

ენათმეცნიერება Linguistic

**Semantic Shift of Pop-Culture Antonomasia in Georgian Digital Discourse**

**Marine Makhatadze**

Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
Tbilisi, Georgia

e-mail: [marine.makhatadze540@hum.tsu.edu.ge](mailto:marine.makhatadze540@hum.tsu.edu.ge)

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*In the digital age, popular culture franchises have evolved beyond their traditional role as mere entertainment and became significant sources of lexical innovation. These franchises offer a shared culture which serves as a framework for interpreting modern reality. This study investigates the linguistic phenomenon of pop-culture antonomasia, a device and the process by which proper names from cinema, literature, and television are transformed into common nouns in a language, in this case in Georgian. The research employs a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) approach and uses a triangulated dataset comprising the kaTenTen24 (Georgian Web Corpus), kaWaC, and the Georgian National Corpus (GNC) to ensure both diachronic depth and contemporary digital coverage.*

*The study draws on the theoretical framework of semantic bleaching (Squires, 2014) to distinguish between source-referential usage (discussing the film) and metaphorical extension (describing real-world events). A rigorous filtration methodology was applied to concordance lines and to reveal that specific media icons have undergone significant de-proprialization. These icons have shed their fictional origins, functioning now as abstract concepts. The findings reveal a discernible dichotomy within the Georgian lexicon, distinguishing between global and local borrowings. The employment of imported Anglophone terms, such as "Terminator" and "Orcs," is predominantly employed to characterize political aggression and physical force. Some of the lexemes in the study function as expressive synonyms for "enemy" or "invader". Some of them have negative connotations.*

*In contrast, Georgian cinematic metaphors (e.g., Blue Mountains, Pupala) are utilized for social satire, specifically to critique bureaucratic absurdity and delusional behavior. The study posits that these neologisms should not be considered ephemeral slang; rather, they are to be regarded as*

*condensed ekphrastic narratives that serve to fill critical lexical gaps in political and social discourse. This article posits that a descriptive expansion of Georgian lexicography is necessary to accommodate the de-contextualization of these terms, which have transitioned from fictional entities to functional lexemes.*

**Keywords:** *Pop-culture, antonomasia, semantic bleaching.*

## 1. Introduction

Culture manifests itself through conceptual, material, performative, and aesthetic channels. While traditional linguistics often views popular culture as a source of ephemeral slang, modern discourse analysis reveals a deeper phenomenon: the transformation of fictional entities into essential cognitive tools.

Historically, this influence was seen when the conversational style and vocabulary used in pulp fiction magazines and dime novels penetrated the speech of society, showing up in newspaper and magazine articles. However, a more specific linguistic process is at work in the 21st century: Antonomasia, or the usage of a proper name as a common noun. Rather than just catchy phrases such as “That’s what she said”, “That is so last year,” “Get a life,” “It doesn’t get any better than this,” we are witnessing the birth of new functional vocabulary derived from mass media. Research by scholars such as Marcel Danesi (2019) suggests that pop culture now functions as a “modern mythology,” providing the shared symbols we use to interpret reality.

Research on pop language, slang throughout the world shows that coinages and linguistic patterns have a short lifespan. However, the same domain of research also shows that there are many terms that gain general currency, cutting across age, class, and gender boundaries. The language used on screen stages (television, cinema, internet) entertains us as well as makes us debate important things, such as the nature, role, and evolution of language itself. For instance, in the 1920s, jazz culture introduced a whole series of buzzwords and catchphrases into everyday discourse, including words such as *hip*, *stylin’*, *cool*, and *groovy*. The words *pot* and *marijuana*, which were part of a secret criminal jargon in the 1940s, became everyday words in the 1960s when young people adopted them and spread them through lifestyle images, recordings, and other media. In the 1990s hip-hop culture introduced expressions such as *bad*, *chill*, and *nasty* into conversational style. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines this process as “De-contextualization”—the moment a word leaves its fictional universe and enters the real world. While the Oxford English Dictionary actively monitors such ‘de-contextualization,’ Modern Georgian lexicography remains largely resistant to including pop-culture realia, creating a divergence between codified language and digital discourse.

