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The language of the Laz in Turkey: Contact-induced change or gradual language loss?

Silvia Kutscher

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Laz, a sister language of Georgian spoken on the southeastern coast of the Black Sea, is the only member of the South Caucasian family which is spoken primarily in Turkey. Due to the socio-political circumstances all speakers of Laz living in Turkey are bilingual and use Laz primarily in private communication. Using these observations as a starting point, the paper looks at the question of whether Laz is an endangered language. In order to clarify the sociolinguistic situation of Laz in Turkey, the different levels involved in the process of gradual language loss (language-external factors, speech behaviour and structural consequences within the language system) are dealt with in detail. To determine which data should be taken as basis for the documentation of the language, the paper also discusses linguistic criteria for differentiating between fully competent speakers of Laz and speakers who show signs of language attrition.

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1. Introduction*

Laz is a member of the South Caucasian (also: Kartvelian) language family. With the exception of Laz, all South Caucasian languages are primarily spoken in the Republic of Georgia. Laz, on the other hand, is primarily spoken in Turkey.¹ All ethnic Laz are competent speakers of the national language Turkish; older generations (from 35 years of age onwards) are also competent speakers of Laz. An increasing number of ethnic Laz, especially the younger generation, however, are fluent in Turkish only. In addition to this, native speakers of Laz restrict the use of that language to communication amongst friends and family members. Laz has several dialectal varieties and no spoken or written standard form. In 1984, a writing system based on the Turkish alphabet was developed by Lazoğlu & Feurstein. Although there has been some effort by Laz intellectuals to establish Laz as a written language based on this system, the vast majority of Laz use their language in oral communication only.

* I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for his valuable comments on the earlier version of this paper and Katherine Maye-Saidi for brushing up my English. I am also grateful to the patience and helpfulness of the Laz speakers in the region of Ardeşen and in Germany with whom I have the pleasure to work.

¹ With the exception of appr. 2,000 Laz living in the small town of Sarp'i, Georgia.

My further explanations concerning the situation of Laz are based exclusively on observations I made during three field studies together with Sevim Genç in 1996, 1998 and 2000 in Ardeşen and Pazar, and, in this context, during the conversations I had with some of the ethnic Laz living in this region. The results and conclusions drawn in this paper can therefore be considered as predominantly restricted to this area.

Examples with references are extracts from a previously published text collection (Kutscher & Genç 1998); examples without any references are taken from my field notes or were gained by elicitation. In the following, Turkish data and names are underlined, and Laz language material is italicized. Language material derived from Turkish and integrated into the Laz system is simultaneously italicized and underlined.

2. About the socio-linguistic situation of the Laz language in Turkey

Laz is the only language of the Kartvelian family whose ancestral settlement area is mainly located beyond the borders of Georgia.² Only 2,000 of the approx. 250,000 Laz people live in Georgia. Due to a lack of census information on minorities (aside from a small number of exceptions such as the Greek or Armenian populations), the actual number of the Laz living in Turkey can only be estimated. The numbers in linguistic and ethnological literature range between 45,000 (Andrews (ed.) 1989) and 500,000 (cf. Holisky 1991).³

The autochthonous settlement area of the Laz (Lazona) and the five cities predominantly inhabited by Laz people within Lazona are illustrated in map (1). The city names are cited in Laz. The Turkish names of the cities are Pazar (Atina), Ardeşen (Artaşeni), Fındıklı (Viçe), Arhavi (Arkabi) and Hopa (Xopa).⁴

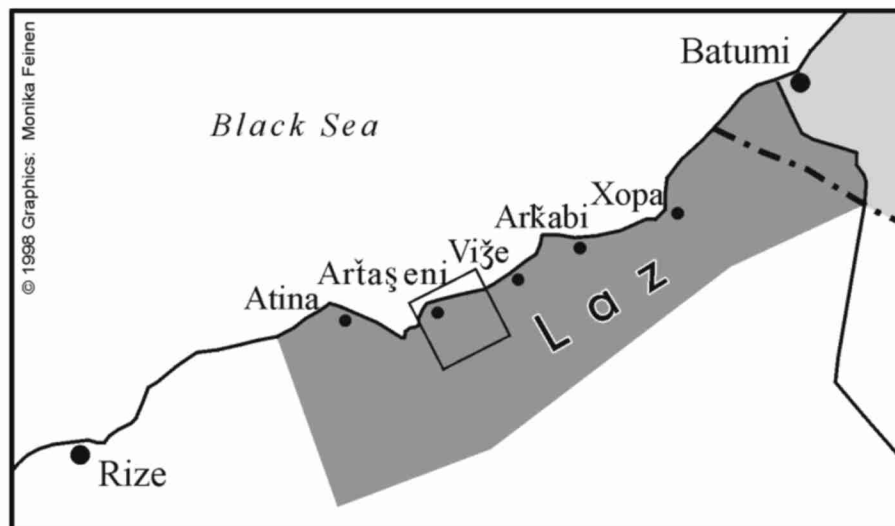
² During the Russian-Ottoman War (1877-1878) the majority of the Muslim Laz emigrated from Georgia to Turkey. They settled in a region in the north-west of the Turkish Black Sea coast. The following villages near İzmit describe their main settlement area: Yalova, Karamürsel, Gölcük, Sapanca, Düzce and Akçakoca. I do not have any information concerning either the situation of the Laz people living in this area nor the Laz language they speak.

