

## On linguistic features in Tsova-tush (Batsbi) musical folklore

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Linguistic features in Tsova-tush musical folklore is a theme that has not been studied systematically. Georgian specialists have made some recordings of Tsova-tush folklore music as one component of Georgian folklore. For instance, early recordings of Tsova-tush songs were made by Abram Shavkhelishvili (unpublished) and more recent fieldwork was conducted in 2004 by Otar Kapanadze.

The Tsova-tushs live in the village of Zemo-Alvani in North-Western Georgia. The ethnic group amounts to approximately 1000 persons, but only 20-30% of the population are fluent speakers of Tsova-tush (belonging to the Nakh group of the Northeast Caucasian languages). As most fluent speakers are found among the older generation, the Tsova-tush language is highly endangered as well as its folklore.

For those who hear Tsova-tush melodies for the first time they often seem simple and as if the same melody is repeated over and over again, but the Tsova-tushs themselves perceive and value the subtle differences. The musical folklore of the Tsova-tush developed on the basis of musical traditions of other ethnic groups in Northeastern Georgia – Tushs, Pshavs, Khevsurs, Mtiul-Mokhevs etc. These groups contributed in different ways; to the Pshavs and Khevsurs the versification was particularly important and their solo performances were often in the form of competitions.

The Tush musical folklore is characterized by the lyric genre with songs about love and friendship, hardships of life in the highlands, the traditional sheep-breeding, feats of the ancestors, hostilities and treason. Lyrical couplets follow a main theme, but often diverge from the plot. The quatrain is a form with a completed meaning; in the laconic verses the two first lines are often repeated. Each couplet is usually followed by an instrumental part, when the singer may focus on the next couplet. It is interesting to note that the song texts are not connected to a specific melody, as it is possible to select a melody of your own choice.

Tush ballads are usually distinguished by their patriotic contents. They are performed during Christian festivities and celebrations commemorating important events (the founding of the village Zemo-Alvani, *Berikaoba*, etc.).

Historically, Tush songs have been performed in solo singing, however, more recently, polyphony has also appeared, but almost limited to stage performances and banquets.

The Tsova-tushs have special melodies that are connected with events and important figures in Tsova-tush history. Such melodies are mostly melodies of mourning that commemorate the death of young people (*Tamruj datxar*) and children (*C'iplovana*), or the death of the bread-winner and their herd of sheep. These melodies are performed by friends and relatives during mourning rituals. The melody *Samgzavro* is connected with

another tradition and is performed accompanied with dancing and toasting when the herds are driven to or from their pasture in the mountains.

According to Tsova-tush traditions, at least one family member should be able to play an instrument. Women usually play the accordion (*buzk'ant'* Tsova-tush, cf. *muzikant*, *garmo(n)* – cf. *garmoni* Georgian), which is also the common wedding gift for a young girl. Men traditionally play string instruments (*ç'inuri* Tsova-tush, cf. *çianuri* Georgian, *ç'ugur* Lak, *ç'ondarg* Chechen) or *pandur* (cf. *panduri* Georgian, *deçig pondar* 'wooden panduri' Chechen). The pipe (*salamur* Tsova-tush, cf. *salamuri* Georgian) and drum (*dol* Tsova-tush, cf. *doli* Georgian), were the usual companions in their hard work in sheep-breeding. Local Tsova-tush craftsmen made the string instruments and pipes, but the prestigious accordions had to be purchased far from the local village.

In our paper we will focus on archive materials on Tsova-tush music instruments as well as unpublished research materials and musical recordings made in Zemo-Alvani in the 1960s by the prominent historian prof. Abram Shavkhelishvili. Furthermore, linguistic features that are characteristic of Tsova-tush musical folklore will be discussed in the paper.