Linguistically, this process follows a specific trajectory. The meaning changes are initially pragmatic and associative, arising in the context of the flow of speech. At later stages, meaning loss or semantic bleaching (Squires, 2014) typically occurs, where the specific details of the character or plot fade, leaving behind a generalized abstract concept.

This study attempts to bridge that gap by analyzing how global and local pop culture icons have been lexicalized in Modern Georgian. The article poses two primary research questions: a) To what extent do pop-culture eponyms in Modern Georgian demonstrate semantic bleaching, where the original source referent is entirely lost? b) Does the adoption of global pop-culture antonomasia in Georgian serve primarily to fill lexical gaps?

In this article, we adopt a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies approach, using the kaTenTen24 web corpus to track these shifts. This paper will first analyze the theoretical framework of semantic shift, followed by a quantitative analysis of the case studies. To distinguish between references to the source material and genuine semantic innovation, we adopt the corpus-filtering methodology outlined by Sanchez-Stockhammer (2023). In her study on the impact of *Star Wars* on English, demonstrates that franchise-specific terms (e.g., Jedi, Padawan) frequently undergo a process of generalization, moving from specific character names to generalized descriptors of skill or rank. Her findings indicate that the longevity of these terms depends on their ability to fill functional gaps in the receiving language.

## 2. The Phenomenon of Pop-Culture Lexis

Pop culture language offers a wide range of characteristic vocabulary items suitable for empirical study in the Georgian context. The majority of these items originate as proper nouns, specifically the names of characters, fictional locations, or franchises. However, the migration of vocabulary from fiction to reality mirrors the process of how specialized terms enter the general language. Just as scientific terms like "clone" (from biology) and "quantum leap" (from physics) have been adopted by the general public to describe non-scientific situations, for example "paparazzi" (derived from the character name Paparazzo in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*).

The primary mechanism driving this meaning change is antonomasia, a rhetorical device where a proper name is used as a common noun or verb. This process relies heavily on metaphorical extension, where the specific attributes of a fictional character are isolated and applied to a real-world entity. For example, when a Georgian speaker refers to a person as a "ტერმინატორი" ("Terminator"), they are not referencing the Cameron film franchise, but rather activating the metaphorical traits of ruthlessness associated with the character.

This verbal representation of visual media can be further understood through the lens of intersemiotic ekphrasis. While traditionally defined as the description of visual art, Rusieshvili-Cartledge and Dolidze (2012) argue that ekphrasis is a "multifaceted phenomenon" that extends to "uncanonical art forms such as... cinematography." They propose a bipartite model consisting of a "surface plane" (the text) and a "background cultural knowledge plane" (the associations). Applying their typology, the pop-culture neologisms in this study function as "ekphrastic allusions" or "ekphrastic similes."

Our study specifically focuses on such instances of semantic change. As noted by Sanchez-Stockhammer (2023), this process often involves semantic bleaching, where the complex context of

the original story (the plot, the actors, the setting) fades away, leaving behind a simplified, functional meaning (e.g., Santa Barbara denotes to Chaos) that can be easily integrated into everyday discourse.

### 3. Material and Methodology

Popular culture language offers a large range of characteristic vocabulary items that could be considered in an empirical study. To investigate vocabulary with sufficiently high frequency, the empirical study reported here is based on some coverage in the press, blogs, fandoms and social networks. The data are gathered in Georgian Web 2024 (kaTenTen24), Georgian Web 2013 (kaWaC) and for more academic genre we used Georgian National Corpus (Gippert & Tandashvili, 2015). Dictionary entries have not been the source of evidence, due to the fact that Georgian explanatory dictionary uses high frequency of evidence and rather orthodox and restricted in adding new words.