³ My own estimates—which are consistent with those of the anthropologist Feurstein (1983)—arise from the number of Laz people registered in Ardeşen (identifiable due to the name of the village which is given as the residence of the family, cf. table (1) below) multiplied by the five Laz cities located between Rize and the border of Georgia, which—according to their official population figures—are all about the same size. This estimate can only offer an approximation; it must also be taken into account that there also are persons of Turkish and Hemşin (Muslim Armenian) extractions in all Laz cities.

⁴ Laz data are written in the Lazoğlu & Feurstein-alphabet introduced to the Laz community in Turkey in 1984. It deviates from the Caucasianists' transcription in the following graphemes (<Laz = Caucasianist>): <ç = č>, <c = ĵ>, <ķ = k'>, <ṗ = p'>, <ş = š>, <ț = t'>, <ž = c>, <ž = c'>.

The cities where the Laz settled are assigned to two different administrative districts (Turkish *il*). The city of Pazar (Atina) and the city of Ardeşen (Artaşeni) belong to the administrative district of Rize, while Fındıklı (Vişe), Arhavi (Arkabi) and Hopa (Xopa) fall under the jurisdiction of the Artvin district. Hence, the borders of the administrative districts run straight through the ethnically differentiable settlement area.

As map (1) illustrates, the Laz indeed do tend to settle in a circumscribed settlement area. However, the ethnic groups of the Hemşin, the Pontus-Greek and Georgians also belong to the autochthonous population of the area. Additionally, due to migration and seasonal work, we also find ethnic Turks and Kurds in this area.⁵



Map 1. Laz settlement area

Among the resident population though, the Laz form by far the largest group; table (1) exemplifies this fact regarding the population of the Ardeşen region (Turkish *ilçe*). From the information provided by some local Laz people, I was able to ascertain whether a certain village was exclusively inhabited by Laz or Hemşin or whether both groups lived in the same settlement. In this manner, the actual size of the respective ethnic groups can be deduced from the official population census statistics, which, in contrast, do not differentiate among the various ethnic groups.

⁵ For a geographic overview concerning the settlement structure of the region see Hann & Bellér-Hann (2000: 3).

Laz name of village (ethnic diversity)	Turkish name of village	number of inhabitants (1997)
Ķanŧeva (Laz only)	Akdere	155
Pelergivati (Laz only)	Akkaya	385
Muŧafi (Laz only)	Gŧndoĝan	299
Salonŧe (Laz and Hemŧin)	Armaĝan	453
Aŧeni (Hemŧin only)	Beyazkaya	271

Table 1. Exemplary illustration of census data for the region of Ardeŧen

According to the 1997 census, 17,554 inhabitants were reported for villages and 33,727 people were registered as living in the city of Ardeŧen. Taking the ratio resulting from the analysis of the number of people in villages (90% Laz and 10% Hemŧin) as a valid guideline for the ratio of Laz to non-Laz inhabitants in towns, it may be deduced that there are 45,000 Laz and 5,000 Hemŧin in the region of Ardeŧen. The ratio of Laz to non-Laz living in other cities and regions may be of a quite different nature. In Pazar, one would expect a higher percentage of Hemŧin, and in Fındıklı and Arhavi a lower one. A large group of Hemŧin as well as a number of people of Georgian extraction live in an area around the city of Hopa.

3. Laz as an endangered language

All Laz are fully proficient in Turkish; the older generations (i.e. older than 40) are generally bilingual speakers. Among the younger generation, a rapid decrease in the number of competent speakers of Laz can be observed. It therefore may be said that child and adolescent speakers of Laz make up 5-10% of fully proficient speakers. A further 50-70% are passive users of Laz, i.e. they understand the language but cannot actually speak it (see Tsunoda 2004 for an overview on classifications of speakers in terms of proficiency). This situation is demonstrated in (1) where person I. is the youngest child (aged approx. 30) of parents and a sibling (aged 45) who speak Laz proficiently.⁶ The given example (1) is extracted from a video recording, which was produced in order to document the traditional fishing techniques. The questioned persons were asked to comment on the steps of such techniques, in the Laz language where possible. While some of the interviewees fulfilled this request without any further comment, speaker I. annotated his illustrations with the remark that he was not proficient in Laz, cf. (1a). Since the interviewer S. was familiar with the fact that I. was capable of understanding Laz, she nevertheless chose Laz as the interview language.

⁶ Nevertheless, the usual means of communication even of the Laz-speaking members of this family is Turkish.

- (1) a. I: lazca var soylevemem ki ben
 'I cannot speak Laz.'
 b. S: *ma možiři, ma gižvare. mu i huy? kfa nunķori i?*
 'Just show me what you are doing and I tell you. What did you do?'
 c. I: taşı bağladım
 'I tied (a string to) a stone.'
 d. S: *kfa nunķori*
 'You have tied (a string to) a stone.'
 e. I: bunun özelliği taşı denize vurduğu zaman taş çıkacak düştüğü zaman
 'The special thing is that when the stone touches the floor of the sea, it will slip.
 When it slips.'
 f. S: *ham doložoçasi kfa gamalasen. hay mu nunķori?*
 'When you throw this into (the sea), the stone will fall out. What did you tie
 to it now?'
 g. I: istravit yem
 'Mackerel, as bait.'
 h. S: *ha, çxomi nunķori*
 'Ah, you tied a fish (on the string).'

The sequences (1f)–(1g) demonstrate that speaker I. understands speaker S. as he answers the questions directed to him. Despite the fact that speaker S. keeps repeating his answers in Laz, he still adheres to the monolingual text production in Turkish.

