

XINALIY: LANGUAGE, PEOPLE AND GEOGRAPHY HİNALIK: DİL, HALK VE COĞRAFYA

Özet

Azerbaycan'ın kuzeyinde, Kubat bölgesinde tek bir köyde yaşayan Hinalik halkının konuştuğu Hinalik dili, Kuzeydoğu Kafkas (Nah-Dağıstan) dil ailesine mensup bir Kafkas dilidir. Bu makalede Hinalik dilinin Kafkas dil ailesindeki yeri, Azerbaycan dili ve diğer dillerle ilişkisi, Hinalik halkının toplum dilbilimsel durumu ve Hinalik köyünün kültürel coğrafyası ana çizgileri ile alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Xinalık, Hinalik, Hinalik dili, Kafkas dilleri, Nah-Dağıstan dilleri, tehlikedeki diller

Abstract

Xinaliq, a language spoken by the Khinalug people living in one village situated high in the Quba district in the north of Azerbaijan, is a Caucasian language which belongs to the Northeastern Caucasian branch. This articles examines the place of Xinaliq in the Caucasian language family, its relations with Azerbaijani and other languages, sociolinguistic features of the Xinaliq and the cultural properties of the Xinaliq village.

Key Words: Xinaliq, Xinaliq language, Caucasian languages, Nakh-Daghestanian languages, endangered languages

Xinaliq: Language, People and Geography

The languages of the Caucasus are spoken in the territory extending from Black Sea to the Caspian Sea in the region of the Caucasus Mountains. This area has been renowned since antiquity for the immense number of languages it hosts. There are three separate language families in this region: the Northwest Caucasian Language Family, the South Caucasian (Kartvelian) Language Family, and the Northeast Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian) Language Family. The language families in this region are not related to one another genetically (i.e., the languages are not descended from a common language ancestor), thus, they represent three separate and distinct language families, however they have regional and areal relations such as borrowings. Some scholars speculate on relations among these families or languages outside the Caucasus region. However none of the proposals has been proven and therefore they are not generally accepted by the wider linguistic community. The term *Caucasian Languages* only refers to the geographic proximity of the language families. In addition, none of them has a relationship with any languages outside of the region; all three of the language families are considered indigenous to Caucasus region. According to Comrie (2008) there is an important distinction between the terms *Caucasian Languages* and *Languages of the Caucasus*. The former refers to the three language families that are restricted to the Caucasus. The latter can include other languages that are spoken both in and outside of this region, such as Armenian, Azeri and Russian, among others.

Xinaliq (ISO639-3: kjj) (alternate names Khinalug, Khinalugh, Xinalug, Khinaliq, Khanaluka and Khynalyk) is a Caucasian language, belonging to the Northeast Caucasian (Nakh-Daghestanian) language family. It is spoken primarily in one village of northern Azerbaijan where it has been spoken for centuries. Although the language has changed over the years and certain expressions, phrases, and grammatical variants have been abandoned by the younger generations, Xinaliq does not show dialectal variation. While some of the Northeast Caucasian languages in the region are spoken both in Daghestan and Azerbaijan, Xinaliq is language spoken only in Azerbaijan by a few people. The border between Daghestan and Azerbaijan was of no great importance during Soviet times, but it is now the national border separating Daghestan, which belongs to Russia, and the independent country of Azerbaijan. Although the languages spoken on the two sides of the border differ, there was strong cultural contact and communication between the communities which is almost nonexistent now, being too difficult to maintain for geographic and socio-political reasons. Russians now need a visa to enter the country of Azerbaijan, and vice versa. These political changes and their effects on the languages spoken in this region have not been studied yet. Almost all Caucasian languages have been significantly influenced by Russian since Czarist times, while the impact of Georgian, Azeri, and, to a lesser extent, also Arabic, Iranian, and Turkish has remained restricted to certain areas. The influence of Azeri on Xinaliq is observable not only in the vocabulary but also in the phonetics and grammar (Kibrik and 1972).

