



## Section 5. Languages of the world

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### THE CATEGORY OF ITERATIVE IN OLD GEORGIAN

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#### Abstract

This study explores the historical development and eventual disappearance of the Perman-sive (iterative) category in the Georgian language. Georgian, a member of the Kartvelian lan-guage group, has maintained continuity between its written and spoken forms for over sixteen centuries, making Old Georgian comprehensible to modern readers. Unlike Classical Greek or Classical Armenian, which lost their connection to spoken forms, Georgian has evolved without significant divergence.

The Permansive was once a crucial morphological category expressing habitual and iter-ative actions. Old Georgian featured five Permansive screeves across all three verb series, but these forms began to decline after the 9<sup>th</sup> century, replaced by conjunctive and present forms. Through an analysis of Gospel manuscripts, this study traces the transformation of Permansive screeves, demonstrating their gradual loss and replacement by non-iterative constructions.

In Modern Georgian, iterativity is no longer a distinct morphological category. Instead, it is conveyed descriptively through contextual markers or particles such as ხოლმე (*kholme*, mean-ing “usually”), though its use is restricted in literary language. While some Georgian dialects preserve archaic iterative markers, standard Georgian now relies on generalized expressions and contextual interpretation. This linguistic shift highlights the broader evolution of Georgian grammar and its adaptation to modern usage.

**Keywords:** *Permansive, Iterative, Old Georgian*

#### Introduction

The Georgian language belongs to the Iberian-Caucasian language family and is spe-cifically classified within the Kartvelian lan-guage group alongside Mingrelian, Svan, and Laz. Since the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Georgian has had a continuous tradition of both translated and

original literature, with even earlier epigraphic materials available (e.g., Georgian inscriptions from Palestine dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Gagoshidze, G., 2022). Despite the history of development of the language spanning six-teen centuries, there has been no divergence between the written and spoken forms of the

language. Texts written in the early Middle Ages remain comprehensible to 21<sup>st</sup>-century readers without the need to learn about specific grammatical aspects. This characteristic distinguishes Georgian from other ancient languages, such as Classical Greek or Classical Armenian, which, at a certain point of their development, lost their connection to living spoken forms. The term “Old” with regard to Georgian is not entirely accurate, as “Old Georgian” does not differ from “Modern Georgian” as is the case with “Classical Greek” vs. “Modern Greek” or “Classical Armenian” vs. “Modern Armenian.” Indeed, when discussing “Old,” “Middle,” and “Modern” Georgian, we refer to certain stages of a continuously developing literary language. These terms serve more as scholarly designations than being reflective of an actual linguistic divergence.

**The Permansive (iterative)** is one of the challenging categories of the Georgian verb. In Georgian linguistic literature, this concept encompasses both iterative and habitual nature. According to A. Chikobava, aspectual distinction in the verb conjugation system, i.e., distinguishing between two aspects: the *Durative Aspect* (marked by the suffix -ო (-i), Iterative Aorist) and the *Momentary Aspect* (marked by the suffix -ე (-e), Aorist) predated temporal distinction (Chikobava, 1943). Thus, the Permansive is one of the oldest morphological categories of the Georgian verb, and studying this category is crucial for understanding the history of Georgian literary language.

The expression of this category evolved differently across different stages of the development of the Georgian Language: In **Old Georgian, the Iterative was a morphological category** expressed through specialized “habitual/iterative screeves”. Whereas in Modern Georgian, the morphological category of the Permansive and the distinction between semelfactive vs. iterative actions have been lost. Instead, this semantics is expressed **descriptively or periphrastically**. Old Georgian employed five Permansive screeves across all three verb-series.

Verb series and screeves in Old Georgian can be summarized as follows: verb conjugations in the Ancient Georgian language contain three paradigms based on the morpho-syntactic principle. The first series contains

six screeves. The second series contains four basic and two additional (mixed) screeves. The third series contains four basic and one additional (mixed) screeves. “A screeve is a complex category that corresponds to person, number, tense, mood and aspect” (Sharashenidze, 2018, p. 29).

Hence, in Old Georgian, all three series included Permansive screeves:

**1<sup>st</sup> Series:** Iterative Present; Iterative Imperfect.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Series:** Iterative Aorist; Mixed Iterative.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Series:** Iterative Perfect.

All five of them were lost in Modern Georgian.

Initially, these forms had distinct functions without significant overlap, but over time, as the morphological category of Permansive weakened, they started to be increasingly replaced by non-Permansive forms.

### Research method

Iterative screeves prevailed in Old Georgian in both original and translated texts. To observe their diachronic development and transformation, we can examine several passages from Gospels in different manuscripts, such as the Khanmeti Gospel (7<sup>th</sup> century), the Adishi Gospel (897 AD), the pre-Athonic and the Giorgi the Hagiorite’s recensions (Kvirkvelia, 2019; Mrevlishvili, 2013).

Matthew 7:8 „რამეთუ ყოველი რომელი ხიბობვს, მიიღოს, და რომელი ხეძიებდს, პოვოს და რომელი ხირეკს, განედოს” XC.

