

Ling 50, W11, 10A

Clusters, closures and releases – Comparative sound systems of Caucasian languages

Taught by: Ioana Chitoran

Guest lectures by Visiting Professor Ramaz Kurdadze of Tbilisi State University, Georgia

The Caucasus mountains, bridging the Black and Caspian Seas, are home to over 50 indigenous languages from three unrelated families, a highly diverse linguistic area. Caucasian languages have unusually large consonant inventories (“clusters and closures”), and relatively small vowel inventories (“releases”). This course examines the phonetic inventories – their historical evolution, their typology – through analysis of phonetic data, phonological processes, and sound change.

Prerequisite: Linguistics I.

Readings: Journal articles and book chapters available on Blackboard

Grading: 20% class participation
45% problem sets (3)
15% phonological language sketch
20% final exam

SYLLABUS

Basic concepts

- Week 1 Introduction to the families of Caucasian languages. Genetic, areal, and contact-based relationships.
- Week 2 Elements of phonetics and acoustic analysis of speech relevant for linguistics. The role of “clusters”, “closures”, “releases” in phonetic systems. The concepts of vowel, syllable, mora.
- Week 3 Elements of phonological analysis relevant for the comparative study of Caucasian languages. Phonological and morphological aspects of Caucasian languages.

Typological approach

- Week 4 Voicing contrasts in the consonant systems of Caucasian languages.
- A typology of ejectives. Cross-linguistic variation in the phonetic realization of ejectives
 - Phonological processes involving ejectives in Lezgi (North-East Caucasian)
- Week 5 A typology of vowel harmony.
- Cross-linguistic comparison: Caucasian and Turkic languages
 - Vowel-“coloring”; The vowel in Kabardian (North-West Caucasian, Circassian)

- Week 6 A typology of vowel devoicing and the development of consonant clusters.
- Consonant clusters in Georgian
 - Vowel devoicing in Lezgi and cross-linguistic comparison (Japanese, Turkic, Native American, Indo-European)

Individual languages

Week 7 Main phonetic-phonological aspects of South Caucasian (Kartvelian) languages. Historical perspective and synchronic comparison.

- Week 8 Phonetic and phonological dialectal variation in Georgia.
- Vowel processes: umlaut, vowel length, moraic restrictions
 - Consonant processes

- Week 9 Main phonetic-phonological aspects of
- North-West Caucasian (Circassian) languages
 - North-East (Nakh-Daghestanian) languages

Language contact

Week 10 Loanword exchange across Caucasian languages. Loanword adaptation between Russian and Caucasian languages.