The Northeast Caucasian language family is by far the largest and the most linguistically diverse of Caucasian language families and its age is often compared to that of Indo-European (Nichols 1992:14). There are 31 languages that belong to the Northeast Caucasian language family. Views

on the classification of languages within the family tree have varied among language specialists. The family tree is complex, and the documentation of all of its languages is not complete, thus, leaving some questions unanswered. The traditional classification of the language family splits it into two main branches, a western group consisting of the Nakh languages and an eastern group comprising of Daghestanian languages. This division is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below. The dotted lines represent alternative classification options for some of the families and individual languages. The other classifications differ by holding that Nakh and Daghestanian are not the two main branches of the family, but rather the language family has five to seven principal branches (Figure 2.2).

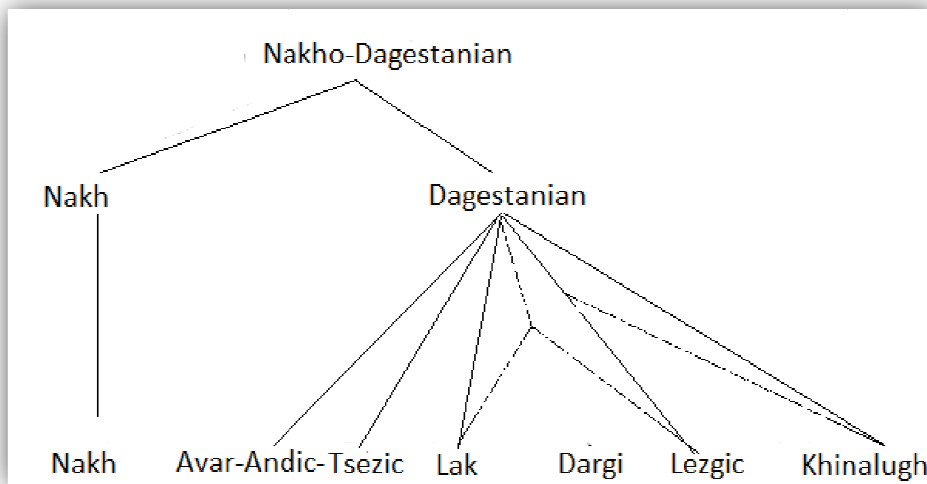


Figure 2.1 Traditional Classification (Nichols 2003)
 Nakho- Daghestanian=Nakh-Daghestanian; Dargi=Dargwi; Lezgi=Lezgian;
 Khinalugh=Xinaliq)

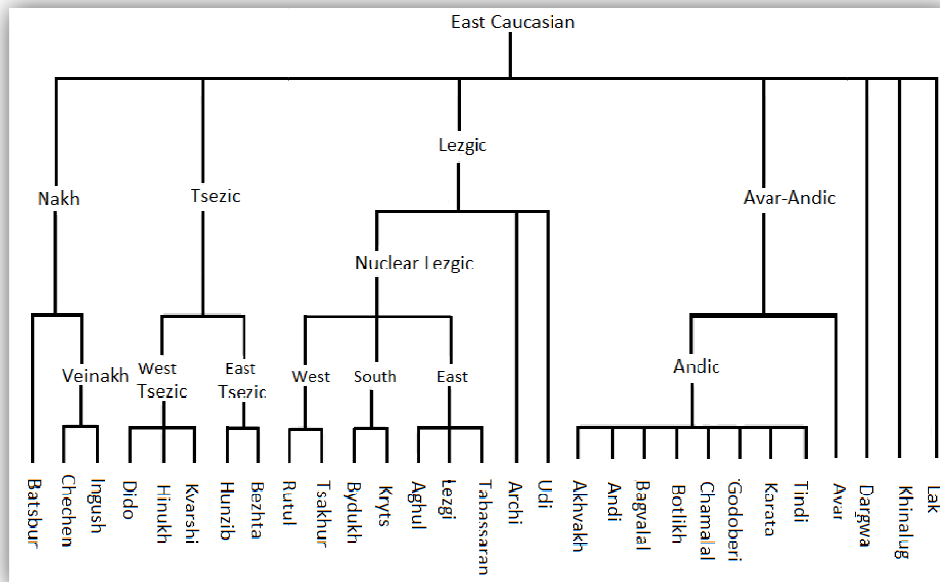


Figure 2.2. (Klimov 1994)
 (East Caucasian=North East Caucasian; Lezgi=Lezgian; Dargwa=Dargwi;
 Khinalugh=Xinaliq)

According to a 1994 survey (Kibrik 1994), at that time the three Nakh languages taken as a group had about one million speakers. The same survey numbered all Daghestanian languages taken together at one and a half million speakers. As for Daghestanian languages, there are four main sub-groups: (i) Avar-Andi-Tsezic, (ii) Lak, (iii) Dargi, and (iv) Lezgi.