It is important to distinguish these passive speakers (in terms of the classification of Tsunoda 2004) from those who are proficient in both—speaking and understanding—but prefer to use the Turkish language as their standard means of communication. The following example (2) illustrates the typical language behaviour of such speakers. Speaker E. was asked to make a piece of jewellery from the root of a fern plant. He was also asked to comment on the procedure in Laz. Speaker T. is a relative of speaker E., and he was keeping him company. Speaker E. asked whether the recording had begun in Turkish (2a), thereby demonstrating that Turkish is evidently the language which he uses on a daily basis with his relative. Responding to the request, speaker E. then comments on his performance in Laz, implementing the well-formed complex verbal form *gožxoñum* (to peel something off in circular motion) but soon switches over to Turkish (2a). Speaker T. notices and indicates the language change by repeating what has been said in Laz (2b). Speaker E. switches back to Laz and then again lapses into Turkish (2c). Thereupon there follows a more distinct intervention by speaker T., who explicitly prompts speaker E. to stick to Laz (2d). The rest of the conversation is carried out entirely in Laz (2e).

- (2) a. E: cekeyi mi? gožxoñum / ondan sonra üzeri
 'Is she recording? You peel it / then'
 b. T: *dotemizum*
 'You clean it'
 c. E: *dotemizum - oñaxu / bu kökünden başlıyorsun*
 'You clean it to break it / You start from the root.'

- d. T: *olan* | *lazca ŋvi*
 'Hey man | speak Laz'
 e. E: *dibiša moičam oŋxu*,
 'You start breaking it from the bottom.'

The language behaviour of speaker E. is characteristic of many of the competent Laz speakers who frequently apply Turkish in their daily lives. The speakers hesitantly use Laz (an effect often intensified by field research due to the unusual situation of speakers being observed while speaking), a language shift to Turkish can be observed frequently, and many times it takes repeated requests to speak in Laz in order that the speaker will actually utter his explanations in Laz. Over the course of more recordings, the frequency and the length of the Turkish episodes normally decrease.

In the following, the question of whether Laz is an endangered language and if so, whether the situation can be described as a gradual death-scenario (as in the sense of Campbell & Muntzel 1989: 182-185) is going to be of special interest. According to Campbell & Muntzel (1989) the language shift due to language contact can occur in different ways. Relevant for this research is the so-called gradual death-scenario, i.e. the gradual shift of the speech community to the prestige language involving a total loss of the native language. This process creates a diglossic context where more and more domains are occupied by the prestige language; it is characterised by widespread bilingualism and a coexistence of varying competence levels of the speakers ('proficiency continuum').

The process of gradual language loss involves different levels, all of which need to be considered in order to gain a clear picture. In his theory of language death, Sasse (1992) determines three different levels:

- external factors such as the cultural, the sociological and the historical context ('external setting', cf. 3.1)
- the speech behaviour, as it is shown in the distribution of language use concerning the respective speech domains ('speech behaviour', cf. 3.2)
- structural consequences, as they appear in changes in the language system due to language contact ('structural consequences', cf. 3.3)

In the following, all three levels will be examined closely with respect to the Laz language.

3.1. External factors

The following issues are the external factors most notable in the process of the loss of the autochthonous language Laz:

- a) economic factors/education
- b) pro-Turkish quasi-scientific propaganda
- c) political factors, such as the linguistic legislation in Turkey.

We will now consider these factors in detail with respect to the current situation of Laz.

Economic factors/education

Many Laz parents hope that their children will have good career prospects and place emphasis on the necessity of a good education. Given that the Turkish language is the medium of teaching in Turkey,⁷ a good education requires full proficiency in Turkish. Many parents believe that raising their children to be bilingual would prevent them from becoming proficient speakers of Turkish. As a result of this, many parents prefer to speak Turkish only to their children.

Pro-Turkish quasi-scientific propaganda

Some members of the Turkish academic elite deny the existence of a distinct Laz ethnic identity (see Bellér-Hann & Hann 2000). Furthermore, this view is also promoted among the Laz people. During the nineties, the Turkish historian Kırzioğlu travelled to areas where the Laz live and gave speeches spreading the theory that Laz was a Turkish dialect and also that the Laz people were ethnically of Turkish extraction.⁸

Legislation

Up until the late nineties, draconian laws oppressed any usage of minority languages such as Kurdish or Laz in Turkey (see Haig 2003). In addition to this, one must mention other repressive political factors such as the law enacted in 1934 concerning the naming of children, which forced the population to opt for Turkish first and surnames only; the government also decreed in the 1950s that towns, villages, etc. should be renamed. With regard to the latter, table (1) above gives some examples. Only the Turkish names in the second column of table (1) are considered official (e.g. in maps and place name signs). Despite this fact, the Laz population still know the Laz names and use them.

The sociological, political and academic pressure has apparently had a notable effect on speakers of the Laz language. During conversations with Laz people of Ardeşen, astonishment was uttered many times when the idea was brought up, that, compared to Turkish, the Laz language was an equal language system with its own grammatical rules. Despite the presentation of the Lazoğlu & Feuerstein-Alphabet and Laz written documents, my language consultants frequently doubted that it could ever be possible to transfer Laz into written form or, even more so, they recommended right away that I should preferably learn and investigate a “real” language like Turkish. Moreover, during more personal conversations I had, some of the ethnic Laz people defined themselves as Turkish only.

⁷ Some universities use English as the language of instruction.

⁸ As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, similar propaganda has also been put forward concerning the neighbouring Hemşin, see Benninghaus 2007.