These target items were searched in their unlemmatized, case-insensitive base form in three corpora to yield the number of occurrences of each item (presented in Table 1). These are the following corpora: Georgian Web 2024 (kaTenTen24), Georgian Web 2013 (kaWaC) and Georgian National Corpus. KaTenTen24 comprises 1,108,748,686 tokens, KaWaC – 63,632,861 tokens and GNC – 204,721,351 tokens (Modern Georgian and Georgian Reference Corpus). Given the fact that each corpus is different in size, raw frequency counts were normalized.

In view of possible alternative forms of the word singular and plural or using hyphenation, spacing or concatenation – the corpora were systematically searched for all variants of the word.

Table 1. Number of occurrences of the unlemmatized Pop-culture items across corpora

n	Lexical Item	Georgian Web 2024 (kaTenTen24)	Georgian Web 2013 (kaWaC)	Georgian National Corpus (GNC)	Total N
1.	ორკ-(ებ)-ი (Orcs)	n= 401	n= 20	n= 2	423
2	აკაცუკ-(ებ)-ი (Akatsuki)	n= 65	n= 2	n= 1	68
3.	ტერმინატორი (Terminator)	n= 382	n= 37	n= 115	534
4.	შერლოკ ჰოლმსი (Sherlock Holmes)	n= 458	n= 47	n= 289	794
5.	სანტა ბარბარა (Santa Barbara)	n= 61	n= 0	n= 3	64

6.	ცისფერი მთები (Blue Mountains)	n= 472	n= 20	n= 130	622
7.	მაუგლი (Mowgli)	n= 495	n= 16	n= 76	587
8.	ფუფალა (Pupala)	n= 169	n= 35	n= 68	272
	Total				N= 3364

KWIC (key word in context) lists were retrieved from the online corpus query tools and they were copied into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for further processing of the keywords with their surrounding context. To ensure diffusion and prevent repeated use inside the same text from skewing the results, the data was filtered by applying Excel's duplicate-deleting function either to the column with the identifiers of individual texts in the corpus.

The resulting sample of usage contexts was manually annotated in a separate column of the Excel spreadsheet to indicate the membership of each context in one of five categories, described below with their most important subcategories. The decision was made due to extract those instances of secondary meanings (metaphoric, antonomasia, semantic bleaching).

In the process of coding, ample use was made of the extended context of the samples to achieve a high level of accuracy in the categorization. As is usually the case in categorization, there were borderline cases, but each item was only assigned to the one category that represented the most likely interpretation. These categories are: a) Reference to films or texts as films or texts; b) Metaphorical use of pop-culture language items in the real world.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

##### 4.1 Concordance results

In some cases there was no or unclear reference to the pop-culture item and context was vague. Instances in this category were disregarded in the analysis of the impact of popular culture language on Georgian.

a) Reference to films or texts as films or texts:

- (1) *ტოლკინის ნამუშევრებში ორკები იყვნენ ბოროტი არსებები, რომლებიც ექვემდებარებოდნენ შავ მბრძანებელს (KaWaC) (In Tolkien's works, orcs were evil creatures subject to the Dark Lord).*
- (2) *აკატსუკი იაჰიკომ შექმნა, ხოლო მის ტანსაცმელზე გამოსახული წითელი ღრუბლები ომის სიმბოლოა (KaTenTen24) (Akatsuki was created by Yahiko, and the red clouds depicted on his clothes are a symbol of war).*
- (3) *შევვიძლია ასევე გავიხსენოთ ტერმინატორი 2, სადაც სარა კონორი საგოიეთში ხვდება (KaWaC) (We can recall The Terminator 2, where Sarah Connor ends up at mental hospital).*
- (4) *ნახატზე ეხატა შერლოკ ჰოლმსი, რომელიც შხაპუნა წვიმაში დგას (GNC) (The painting depicts Sherlock Holmes standing in the pouring rain).*

