

Documenting Dargi languages in Daghestan

Shiri and Sanzhi and their speakers

Shiri and Sanzhi are two different varieties from the Dargi branch of the Nakh-Daghestanian language family. The languages are spoken in the central part of Daghestan in the North Caucasus (Russian Federation). The vast majority of the around 200 Shiri families and about 100 Sanzhi families live in the villages of Druzhba and Chinar.



Shiri and Sanzhi villages in Daghestan

The two languages are heavily endangered, and the reasons for this endangerment lie in the recent history. In the 20th century a number of Daghestanian ethnic groups, including the Shiri people, were forced to move to Chechnya, where many people died. After their return to Daghestan in 1957 the Soviets pressured people living in the Caucasus mountains to move to the lowlands. Thus, the Shiri and the Sanzhi people began to settle in multi-ethnic villages. In these villages the social life outside the household is dominated by Russian. Especially younger generations, including small children, speak predominantly Russian with each other.



The village of Shiri

The project

During three years (July 2012-June 2015) we aim at a detailed and in-depth documentation of Shiri and Sanzhi through the collection of texts from a wide range of genres. We record traditional narratives, natural conversations, songs, rituals, and procedural texts. Of special importance are cultural events such as weddings, holidays, or the festival at the *ziyarat*, a Muslim pilgrim site, on the graveyard of Shiri in June. During our first field trip in August 2012 we collected around 10 hours of high-quality audio and video recordings of each language that are currently analyzed.



The village of Sanzhi (Photo by Gadzhimurad Gadzhimuradov)

Linguistics

In the linguistic documentation and analysis of Shiri and Sanzhi we will pay special attention to those features that are unusual for the Nakh-Daghestanian language family and of broader typological interest. Two of these features are person agreement, and extraordinarily rich tense, mood, aspect and evidentiality paradigms.

dam	han-b-ik-ib	b-ik'-u-l	ca(b)i
1sg.DAT	memory-N-receive-PRET	N-say.IPFV-PRS-CVB	COP(N)
sa-r-b-ulq-an-ni	b-ik'-u-l	iž	sa-r-b-uq-n-ak-al
ANTE-EL-N-run.IPFV-POT-3	N-say.IPFV-PRS-CVB	this	ANTE-EL-N-run.IPFV-NEG-CVB
di-ja	či-saq'-un	b-ik'-u-l	ca(b)i
1sg.OBL-SUPER[LAT]	SUPER[LAT]-HITHTER-go.IPFV-PRS	N-say.IPFV-PRS-CVB	COP(N)
*(The wolf says:) I had thought that it (the donkey) would run away, but without running away it comes to me, it says.			