3.2. Frequency of application and distribution of domains

An enlightening parameter for the evaluation of the degree of endangerment of a certain language is the amount of different domains of communication where it is used. In this respect, both the number and the character of the linguistic domains where the endangered language is applied are relevant (see Himmelmann 1996: 2). Thus, in the following, I will focus in detail on the distribution of domains (section 3.2.1) as well as on the commitment of some groups of Laz speakers to reclaim certain domains (section 3.2.2).

3.2.1. Distribution of domains

The effects caused by the Turkish language legislation hostile to minority languages and its implementation with regard to the Laz language are still noticeable in the 21st century. As a result, we find a diglossic situation with regard to issues such as politics, religion, science, education, and certain conversational topics also. Thus, the entire communication regarding the public sphere is restricted to Turkish.⁹ As far as the semi-public sphere is concerned, i.e. streets and shops, I discovered that Turkish is mainly used. Compared to the rural population, the town inhabitants speak Laz in the private sphere much less frequently. This sometimes leads to a language loss within one generation of siblings. This situation can be caused by two different scenarios. One possible and also frequent scenario is the relocation of the family; the elder siblings are then raised mainly in a rural environment while the younger ones grow up in a more urban region. Another possible scenario that could cause a language division among siblings occurs when some of the siblings visit relatives in a rural region on a regular basis (e.g. during the summer holidays, etc.) with the others preferring to stay in town with their parents.

With regard to daily situations, all speakers of Laz use both Turkish and Laz. However, in some of the domains, the vocabulary used can be observed to be of either exclusive Turkish origin – as in religious contexts or in the case of naming occupational titles (cf. (3)) – or of partial Turkish origin – as in kinship terms (cf. (5) below), even though the words have been adapted to the phonological system of Laz.

- (3) *Sevimi öyretmeni on*
 Sevim teacher be:3SG:PRS
 ‘Sevim is a teacher.’ (Kutscher 2001: 51)

Sayings and aphorisms also occur in my data as Turkish-based idiomatic phrases only, cf. (4).

⁹ The situation of the governmentally induced diglossia has loosened since the language law amendment in 2002. Since then, it has been possible to give language classes for the minority languages in Turkey and to use these languages in the media. In addition, Laz first names are now accepted.

- (4) *xoskūrĭtay* *na* *mebokvātaten*
 die[animals]:3SG:OPT.PFV NOM'er cut:[1>3]PL:FUT.PFV
 'Should she perish, they will cut her up immediately.'
ķeci can derdinde ķasap yayĭ derdinde-si xava
 goat soul in.sorrow butcher fat in.his.sorrow-GEN inclination
 'The goat fears for its life and the butcher is (only) concerned with the fat'
 (Kutscher & Genç 1998:33)

However, there has been no systematic investigation for this domain in the research on Laz, and for this reason it would seem unreasonable to claim that there is no usage of Laz sayings in everyday life.

Kinship terms consist of Turkish as well as of Laz based forms. (5) lists some instances of the Turkish based words; (6) records some of the Laz based types. There are no direct equivalents in the two languages for the terms listed in (5) and (6). The Turkish kinship term system differentiates between paternal and maternal lineage (cf. (5a), (5c)). Since I could not elicit any parallel forms in the Laz system, I assume this division is not used in Laz. However, some kinship terms are semantically matched and are used in the Laz as well as in the Turkish forms, cf. (7).

- (5)a. *xala* (< Turkish *hala*) 'father's sister'; *teze* (< Turkish *teyze*) 'mother's sister'
 b. *dayi* (< Turkish *dayı*) 'mother's brother', *amca* (Turkish *amca*) 'father's brother'
 c. *abi* (< Turkish *ağabey* ([a:bi])) 'older brother', *abla* (< Turkish *abla*) 'older sister'
- (6)a. *bena* 'grandmother / older female close relative'¹⁰
 b. *da* 'sister', *cuma* 'brother'¹¹
- (7)a. *nana* ¹²/*anne* 'mother', *baba* / *baba* 'father'
 b. *nusava* / *elti* 'co-sister-in-law' (wives of two or more brothers are *nusava* / *elti* to each other)

Regarding numbers: it has to be stated that in the majority of cases Turkish based terms are applied and that some of the younger Laz speakers are not familiar with Laz numbers at all. Some of the speakers use both groups of number terms. The text sequences in (8) belong to two different narratives given by the same speaker.

- (8)a. *ķoreǰumĭ* *ar* *cur* *sum* *otxo* *xut* *aĭi*
 count:3SG: PAST.IPFV one two three four five six
 'She counted, "One, two, three, four, five, six"' (Kutscher & Genç 1998:66)

¹⁰ In contrast to Turkish, these terms apply to relatives on both the paternal and maternal side.

¹¹ Both terms also apply to older siblings.

¹² As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the term *nana* 'mother' is probably of Persian origin and can also be found in other parts of the Eastern Black Sea coast. In other Anatolian dialects the word *nana* (in the form *nine*) has acquired the meaning 'grandmother'.

- b. *ardaha ti eveli xolo ti daha bere*
 and.then too once again too again child
borñ yedi sekiz yaşine
 be:1SG:PAST.IPFV seven eight age
 'I was once a child, about seven or eight years old.' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 30)

In sum, we can observe a decreasing use of Laz in many linguistic domains, registers, and text genres as well as a diminishing of areal domains such as places where Laz is actually spoken.