Xinaliq (Khinalug) has been classified as a member of the Lezgi sub-family. However, opinions diverge as to the correct classification of Xinaliq in relation to the languages of the Lezgi subgroup. The view that Xinaliq may belong to the Lezgi sub-group (instead of representing a sub-group in its own right) is highly disputed. Although debate continues, most scholars today consider Xinaliq to be a separate branch of which Xinaliq is the only member within the Northeast Caucasian family.

Most of the indigenous Caucasian languages have never had their own writing. As a matter of fact, no more than 12 of these languages adopted a written standard during Soviet times. Only one of the autochthonous Caucasian languages, Georgian, has a long historical tradition as a written language, persisting uninterrupted since the 5th century AD and for Udi, written attestations of an old form of the language were discovered in the "Caucasian Albanian" palimpsests of the Middle Ages (Gippert, Schulze et al. 2009).

Many attempts to provide orthographies for unwritten vernacular languages of the Caucasus have been made in the recent past, partly with emphasis on language maintenance; however, none of them has received official status so far. Since the second half of the 20th century there have been several attempts to create a writing system for Xinaliq based on the Cyrillic and the Latin alphabets. There is no accepted standard currently.

The Xinaliq People

Many of the minority languages and people of the Caucasus are heavily endangered as a more or less homogeneous community, much more so now than ever before in their history. With the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the emergence of independent former Soviet states, and the beginning of armed conflicts in the struggle for independence, economic conditions have deteriorated and it has become much harder for smaller communities to survive. Many communities are now dissolving, with their languages being abandoned. The remoteness and isolation of the Xinaliq village have contributed to the survival of its language; however, the number of Xinaliq speakers has been declining more and more rapidly due to many of the changing factors mentioned above.

The Xinaliq people were not counted as a separate ethnic group during the Soviet era (Gardanova, 1962; Desheriyev, 1968; Kibrik and Kodzasov, 1972; Isaev, 1978) due to the ideological Soviet definition of *ethnicity* (i.e., *natsionalnost*) that has persisted up to the present day in Azerbaijan. The most recent estimate of the Xinaliq population is 2,500 according to a 1976 census (cf. Clifton and et al. 2005). The real numbers are probably significantly lower today, with an estimated number at about 2,000 or lower. The number of full-time residents in Xinaliq village might be closer to 1,000. Xinaliq is the first language of the residents; however, almost everyone in the

village also speaks Azerbaijani (Azeri), and some speak Russian. Although many children still spend their first few years speaking Xinaliq, they are expected to speak Azeri as soon as they enter the school system. There is no schooling in Xinaliq language, and Russian is only spoken by elderly men who served in the army during the Soviet times. Even though the residents have been used to the presence of those dominant languages for quite some time, they have maintained Xinaliq as the primary language in most home and family domains. Yet recently more and more domains are being lost to Azeri (Clifton and et al. 2005). Although limited trade with the outside world has always existed, there have been growing work opportunities extraneous to Xinaliq due to more access to transportation and better roads. As the result there is a shift in who Xinaliq people work with and work for. Increasing number of Xinaliq population conducts business with the residents of near by industrious town of Quba, where the language spoken is Azerbaijani. Thus Azerbaijani slowly is becoming the language of commerce. Currently there are very few monolingual Xinaliq speakers left, mostly women, who are the members of the population least likely to attend the school. More and more Xinaliq speakers find it necessary to conduct business and to communicate with others outside of their village. The construction of a better road connecting Xinaliq to the larger industrial town of Quba has contributed to more Xinaliq speakers finding it tempting and at times necessary to conduct business outside of their village. The road has also made many other facets of life, such as electricity and a better diet possible. With all of these changes in recent years, there is a serious danger of Xinaliq gradually dying out within the next two generations. However although the number of speakers is declining, most residents still consider Xinaliq to be their mother tongue and take an enormous pride in their language and heritage.

