

The Lord's Prayer in Abkhaz: A Comparison of Three Published Versions

***Молитва «Отче наш» на абхазском языке:
сравнение трех изданных версий***

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This article compares and analyses three versions of the Lord's Prayer in the Abkhaz language, spanning the years 1866 to 2015.

Key words: Abkhaz, Bible translation, Lord's Prayer

Статья сравнивает и анализирует три версии перевода молитвы «Отче наш» на абхазский язык, появившиеся в период с 1866 г. по 2015 г.

Ключевые слова: абхазский язык, перевод Библии, молитва «Отче наш»

Introduction

Abkhaz (and its divergent dialect Abaza) together with Circassian and the now extinct Ubykh form the small North West Caucasian language-family. It was only towards the close of tsarist Russia's imperial drive south that the first serious attempts were made in the latter half of the 19th century to study and provide a writing system for Abkhaz. Following Russia's final subjugation of the whole North Caucasus in 1864 and again after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878, most of the Abkhazians and Circassians plus all of the Ubykhs migrated to various parts of the Ottoman Empire. The remaining rump-population of Abkhazians were confessionally mixed Christian and Muslim, though it is fair to assume that those most strongly committed to Islam will

have left the Caucasian homeland¹. This article compares and analyses three versions of the Lord's Prayer spanning the years 1866 to 2015².

The first grammar of Abkhaz came from the pen of the Russian soldier-linguist Baron Pëtr Uslar (1816–1875), his original publication appearing in lithographic form in 1862, and this was modified during the process of translation into German by Schiefner [1863]; Uslar's own text was posthumously published in print in 1887. It included the first attempt to provide the language with an orthography. The basis of Uslar's study was the more phonetically complex of the two dialects still spoken today in the Republic of Abkhazia, namely Bzyp, located to the north-west of the capital Sukhum. Uslar's script, employed in Version 1, was based on Cyrillic, but additional characters had to be devised to accommodate the large consonantal phonemic inventory characteristic of any North West Caucasian tongue. Given the complexity of Bzyp, it is not surprising that Uslar failed to distinguish all its 67 consonantal phonemes; his script consisted of 55 letters. Unsurprisingly, the script was later subjected to adaptations, the most enduring of which was that of Abkhazian Andrej Ch'och'ua [1909], whose version, also employing 55 characters, was used between 1909 and 1926; thus it was the one used for Version 2. The Georgian-Scot Nikolaj Marr invented a highly idiosyncratic orthography [1926], but it was Marr's pupil and fellow Russian Nikolaj Jakovlev's 'Unified Alphabet'

¹ On the religious beliefs of the Abkhazians (including paganism) see such works as: [Clogg 1999], [Janashia 1937] and [Marr 1937].

² In addition to the three versions that we compare in this volume four further translations are known to the author. Three of these are referenced in the body of the article below and are by Zaira Khiba, Father Dorotheos (Dorofej) Dbar, and Mushni Lasuria according to his first rendition, which was included in his 2004 translation of the whole New Testament. The fourth appears on p. 185 of a «Bible for Children» translated from Russian by T'. Arys-pha and G^w. K^w?ətsnia-pha [2001], a publication that was not for sale but for free distribution.

that was adopted in 1928 during the USSR's romanisation-drive (*latinizatsija*), and it was around this time when the simpler of the two dialects still spoken in Abkhazia after the late-19th-century mass-migrations to the Ottoman Empire, namely Abzhywa with only(!) 58 consonantal phonemes, became the basis for the literary language. In 1938 a Georgian-based orthography was imposed (as can be seen in Džhanashia's dictionary [1954]), but after the death of (Georgian) Stalin (1953) a new Cyrillic-based script was drawn up (by committee!), and this in turn underwent some slight logical changes for the purposes of standardisation in the 1990s; naturally, this last was the script used for Version 3³.

Analysis and Comparison

Version 1

The Lord's Prayer (according to Matthew 6) first appeared in Abkhaz in 1866 in a hand-written publication edited by Ivan Bartolomej, who, building on Uslar, had himself published an Abkhaz primer in 1865 — the verses in this original format were unnumbered. The text was then included, with minor (not always correct) changes to punctuation, in print-form on p.71 of [Dalton 1870], but not without the odd typographical slip: in two words in the final clause (namely *ҭагыцџынырха* *haɡʲitʰʷənərχa* and *аџџа* *atʰʷgʲa*) the handwritten text of 1866 provides one token in each word of the voiceless labialised alveolo-palatal affricate (*tʰʷ*, underlined above), whereas in the printed version it is the plain alveolar affricate (*ts*) that is wrongly substituted in both instances.