As a consequence we find overgeneralization when it comes to interaction between elderly speakers and younger Laz people. In this case – given a scenario where the speakers do not know each other well – the older person automatically assumes that the younger person is not proficient in Laz. When it turns out that the younger counterpart is in fact capable of speaking Laz, the assumption is that the vocabulary is a reduced one, which then leads to the substitution of supposedly unknown Laz words for Turkish based words by the elder speaker. The latter situation is illustrated in (9), where a speaker talks about a childhood episode to a considerably younger woman. The speaker uses the Laz word *ineri* 'ice', but as the immediate replacement with the Turkish based word *buzi* (< Turkish *buz*) 'ice' shows, she presumes that the woman listening, who is about thirty years younger, does not know the word. From a morphosyntactic perspective, the text does not feature any Turkish based structures but corresponds to the language pattern observed when proficient Laz speakers speak to each other.

- (9) *camı sñeri ineri do-ķoru* *ineri - buzi ineri*
 glass as ice MOD-bind:3SG:PAST.PFV ice ice ice
 'The ice became like glass. The ice'
larça muşi ineri
 in.Laz POSS:3SG ice
 'in our Laz it is called *ineri*.'
camı sñeri buzi d-iu
 glass as ice MOD -become:3SG:PAST.PFV
 'The ice became like glass.' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 100)

3.2.2. Reclaiming linguistic domains

Since the nineties, a slight change in the linguistic domains of Laz has been observed; this extends especially to the electronic media but also includes the print media. First, by virtue of some Laz intellectuals—even though many of them live outside the Laz areas—, a Turkish-Laz magazine was created (*Ogni skani nena* 'Listen to your language'). Unfortunately, publication of the magazine had to be abandoned shortly after its establishment (six issues were published; a few years later a second but equally unsuccessful attempt was made under the name of *Mjora*). Additionally, some poetry volumes were published in Laz (e.g. *Nena murun̄xi* 'Stars of (our) language' by Selma Kociva) and traditional as well as modern, commercially

promoted Laz music was recorded (e.g. the rockband *Lazuri Berepe* ‘Laz sons’ and Birol Topaloğlu, who combines traditional with pop elements and is not only known among the Laz but also among the Turkish). Since the beginning of the 21st century, regional radio and TV channels have become more widespread also in the Laz areas (for example *Gelişim-TV* in Ardeşen). They produce programs mainly in Turkish but occasionally Laz is spoken in some programs. Furthermore, some first attempts to maintain the language have been made such as the compilation of two Turkish-Laz dictionaries (one of which can be used academically, cf. Buçaklışı & Usunhasanoğlu 1999) and one grammar book (Kojima & Buçaklışı 2003).

3.3. Structural consequences of language contact

As frequently discussed in the literature on language contact phenomena, the distinction between linguistic elements that need to be classified as elements entering the target language and pure code-switching cannot be established easily. For the following description of the situation of Laz, the Turkish based words and structures that have undergone morphological and phonological adaptation were regarded as relevant for the description of the Laz linguistic system. Parts of an utterance corresponding to standard Turkish or to the Turkish dialect spoken in the Laz areas were classified as code-switching and excluded from the further investigation of the structural consequences. In addition to this, the theoretical evaluation of the structural consequences of a contact situation may vary. If one element or one structure which is identified as belonging to the source language is considered as a loan and therefore alien to the system of the target language, then the findings of a relatively high number of such loans can lead to the conclusion that the investigated language is exposed to the danger of attrition or that the language may be shifting.

By introducing the term ‘copy’, Lars Johanson (1992, 1999, 2002, 2008) offers a slightly different approach, which is adopted in this paper. In his Code Interaction framework, the language material which is taken from the source language (Model Code) is considered a self-contained “copy” independent of its origin, which becomes an integral part of the copying language system (Basic Code). Being a self-contained element, the copy becomes unconditionally available in the Basic Code and is categorised as material proper to the copying language. The process is creative and, at the same time, rule based, forming part of the linguistic competence of these language communities. One consequence of such a theoretical viewpoint is that a large number of copied lexemes and structures are not necessarily seen to be endangering the language system. In fact, we find highly copying languages where the existence of large amounts of copies may account for the preservation of a language or for the extension of its existence as a vibrant language among its users, (cf. Csató 2001: 274 for the situation of Karaim). Additionally, the term ‘copy’ emphasises the fact that structures, meanings or elements taken from the source language are never completely identical to the use and meaning of these elements in the target language (see Johanson 2008: 62).

Lexicon

We find a multitude of Turkish-based copies in Laz that are phonologically completely integrated. The contact with the Turkish language did not result in the introduction of new phonemes in Laz. Even more so, the Laz phonological rule which determines that all nominal word forms end in a vowel, holds for all words, including the Turkish based elements. This means that elements which end in a consonant in Turkish obtain the final vowel /i/ in Laz (cf. (10)). As shown in (10b), where the Turkish inflection base, and not the nominative word form, serves as the source for the Laz copy.

- (10) a. Turkish cam 'glass' → Laz cami 'glass'
 b. Turkish dolap 'cupboard'
 (→ dolaba 'cupboard:DAT') → Laz dolabi 'cupboard'

Turkish phonemes that do not have phoneme status in Laz undergo phonetic adaptation. This process particularly affects the phoneme classes of the plosives and vowels. We find voiced and voiceless plosives in both the Laz as well as the Turkish phonological systems. But while Turkish only differentiates between these two classes of plosives, Laz adds a third opposition, namely glottalised stops. Interestingly, non-aspirated plosives of the Turkish class become glottalised plosives in Laz rather than aspirated voiceless plosives, cf. (11).

- (11) Turkish akıllı 'clever' → Laz akili [ak'ili] 'clever'

The vowel inventory of Laz is considerably smaller than the Turkish one due to the fact that the Laz vowel system only consists of five cardinal vowels. The Turkish rounded front vowels /ö/ and /ü/ are realised as back vowels in Laz (cf. 12).

