *de jure* official status in the areas of compact settlements, their presence in literature and media (including internet) is limited, and in official settings apart from those linked to traditional culture, virtually non-existent;
 - the languages are still passed on to children, however, the latter also learn Russian early on and are more fluent in it;
 - schooling in NWC languages has been on decline since the end of the Soviet Union, and since the passing of the new law in 2018 declaring that the “national languages” can only be studied on a voluntary basis, the situation has aggravated even more.

4. Sociolinguistic profile

- All extant NWC languages and varieties are vulnerable:
 - in Abkhazia, with Abkhaz being *de jure* the state language, Russian is *de facto* not only the local lingua franca, but the language of education, business and administration as well (Chirikba 2012a);
 - in Turkey, the minority languages have been oppressed during the most of the 20th century, with education and writing in NWC languages being banned during some periods.

4. Sociolinguistic profile

- Language contact:
 - pre-historic contact with Indo-European, suggested by common mythological motives (reflected e.g. the Nart epos)
 - historical contact with Kartvelian, Ossetic, Turkic
 - Abkhaz with Mingrelian, later with Georgian
 - with Russian, especially after 1917
 - in diaspora with Laz, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew etc.
 - within the family:
 - Ubykh with West Circassian
 - Abaza with Kabardian
 - between Circassian varieties



5. History of research

5. History of research

- The earliest records of NWC languages:
 - **Evliya Çelebi** (1611-1682), an Ottoman traveler and writer of partly Abkhaz origin, recorded some words and phrases in Ubykh in his *Seyâhatnâme* ("Book of Travel").



wikipedia

5. History of research

- The earliest records of NWC languages:
 - **Johann Anton von Güldenstädt** (1745-1781), the Baltic-German explorer in the Russian imperial service, recorded specimens of many languages of the Caucasus, including Abaza and Kabardian.



wikipedia

5. History of research

- The earliest records of NWC languages:
 - **Neg^wəme Š^were** (Rus. Shora Nogmov, 1794-1844), a Kabardian philologist and poet, wrote the first Kabardian textbook and dictionary as well as “A history of the Circassian people”.



<https://adg.guidebook.ru/>

5. History of research

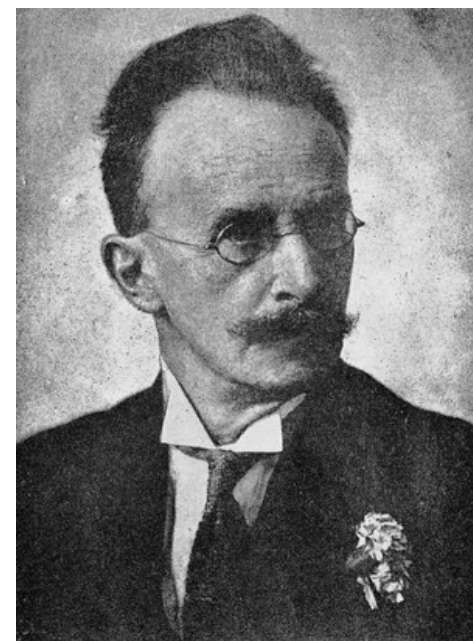
- The first systematic scientific investigations of NWC (and Caucasian in general) languages were conducted by the German-origin Russian military engineer general **Peter von Uslar** (1816-1875), who wrote the first grammar of Abkhaz as well as drafted the first grammatical sketches of Kabardian and Ubykh.



wikipedia

5. History of research

- **Adolph Dirr** (1867-1930), a German linguist and ethnographer, one of the leading specialists on the Caucasian languages of the 1st half of the 20th century, wrote a grammar and glossary of Ubykh and a treatise *Einführung in das Studium der kaukasischen Sprachen* (1928), where the term „ergative“ was introduced.



wikipedia

5. History of research

- **Georges Dumézil** (1898-1986), French linguist and specialist on comparative mythology, most famous for his works on the Indo-European pantheon.
- Simultaneously a devoted student of NWC, in particular of Ubykh, on which he has published a series of influential works, some of them in collaboration with Tevfik Esenç, as well as works on comparative grammar of NWC and on individual varieties spoken in Turkey.