Two linguistic puzzles manifest themselves. The postposition meaning 'in' attested in Mt 6:9 and 6:10 in that early version (namely *ахъка* [*a-ʃaxʲ.q'a* = /[[it-]to(wards)]/) would in standard

³ Further discussion of writing-systems for Abkhaz, the language and its literature can be found in such works as: [Avidzba 1999; Bgazhba 1967; Hewitt 1995, 1999, 2010]. Parellelling the present article, [Hewitt 2017] compares and analyses three translations of the Sermon on the Mount.

modern Abkhaz be either *a-fʃ'ə* = /it-in/ or *a-q'.nə* = /it-in/; the postposition in question also features in Mt 6:13 as the final element of *ахька арыафарач'q'a* 'into confusion', where, of course, it signifies 'into'. I am grateful to Prof. Vjacheslav Chirikba for pointing out (personal communication) that this postposition is typical of the Sadz dialect (supposedly not spoken in Abkhazia after the 1864 migration). He suggests that the form might have been a shared Bzyp-Sadz feature, retained by Sadz speakers in Turkey but lost now in Bzyp. Chirikba also confirms that the form *иахьтэа jax'.tʷ'a* 'today' at Mt 6:11, for which *jax'a* would be expected, is another Sadz form. The form of the final verb (viz. the already cited *ҟагыцэынырха*) is also worth noting — it is the causativised form (in *-r-*, underlined above) of the verb *a-n-χa-ra* = /Article-Preverb-Root-Infinitive/ 'to live', the force of the causative here being 'allow, permit'.

A literal translation of the earliest rendition would read as follows, without, be it noted, the inclusion of the doxology:

[9] Pray regularly like this: You who are our father [and] who are in heaven, let Your name be(come) pure/hallowed; [10] Let Your kingdom come, let it be as You desire, as in heaven just so on earth too; [11] [as for] bread for our well-being/existence give it to us today; [12] and forgive us our debts just so as we forgive those upon whom are ours; [13] and lead us not into confusion, but also allow us to live free from the evil one.

Interlinear Gloss for Version 1

[9] Шəныхəала	абарс	Ҟара		
pray regularly	thus/like this	us		
Иҟабы	Уара	иҟоу	ажəсан	ахька
who are our father	you	who are	heaven	in(to)
ицқаны	иқалааит	Уара	ухьз	
pure/hallowed	let it be(come)	you	your name	

- [10] **иаиаит Уара уцсхара Уара**
 let it come you your kingdom you
- иера убарс адсабараҕы**
 It so/like that in the world/nature too
- [11] **Ача хара хабзазаразы**
 the bread us for our well-being/existence
- ихат иахытәа егыҕазныж**
 give it to us today and forgive us them
- [12] **хара хуалқәа иара**
 us our debts (obligations) it
- Убарс харгы хатәы зқәқоу**
 so/like that we too ours upon whom they are
- ишырзынхажьуа аицш**
 how we forgive them as/like it
- [13] **хагыаломгалан хара арҕашьарахька**
 and lead us not into it us into confusion/temptation

Version 2

The 1912 translation of the Gospels was one of a series of publications produced by the Translation Commission that had been established in 1892. One of its members was Dmitry Gulia (1874–1960), a native of the Abzhywa-speaking region who was to become regarded (and revered) as the ‘Father of Abkhazian Literature’. The text was published in the Georgian capital Tiflis (later Tbilisi) in the script employed at the time — a facsimile of the 1912 translation of the Gospels was published in the 1970s by the Institute for Bible Translation; to facilitate ease of reading, this rendition was reprinted in 1998 in the script then in official

use, which means prior to the standardising adaptations mentioned in the Introduction. Verses are numbered, and the doxology is included. The text may be rendered thus:

[9] Pray like this: Our Father who are/art in heaven, let Your name be(come) pure/hallowed;

[10] Let Your kingdom come; let Your will be done as it is in heaven above and also on earth below.

[11] Give us today the bread without which we are helpless;

[12] And forgive us our debts, as we forgive those upon whom are ours;

[13] And lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. For You possess the kingdom, the power and the greatness/glory without interruption. Amen.