- (12) Turkish yüz '100' → Laz yuzi '100'

In Laz, the Turkish high unrounded back vowel /ɯ/ can be instantiated as an unrounded front vowel /i/, cf. (11) or as a high rounded vowel /u/ (cf. 13).

- (13) Turkish sağlık 'health' → Laz saytuyi 'health'

Laz copies based on Turkish elements are usually derived from the Turkish Black Sea dialect (Rize dialect) spoken in Laz areas and not from standard Turkish. This is why many of the copies (possibly depending on the level of education of the speaker) show the palatalization characteristic of the Black Sea dialect, which does not correspond to the standard version of Turkish, cf. (14).

- (14) Standard Turkish: kitap 'book'
 Turkish dialect of Rize: çitap 'book'
 Laz: çitabi 'book'

Another characteristic of the Turkish Black Sea dialect is the lack of any vowel harmony, which again provides further reasons for the assumption that the sources for the Laz copies originate from the Black Sea dialect and not from standard Turkish.

The copied elements can embrace entire word forms, as shown in (10)-(14). However, with regard to the verbal domain, only the roots tend to be copied, which then follow the regular Laz verbal inflection paradigm, cf. (15).

- (15) Turkish çalış-mak 'work-INF' → Laz *biçalışam* 'I work'

Aside from Turkish, copies derived from Greek can be observed in Laz (Brendemoen 1999) which do not form part of the vocabulary of the Turkish varieties spoken in the Black Sea region. (16a) provides some examples, most of which can also be found in the listings of Brendemoen (1999: 364, fn. 17). Some of the originally Greek words are used in Laz as well as in the Turkish varieties of the region (Brendemoen 1990: 51, fn. 9, Tzitzilis 1987), an exemplary list is given in (16b). Copies from Greek appear to be mainly nouns, but in my data, there exists at least one verb – *ṣṛaɣudam* 'I sing' – whose root can be traced back to Greek origin (cp. Greek. *τραγουδῶ* 'I sing'), cf. (17).

- (16) a. *ṣote* (Greek *ποτέ*) 'ever', *ora* (gr. *ώρα*) 'time', *nosi* (gr. *γνώσις*) 'mind';
raḱani (Greek *ράχης*) 'slope, mountain'
 b. *serende* (Greek *ξηραντήριο*) 'chamber for drying' 'storehouse',
raxna (Greek *ἀράχνη*) 'spider'

- (17) *feli* *bcibuntu* *ṣṛaɣudamtu*
 pumpkin boil:1PL:PRS sing:1PL:PRS
 'We boil the pumpkin (while) we sing.' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 118)

Morphosyntax

The data that I have collected do not contain any copies of inflection or derivation. Nevertheless, due to close language contact, we can find some structural parallels between Turkish and Laz, for instance in the grammatical domains of word order and phrase linking (for examples, see Haig 2001). Similar cases can be observed for other aspects of the Laz grammar such as the copying of certain discourse particles, (e.g. *ṣimdi* 'now, well' in (22a), *ama* 'but'), which will be of no further interest at this point; for more detailed information see Haig (2001).

In the following, I will address the issue of another morphosyntactic phenomenon which, up to this point, has been neglected in the literature and which will show that changes caused through language contact can lead to the enrichment of a language

system by expanding the expressional means in a morphosyntactic subdomain, i.e., by enhancing the functionality of the grammar (cf. also Johanson 2008: 63).

An example for such an independent integration and usage of foreign language material supportive of the assumption of copying rather than loaning is the Turkish locative marker *yeri* (< Turkish *yer* 'place, site'). In Ardeşen-Laz, which, in contrast to other varieties, does not have locative case, *yeri*—in accordance with its Turkish origin—can be used as a noun, cf. (18a). Additionally, we can observe a grammaticalisation process with respect to *yeri* which includes the change of the nominal spatial expression into an adposition, cf. (18b) and (21b). Interestingly, the Laz system does not simply copy the Turkish locative case *-de/-da* 'LOC', which contrasts with Johanson's (1992: 41) assumption that the Turkish case suffixes are easily copied.

- (18) a. *ma başka yeri k-efti*
 1SG another place MOD-go.up:1SG:PAST.PFV
 'I climbed another place.' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 47)
- b. *didi livadi yeri beraber mtxorumt*
 big garden place together dig:1PL:PRS
 'We both dig in the big garden.' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 56)

In an ongoing conversation, the same speaker implements a semantically comparable construction to the one given in (18b) without the element *yeri*.

- (19) *bena şkimi livadi-pe ntxorumŭ-koşani*
 grandma 1SG:POSS garden-PL dig:3SG:PAST.IPFV-while
 'While my grandma digs in the garden, (...)' (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 63)

The utterance in (18b) would have been completely grammatical without the Turkish based element *yeri*. In Ardeşen Laz there is no nominal morphology that marks the location of an object (i.e. locative case or locative adpositions), apart from the copied element *yeri*. The application of an explicit locative marking can possibly be explained by the circumstance that, at the beginning of the narration, the marking is used to locate the protagonists, i.e. it emphasises the yard as their whereabouts. In (18b) the yard is of greater importance than in (19), given that, in this part, the relevant information consists in the further proceedings of the story, namely the discovery of a large amount of hazelnuts beneath an unearthed root. The copying of the Turkish element *yer* 'place, site' and its further restriction to being used as a locative marker, therefore, constitutes an enrichment for the Laz grammatical system with respect to expressional precision.