www.college-de-france.fr

5. History of research

- **Nikolay Yakovlev** (1892-1974), Soviet linguist, author of grammars of West Circassian, Kabardian and Abkhaz. One of the founders of phonological theory, which he used as a scientific basis for designing alphabets for the Caucasian languages.
- After Stalin's suppression of Marrism in 1950 was ousted from academic and university positions and spent the rest of his life psychologically insane.



wikipedia

5. History of research

- Alphabetisation of NWC:
 - first attempts to create Cyrillic- or Arabic-based alphabets for Circassian and Abaza go back to the 19th cent., but were not successful;
 - Latin-based alphabets for Circassian and Abaza were developed by Nikolay Yakovlev in 1920-ies and were in use till 1938, when they were replaced by the currently employed Cyrillic-based alphabets;
 - the hallmarks of these alphabets are the the so-called “palochka” (‘a little stick’) / indicating glottalisation, the use of vowel symbols to indicate labialisation of preceding consonants and of numerous digraphs and even trigraphs for consonants absent from Russian.

The Abaza alphabet

АБАЗА ХІАРЫФКВА

The chart displays the Abaza alphabet with 30 letters arranged in a grid. Each letter is accompanied by a small illustration representing a word starting with that letter. The letters are: А, Б, В, Г, ГІ, ГІВ, ГВ, ГЪ, ГЪВ, ГЪЬ, Гь, Д, ДЖ, ДЖВ, ДЖЪ, ДЗ, Ж, ЖВ, ЖЪ, З, Й, К, КІ, КІВ, КІЬ, КВ, КЪ, КЪВ, КЪЬ, Кь, Л, ЛЬ, М, Н, П, ПІ, Р, С, Т, ТІ, ТЛ, ТШ, У, Ф, Х, ХІ, ХІВ, ХВ, ХЪ, ХЪВ, Хь, Ц, ЦІ, Ч, ЧІ, ЧІВ, ЧВ, Ш, ШІ, ШВ, Щ, Ъ, Ё, И, О, Ы, Чѐ, ЧѐІ, ЧѐВ, ЧѐІВ, Шѐ, ШѐІ, ШѐВ, ШѐІВ, Щѐ, ЩѐІ, ЩѐВ, ЩѐІВ, Ъѐ, ЪѐІ, ЪѐВ, ЪѐІВ, Ёѐ, ЁѐІ, ЁѐВ, ЁѐІВ, Иѐ, ИѐІ, ИѐВ, ИѐІВ, Оѐ, ОѐІ, ОѐВ, ОѐІВ, Ыѐ, ЫѐІ, ЫѐВ, ЫѐІВ.

А АРБА	Б БАГА	В ВАГЪЫ	Г ГАРА	ГІ ГІАЗАГ ЫЫ	ГІВ ГІВАРА	ГВ ГВЫР	ГЪ ГЪЫ	ГЪВ ГЪВГЪВАРА	ГЪЬ ГЪЬАР-ГЪЬАР	Гь ГЬЕЙ
Д ДАДА	ДЖ ДЖЫШ	ДЖВ ДЖВДЖВАГА	ДЖЪ ДЖЪМА	ДЗ ДЗЫГ В	Ж ЖАКЪА	ЖВ ЖЫ	ЖЪ ЖЫЙ	З ЗКЫ	Й ЙАЧ ВА	К КЛЫС
КІ КІАСЫ	КІВ КІ ВЫМ КЫ	КІЬ КІ ЬА Н ДЖЫ	КВ КВ У	КЪ КЪАЗ	КЪВ КЪВАЕЫС	КЪЬ КЪЬАТ-КЪЬАТ	Кь КьЫМ	Л ЛА	ЛЬ ЛЪАГ АН	М МАРА
Н НАША	П ПЪЖВ АНА	ПІ ПІ ЫТ І	Р РЫМ ДЗА	С СЫС	Т ТАМЦАКЪ	ТІ ТІ Ы	ТЛ ТЛІПАД	ТШ ТШЫ	У УАРБА	Ф ФАЧ Ы
Х ХЫРБЫС	ХІ ХІ А	ХІВ ХІ ВАС ТА	ХВ ХВ А	ХЪ ХЪЫШ В	ХЪВ ХЪ ВА РТ	Хь Хь А П Ц	Ц ЦЫЦА	ЦІ ЦІ ЛА	Ч ЧА РХ	ЧІ ЧА Х ВА
ЧІВ ЧІ ВА	ЧВ ЧВЫ М ЛА	Ш ШАШЫ ХВ	ШІ ШІ У Б	ШВ Ш ВА РАХ	Щ ЩА	Ъ ЪАХ В ТАН	Ё	ЁІ	И	О
Э	Ю	Я	І	Ь						