It is the 1912 version of the Gospels in the originally published script which is enshrined as the officially sanctioned text for ecclesiastical use in the Republic of Abkhazia.

Interlinear Gloss for Version 2

[9] **Шэныхэа абас**
Pray like this

Жэџан икоу Хаб!
(in) heaven who is // are (art) our father

ицкъахааит ухъз
let it become pure/hallowed your name

[10] **Иааиааит уцсхара**
let it come your kingdom

икалааит угэацхара,
may it be(come) // let it be(come) your desire // will

хахь ажэџан
above heaven

Акны **еицш** **цака** **адунеи** **аеггы;**
 in it as/like it below the world in it also

[11] **Ача** **зда**
 the bread without which

ххэартам **ихат**
 we are helpless // are not sustainable give it to us

хара **ехъа**
 us today

[12] **Егъхазныжъ** **хара** **хауалкуа**
 and forgive us them us our debts

хара **хтэы** **зыкукуоу**
 us belonging to us on whom they are

ишырзынхажъуа **аицш;**
 how we forgive them them as // like it

[13] **хагъалаумгалан** **хара** **ацэыгъпышэара,**
 and lead us not into it us temptation

хагъацэнырха **хара** **ацэгъара.**
 and let us live free from it us evil

Уара **ацсхареи**
 You the kingdom and

амчи **адуреи** **цымкрыда**
 the power and the glory and permanently

иумоуп **азы.**
 you have them for it = because

Амин.
 Amen

Comparative Remarks

Some comparative comments on both the language and content of these renditions are justified, although such minor features as differences in word-order will be ignored.

Verse 9: Version 1 begins with two relative structures ('who are our Father' and 'who are in heaven'), whereas the later translations avoid the first of these by using the simple phrasal address 'Our Father'. Version 1 has the full verb 'become' in the subjunctive mood coupled with the adverbial form of the adjective for 'pure, clean, hallowed' as complement, whilst Version 2 couples this adjective with a verbal root meaning 'become' to form a compound stem which is then placed in the subjunctive. Version 3 clearly differs from its predecessors. As a matter of interest, Lasuria's 2004 version had omitted the relative structure 'which is holy' (= 'holy').

Verse 10: Versions 1, 2 and Lasuria in 2004 all expressed 'Your kingdom' in the same way (viz. *уццхара wə-ps.ħa-ra* = /your-king-ABSTRACT/), whereas Lasuria in 2015 opted for the alternative *yaħpa w-aħ-ra* = /your-king-ABSTRACT/, the preference perhaps motivated by a perception that *аццхара a-ps.ħa-ra* = /the-king-ABSTRACT/ '(the) kingdom' might suggest a nuance of delimiting the said kingdom to Abkhazia (cf. *аццуа [a-]aps-wa* = /[the-]Abkhaz-Human/ '(the) Abkhazian (person)'; note that Kaslandzi(j)a's 2005 Abkhaz-Russian dictionary defines *аццха [a-]aps-ħa* = /[the-]Abkhaz-king/ as '(the) tsar, ruler of Abkhazia'). Versions 2 and 3 offer a simple nominal equivalence to *θélēma* 'will', but Version 1 complicates matters with the expression 'as you desire/will/wish (it)'; the subjunctive ending of the verb 'be done' lacks an 'a' in the suffix in Version 1. Versions 2 and 3 add 'above' (Бзыр хахь *χaχ'* [recte *χaχ'* with pharyngalised initial fricative, marked by underlining in this transcription] in 2 vs *Abzhywa хыхь χaχ'* in 3) and 'below' (in its adjectival, rather

than adverbial, guise in 3). The word ‘(the) world’ is normally expressed in Abkhaz as адунеи *a-dunej* (ultimately a loan from Arabic), and this appears in Versions 2 and 3, but Version 1 has the word ацсабара *a-psa.ba-ra* = ?/the-wet.dry-ABSTRACT/ which today is mostly used in the sense of ‘(world of) nature’. However, having said this, it is *a-psa.ba-ra* which is seen at John 17.13-18 in the meaning ‘world’ in the Gospels as translated in 1912, by Lasuria and also Zaira Khiba (for whom see below).

Verse 11: Perhaps Version 1 comes closest to rendering Greek *epiούσιον* ‘sufficient for the day’. Whilst Versions 2 and 3 are aligned, Lasuria in 2004 literally had ‘without which we have no means’.