In sum, we can note that the highly frequent copies of Turkish expressions in Laz are indeed the consequence of the sociolinguistically determined and therefore structurally asymmetric interference of two language systems. However, there is no need to interpret this process as a sign of decay of the Laz language system. In fact, it

seems reasonable to consider this occurrence as an enhancing of the expressional means of Laz and not as substitution or attrition of the Laz structure.¹³

On the other hand, some Laz speakers apply linguistic strategies which – considering the linguistic competence of these speakers – can be construed as a sign of lacking linguistic competence and as a sign of attrition, respectively. The following section deals with such strategies.

4. Creative copying or language attrition?

When investigating and describing a minority language, it is usually not only problematic to determine exactly to what extent the language is endangered but also to differentiate between fully competent speakers of the language and semi-speakers. Therefore, when documenting an endangered language, this differentiation is highly relevant. For documenting the sociolinguistic situation, data from semi-speakers are informative, but for the analysis of the language system data which are the result of language attrition have to be excluded. What are the criteria for separating “good data”, i.e. data from fully competent speakers, from data that come from less reliable sources, i.e. from semi-speakers? Sections 2 and 3 showed that the fact that speakers use words or constructions of Turkish origin is not a sufficient criterion for exclusion. The language competence of a Laz speaker can be deduced from the fact that s/he has full command of the morphosyntactic structures and forms which are typical of South Caucasian languages but do not appear in Turkish and also that s/he has a rich Laz-based lexicon comprising words which are not typical of everyday communication.

The following sample from a Laz narrative illustrates this in more detail, cf. (20). The text given in (20) is a typical example of the communicative strategy of a fully competent speaker of Laz. For example in (20) the speaker uses complex verb forms which exhibit polypersonal inflection and spatial preverbs (cf. 20c, 20e, 20f); he also employs Laz words for traditional artifacts which are no longer in everyday use, such as *çambri* ‘mortar’ and *mangana* ‘pestle’.

- (20) a. *şimdi* *çouri-pe* *çambri* *do-azey*
 well villager-PL mortar MOD-carve:3PL:PAST.PFV

¹³ At this point, it shall not be claimed that every copy entails the enhancing of expressional means. In addition to such copies, there are also copying phenomena which are substitutions of Laz or Kartvelian structures and nonetheless are part of the Laz system used by competent and experienced speakers. As an example one could name the formation of the comparative and superlative. The grammatical constructions in Turkish and Kartvelian are equal—nevertheless, Laz has replaced the Kartvelian comparative and superlative markers with Turkish copies (*daha* ‘more’ und *eni* ‘superlative’ < Trk. *daha* ‘more’, *en* ‘superlative’, cf. (24)).

- b. *raḱani yeri*
 slope place
 ‘Well, the villagers carved the mortar on the mountain slope.’
- c. *mangana çambri eṣ-udganen çambri*
 pestle mortar under-put:[3>3]PL:FUT.PFV mortar
 ‘They are going to put the mortar under the pestle, they have carved a mortar.’
- d. *do-azey*
 MOD-carve:3PL:PAST.PFV
 ‘They are going to put the mortar under the pestle, they have carved a mortar.’
- e. *beñ kfa var-c-ayenan ište*
 big stone NEG-down-bring[POT]:>3PL:FUT.PFV so
 ‘They can’t bring the large stone down (into the village).’
- f. *ham muço ce-biyaten su bu*
 DEM how down-bring:1PL:FUT.PFV that this
 So: ‘How we are going to bring it down?’ ‘Like this.’ – ‘Like that.’
- g. *karar vere-me-di-ler enson*
 decision give-NEG-PAST-3PL finally
 ‘They couldn’t decide. Finally,’
- h. *ham eni aḱili mi on*
 DEM SUPERL clever who be:3SG:PRS
 ‘(they decided) this: “Who is the cleverest?”’ (Kutscher & Genç 1998: 11-12)

The text production of semi-speakers on the other hand shows characteristic differences. Semi-speakers have a reduced lexicon and tend to replace grammatical structures which are significant for South Caucasian languages with more Turkish-like constructions. Both phenomena will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Decrease in vocabulary

Even speakers of Laz who have a full command of the morphosyntactic system and who rarely switch between Laz and Turkish when narrating a story have gaps in their Laz vocabulary occasionally. These gaps may be systematic when the speaker lacks Laz words for a complete lexical field, e.g. the lack of knowledge with respect to the Laz terms for numbers, illustrated in (8) above. Some speakers have unsystematic gaps, as illustrated in (21), where speaker E. does not know the Laz word for ‘sewing’ and asks his relative to tell him the word.

- (21) E: *ayni hašo şuman - ham hašo doşva şukule guşamanu uḱaçxe toçte toçte - mu uşomenan?*
 ‘They braid exactly like this, and after you have braided it like this they take it as a thread in order to – how do you say it?’
- S: *çumanu*
 ‘They sew.’
- E: *toçte çumanu*
 ‘(In order to) sew with the thread.’

In combination with the observation illustrated in (9), i.e. that Laz speakers from older generations expect Laz adolescents not to have full command of the Laz vocabulary, (21) supports the assumption that among younger generations of Laz speakers we find symptoms of language attrition with respect to the size and structure of the lexicon.

