

Teaching Georgian in a Multinational Classroom: Challenges and Strategies from a University Teacher's Perspective

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Abstract

Teaching Georgian to international university students requires more than the presentation of grammar and vocabulary. The teacher must make an unfamiliar writing system accessible, manage substantial differences in linguistic background, connect classroom language with students' immediate academic and social needs, and create participation conditions in which learners are willing to speak before they feel fully accurate. This practitioner-perspective article examines recurrent challenges in a multilingual Georgian-language classroom and proposes strategies that can be adapted in university programs serving international students. The discussion draws on reflective teaching experience and scholarship on multilingual education, intercultural language learning, translanguaging, scaffolding, and task-based instruction. Five areas receive particular attention: learning the Georgian script, structural distance between Georgian and learners' previously known languages, uneven proficiency within one class, anxiety and participation, and the transfer of classroom knowledge to authentic communication. The article argues for a staged, meaning-oriented approach that combines explicit instruction with visual scaffolding, multilingual mediation, predictable interaction routines, medical and campus-based scenarios, formative assessment, and systematic recycling. Its central claim is that multilingual diversity can be treated as a pedagogical resource. Drawing on learners' linguistic repertoires while progressively increasing their use of Georgian can create opportunities to practise functional communication and participate in the university and wider community.

Keywords: Georgian as a foreign language, multinational classroom, multilingual pedagogy, international students, university teaching, intercultural communication

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1. Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has created classrooms in which students with different first languages, educational traditions, cultural expectations, and levels of experience learn together. In Georgia, this development is especially visible in English-medium university programs that attract international students. Although English may be the principal language of academic instruction, Georgian remains important for everyday life, interaction with local communities, administrative communication, and, for medical students, contact with patients and clinical personnel. Learning Georgian can therefore support both practical independence and fuller participation in the host society.

Teaching Georgian in this context presents a distinctive set of challenges. Students may enter the same classroom with very different literacy systems, grammatical knowledge, learning habits, and motivation. Some are accustomed to highly explicit grammar teaching, while others expect communicative practice. Some already speak several languages and transfer useful learning strategies; others are studying an additional language for the first time. The Georgian script is unfamiliar to most learners, and the language contains structural features that may initially seem distant from English and from many students' first languages. At the same time, students need usable expressions quickly. They cannot wait until they have mastered the entire grammatical system before greeting a neighbor, asking for directions, speaking with university staff, or addressing a patient.

This article examines the teaching of Georgian from a university teacher's perspective. It is not presented as an experimental study and does not report systematically collected participant data. Instead, it is a structured practitioner reflection that connects recurrent classroom challenges with established scholarship on multilingual and intercultural language education. The article addresses three questions: What difficulties are especially prominent when Georgian is taught to a multinational group? Which classroom strategies may support participation and the recall of useful language? How can teaching connect linguistic accuracy with the academic, professional, and social purposes for which international students need Georgian?

2. Conceptual Background

2.1 Multilingual classrooms as learning environments

A multilingual classroom is more than a learning environment in which several languages are present. Learners interpret new material through languages and concepts they already know. Cummins (2007) argues that strict separation of languages can overlook the cognitive relationships that multilingual learners build across

their repertoires. Translanguaging scholarship similarly describes multilingual meaning-making as the flexible use of available linguistic resources rather than the mechanical alternation of sealed language systems (García & Wei, 2014). For the Georgian teacher, this does not mean abandoning Georgian as the instructional goal. It means permitting carefully planned comparison, translation, gesture, visualization, and peer explanation when these practices help students understand and subsequently perform in Georgian.

Multilingualism also increases the potential for unequal participation. Learners who share a strong common language may answer rapidly and dominate group work, while classmates with less experience in that language may remain silent. Inclusive instruction therefore requires more than goodwill. It requires deliberate structures that distribute speaking time, make expectations visible, and provide several routes into a task. Gay's (2018) account of culturally responsive teaching emphasizes that teaching quality depends partly on recognizing how learners' cultural and communicative backgrounds shape participation. In a multinational Georgian class, difference should be anticipated in lesson design rather than treated as an unexpected obstacle.