Verse 12: The three versions exhibit basic alignment, except that Lasuria inserts (somewhat tautologically) ‘which are upon us’ as epithet to ‘our debts’.

Verse 13: Versions 2 and 3 agree on the choice of nominal equivalent for *peirasmón* ‘temptation’, whereas Version 1 makes a different selection. Most interesting is how Greek *apò tou̯ ponēroū* is interpreted. The Greek is ambiguous between ‘from the evil male being’ and ‘from evil (in the abstract)’. Version 1 opts for the first interpretation, where incidentally we also note the rather strained syntax, being literally ‘allow us to live free from him, from the evil one’, the postposition ‘from’ being unnecessary, as the oblique object is referenced in the accompanying verb-form — exactly the same phenomenon is observed in the immediately preceding construction, which is literally ‘lead us not into it, into temptation’, the postposition ‘into’ being pleonastic for the same reason. On the other hand, Version 2 prefers the second interpretation of the Greek. Version 3 agrees with the first interpretation but differs in actually naming ‘the evil one’ as ‘the Devil’. In taking this step Lasuria is in agreement with a translation by Father Dorotheos, an Abkhazian priest at the New Athos Monastery in Abkhazia

who studied on Mt. Athos itself, whereas another translation by Zaira Khiba which can be consulted on the Net at: (<http://clarino.uib.no/abnc/document-element?cpos=219571>) within her rendition of Matthew's Gospel is in line with what we read in Version 2⁴. Interestingly, in his 2004 translation Lasuria had employed the periphrasis 'guard/protect us from those things which are evil'. Versions 2 and 3 incorporate the doxology, though Version 2 omits the connective 'for'. Once again Lasuria stands apart by inserting a tautologous epithet 'eternal' attached exclusively to the third conjunct 'honour-and-glory'.

Conclusion

The article has demonstrated how a short, structurally (syntactically) straightforward text can, in parts at least, be treated by translators in more or less subtly different ways. Differences may be occasioned by such factors as: the dialect of the translator, their lexical preferences, their particular interpretations of the source-text, or changes affecting the language over the course of time.

⁴ Khiba's translation of all four Gospels was closely edited against the original Greek by the writer of the present comparison, and her translations are soon to appear in Abkhazia in numbers of the journal *Aq^w'a* 'Sukhum' edited by Mushni Lasuria.

Illustrated Text Ecompassing Version 1 (1866)
 (Last 5 lines of p. 102 & top 11 lines of p. 103)

— 102 —

<p>рунаху ирүмтман ауа ишрбгца уртз истрийан- ха. ус акум ишрзёуша аррј узмангк жатрејуа агіј унант жазрмдрца- нт; аррунаху ііүтреја мазала, усдан азёсангг хаб ііүртман іуара уј азрхан аргала. іуанн- нгца ііүртмун аррј цаша урс, ауа ссідрсрббанха, уантннрца, мгуцу ум- нан, уј ідрцејт азёсан ахјгг хаб іуара іүзгз- гуадрца. іүнрхала абарс. „кара інабгца уара ідау азёсан ахја, іүкјант ідалаіјт уара ухјз јāj- іјт уара уцшара іда-</p>	<p>хорошо; напротив, дѣлай- те это такъ, чтобы одна рука не видѣла, что дѣ- лаетъ другая; давайте ми- лостиво тайно, и тогда Отець Небесный воздастъ вамъ за нее явно. Когда молитесь, не дѣлайте это нарочно такъ, чтобы пока- заться передъ людьми, а молясь, не говорите лиш- няго, ибо знаетъ отецъ Не- бесный въ чель вы имѣете нужду. Молитесь такъ: „Отче нашъ, иже еси на небесѣхъ, да святится имя Твое, да придетъ царствіе Твое, да будетъ воля Твоя, яко на небеси и на земли.</p>
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Illustrated Text of Version 2 (1912)

9. Шнѣна абас: Эжѡан ѡгоу н'Аб, ицѣа-
хааит ѡхиз;