“For everyone who **asks receives**, and he who **seeks finds**, and to him who **knocks it shall be opened**”

Verb forms reflect the linguistic phenomenon characteristic of the linguistic phase of Early Old Georgian, known as Khanmet. The Georgian language of the 5<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> centuries is characterized by *Khanmetoba* (use of the prefix **Kh-**), the 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries by *Haemetoba* (use of the prefix **H-**), and from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward by *Sannarevoba* (use of the **H-/S-/Sh-/Ø** prefixes), which is also a defining feature of the modern Georgian literary language. In the written monuments of Khanmet the existence of *Kh*-prefix in all three person forms of *I*-Prefix Passive Voice is a norm (Therefore, in Haemet we come across **H-**) (Tsikhelashvili, 2013).

The Khanmeti Gospels (marked with “C”) and the Adishi Gospels (marked with “A”) attest to the use of Iterative screeves in the forms of Iterative Present (e.g., ხითხოვნ [khithkhovn], ხეძიებნ [khedziebn], ხირეკნ [khirekn]) and Iterative Aorist (e.g., მიიღის [miighis], პოვის [povis], განელის [ganeghis]). However, in the Ksani (A), Berti (B), Jruch (D), Parkhli (E), Urbnisi (F), Palestinian (G), Tskarostavi (T), Geo.O.Sin-30 (P), Geo.O.Sin-15 (R), Geo.O.Sin-16 (S) Gospels, as well as in the Giorgi the Athonite’s recension (manuscripts I, K, N, Z, Y, U, Q, X, J, H), the Iterative screeves are replaced by Conjunctive I and Conjunctive II forms. Specifically: Iterative Present is replaced by Conjunctive I, whereas Iterative Aorist is replaced by Conjunctive II:

Matthew 7:8 „რამეთუ ყოველი რომელი ითხოვდეს, მიიღოს, და რომელი ეძიებდეს, პოვოს, და რომელი ირეკდეს, განელოს”

For everyone who **will ask shall receive**, and the one who **will seek shall find**, and to the one who **will knock, it shall be opened**”.

Given that Iterative Aorist is an ancient screeve not confined to frameworks of tenses and that “in Old Georgian, the Permansive occasionally aligns with present or conjunctive semantics in context” (Kavtaradze, 1961), we may conclude that Permansive screeves in Old Georgian also accommodated future tense meaning. Analysis of other Gospel manuscripts suggests that the Permansive forms used in the Khanmeti and Adishi Gospels likely expressed future tense rather than iterativity. In Modern Georgian, this passage would read as follows: „ყველა, ვინც/რომელიც ითხოვს, მიიღებს, ვინც ეძებს, იპოვის, ვინც დარეკავს, გაუღებენ” [For everyone who asks will receive; the one who seeks will find; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened]. It was natural for Old Georgian to express future indicative mood via conjunctive screeves, a pattern supported by most manuscripts. Notably, Iterative screeves with future function are uniquely preserved in the oldest Khanmeti Gospel (7<sup>th</sup> c.).

In some cases, the Iterative Present is replaced by the Present Screeves in other manuscripts. For example:

Luke 5:31 „არა უკმს ცოცხალთა მკურნალი, არამედ რომელნი ბოროტსა

სენსა შინა არიედ”. manuscript C. “The healthy do not **need** a healer, but rather those who **usually are** in evil sickness.”

არიედ (“**usually are**”, Iterative Present) C.

არიან (“**are**”, Present) manuscripts: ABDEFGPRST; IKNUQHJXZY.

“It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. (Lk. 5:31 NASB)

In Pre-Athonite and Athonite recensions, the Iterative Present არიედ (“**usually are**”) is replaced by the Present form არიან (“**are**”). Additionally, it is noteworthy that in the Adishi Gospel, present tense (უკმს [ukhms] – “**need**”) and Iterative Present (არიედ – [ari-ed] “**usually are**”) alternate within the same sentence. This is entirely natural, as the present tense expresses not only a temporal action occurring at the time of speech but also, at times, an action stripped of a specific temporal context, i.e., a general action (e.g., „მამაო ზვენო, რომელი ხარ ცათა შინა” [Our Father, who **art** in heaven]). In our case, უკმს [ukhms] – **need** likely expresses precisely such a timeless meaning: it refers to the general idea that healthy people do not need a physician.

In the example we provided, the alternation between the present tense and Iterative Present within a single sentence to convey iterative or habitual meaning – alongside the replacement of Permansive forms with present tense forms in later manuscripts – suggests a tendency toward the elimination of the Iterative.

Iterative Aorist screeve is one of the oldest. Its decline is observable from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onward, evidenced by the alternation between Iterative Aorist and aorist forms in sentences:

Matthew 13:23 „რომელმან სიტყუაჲ იგი ისმინის და გულისხმა–ყვის და გამოიღის ნაყოფი და ყვის: რომელმანმე – ასი, რომელმანმე – სამეოცი, რომელმანმე – ოცდაათი” C.