5. History of research

- Alphabetisation of NWC:
 - the first Abkhaz alphabet was designed by Peter Uslar in 1862 on the basis of Cyrillic script, to which he added various symbols for consonants absent from Russian; this alphabet was redesigned by Mikhail Zavadsky in 1887;
 - a Latin-based alphabet designed by Nikolay Yakovlev was in official use in 1928-1938;
 - a Georgian-based alphabet was in official use in 1938-1954;
 - the current Cyrillic-based alphabet containing numerous symbols not used in any other script as well as certain further idiosyncrasies is based on the alphabet of Zavadsky.

The Abkhaz alphabet

А а	Б б	В в	Г г	Гь гь	Ԃ Ԃ	Ԃь Ԃь	Д д
a	b	v	g	g'	ǵ	ǵ'	d
[a]	[b]	[v]	[g]	[gʲ]	[ʏ~ʝ]	[ʏʲ~ʝʲ]	[d]
Ԃә Ԃә	Е е	Ж ж	Жь жь	Жә жә	З з	Зз	Зә зә
də	e	ž	ž'	žə	z	zə	zə'
[dʷ]	[ɛ]	[z]	[ʒ]	[ʒʷ]	[z]	[dz̄]	[dz̄ʷ]
И и	К к	Кь кь	Қ қ	Қь қь	К к	Кь кь	Л л
i	k	k'	q	q'	ƀ	ƀ'	l
[j/ji/ij/i]	[kʰ]	[kʰʲ]	[kʰ]	[kʰh]	[qʰ]	[qʰʲ]	[l]
М м	Н н	О о	П п	Пь пь	Р р	С с	Т т
m	n	o	p	p'	r	s	t
[m]	[n]	[o]	[pʰ]	[pʰh]	[r]	[s]	[tʰ]
Ԃә Ԃә	Ԃ Ԃ	Ԃә Ԃә	У у	Ф ф	Х х	Хь хь	Х х
t°	t̥	t̥°	u	f	x	x'	x̣
[tʰʷ]	[tʰ]	[tʰh]	[w/wi/iw/u]	[f]	[x~χ]	[xʲ~χʲ]	[h]
Хә хә	Ц ц	Цә цә	Ц ц	Цә цә	Ч ч	Ч ч	Ԃ е
x̣°	c	c°	č	č°	č̣	č̣	č̣
[hʷ]	[tʰh]	[tʰhʷ]	[tʰ]	[tʰʷ]	[tʰh]	[tʰ]	[tʰh]
Ԃ е	Ш ш	Шь шь	Шә шә	Ы ы	Ԃ Ԃ	Ԃ Ԃ	Ԃь Ԃь
ç	š	š'	š°	y	ɸ	j	j̣
[tʰ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃʷ]	[i]	[ɸ~ɸʰ]	[dʒ̄]	[dʒ̄ʷ]

5. History of research

- **Ketevan Lomtadze** (1911-2007), one of the leading Georgian linguists, author of numerous descriptive and comparative works on Abaza and Abkhaz.
- The first Georgian woman to receive a habilitation degree (1945) for her grammar of the Tapanta dialect of Abaza.