- (5) გახსოვთ „სანტა ბარბარა“? ოთხმოცდაათიან წლებში ერთ-ერთი ყველაზე რეიტინგული, პოპულარული და ამავდროულად დაუსრულებელი სერიალი იყო (KaTenTen24) Do you remember "Santa Barbara"? It was one of the highest-rated, most popular, and at the same time never-ending TV series in the nineties.
- (6) როცა „ცისფერი მთები“ ეკრანებზე გამოვიდა, ეს სურათი ზარბაზნის გასროლას ჰგავდა (GNC) When "The Blue Mountains" hit the screens, the image was like a cannon shot.
- (7) ჯერ მაუგლი უნდა წაეკითხა, მერე აივენჰო, მერე ტომ სოიერი (KaWaC) He should have read Mowgli first, then Ivanhoe, then Tom Sawyer.

In these instances, no semantic change has occurred; the words function as standard proper nouns.

b) Metaphorical extension and de-contextualization: Here, the speakers use the terms to describe political, social, or personal realities, demonstrating semantic bleaching:

- (1) რამდენიმე აკაცუკი შეიკრიბება, გადაკეტავს გზას, ძალიან დიდ დისკომფორტს უქმნის დედაქალაქის მოსახლეობას (GNC) (Several Akatsuki will gather, block the road, causing great inconvenience to the capital city).
- (2) რუსთაველის გამზირზე ორკები დათარეშობენ (GNC) (Orcs are descending on Rustaveli Avenue).
- (3) ზელანდიელი შეუჩერებელი ტერმინატორი 2007 წელს რაგბის საერთაშორისო დიდების დარბაზში შეიყვანეს (KaTenTen24) (The unstoppable New Zealand terminator was inducted into the International Rugby Hall of Fame in 2007).
- (4) შერლოკ ჰოლმსი მე არ ვარ, იცი და არც პრეტენზია მქონდა დიდი, მენს პატარა საქმეს თუ კარგად გააკეთებ, ესეც რაღაცას ნიშნავს (GNC) I'm not Sherlock Holmes, you know, and I didn't claim to be great. If you do your little job well, that means something.
- (5) ნამდვილი სანტა ბარბარა მოაწყო და მგონი პირდაპირ ეთერში ვიხილავთ მთელ ამ დრამას (KaTenTen24) The real Santa Barbara has been organized and I think we'll see all this drama live.
- (6) საპარლამენტო ცისფერი მთები ანუ საგაზაფხულო სესიის ბოლო დღე (GNC) The Parliamentary Blue Mountains or the last day of the spring session.
- (7) ბავშვობაში სუფთა მაუგლი იყო, ხან რაზე აცოცდებოდა მოუსვენარი! (KaTenTen24) In his childhood he was Mowgli, he was crawling on the trees he was such a naughty child.
- (8) ქალბატონ ნესტანს ყველა იცნობთ, ჩვენი ფუფალა ერთი იმათგანია, ვინც ქუთაისს თავისებურ ელფერს მატებს (GNC) You all know Ms. Nestani, our Pupala is one of those who adds a unique touch to Kutaisi.

#### 4.2 Quantitative Overview and Normalization

The quantitative analysis of the corpus data reveals a significant divergence between referential and metaphorical usage. Furthermore, when normalized to frequency per million words

(pmw), the data highlights a distinct distributional pattern between established literary metaphors (predominant in the GNC) and emerging digital neologisms (predominant in kaTenTen24).

To account for the disparity in corpora size, frequencies were normalized to comparable units. The normalized data supports a clear distinction in usage domains. Canonical metaphors such as *Sherlock Holmes* appear significantly more frequently in the GNC (1.41 pmw) than in the digital corpus (0.41 pmw), suggesting their integration into standard literary Georgian. In contrast, recent pop-culture loans like *Santa Barbara* show the inverse pattern, being five times more frequent in digital discourse (0.05 pmw) than in the national corpus (0.01 pmw).