2.2 Language, culture, and communicative competence

Language learning is inseparable from the social situations in which language is used. Kramsch (1993) describes language teaching as engagement with meanings and cultural boundaries, while Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) position intercultural language learning as interpretation, comparison, reflection, and interaction. These principles are particularly relevant when international students are living in the society whose language they are studying. A Georgian lesson can help learners interpret forms of address, politeness, hospitality, turn-taking, non-verbal behavior, and expectations in institutional or clinical encounters. Such content should not reduce Georgian culture to fixed rules. Instead, students should examine variation and learn to ask for clarification when communicative expectations are uncertain.

The Common European Framework of Reference Companion Volume broadens communicative competence by emphasizing mediation, plurilingual repertoires, and collaborative meaning-making (Council of Europe, 2020). This orientation supports an approach in which learners do not merely reproduce isolated forms. They use Georgian to accomplish realistic purposes: obtaining information, explaining a basic need, facilitating understanding, or participating in a short exchange. Accuracy remains important, but it develops within meaningful activity.

2.3 Features of Georgian relevant to instruction

Georgian uses the Mkhedruli script, whose letters may be unfamiliar to learners. Georgian also differs typologically from many languages familiar to international students. Descriptive accounts show a rich verbal system, extensive use of case marking, flexible word order influenced by information structure, and sound combinations that may be unfamiliar to beginning learners (Aronson, 1990; Hewitt, 1995). A complete linguistic description is not an appropriate starting point for novice students. Nevertheless, teachers need sufficient awareness of these features to sequence instruction carefully. If terminology and paradigms are introduced faster than learners can connect them with communicative meaning, cognitive load increases and students may remember rules without being able to use them.

In this article, "writing system" refers to the broader way Georgian is represented in writing. "Mkhedruli script" names the script used in the course, and "alphabet" refers to its individual letters. "Script learning" describes students' developing ability to recognize and use written Georgian; "alphabet instruction" refers more narrowly to teaching letters and their sound associations.

3. Approach and Scope

The article uses structured practitioner reflection. The perspective is that of a university teacher working with international students in a multinational environment. The analysis organizes recurring pedagogical concerns into five connected areas and interprets them through relevant literature. No questionnaires, interviews, tests, or student quotations were collected for this paper, and no personally identifiable information is reported. The purpose is therefore analytical and practical rather than statistical: to make teaching knowledge explicit, examine why particular difficulties occur, and propose strategies that other instructors can adapt and evaluate in their own settings.

The teaching context is a Georgian language course for international medical students at BAU International University, Batumi. The course runs over three terms, and the class described here includes approximately 32 students. Learners enter with different first languages, degrees of exposure to Georgian, and expectations about classroom speaking. This reflection does not catalogue individual language backgrounds. Role-play is a regular part of instruction, including situations connected to everyday university interaction and elementary medical communication. The examples below are anonymized recollections of classroom practice, not records from a research sample.

For this article, the teacher's retrospective reflection proceeded in three steps: identifying recurring difficulties in classroom interaction, examining the instructional responses used or proposed, and relating those

difficulties and responses to relevant literature. This is reflection on teaching after the event; no named reflective framework was used prospectively and no formal observation protocol was applied. The episodes described below are remembered classroom observations rather than systematically collected data. They illustrate the pedagogical problem and cannot establish the frequency of a difficulty or changes in confidence, retention, or achievement.

Practitioner reflection has value when it moves beyond anecdote and makes its basis and limits transparent. Farrell (2015) describes reflective practice as systematic attention to the relationship between teachers' beliefs and classroom actions. In the present article, the claims are framed as pedagogical interpretations rather than universal findings. The strategies should be adjusted for learners' proficiency, program aims, contact hours, and professional needs. Future empirical work could examine these proposals through observation, learner feedback, and pre- and post-course performance tasks.

4. Principal Challenges

4.1 Learning the Georgian script

For many international students, the Georgian script is the first visible barrier. At the beginning of a course, learners must recognize unfamiliar shapes, distinguish visually similar letters, associate symbols with sounds, and write by hand while also trying to understand new words. If the alphabet is taught only as a sequence to memorize, students may recite letters but struggle to decode signs, names, or classroom instructions. Differences in prior scripts also matter. Learners familiar with alphabetic writing may adapt differently from those whose literacy experience is primarily with abjad (e.g., Arabic), abugida (e.g., Devanagari), syllabic, or logographic writing systems.

