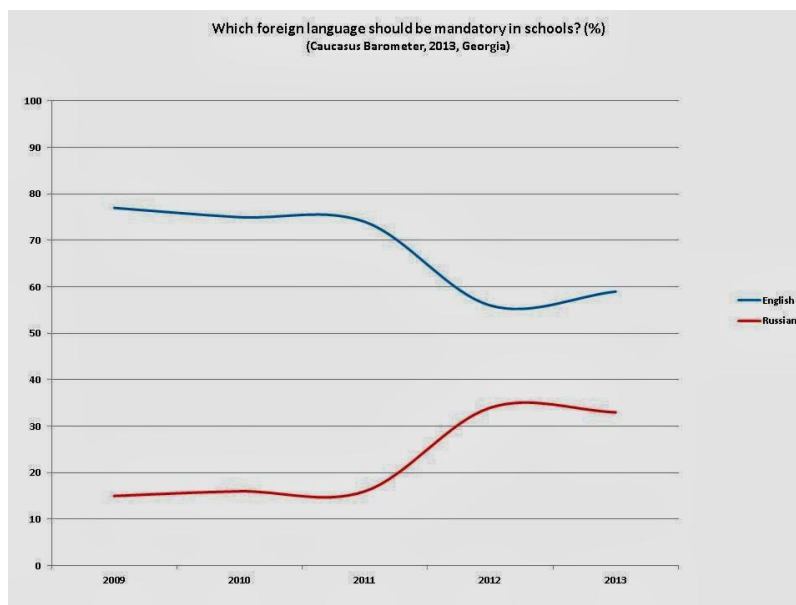


Second Languages in the South Caucasus and Georgian Education Policy

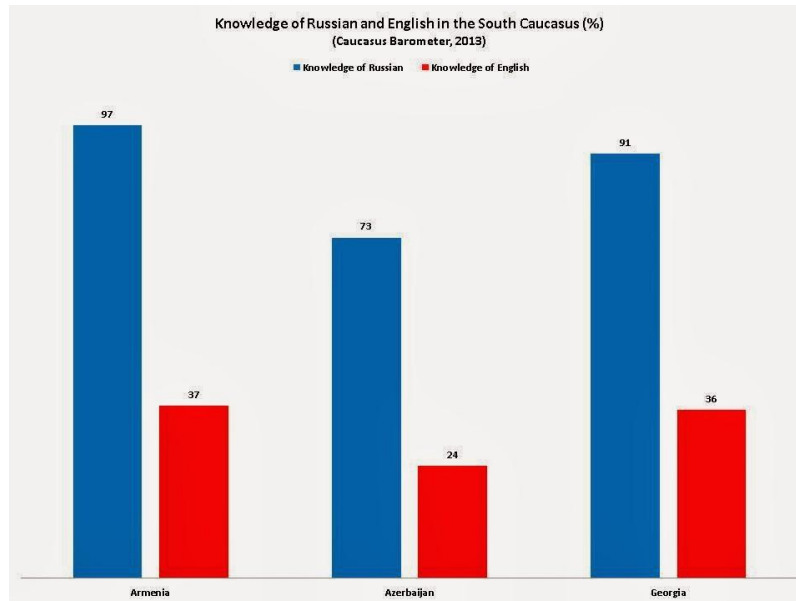
In his widely read 1983 book, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson wrote that English now serves “as a kind of global-hegemonic, post-clerical Latin.” In Georgia, knowledge of the English language is often important for educational opportunities as well as [employment](#). In 2010, the Georgian government began an English teaching program called [Teach and Learn with Georgia](#) (TLG) which brought English teachers to Georgia in order to improve the level of English in the country. TLG continued with fewer teachers after the change in government in 2012. Additionally, only native English speaking teachers are now accepted for TLG, whereas non-native speakers of English had previously been accepted as teachers. With this background in mind, this blog examines which languages Georgians think should be mandatory in schools, as well as the perceived level of Russian and English knowledge in the South Caucasus, and how age relates to knowledge of Russian and English.