“But the one who **hears** the word, **understands** it, and **bears** fruit, **yielding** a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown” Manuscript C.

ისმინის [“hears”, Iterative Aorist] Manuscript E, ისმინა [heard, Iterative Aorist] Manuscripts DFGHIK.

გულისხმა–ყო [“understood” Aorist] Manuscripts DEFGHIK

გამოიღო [“bears”, Aorist] Manuscripts DEFGHIK.

ყო [“yielded”, Aorist] Manuscripts DEFGHIK.

In the Adishi Gospel, verbs in Iterative Aorist are rendered as aorist forms in the Jruchi Gospel (D) and Athonite recension, while the Parkhali Manuscript (E) employs both Iterative Aorist (იხმინის) and Aorist forms (გულისხმა–ყო, გამოიღო, ყო). The corresponding passage is missing from the Khanmeti Gospels.

### Results analysis

Our analysis reveals that Permansive forms are better preserved in older manuscripts like Khanmeti (7<sup>th</sup> c.) and Adishi (897 CE), though we also documented cases where certain verbs in these manuscripts appear in the present screeve, while later manuscripts reintroduce Permansive forms.

Permansive III forms are exceedingly rare, especially in translated texts, as III series forms are generally uncommon in such works (Shanidze, 1947).

In Modern Georgian, iterativity is no longer a morphological category. Instead, the semantic is expressed descriptively: the function of Permansive screeves has been distributed across different screeves, which express the category by adding particle ხოლმე [kholme] (meaning “usually”).

While literary Georgian no longer expresses iterativity morphologically, some eastern dialects retain archaic ways of conveying iterativity. Notable examples include Khevsurian (Arabuli, 1978), Tush (Tsotsanidze, 1970), and Mokheuri (Kobiashvili, 1999), where particles like -ჰე/-ყე [ke] mark iterative actions. Similar forms appear in Phereidan and the Kizik sub-dialect of Kakhetian dialect.

In contemporary literary Georgian, the language of the press – which better reflects

living language – shows limited use of the particle ხოლმე [kholme] (meaning “usually”). Instead, iterativity is often implied contextually or expressed through so called generalized forms by adding adverbial modifiers like: ყოველთვის (always), მუდამ (always), or ხშირად (often). We provide an example from the press:

„როცა ვლაპარაკობთ ქართულ კულტურაზე, ყველას ახსენდება ცეკვა”  
Translation: “When we talk about Georgian culture, everyone thinks of dance.” Implied meaning: [whenever] we talk about Georgian culture, everyone [usually] thinks of dance.

In press language, the explicit use of ხოლმე [kholme] (translated as “usually”) is maximally restricted – a trend likely driven by stylistic preferences.

### Conclusion

As discussed above, we examined how Iterative forms in Gospel manuscripts are rendered in New Georgian texts. In the majority, if not all of the cases, this semantic category is conveyed through screeves expressing single, non-iterative actions without the particle ხოლმე [kholme] (translated as “usually”). For example: „მკურნალი ჯანმრთელებს კი არა, სნეულებს სჭირდებათ” – translated as: “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but the sick” (and not: სჭირდებათ ხოლმე, translated as “usually need”).

Thus, on the path of development of the Georgian literary language, the morphological category of iterative (Permansive) has been replaced by descriptive constructions involving adding appropriate particles to the screeves of non-iterative semantics. In modern literary Georgian, this meaning is increasingly expressed via generalized forms, without the particle ხოლმე [kholme] (meaning “usually”). In such cases, distinguishing between semelfactive and iterative actions depends entirely on contextual interpretation.

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## Abbreviation

NASB – The New American Standard Bible: 2020 Edition.

### Marks of the Preathonic Gospels:

X Khanmeti Gospel (7<sup>th</sup> c.),  
C Adishi Gospel (897)  
A Ksani Gospel (10<sup>th</sup> c.),  
B Berti Gospel (10<sup>th</sup> c.)  
D Jruchi Gospel (936)  
E Parkhali Gospel (973)  
F Urbnisi Gospel (11<sup>th</sup> c.)  
G Palestina Gospel (1048)  
P Sin.Geo.O. 30 (10<sup>th</sup>)  
R Sin.Geo.O.15 (975)  
S Sin.Geo.O. 16 (10<sup>th</sup> c.)  
T Tskarostavi Gospel (10<sup>th</sup> c.)

### Marks of the George the Hagiorete's Recension:

I Echmiadzini Gospel (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>rd</sup> c.)  
K Gelati Gospel (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>rd</sup> c.)  
N Sin.Geo.O.-19 (1074)  
Z Jer.Geo.-103 (13<sup>rd</sup> c.)  
Y Jer.Geo.-153 (12<sup>th</sup> c.)  
U Jer.Geo.-102 (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c.)  
Q Jer.Geo.-49 (11<sup>th</sup> c.)  
X Jer.Geo.-93 (12<sup>th</sup> c.)  
J Jer.Geo.-122 (12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> c.)  
H Vani Gospel (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>rd</sup> c.)

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