5. History of research

- **Mukhadin Kumakhov** (Kab. Q^wəmax^we Muhedin, 1928-2008), a native Kabardian linguist, Dr. hon. of Lund University, one of the leading scholars of Circassian languages and author of a series of influential comparative and historical works, as well as a number of joint works with Karina Vamling.



<https://iling-ran.ru/>

5. History of research

- Our contemporaries:
 - B. George Hewitt, author of a reference grammar of Abkhaz in English and numerous other influential works
 - John Colarusso, author of a reference grammar of Kabardian in English and of a *Phonological Survey* of NWC
 - Riëks Smeets, author of important works on phonology and morphology of West Circassian
 - Monika Höhlig, author of phonetic and sociolinguistic studies of West Circassian
 - Rohan/Rhona Fenwick, author of a reference grammar of Ubykh in English and of a comprehensive Ubykh dictionary

5. History of research

- My own team:
 - Yakov Testelet, the leading Russian caucasologist and theoretical linguist working, inter alia, on NWC
 - Yury Lander, author of numerous typologically-oriented works on West Circassian
 - Alexander Letuchiy, author of several typologically-oriented works on West Circassian
 - George (Garik) Moroz, a specialist on NWC phonology
 - Ksenia Ershova (MIT), author of generative work on aspects of West Circassian morphosyntax
 - Evgeniya Klyagina, specialist on NWC tense and aspect systems
 - and others

5. History of research

- My own team:
 - fieldwork on Temirgoy, Shapsug and Bzhedugh dialects of West Circassian in Republic of Adygheya and Krasnodar Kray, 2003-2010 and 2013-2014
 - fieldwork on Besleney and Kuban dialects of Kabardian in Republic of Adygheya in 2011-2013 and 2015-2016
 - fieldwork on Abaza in Republic of Karachay-Cherkessia in 2017-2019 and 2021

6. Major features



6. Major features: Phonology

- Exuberant consonant systems:
 - 47 consonants in Standard Kabardian
 - 55 consonants in Standard (Temirgoy) West Circassian
 - 58 consonants in Standard Abkhaz
 - 63 consonants in Tapanta Abaza
 - 66 consonants in the Bzhedugh dialect of West Circassian
 - 80-83 consonants in Ubykh

Colarusso 1988, Hewitt 2005

6. Major features: Phonology

- Ubykh consonants (Arkadiev & Lander 2020, based on Fenwick 2011)

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+ glottal	+ voice	-voice	+ glottal	+ voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	f		v	m	w
pharyngealized	p ^ʕ	p̣ ^ʕ	b ^ʕ			v ^ʕ	m ^ʕ	w ^ʕ
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
labialized	t ^w	ṭ ^w	d ^w					
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	ʃ		ʒ̥		
labialized	ç ^w	ç̣ ^w	ʒ̣ ^w	ʃ ^w		ʒ̥ ^w		
palato-alveolar	ç̣	ç̣̣	ʒ̣̣	ʃ̣		ʒ̣̣̣		
palatalized	ç̣ʰ	ç̣̣ʰ	ʒ̣̣ʰ	ʃ̣ʰ		ʒ̣̣̣ʰ		
labialized				ʃ̣ ^w		ʒ̣̣̣ ^w		
lateral				λ	λ̣			l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g	x		ɣ		
palatalized	kʰ	ḳʰ	gʰ					
labialized	k ^w	ḳ ^w	g ^w	x ^w				
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized	qʰ	q̣ʰ		χʰ		ʁʰ		
labialized	q ^w	q̣ ^w		χ ^w		ʁ ^w		
pharyngealized	q ^ʕ	q̣ ^ʕ		χ ^ʕ		ʁ ^ʕ		
lab. + pharyng.	q ^{wʕ}	q̣ ^{wʕ}		χ ^{wʕ}		ʁ ^{wʕ}		
laryngeal				h				

6. Major features: Phonology

Abaza consonants:

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+glottal	+voice	-voice	+glottal	+voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	(f)	(f̣)	(v)	m	w
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	š		ʒ̣		
palato-alveolar	č	č̣	ʒ̣	ṣ̌		ʒ̣		
palatalized	čʹ	č̣ʹ	ʒ̣ʹ	šʹ		ʒ̣ʹ		
lateral				(λ)	(λ̣)	(ʎʹ)		l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g					
palatalized	kʹ	ḳʹ	gʹ					
labialized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized		q̣ʹ		χʹ		ʁʹ		
labialized	qʷ	q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
pharyngeal				ħ		ʕ		
labialized				ħʷ		ʕʷ		
laryngeal	ʔ							

6. Major features: Phonology

Abaza consonants:

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+glottal	+voice	-voice	+glottal	+voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	(f)	(f)	(v)	m	w
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	ʃ		ʒ̣		
palato-alveolar	č	č̣	ʒ̣	š		ʒ̣		
palatalized	čʹ	č̣ʹ	ʒ̣ʹ	šʹ		ʒ̣ʹ		
lateral				(λ)	(λ)	(ʎ)		l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g					
palatalized	kʹ	ḳʹ	gʹ					
labialized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized		q̣ʹ		χʹ		ʁʹ		
labialized	qʷ	q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
pharyngeal				ħ		ʕ		
labialized				ħʷ		ʕʷ		
laryngeal	ʔ							

Glottalised stops and affricates

6. Major features: Phonology

- Abaza glottalised plosives:

çara 'quick'



tk'əj 'strict'



6. Major features: Phonology

- Still more exotic: West Circassian glottalised sibilants

ʂe 'do!'



λə 'man'



6. Major features: Phonology

- Bzhedugh West Circassian further distinguishes between plain and aspirated voiceless stops:

*t*ə 'father'



*t^h*ə 'give!'



6. Major features: Phonology

Abaza consonants:

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+glottal	+voice	-voice	+glottal	+voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	(f)	(f̣)	(v)	m	w
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	ʃ		ʒ̣		
palato-alveolar	č	č̣	ʒ̣	š		ʒ̣		
palatalized	čʷ	č̣ʷ	ʒ̣ʷ	šʷ		ʒ̣ʷ		
lateral				(λ)	(λ̣)	(ʎ)		l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g					
palatalized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
labialized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized		q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
labialized	qʷ	q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
pharyngeal				ħ		ʕ		
labialized				ħʷ		ʕʷ		
laryngeal	ʔ							

A rich system of dental and alveolar affricates and fricatives

6. Major features: Phonology

- Abaza alveolar affricates:

čə 'horse'



č'as 'food'



čarta 'bed'



6. Major features: Phonology

- Bzhedugh West Circassian plain vs. aspirated voiceless fricatives:

š'e 'sell!'



š^he 'milk'



6. Major features: Phonology

- Circassian lateral fricatives:

ʎə 'meat'



λə 'blood'



λə 'man'



6. Major features: Phonology

Abaza consonants:

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+glottal	+voice	-voice	+glottal	+voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	(f)	(f̣)	(v)	m	w
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	š		ʒ̣		
palato-alveolar	č	č̣	ʒ̣	ṣ̌		ʒ̣		
palatalized	čʹ	č̣ʹ	ʒ̣ʹ	šʹ		ʒ̣ʹ		
lateral				(λ)	(λ̣)	(ʎ)		l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g					
palatalized	kʹ	ḳʹ	gʹ					
labialized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized		q̣ʹ		χʹ		ʁʹ		
labialized	qʷ	q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
pharyngeal				ħ		ʕ		
labialized				ħʷ		ʕʷ		
laryngeal	ʔ							

A rich system of velar, uvular and pharyngeal consonants.