### 4.3 Analysis of semantic change

The qualitative analysis of concordance lines suggests that semantic bleaching is not a binary state but a gradient process (Squires, 2014). The data indicates varying degrees of de-proprialization among the target lexemes. Several directions of semantic change can be systematically identified:

#### A. Partial semantic bleaching

(3) "*The unstoppable New Zealand terminator was inducted into the International Rugby Hall of Fame...*" (KaTenTen24). Here, the term *Terminator* retains a strong connection to its source domain. The speaker alludes to the specific physical attributes of the cyborg (mechanical strength, relentlessness). The word functions as a metaphor, but the "source" (the movie character) is still visible to the audience.

#### B. Full semantic bleaching

(5) "*The real Santa Barbara has been organized...*" (KaTenTen24). In this instance, *Santa Barbara* displays total de-proprialization. The specific narrative details of the 1990s soap opera (the actors, the California setting, the specific plotlines) have been entirely eroded. The term now functions as a purely abstract signifier for "disordered temporality" or "chaos." A younger speaker using this term may not even be aware of the original TV show, indicating that the lexeme has achieved autonomy from its source.

#### C. Pejoration

(2) "*Orcs are descending on Rustaveli Avenue*" (GNC). This represents a unique form of bleaching driven by political discourse. The fantasy elements of Tolkien's world are stripped away, and the term is redeployed as a raw label for "aggressor." The normalization data shows that *Orcs* is statistically invisible in the GNC (0.01 pmw) but prevalent in digital media (0.36 pmw), suggesting that indexical bleaching is accelerated by political conflict, where communicative efficiency ("Enemy") is prioritized over referential accuracy.

#### D. Grammatical Integration

Linguistically, this shift marks a move from rigid designators (proper nouns pointing to one specific film) to predicates (common nouns describing a class of events). Evidence of this grammatical integration is found in the syntax. In example (5), the use of the adjective "real" (*namdvili Santa Barbara*) syntactically forces the proper name to behave as a common noun. By

accepting adjectival modification, the proper noun *Santa Barbara* surrenders its status as a unique entity and becomes a category label.

### E. Ekphrastic allusion

Beyond simple metaphor, these terms function as condensed narratives. As Rusieshvili-Cartledge and Dolidze (2012) argue, ekphrasis extends to the verbal representation of cinema.

(6) "*The Parliamentary Blue Mountains...*" (GNC). The use of *Blue Mountains* (*Tsisferi Mtebi*) to describe bureaucratic delay is a filmic ekphrastic allusion. The speaker relies on the listener's cultural knowledge of Eldar Shengelaia's film to decode the meaning without explicit description.

### F. The functional dichotomy

Finally, the results indicate a functional division of labor in the Georgian lexicon. Imported anglicisms (e.g., *Terminator*, *Orcs*) are predominantly employed for hyperbole and to characterize physical force or geopolitical aggression. In contrast, indigenous cinematic metaphors (e.g., *Blue Mountains*, *Pupala*) are utilized for social satire, specifically to critique internal corruption, bureaucracy, and delusional behavior.

**Conclusion.** This study has investigated the semantic integration of pop-culture realia into Modern Georgian. Regarding the first research question, the corpus evidence confirms that these lexemes display advanced stages of semantic bleaching, moving along a gradient from residual indexicality (e.g., *Terminator*) to total de-proprialization (e.g., *Santa Barbara*). Grammatical integration, such as the acceptance of adjectival modification (e.g., "real *Santa Barbara*"), further confirms their transition from rigid designators to functional predicates.

Regarding the second research question, the data suggests that pop-culture items fill specific lexical gaps through a functional division of labor. Normalization of frequency data reveals that while established literary metaphors like *Sherlock Holmes* are integrated into the standard corpus (GNC), lexemes like *Orcs* are almost exclusively restricted to digital discourse.

Conversely, Georgian cinematic metaphors operate as condensed ekphrastic narratives, using collective cultural memory to critique local bureaucratic and social realities. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that pop-culture antonomasia is not a random linguistic habit but a structured mechanism of intersemiotic transfer, because speakers increasingly rely on shared popular culture to interpret complex realities.