The main instructional challenge is to establish automatic recognition without postponing communication. Script work should therefore begin with high-frequency words that students immediately encounter: greetings, numbers, places, university vocabulary, and personal names. Short daily cycles of seeing, hearing, tracing, writing, and retrieving are more useful than a single intensive alphabet lesson. Keyboard practice should accompany handwriting because international students encounter Georgian in digital messages, maps, menus, and administrative systems.

4.2 Structural distance and pronunciation

Learners often search for direct equivalents between Georgian and a language they already know. This strategy is natural but can produce confusion when grammatical meanings are organized differently. Case endings, agreement patterns, verb forms, and flexible word order may appear as disconnected rules if they are introduced in large paradigms. Pronunciation can also affect confidence, especially when students meet consonant clusters or contrasts not present in their first language. A learner may know the intended sentence yet avoid speaking because producing it feels physically difficult or because an early correction has made the risk of error too visible.

The teacher must decide what requires immediate correction and what can develop over time. Errors that block meaning or create a professionally important misunderstanding deserve prompt attention. Less consequential errors can be noted and addressed after the interaction. This distinction protects communicative flow and allows students to experience Georgian as a language for action, not only as an object of evaluation.

4.3 Uneven proficiency and different learning traditions

A single group may include complete beginners, students who have lived in Georgia for some time, and learners who have acquired informal expressions through daily contact. Fast learners can become bored by extended repetition, while novices can become silent if every task assumes equal processing speed. Differences in educational culture compound this variation. Some students expect the teacher to explain and correct every form; others are comfortable discovering patterns through tasks. Some interpret voluntary discussion as optional, whereas others compete to respond first.

Uniform instruction cannot fully address this range. Yet dividing students permanently by perceived ability can stigmatize learners and reduce peer learning. The more productive response is flexible differentiation: common communicative goals with varied levels of support, rotating roles, optional challenge elements, and changing pairings. Success is then defined by progress toward the task rather than by identical sentence complexity.

4.4 Anxiety, silence, and fear of error

Speaking an unfamiliar language in front of classmates can threaten a learner's sense of competence. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) identify communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation as central dimensions of foreign-language anxiety. In a multinational class, students may also worry that classmates with stronger English or Georgian will judge their speed, accent, or educational background. Silence cannot

automatically be interpreted as lack of preparation. It may reflect processing time, uncertainty about turn-taking, or an attempt to avoid public error.

A patient–doctor role-play illustrates this participation challenge. When asked to express a familiar idea in Georgian during the simulated exchange, some students paused and used mime or gestures while searching for words; some were shy about speaking in front of the group. A gesture also required verbal clarification because its meaning was not shared by classmates from different cultural backgrounds. These are anonymized recollections of classroom practice, not counted observations or student quotations. They show why opportunities to rehearse and clarify meaning matter in this particular activity.

Excessive correction can intensify this problem, but the complete absence of correction is not helpful either. Students need evidence that their Georgian is becoming more precise. The challenge is to separate practice designed for fluency from practice designed for accuracy and to tell learners which aim is primary. Predictable routines, rehearsal time, pair work before public speaking, and neutral requests for clarification can lower the immediate risk of participation.

4.5 Transfer from the classroom to real situations

Students may perform successfully in a controlled dialogue and still find authentic interaction difficult. Real speakers vary in speed, pronunciation, vocabulary, and willingness to accommodate a beginner. In shops, public transport, university offices, or clinical settings, learners must listen and respond under time pressure. The emotional stakes may also be higher than in class. This gap between demonstrated classroom knowledge and spontaneous use is one of the most persistent challenges in language teaching.

Transfer is more likely when classroom tasks preserve essential features of real communication: incomplete information, a genuine reason to listen, choices in the response, and the need to repair misunderstanding. Repeating a model can establish useful patterns, but students must then adapt the language to a changed person, place, symptom, request, or problem.

5. Strategies for Effective Teaching

5.1 Teach the Georgian script through meaning and retrieval

Instruction in the letters of the Georgian script should combine explicit sound–symbol teaching with meaningful recognition. Each small group of letters can be attached to familiar names, campus locations, food, numbers, or basic medical terms. Learners should retrieve letters from memory rather than repeatedly copy a completed model. Useful routines include rapid letter identification, matching printed and handwritten forms, short dictation, labeling images, reading signs, and typing a two- or three-word message. Spaced review should continue after the alphabet unit, because apparent mastery during one lesson may disappear without retrieval.

