

Marika Butskhrikidze

Title: The nature of consonant sequences in Modern Georgian

Due to their length and constituency, the consonant sequences of Georgian (e.g. /prckvn/, /mc'vrtn/, /brt'χ'/ in words such as /prckvna/ 'to peel', /mc'vrtneli/ 'trainer', /brt'χ'eli/ 'flat') appear to be problematic.

We propose the Gradual Consonant Analysis (GCA) incorporating the following types of evidence: paradigmatic, syntagmatic, phonetic, historical and comparative. Examination of consonantal stems of Georgian and the application of the GCA shows that language-external and internal evidence provide a sound basis for exploring the nature of 'complex' structures of a language. In most cases, the long consonant sequences appear to be the result of a very productive vowel-reduction process and of complex segment formation. Georgian is an inflectional-agglutinative language and consonant sequences are generally derived from CVC stems when vowel-initial affixes are added. Thus, the phonological 'complexity' is primarily due to morphological complexity and the structures of the CCC type in Georgian appear to be the result of transformations of the structures of the CVCVCV type.

Several criteria are used to compare the GCA to the previous analyses: (i) simplicity or economy, (ii) generality or abstractness and (iii) adequacy (empirical and explanatory). The evaluation of previous analyses and the GCA against these criteria shows that the GCA provides a better understanding of Georgian consonant sequences as it provides a direct and clear link between empirical structures and theoretical constructs, and explains why consonants form complex structures in Georgian..