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## მარინე მახათაძე

ივ. ჯავახიშვილის სახელობის თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი  
თბილისი, საქართველო  
e-mail: [marine.makhatadze540@hum.tsu.edu.ge](mailto:marine.makhatadze540@hum.tsu.edu.ge)

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## პოპკულტურული ანტონომასიის სემანტიკური ცვლილების მექანიზმები

### ქართულ ციფრულ დისკურსში

#### რეზიუმე

ციფრულ ეპოქაში პოპკულტურა გასცდა მხოლოდ გართობის ტრადიციულ როლს და ენობრივი შემოქმედების მნიშვნელოვან წყაროდ იქცა. ისინი ქმნიან საერთო კულტურულ სივრცეს, ერთგვარ უნივერსალურ მითსებს, რომელიც თანამედროვე რეალობის ინტერპრეტაციას ახლებულად გვთავაზობს. წინამდებარე კვლევა შეისწავლის პოპკულტურული ანტონომასიის ლინგვისტურ ფენომენს — ენობრივ გამომხატველ საშუალებასა და პროცესს, რომლის მეშვეობითაც კინემატოგრაფიის სფეროში არსებული საკუთარი სახელები ენაში (ამ შემთხვევაში, ქართულში) ახალი სემანტიკის მქონე საერთო ენის ლექსიკურ ერთეულებად გარდაიქმნება.

კვლევა იყენებს კორპუსზე დაფუძნებული დისკურსის ანალიზის მეთოდს და ეყრდნობა მონაცემთა ტრიანგულირებულ ბაზას: kaTenTen24-ს (ქართული ვებ-კორპუსი), kaWaC-სა და ქართულ ეროვნულ კორპუსს (GNC). ნაშრომი ეფუძნება სემანტიკური ცვლილების მექანიზმების,

მაგ., სემანტიკური გაუფერულების (Semantic Bleaching) თეორიულ ჩარჩოს (Squires, 2014). აღნიშნულ კორპუსებში კონკორდანსის სტრიქონების შესწავლამ და მეთოდოლოგიამ გამოავლინა, რომ კონკრეტულმა მედია-ხატებმა განიცადა მნიშვნელოვანი ცვლილება. პოპკულტურული ლექსიკის ჩვენ მიერ შესწავლილმა ერთეულებმა მათი პირვანდელი ფიქციური წარმომავლობა დაკარგეს, მათი სემანტიკური შრე ტრანსფორმირდა და აბსტრაქტულ ცნებებად იქცნენ.

მიღებული შედეგები ცხადყოფს იმ დიქოტომიას ქართულ ლექსიკაში, რაც გლობალურ და ლოკალურ ნასესხობებს შორის განსხვავებაში ვლინდება. ანგლიციზმები, როგორცაა „ტერმინატორი“ და „ორკები“, უმეტესწილად პოლიტიკური აგრესიისა და ფიზიკური ძალის დასახასიათებლად გამოიყენება. მასალის კონტექსტუალურად შესწავლის შემდეგ ლექსემების ნაწილი უარყოფითი კონოტაციის მატარებელია. ამის საპირისპიროდ, ქართული კინემატოგრაფიული მეტაფორები (მაგ., „ცისფერი მთები“, „ფუფალა“) სოციალური სატირისთვის გამოიყენება, კერძოდ კი ბიუროკრატიული აბსურდისა და არაადეკვატური ქცევის გასაკრიტიკებლად. კვლევა მიიჩნევს, რომ ეს პოპკულტურული ენა, მისი ცვლილების მექანიზმები პოლიტიკურ ან/და სოციალურ დისკურსში არსებულ ლექსიკურ სიცარიელეს ავსებენ.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** *პოპკულტურა, ანტონომასია, სემანტიკური გაუფერულება.*

**რეცენზენტი:** პროფესორი ნაზია ჟანპეისოვა