

Artificial Change of Toponymy as a Tool of Propaganda of Soviet Ideology

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Abstract

Toponymy, this original area of the vocabulary of the language, is a kind of guide, since taking into account the conclusions obtained on the basis of its scientific study is the best way to fully understand nature, historical past, culture, migration, and the existence of a particular country. We consider it especially important to include toponymy as an auxiliary discipline in the educational process of general education schools. With this goal, since 2022, we have started work on the project "Georgia through Toponymy". The topic turned out to be very diverse. This time, we present only one aspect of the project - "Artificial change of toponymy as a tool of propaganda of Soviet ideology". It is important to observe the artificial change of preselected toponyms to give students an understanding of the tragic history of 20th-century Bolshevism-infected Georgia, which is still not fully appreciated and underestimated by modern society. We selected the toponym "Leselidze" as a sample. This is a striking example of artificial toponym change. The change was implemented in 3 stages, and each stage was determined by the historical context. Our conclusion is as follows: Toponymy is a linguistic historical document. It is necessary to include toponymy achievements in the educational process.

Keywords: Toponymy, Soviet ideology, The conquest of the Caucasus by Russia, Toponym "Leselidze", Project teaching models.

Introduction

School programs are based on fundamental sciences, and since science is developing at a rapid pace, it is necessary to incorporate its achievements in educational processes in a timely and effective manner. We consider it interesting to gradually include the achievements of toponymy in the educational programs of general education schools in different directions.

Students show special interest in the recent history of Georgia. The occupation of the Democratic Republic of Georgia, the criminal ideology of the Bolshevik government, has not yet been adequately studied in Georgian historiography. This flaw can be seen in school textbooks as well. To effectively include toponymy in the learning process, it is necessary to select appropriate toponymy taking into account school programs, knowing the selected toponyms and a number of issues related to them with project teaching models, creating and reviewing a presentation sample, and forming certain recommendations for teachers.

Taking into account the topic, we choose any interesting toponym and offer the students a presentation prepared by us as a sample (the presentation sample is enriched with appropriate visuals). We will present it ourselves and discuss it together with the students. Division of students into groups. Giving a task to each group; Preparation of works by students and their presentation step by step; Review and evaluation of work.

We selected the toponym "Leselidze" as a sample. This is a striking example of artificial toponym change. The change was implemented in 3 stages, and each stage was determined by the historical context, the location of this geographical object and the historical-political issues related to it.

Methods and Materials

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The geographical object, the name changes of which we have to talk about, is in Georgia, in the territory of the currently occupied Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia. The township is located near the Georgia-Russia border on the Black Sea plane.

Until the end of the 19th century, this place was called Gechripsh, the etymology of which is presented in special literature as follows: Gechripsh - "Gechbes' area, residence" (Gechbes were the owners of this place, Gechba - the lineage of the nobles of the Jiks ethnic group).

To correctly perceive the changes in this toponym, it is necessary for students to repeat a number of issues from the material learned in history and to become acquainted with additional new material.

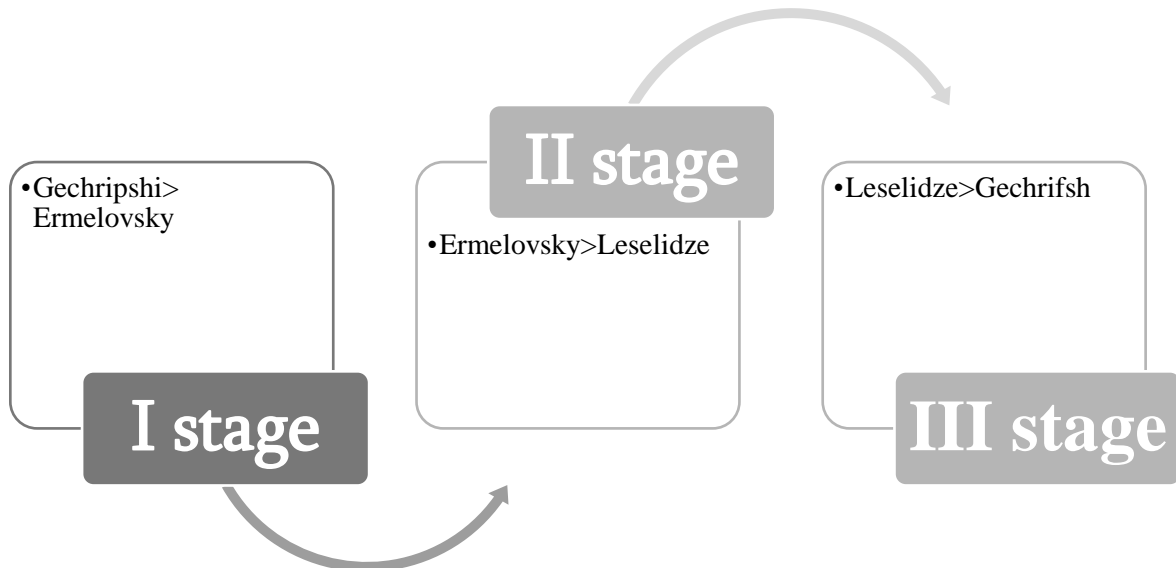


Figure 1. Stages of toponym changes

Results

I stage of toponym change (Gechripshi > Ermelovsky)

The Gechbs, who owned Gechripshi, turned out to be the victims of Muhajir (emigration), and they were forcibly deported to Ottomans in 1864. In 1894, the Minister of Agriculture and Property of the Russian Empire Ermolov came here on a special assignment. After that, the township of Gechripsh was officially renamed Ermelovsky in his honor.