5.2 Use contrastive explanation selectively

Brief comparison can reduce confusion when learners’ languages organize a meaning differently. The teacher may show, for example, how Georgian marks a relationship through an ending where English uses a preposition, or how word order changes emphasis without simply becoming incorrect. Comparisons should remain accessible to the entire group. A teacher does not need to know every first language; students can be invited to notice similarities and differences, explain them in pairs, and test whether a proposed comparison actually helps. The focus should quickly return to Georgian examples and use.

5.3 Build lessons around communicative functions

A productive unit begins with what learners need to accomplish, then identifies the language needed to do it. Early functions may include introducing oneself, asking the price, locating a room, arranging a meeting, describing a routine, or requesting repetition. For medical students, carefully staged functions can include greeting a patient, confirming identity, asking about a basic complaint, giving a simple instruction, and checking understanding. Functional organization gives grammar a clear purpose and allows the same structure to recur across several contexts.

Role-play is used regularly in the three-term medical-student course. In the patient–doctor activity described above, I gave students two minutes to rehearse before they attempted the exchange again. On the second attempt, I observed a marked improvement in how they carried out the role-play. This observation suggests that brief rehearsal can be a useful support for this kind of speaking activity. The observation is a retrospective assessment of one classroom activity: No rubric-based comparison or systematic student responses are reported here, so the observation cannot establish the size or cause of the change or whether confidence and language retention changed over time. A teaching sequence for similar activities can include a model of key Georgian expressions, assigned speaking and listening roles, time to rehearse, and a second attempt with less support.

Task-based language teaching emphasizes the use of language to achieve an outcome (Ellis, 2003). A Georgian task might require students to arrange a suitable appointment time, select appropriate food from a

menu under specified conditions, or conduct a short admission exchange. The teacher can prepare learners with key language, observe task performance, and then provide focused feedback and a second attempt.

5.4 Scaffold participation without lowering expectations

Scaffolding provides temporary support that enables learners to perform beyond what they could manage independently (Gibbons, 2015). In practice, this can include a model dialogue, a visual sequence, a bank of sentence openings, color coding for endings, a pronunciation recording, or a few minutes of written planning. Support should be gradually reduced. If students always read a complete script, they may become accurate readers without becoming flexible speakers.

Participation structures are equally important. Think–pair–share gives learners private processing time before public response. Rotating roles—speaker, listener, recorder, and language monitor—prevent the quickest student from completing every task. The teacher can invite more than one acceptable answer and allow students to pass temporarily, returning to them after rehearsal. These practices communicate that thoughtful participation, not speed, is valued.

5.5 Use multilingual mediation strategically

A Georgian-only environment may be appropriate during a familiar routine, but strict prohibition of all other languages can waste learners' existing knowledge. Strategic mediation can include a bilingual glossary, a brief peer explanation, comparison of two forms, or planning an idea in a stronger language before producing it in Georgian. The condition is that mediation should lead back to Georgian performance. The teacher can ask students to explain how a translation differs from the Georgian expression, thereby turning translation into analysis rather than substitution.

5.6 Integrate culture through situations rather than stereotypes

Cultural content becomes useful when it helps learners interpret and act in a situation. Instead of listing generalized traits of Georgian people, a lesson can examine several possible ways to greet a lecturer, address an older person, enter a home, decline food politely, or ask a patient a sensitive question. Students can compare interpretations, identify contextual variables, and practice clarification. This approach treats culture as dynamic and internally diverse, consistent with intercultural language education (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Nonverbal communication provides a concrete point for comparison. When a student mimes a symptom or uses a gesture in a simulated encounter, the group can discuss whether its meaning is shared and how to ask for clarification respectfully. The aim is to notice possible differences without assigning one fixed meaning to an entire culture.

5.7 Connect assessment with real communicative goals

Assessment should sample what the course claims to teach. If the goal is practical communication, grades should not depend only on written grammar tests. Short performance tasks can assess whether students can understand a simple message, obtain information, respond appropriately, and repair a misunderstanding. Analytic criteria may include task completion, comprehensibility, relevant vocabulary, interaction, and selected accuracy features. Rubrics should be shared before the task and illustrated with examples.

Formative assessment is especially valuable in mixed-proficiency groups. Exit tickets, two-minute audio recordings, script-reading checks, vocabulary retrieval, and brief self-assessment help the teacher identify what needs recycling. Black and Wiliam (2009) emphasize that formative assessment is effective when evidence of learning changes subsequent teaching. A short check is therefore useful only if its results influence grouping, explanation, practice, or feedback in the next lesson.