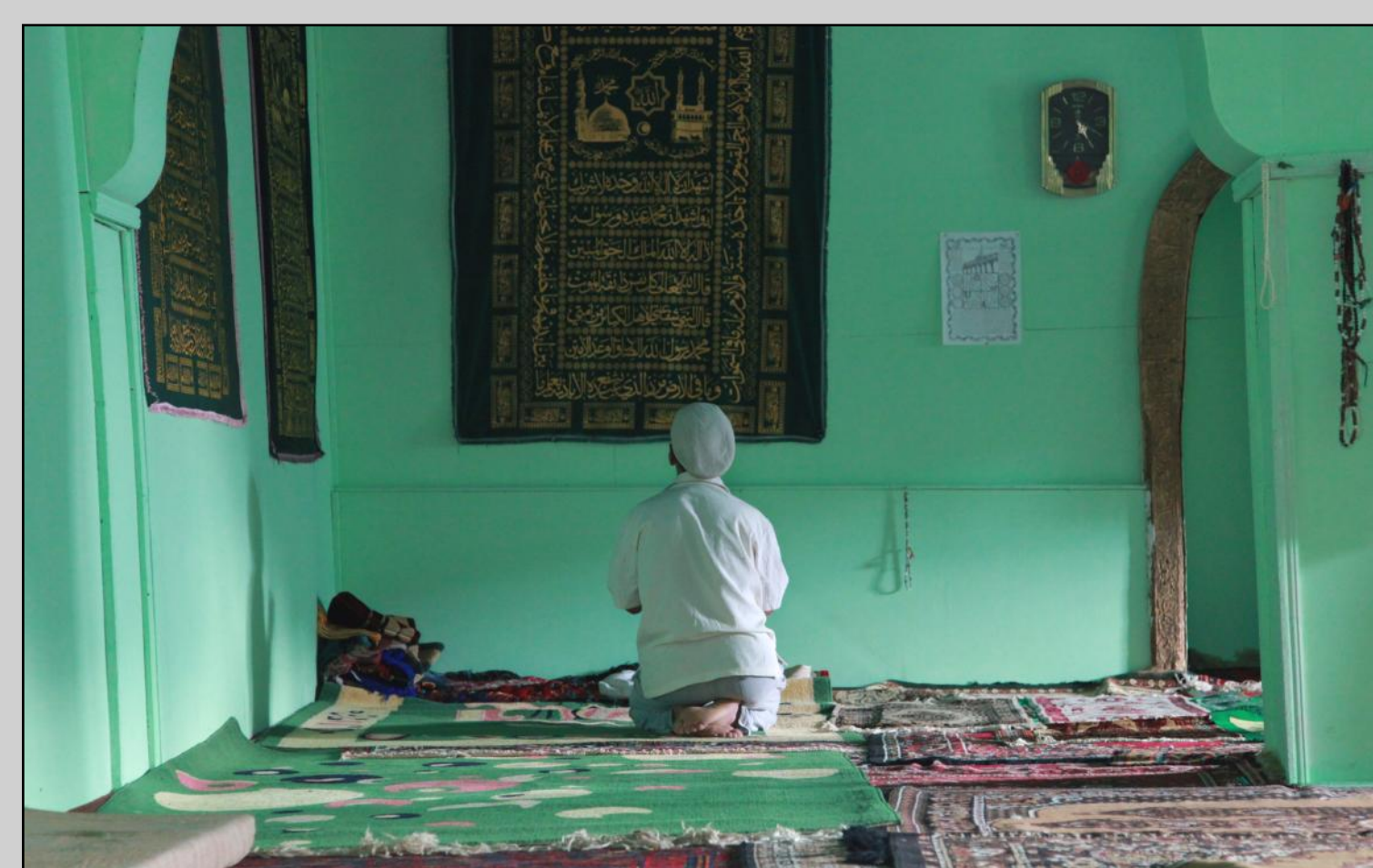
Example sentence from Shiri



Zulejkhat Katilova, a speaker of Sanzhi, talking to Diana Forker

Ethnography

The ethnographical part of the projects includes in-depth interviews and participant observation. In the first phase we have tried to find "good" Sanzhi and Shiri speakers and their "traditional" customs, fairy tales, stories and songs. What seems to be happening is that thanks to our interest these half-forgotten notions once again become the object of interest of the local people. In our project we would like to discover how



A praying man in the mosque of Shiri

the romanticized view of tradition and language coexists with an equally strong emancipatory movement: to get rid of the tiring traditional duties like helping kinsfolks in the mountains, attending weddings of distant relatives etc. How is this friction handled? What is the role of Islam in it? How do people make sense of, re-invent and re-integrate the notions of being Shiri/Sanzhi and at the same time being "modern" and religious? How far does the presence of researchers looking for "good" Shiri and Sanzhi speakers and their "traditions" essentialize the notions of Shiriness or Sanzhi-ness?



Giving chocolates to children at the Uraza Bayram holiday

People involved

- » the Shiri and Sanzhi communities
- » project members: Diana Forker (Bamberg), Rasul Mutalov (Moscow and Makhachkala), Oleg Belyaev (Moscow) and Iwona Kaliszewska (Warsaw)
- » collaboration with the Russian Academy of Science in Moscow and Makhachkala and with the Department of Caucasian Studies at the University of Jena
- » collaboration with Daghestanian researchers at the Daghestanian State University
- » involvement of Daghestanian students at the Daghestanian State University

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