To understand the reasons and essence of the I stage of toponym change, it is necessary to familiarize and discuss the following issues:

1. Abkhazia - historical part of Georgia. Although many issues of the history of Abkhazia require further scientific study, various historical sources undoubtedly confirm the following: Georgians and Abkhazians lived side by side here for many centuries.

The kingdom of Abkhazians was one of the Georgian feudal kingdoms in the middle centuries (8th-10th). In the 19th century, Russia annexed the territory of Abkhazia and abolished the principality of Abkhazia. In the 20th century, Abkhazia was still part of Georgia. After the conflict (in 1992-1993), the territory of Abkhazia was occupied by the Russian Federation and was de facto ruled by a separatist regime.

2. Who were the Jiks? Since the ethnic group of Jiks was named, let us determine what we know about them. Jiks were representatives of the Iberian-Caucasian family. The language of the Jiks and the language of the Abkhazians are considered dialects of the same language. The Jiks used to live across the ridge, and according to Strabo, they are newly settled in the Black Sea region [2]. After the conquest of the Caucasus by Russia (19th), its government forcibly relocated approximately 20 thousand Jiks from the coast. After that, the Jiks disappeared from the arena of history.

3. The conquest of the Caucasus by Russia. In the 19th century, the conquest of the peoples of the Caucasus by Russia lasted for many years (1817-1864). It ended with the annexation of the Caucasus,

the destruction of some mountain peoples. As a result of Russia's conquest of the peoples of the Caucasus, a significant part of the native population of the Caucasus was forced to emigrate to the Ottoman Empire, which is known as the "Caucasian Muhajiro".

Many issues will be raised during the presentation, so we consider it necessary to analyse each stage of toponym change.

What did the empire want to achieve? To erase the historical memory of the conquered Caucasian peoples; The story of the emigration of a particular family should be forgotten; To establish and in the future to perceive surnames of Russian origin as natural; The name of this geographical object was identified with the name of the new owner, a Russian official; To become a reference that the service of the Russian Empire was valued; In the consciousness of the people, this geographical area was established as one of the settlements of the Russian Empire; Along with other rights the local population was limited in their ability to perceive and name the environment in their native language.

II stage of toponym change (Ermelovsky>Leselidze)

In 1944, the township of Ermelovsky of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, included in Soviet Georgia, was named "Leselidze" after the Soviet general of the Second World War, Konstantine Leselidze.

Issues to be discussed:

1. Biography of K. Leselidze. Konstantine Leselidze was born in 1903. He has been a member of the Communist Union since 1920. In 1921, he became a cadet of the Caucasus Red Banner Army. In 1924, he participated in the suppression of anti-Soviet demonstrations in Georgia. In 1934 and 1937, he was a delegate of the congresses of the Communist Party of Georgia. From 1942, he fought against Hitler's Germany on the Transcaucasian front, he was the commander of the troops of the North Caucasus Front. In 1943, he was awarded the military rank of colonel general. Leselidze died in 1944. In Moscow, in a military hospital.

In 1971, he was awarded the title of Hero of the USSR. In 1974, his remains were transferred to the Pantheon of Writers and Public Figures, a bust was placed on the street named after him in Tbilisi, and the streets of many districts and cities of Georgia were named after him.

From Leselidze's biography, it is clear that he aspired to a Bolshevik and military career from his youth and succeeded. He was awarded the rank of Colonel-General of the Soviet Army, and after his death - the title of Hero of the USSR. Apart from township Leselidze, the streets of many Georgian cities were named after him.

2. The Democratic Republic of Georgia and its occupation by Bolshevik Russia. We must definitely touch upon that fateful time when a change took place in the history of Georgia and the independent country became part of the USSR. From that time, everything changes radically - turned upside down. Toponyms have also changed [4].

In 1918, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was established. It was difficult but still successful, moving forward in all directions and becoming a democratic state. In 1921, the Red Army invaded the Democratic Republic of Georgia. Its goal was to establish a Bolshevik regime in the country and to annex and occupy the territory of Georgia. In 1922, Georgia joined the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The history of independent Georgia stopped for several decades.