6. Major features: Phonology

- Abaza voiceless uvulars:

baq 'pull!'



baq̇ 'cover'



baχ 'vapour'



6. Major features: Phonology

Abaza consonants:

	plosives			fricatives			sonorants	
	-voice	+glottal	+voice	-voice	+glottal	+voice	nasals	resonants
labial	p	p̣	b	(f)	(f)	(v)	m	w
dental	t	ṭ	d	s		z	n	r
affricates	c	c̣	ʒ					
alveolo-palatal	ç	ç̣	ʒ̣	š		ʒ̣		
palato-alveolar	č	č̣	ʒ̣	ṣ̌		ʒ̣		
palatalized	čʹ	č̣ʹ	ʒ̣ʹ	šʹ		ʒʹ		
lateral				(λ)	(λ)	(ʎ)		l
palatal								j
velar	k	ḳ	g					
palatalized	kʹ	ḳʹ	gʹ					
labialized	kʷ	ḳʷ	gʷ					
uvular	q	q̣		χ		ʁ		
palatalized		q̣ʹ		χʹ		ʁʹ		
labialized	qʷ	q̣ʷ		χʷ		ʁʷ		
pharyngeal				ħ		ʕ		
labialized				ħʷ		ʕʷ		
laryngeal	ʔ							

Typologically unique palatalised uvulars

6. Major features: Phonology

- Abaza plain vs. palatalised uvulars:

*χ*ə 'bullet'



*χ'*əš 'goldish'



6. Major features: Phonology

- In contrast to extremely rich consonant systems, the vowel systems of NWC are extremely poor:
 - Abaza and Abkhaz: /a, ə/
 - Circassian, Ubykh: /a, ə, ε/

6. Major features: Phonology

- Such “vertical” vowel systems with a high degree of overlap between the allophonic spaces of vowels are cross-linguistically rare in comparison to the standard “triangle”-like systems /a, i, u/ with maximally contrasting members.

6. Major features: Phonology

- Moreover, some scholars proposed “monovocalic” analyses for Circassian (Kuipers 1960, Allen 1965, Anderson 1978), later rejected (e.g. Kumakhov 1973, Choi 1991).
- Cf. a minimal triple from Besleney Kabardian:
 - šxə ‘eat it!’
 - šxe ‘eat! (antipassive)’
 - šxa ‘s/he ate (antipassive)’

6. Major features: Phonology

- In fact, at least phonetically, NWC possess almost all “familiar” vowel qualities, such as [o], [u], and [i]:
 - so-called “colouring” of vowels by preceding labialised and palatalised consonants:

West Circassian *g^wə* ‘heart’ [gu]

- contraction with glides:

Abaza *scəjt̚* ‘he is going’ [st̚it̚]

Choi 1991, Moroz 2021

6. Major features: Phonology

- Complex consonant clusters:

Abaza

χ^w-q̣- bq̣^wəl-ḱ

three-cream-barrel-NUM

‘three barrels of cream’



də-z-z-ʃa-r-g-χ-ṭ

3SG.H.ABS-1SG.IO-BEN-CISL-3PL.IO-carry-RE-DCL

‘they brought him here’ (txt)



6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Only some teasers to be discussed in greater detail later:
 - polysynthesis and head-marking
 - little distinction between major parts of speech
 - ergativity
 - complex system of spatial marking in the verb
 - morphological marking of inter-clausal relations

Hewitt 2005, Kumakhov & Vamling 2009, Arkadiev & Lander 2020

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)



6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-ʒə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF–PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He **thought** that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-ʒə-j-š'a-ɬ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I **would** be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would **be able to** walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on it.' (txt)

6. Major features: Morphosyntax

- Abaza polysynthetic verb:

s-z-á-la-nəq^wa-wa-3ə-j-š'a-ṭ

1SG.ABS-POT-3SG.N.IO-LOC-walk-IPF-PVB-3SG.M.IO-seem-DCL

'He thought that I would be able to walk on **it**.' (txt)

- More to follow

- More to follow
... with your participation!

the \hat{s}^w -j-e-*ve-psew!* (West Circassian)

god 2PL.ABS-3SG.ERG-OPT-CAUS-live

$\hat{s}a$ -z ζ^w *ada- χa - t !* (Abaza)

2PL.ABS-healthy-INC-DCL

Thank you!

Danke!



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