Survey data from the Caucasus Barometer (CB) shows that when the English language teaching program began in 2010, the majority of Georgians (75%) thought that English should be mandatory in school. The level of support for English and Russian as mandatory languages remained similar until 2011 to 2012 when support for Russian increased and support for English decreased. During this time period, a deal for Russia to join the [WTO](#), which Georgia had been [blocking](#), was worked out. This implied that the Russian [embargo](#) that had existed on Georgian products would be lifted in the future, as it slowly has been over the course of the [last year](#). Furthermore, a change in government occurred in 2012, which was perceived by some international observers and Georgians as a [vote](#) to ameliorate ties with Russia. Moreover, TLG was in its second year, and though the program had experienced successes, many Georgians criticized the program for not having certified teachers, and the actions of some volunteers proved [irksome](#) to many Georgians. Between 2012 and 2013, no dramatic change occurred despite what appears to be a slight uptick in English and down-tick in Russian for 2013.

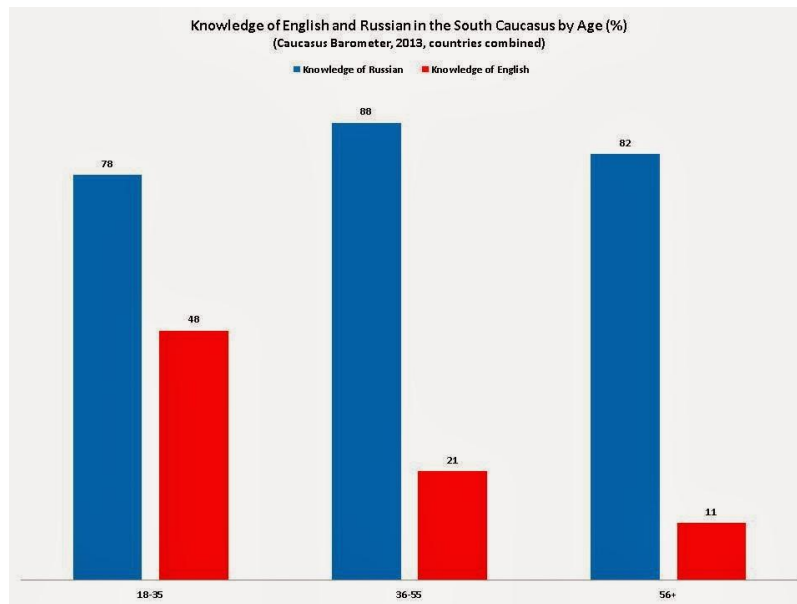


A common language can facilitate business and relationships between people. It can also facilitate

the effective management of relations and communication between neighboring countries. Thus, it is important to look at which languages Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan share. In the CB, respondents were asked to assess whether their level of English and Russian language was no basic knowledge (1), beginner (2), intermediate (3) or advanced (4). Throughout this blog, “knowledge” of Russian and English refers to people who felt they had at least a beginner’s level of knowledge (i.e. beginner, intermediate or advanced) of the language. The survey shows that at least a quarter of people believe they have some knowledge of English in each country, and a majority say they have knowledge of Russian—especially in Armenia and Georgia.



As the graph demonstrates, knowledge of Russian continues to be far more common than English in the South Caucasus, with more than twice as many South Caucasians reporting some knowledge of Russian in all three countries compared to English. Yet, this trend may change as knowledge of English increases, especially among young people. The percentage of 18 to 35 year olds who believe they have at least some knowledge of English is at least twice as high as older age groups in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, knowledge of Russian is lowest in the youngest age group.



What does the language that Georgians want their children to learn say about how Georgia positions itself internationally? Does it tell us anything about whether or not closer ties with its neighbors are desired? For more information, please visit the following [blog post](#) about the Georgian education system and Timothy Blauvelt's 2013 [article](#) on language in Georgia.