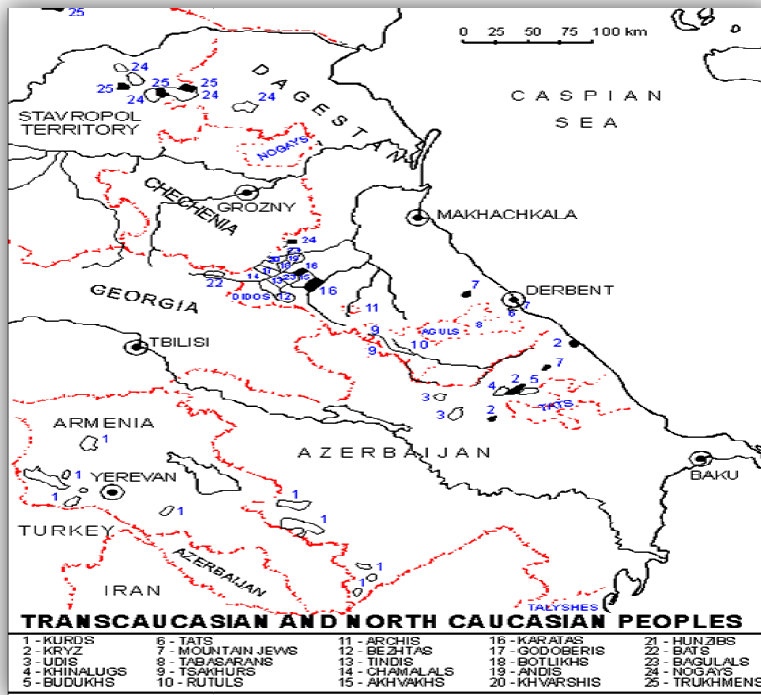


Figure 2.3. The Location of Xinaliq Village¹

Xinaliq Village

The location of Xinaliq village on map can be seen in Figure 2.3 and is identified as #4 on the map. It lies at an altitude of about 2,000 meters in the Quba district of Azerbaijan, in the middle of the Greater Caucasus mountain range that divides Russia and the Southern Caucasus region. Xinaliq is separated from most Daghestanian languages by the Caucasus chain and its closest Daghestani language neighbor is Kryts, in the village of Alik, Djek and Kryts. Xinaliq is the highest and most remote and isolated village in Azerbaijan, and it is among those villages with the highest altitude in the Caucasus region. In fact, because of its remoteness, the government of Azerbaijan subsidizes teachers willing to teach in Xinaliq. Although they are citizens of Azerbaijan, Xinaliq residents are considered to be of a different ethnicity by Azerbaijanian people.

Xinaliq is believed to be an ancient Caucasian village going back to the Caucasian Albanian period. According to Schulze (1994), both the local history and the linguistics of Xinaliq clearly indicate that the early speakers of Xinaliq had once migrated into their present location, during the period from 1000 BC to 300 AD. It is believed by the Xinaliq residents that the ancestors of the Xinaliq people were followers of Zoroastrianism. In the 3rd century they converted to Christianity and then to Islam in the 7th century. All residents are Muslim. Because of the high altitude and its remoteness, the Xinaliq village and its residents have managed to survive and withstand many invasions the region has witnessed. The area has many historical sites including ancient holy caves. Tellingly, the village of Xinaliq was included on the 2008 World Monuments Fund Watch List of the 100 Most Endangered Sites in the World.

In the last 20 years a new settlement of Xinaliq speakers was established about 5 miles from Xinaliq village. The settlement is called Boston Kesh and has a population of approximately 300 people. Because of the lower altitude, residents can grow potatoes in Boston Kesh and life there is a bit easier, although Xinaliq remains the center of the Xinaliq people and their cultural activities.

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¹¹ *The Red Book of the Peoples of the Russian Empire*. ww.eki.ee/books/redbook/khinalugs.shtml