6. A Practical Lesson Sequence

The following sequence is a proposed example of how the strategies could be combined in a university Georgian lesson; it is not presented as a documented intervention with measured outcomes. The communicative objective is to ask for and understand directions on campus. The language focus includes place names, location expressions, polite attention-getters, and a request for repetition. The sequence can be adapted to other topics, including the medical role-plays discussed above.

Stage	Teacher action	Student action	Purpose
1. Notice	Shows a simple campus map and models two short dialogues.	Identify known words and infer the goal.	Connect new language with a visible context.
2. Prepare	Teaches key expressions and highlights script-sound links.	Read, listen, mark stress, and retrieve key phrases.	Reduce processing demands before interaction.
3. Rehearse	Provides a dialogue frame and assigns alternating roles.	Practice in pairs, then change one destination.	Build confidence while introducing choice.
4. Perform	Distributes maps with different missing information.	Ask, listen, clarify, and complete the route.	Create a genuine information gap.
5. Reflect	Elicits useful repair phrases and gives focused feedback.	Repeat the task with less support and self-assess.	Convert feedback into immediate improvement.

The sequence moves from comprehension to supported production and then to flexible use. It also separates feedback from the first attempt so that correction does not interrupt every exchange. The second performance is essential: without it, students receive advice but have no immediate opportunity to apply it.

7. Discussion

The challenges of teaching Georgian in a multinational classroom are interconnected. Script difficulty can slow vocabulary learning; slow retrieval can increase anxiety; anxiety can reduce participation; reduced participation can limit the authentic practice needed for automaticity. An effective response therefore cannot consist of one method. It requires alignment among sequencing, interaction, feedback, cultural content, and assessment.

Three principles emerge from the analysis. First, instruction should be accessible without becoming intellectually or linguistically shallow. Visuals, models, and sentence frames are temporary routes into demanding performance. Second, multilingual resources should support rather than replace Georgian use. Learners' other languages help them notice, compare, plan, and mediate, while the task outcome requires Georgian. Third, communicative confidence is partly environmental. Lessons may make speaking less intimidating when they provide preparation, predictable roles, respectful repair, and more than one opportunity to perform.

The teacher's role is consequently broader than explaining forms. The teacher designs participation, selects culturally meaningful situations, monitors who is heard, distinguishes productive struggle from avoidable confusion, and adjusts the degree of support. This work is particularly important in a university where students need Georgian for both belonging and professional preparation. For medical students, elementary language competence cannot replace qualified interpretation in high-stakes clinical communication. Nevertheless, respectful greetings, basic history-taking language, simple instructions, and awareness of Georgian communicative norms can strengthen rapport and motivate further learning.

The practitioner perspective has limitations. It cannot establish how frequently a difficulty occurs or prove that one strategy causes better outcomes. The analysis may also reflect the expectations of one institutional context and one teacher. Its value lies in generating transparent, theoretically informed proposals that can be examined empirically. Future studies could compare scaffolded and unscaffolded task performance, investigate students' experiences of script learning, analyze patterns of participation across language groups, or explore how elementary Georgian influences international students' sense of belonging and clinical confidence.

8. Conclusion

Teaching Georgian to a multinational university class is both a linguistic and an intercultural task. Learners must approach a new script and unfamiliar structures while adapting to a new academic and social environment. Their differences in language background, proficiency, confidence, and educational experience make uniform instruction ineffective. However, the same diversity also creates opportunities for comparison, peer explanation, intercultural reflection, and collaborative learning.

A practical approach combines explicit teaching with meaningful use. Script instruction should be distributed and linked to high-frequency language; grammar should be selected according to communicative function; speaking should progress from preparation to flexible performance; and assessment should reflect authentic goals. Visual scaffolding, multilingual mediation, rotating roles, delayed correction, and repeated tasks are intended to support participation before complete accuracy is possible. When these supports are deliberately reduced, learners have an opportunity to practise more independently.

The central pedagogical responsibility is to create conditions in which students can risk using Georgian and recognize that their effort has an immediate purpose. Such teaching does not lower standards. It is intended to give learners a realistic pathway toward them. In an international university, Georgian language learning may support language competence, professional preparation, intercultural understanding, and participation in the community.

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