Replacement of constructions

Typologically, the morphology of Laz predicates is radically different from the verbal system of Turkish. The Laz verbal system includes polypersonal inflection and a system of pre-radical vowels functioning as applicative and voice markers; this is characteristic for all South Caucasian languages (version vowel, cf. Boeder 1968, Mattissen 1995, Kutscher 2007, chap. 6). Additionally, Laz (and Mingrelian) has a rather large number of preverbs denoting topological configurations (Kutscher 2003). Further differences are found in the domain of positional verbs, cf. (22). Whereas Laz has a large number of verbs denoting the spatial configuration of inanimate entities (Kutscher & Genç 2007, cf. 22a), in Turkish spatial configurations are expressed with a copula construction, cf. (22b).

- (22) a. Laz: sise *kfa* *goo-dgun*
 bottle stone on-stand:3SG:PRS
 ‘The bottle is (standing) on the stone.’
- b. Trk: sise taş-in üst-ün-de dir
 bottle stone-GEN surface-POSS3SG-LOC be:3SG:PRS
 ‘The bottle is (standing) on the stone.’

Laz speakers who do not speak the language regularly can exhibit strong interference with Turkish structures; this became particularly clear during elicitation tasks. When doing a task to elicit spatial expressions with a speaker who grew up in a Laz speaking family but who as an adult does not have much practice speaking Laz, I found that this speaker frequently used relational noun constructions (cf. 23) instead of using the Laz system of spatial preverbs (cf. *goo-* ‘on’ in 22a). The use of relational nouns to denote spatial configurations is typical in Turkish (cf. 22b) but is not used by Laz speakers who use their language in everyday life on a regular basis. However, as (23) illustrates, the speaker copies the Turkish construction, but uses a relational noun of Laz origin (*cando* ‘surface’). She also appears to have full command of the positional verb system of Laz, as can be seen from the fact that she uses the positional verb *dgun* ‘sth. is standing’ instead of simply using the copula.

- (23) sise *kfa-şi* *cando* *dgun*
 bottle stone-GEN surface stand:3SG:PRS
 ‘The bottle is (standing) on the stone.’

The speaker in (23) uses the constructional properties of Turkish locative expressions and adjusts the structure of her Laz expression accordingly. The Laz language system, however, is much more elaborate within the domain of spatial expressions due to its rich system of preverbs (Kutscher 2003). Hence, expressions like the one in (23) are typical of the decrease in the expressional potential of some Laz speakers compared to speakers of Laz who use their language in everyday life. The latter consider expressions such as the one in (23) defective or at least conspicuous.

Not every instance of structural convergence should however be treated as a sign of language attrition. We also find another kind of constructional replacement in Laz. In these instances, while Laz structures have been replaced by copies from Turkish, the expressional potential of Laz is not reduced by this replacement. An example of this kind of structural replacement is the comparative and the superlative constructions; in contrast to Georgian,¹⁴ Laz does not have comparative morphology. The comparative construction consists of a directional-ablative case affix *-ša* marking the nominal; this refers to the standard of the comparison. The nominal denoting the property which is compared remains unmarked for case, cf. (24). Hence, the comparative construction in Laz is similar to the Turkish comparative construction.¹⁵ In addition to this, in Laz the comparative particle *daha*, which is copied from Turkish, can be used, cf. (24a). The superlative is always marked with the superlative particle *eni*, which is a copy of the Turkish superlative particle *en*, cf. (24b).

- (24) a. *Ali Metini-ša (daha) didi on*
 Ali Metini-MOT more tall be:3SG:PRS
 ‘Ali is taller than Metini.’
 b. *eni didi Mustafa on*
 SUPERL tall Mustafa be:3SG:PRS
 ‘The tallest one is Mustafa.’

5. Conclusion

It seems necessary to classify Laz as a highly endangered language given that there is massive language loss among children and young people; there is a high number of semi-speakers; there are only 5-10% competent native speakers; there are losses of speech domains as described above; and Laz has become a domestic language only spoken within the close family circle.

Competent speakers of Laz use a high number of Turkish based copies in the lexical and the morphosyntactic domains. However, it is necessary to differentiate

¹⁴ Cf. the Georgian comparative particle *upro* ‘more’ and *q’velaze (upro)* ‘SUPERL’.

¹⁵ Note that the same construction—adjective in base form and standard marked by ablative case—is not only found in Turkish but also in Georgian and other South Caucasian languages. Consequently, we cannot conclude that the comparative construction in Laz is of Turkish origin. It appears to be an areal feature.

between structural consequences of sociolinguistic situations that lead to an enrichment of a speaker's grammar and those which result in a decrease in expressiveness; the majority of regular speakers of Laz consider the latter alien. Consequently, I classified these elements as signs of attrition in the language competence of the respective speakers.

Within the scope of the collection of data in Ardeşen, it became clear that the group of Laz speakers is divided into two groups, namely the ones with full proficiency in Laz and those with signs of language attrition. Due to the decrease in competent speakers who use Laz on a regular basis, Laz indeed is a highly endangered language. However, considering that among the young Laz we can still find some native speakers of the language, and given the fact that some of the Laz actively advocate the preservation of Laz, the language does not appear to be moribund, yet. A reinforced commitment to the language, especially on the part of those Laz speakers who still use Laz in everyday life, could, in my judgment, prevent Laz from dying out.

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List of Abbreviations

DAT	dative case	MOT	motative case	POSS	possessive pronoun
DEM	demonstrative pronoun	NEG	negation	POT	potential mood
FUT	future tense	NOM'er	nominaliser	PRS	present tense
GEN	genitive case	OPT	optative mood	PRV	preverb
IPFV	imperfective aspect	PAST	past tense	SG	singular
LOC	locative case	PFV	perfective aspect	SUPERL	superlative
MOD	speaker modality	PL	plural		
[>] verb form is marked for two arguments, predication base/subject (= actor) acting on object (= undergoer)					