3. 1924 Anti-Soviet uprising Georgia. Soon after the occupation of Georgia, the resistance movement started, and in 1924, a general popular uprising took place. Its goal was to liberate Georgia from the Soviet occupation and restore the democratic republic. On the one hand stood an enormous empire; on the other hand, small Georgia and Europe had only moral and verbal support. The rebellion was defeated. Defeat was followed by brutal terror and repression...

4. The history of the name one of the oldest streets in Tbilisi. Here, let us become acquainted with the history of the name of one of the famous streets of Tbilisi because, apart from being very interesting, it is also related to the name of our research toponym (Leselidze). This street was created in the Middle Ages and was called the "Middle Market". Historically, it was the section of the ancient caravan road connecting East and West. Over the centuries, its name has changed many times: "Middle Bazaar">1867 Pavle Tsitsyanov (military, statesman of the Russian Empire)>1876 "Armenian market">1938 Silibistro Todria (Bolshevik)>1944 K. Leselidze (hero of the USSR, Colonel-general of

the USSR)> 2006 Kote Abkhazi (military and public figure of the Democratic Republic of Georgia). Today, this street is named after Kote Abkhazi.

5. Biography of K. Abkhazi. Konstantine (Kote) Abkhazi (1867-1923) was a representative branch of the princes of Abkhazia - Sharvashidzes - established in eastern Georgia. This person has an invaluable contribution to the independence, statehood, and culture of Georgia. He was Major General of Artillery of the National Army of the Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918); Member of the National Council of Georgia (1917-1919); One of the founders of Tbilisi State University (1918); Active participant in the restoration of autocephaly of the Georgian Orthodox Apostolic Church (1917); One of the authors of the Act of Independence of Georgia (1918); One of the founders of the Georgian National Army from the date of occupation-annexation of Georgia by Bolshevik Russia. One of the leaders of the liberation movement of the Georgian nation and the military center of this committee was created under his initiative. In February 1923, the Chekists arrested him together with the officers of the military center and shot him.

It is clear from biography that K. Abkhaz is a hero fighting for the independence of Georgia. There should be a street named after him in Tbilisi.

Taking into account all these issues, the merits of K. Leselidze should be evaluated in a new way and, accordingly, the reasons for the toponym changes that are interesting to us.

How to evaluate Leselidze's life and work? Merit: Bravery, military skills in the fight against fascism. A crime: 1924 Participation in the suppression of the anti-Soviet uprising of Georgia; Loyal service to the Soviet system. Conclusion: 1. He was rightfully awarded the title of Hero of the USSR. 2. Leselidze is not a hero of Georgia! 3. Today, his name should not be confirmed as the names of geographical objects.

Analysis of the 2nd stage of toponym change: 1) With the glorification of Leselidze in 1924 erasing the heroism of the fighters who died for the restoration of Georgia's independence. 2) Glorifying the faithful servants of Bolshevism as an example. 3) The deepening of the rift between Georgians and Abkhazians, which the Russian Empire created from the beginning of the 19th century.

Stage III of toponym change (Leselidze>Gechrifsh)

After the war in Abkhazia, Leselidze was again called Gechrifsh.

Issues to be discussed:

1. Changes in Soviet toponyms after the collapse of the USSR. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in Georgia, the return of historical names began at a rapid pace. Soviet toponymy, as a tool of propaganda, could not withstand the spirit of the era and, by the will of the people, disappeared from the country's geography.

2. 1992-1993 war in Abkhazia and its consequences. It was a war secretly provoked and organized by Russia between the government troops of Georgia and a part of separatist ethnic Abkhazians. After the fall of Sukhumi (1993), separatist fighters shot members of the local government and brutally assaulted the peaceful Georgian population of Abkhazia. It was ethnic cleansing, and the Abkhaz people also suffered heavy losses. The country received the most victims. Even today, the region of Abkhazia, which enjoys de facto independence from Georgia, faces serious social and economic problems.

3. Metamorphoses of toponymy in Abkhazia – “Toponymic war”. In Abkhazia, there was always a deliberate change in geographical names, which was conditioned by political events. Several stages are distinguished. After the end of the war in Abkhazia, changes will take place in two directions: a) Georgian toponyms are replaced by Russian, Abkhaz, and Armenian names; b) Georgian names differ with certain transcriptional changes [1, 3].

Analysis of the III stage of toponym change: 1) The change Gechrib > Leselidze restores the historical reality; therefore, it is justified. 2) Even after the return of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia to the state of Georgia, Gechripshi should remain. The starting point for us is that Abkhazia is the homeland for both peoples. 3) Toponymy war is only harmful to history and the future. Author(s) can divide the result section into the subsections.

Conclusion

Teaching with projective models of toponyms showed us that students independently search for appropriate materials, analyse them, and convincingly present their works. They agree that the toponym

can be a guide in the labyrinths of history. It becomes clear to the teacher that the inclusion of appropriate toponyms as supporting material is a convenient approach to conduct the learning process.

Our conclusion is as follows: Toponym is a linguistic historical document. It is necessary to include toponymy achievements in the educational process.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contribution

N.J., N.K., K.R. and L.C. contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

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