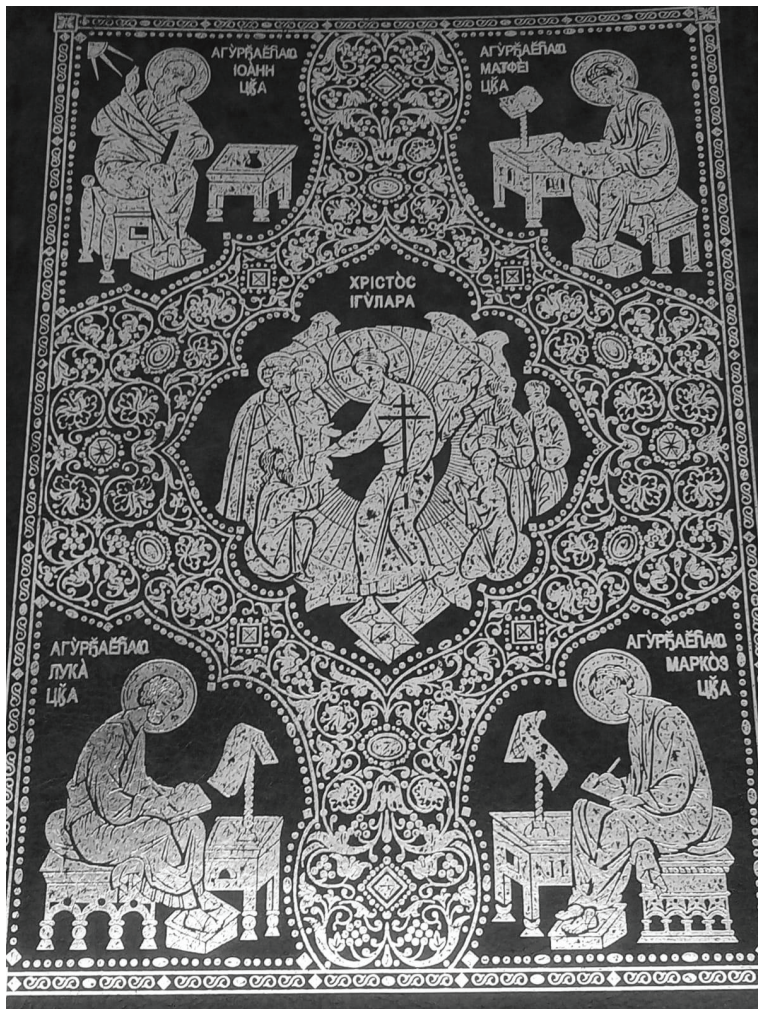
10. Іааіаит уѣсхарà; іқалааит угуаѣхарà, хах
ажѡан аqnѣ еіѣш таqà адуней аеїѣ.

11. Ачà зда ххуàрѣам інàѣ харà ехà;

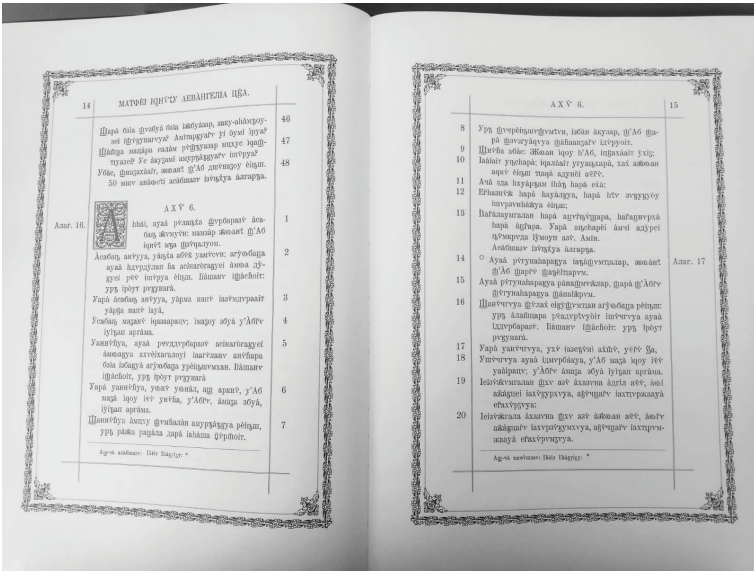
12. Еїһазнѣж харà һауàлѣуа, харà һтѣ зв-
ѣуѣуду ішѣрзѣнһàжѣуа еіѣш;

13. Паїàлаумгалан харà аѣнїѣѣшара, һаїаѣ-
нѣрхà харà аѣгара. Уарà аѣсарей àмчі адѣрей
ѣѣмкѣрѣда іѣмоуп азѣ. Амін.

Cover of the Deluxe Edition of the Four Gospels for Use in Abkhazian Churches



Beginning of Matthew 6 in this Deluxe Edition



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