

From karoche to davbustot: Domain-Specific Grammaticalization of Borrowings in Georgian

This paper investigates the morphosyntactic integration and temporal reanalysis of borrowed lexical items in Georgian, focusing on verbal borrowings from English and discourse particles from Russian. We argue that despite contributing similar root types, English and Russian borrowings follow diverging socio-syntactic trajectories. Drawing on corpus and speaker-based data, we show that the syntactic domain (vP vs. CP), morphological productivity, and sociolinguistic prestige interact to determine whether borrowings become argument-taking verbs or fixed discourse particles. We adopt the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993) to formalize these derivational pathways show how contact phenomena lead to new syntactic structures (Matras, 2009; Alexiadou, 2017).

Our empirical basis includes:

- Sociolinguistic questionnaire (N=71, ages 15–25, 26–40, 41+)
- 1,200 tagged social media posts (2015–2024)
- Syntactic diagnostics for CP vs. vP positioning

Russian and English represent distinct influxes into Georgian. Russian borrowings historically appeared across both vP and CP domains. For instance, data from the 1990s show that Russian verbal roots like *pilasos* ‘vacuum’ were morphologically incorporated into Georgian verbs. Verbs like *mo-va-pilasos-e* (‘I vacuumed’), derived from Russian ‘*pilasos*’, were used productively in vP domains. However, based on our questionnaire results, Russian roots are now largely confined to the CP domain and used primarily as discourse markers (e.g., *karoche*, *itogshi*, *nu*, *vot*). These are still productive across age groups, but they no longer show verbal integration, suggesting fossilization in a limited syntactic scope (Heine & Kuteva, 2005).

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|-----|------------------------|--------|---------------|----------|
| (1) | karoche, | ver | mo-vedi | Georgian |
| | in.short [RUS] | ModNeg | prev-come.1SG | |
| | ‘So, I could not come’ | | | |

In contrast, English borrowings have become highly productive in the vP domain. Younger speakers adapt English roots into Georgian verb morphology, often innovating new derivational patterns (Poplack & Meechan, 1998):

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|-----|--------------------|----------------------------|----------|
| (2) | unda | dav-bust-ot | Georgian |
| | must | prev.1PL-boost[ENG]-TV.1PL | |
| | ‘we must boost it’ | | |

These undergo full derivation:

(a) Syntactic structure:

[TP [T [MoodP [Mood [vP [v dav-] [VP [V boost] [DP it]]]]]]]

(b) Vocabulary Insertion:

boost ⇔ /boost/

v[+1PL, +FIN] ⇔ /dav-/
T[+HORT, 1PL] ⇔ /-ot/

(c) Morphological Output:

dav-boost-ot

1PL-boost-1PL.HORT

'Let's boost it.'

English borrowings are also present in CP (e.g., literally, like, wait) but are notably more integrated in vP than Russian borrowings. This suggests that while both languages contributed to both domains, only English continues to produce derivational verbs, especially among younger speakers, consistent with recent shifts in prestige and global media exposure (Thomason, 2001; Pavlenko, 2011).

Key results:

1. Russian borrowings were formerly present in vP but are now limited to CP, especially in younger speakers.
2. English borrowings span both vP and CP domains.
3. English roots undergo productive derivation; Russian roots do not.
4. The contrast reflects changing prestige and bilingualism patterns.

We propose a model of domain-specific grammaticalization. Russian roots have fossilized into CP discourse markers, while English borrowings feed verbal derivation. This syntactic change aligns with broader social dynamics and indexical revaluation (Agha, 2007), illustrating how sociolinguistic meaning conditions morphosyntactic integration. The findings contribute to socio-syntax by linking functional domains to the diachrony of contact-induced change (Cornips & Corrigan, 2005).

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