

Adapting English Sports Terminology into Georgian: Mechanisms of Transliteration, Translation, and Hybridisation

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Abstract

This article examines the systematic integration of English sports terminology into Georgian, investigating the phonological, morphological, and semantic mechanisms through which English loanwords are assimilated into a typologically distant language system. Drawing on data collected from Georgian sports media, televised broadcasts, and social media platforms across a twelve-month period (January – December 2024), the study classifies English-derived sports terms according to a four-category taxonomy: pure transliteration, full translation, hybrid localisation, and full localisation. Georgian, as the sole surviving member of the South Caucasian (Kartvelian) family, presents distinctive phonological challenges – an elaborate ejective consonant inventory and a constrained five-vowel system – that fundamentally govern loanword integration. Analysis of 57 sport names and over 80 associated technical terms reveals that hybrid localisation constitutes the dominant adaptive strategy (45%), followed by pure transliteration (30%) and full translation (25%); no instances of full localisation were identified in the present corpus. Qualitative examination further documents principled phonological correspondence rules – consonant substitution, epenthetic vowel insertion, and aspiration remapping – alongside notable semantic narrowing in specific borrowings. These findings situate Georgian sports lexicography within broader cross-linguistic patterns of globalisation-driven language change while attesting to the resilience of Georgian linguistic identity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lexical borrowing is one of the most pervasive and analytically revealing processes in sociolinguistics. When a speech community encounters new concepts through trade, conquest, technological change, or cultural prestige it typically imports vocabulary alongside them, reshaping foreign forms to fit the phonological and morphological architecture of the receiving language. In no domain is this process more accelerated or more conspicuous than professional sport, where the British and North American origins of most codified games have endowed English with an effectively global monopoly over technical vocabulary (Crystal, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2011). For languages with limited structural affinity to English, accommodating

sports terminology requires systematic, rule-governed reconfiguration at multiple levels of linguistic organization a complexity that renders such languages especially productive sites for loanword research.

Georgian presents a particularly instructive case. As the sole surviving member of the South Caucasian (Kartvelian) language family, it is typologically unrelated to any Indo-European language, employs the ancient Mkhedruli script, and is characterised by exceptionally dense consonant clusters, a three-way opposition among voiced, aspirated, and ejective obstruents, and a restricted five-vowel inventory (Aronson, 1990; Hewitt, 1995). Each of these features creates structural mismatches with English phonology that oblige borrowers to apply principled substitutions rather than direct phonemic transfers. Despite a growing body of scholarship on language contact and globalisation (Haugen, 1950; Matras, 2020; Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009), the adaptation of English sports terminology in Georgian has received little empirical attention, leaving a gap in the crosslinguistic literature on loanword phonology.

The present study addresses that gap. Guided by three interconnected research questions (1) What are the primary strategies through which English sports terms are integrated into Georgian? (2) What systematic phonological modifications characterise these adaptations? (3) How do the observed patterns reflect the interplay between globalisation pressure and the preservation of Georgian linguistic identity? the analysis draws on a corpus of 137 terms collected across multiple registers from January to December 2024. The findings contribute both to the descriptive documentation of Georgian as a borrowing recipient and to the broader theoretical literature on phonological adaptation in typologically distant language pairs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Language Borrowing: Theoretical Frameworks

Haugen's (1950) foundational taxonomy remains the point of departure for most contemporary work on lexical borrowing. His tripartite distinction among loanwords (wholesale phonological importation with no morphemic substitution), loanblends (partial morphemic substitution preserving some source-language material), and loanshifts (complete semantic replication through native morphemes) provides the descriptive scaffolding upon which more refined analyses are built. Crucially, Haugen observed that borrowing is most likely to occur when the recipient language contains a lexical gap a condition routinely satisfied in sport, where foreign games arrive pre-packaged with English labels for every position, manoeuvre, and rule infraction.

Later theorists refined Haugen's model by foregrounding the agency of recipient-language speakers. Thomason (2001) and Matras (2020) both emphasise that borrowing communities do not passively absorb foreign forms but actively reshape them in conformity with native structural norms. This perspective reframes loanword adaptation as a productive linguistic process comparable to derivational morphology rather than a failure of native vocabulary. Haspelmath and Tadmor's (2009) cross-linguistic survey of loanwords across 41 languages provided large-scale empirical support for this view, confirming that sport and recreation constitute one of the borrowing domains most susceptible to English influence, particularly in societies where English-language media command high prestige.

2.2 English as a Global Lingua Franca in Sport

The global diffusion of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has restructured borrowing dynamics in virtually every domain of public life (Seidlhofer, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). In sport, English hegemony is deeply rooted in the British and North American origins of codified football, rugby, basketball, and tennis, all of which spread internationally together with their terminological apparatus (Furiassi, Pulcini, & Rodríguez González, 2012). Nartey's (2016) analysis of Ghanaian sports commentary demonstrated that prolonged exposure to English-language broadcasting correlates with higher rates of transliteration over translation, as source-language forms acquire auditory familiarity even among non-Anglophone audiences. Franks and Saeed (2023) extended this argument to the digital environment, showing that social media and streaming platforms have dramatically accelerated the international circulation of English sports vocabulary, intensifying the adaptive pressures on recipient languages.

2.3 Georgian Phonology and Language Policy

Georgian's consonant system is typologically unusual in featuring a three-way distinction among voiced, aspirated, and ejective obstruents stops such as /pʰ/, /tʰ/, and /kʰ/ for which English has no functional equivalents (Aronson, 1990; Hewitt, 1995). Its vowel inventory, by contrast, comprises only five phonemes (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/) with no contrastive vowel length, creating a sharp asymmetry between rich consonantism and restricted vocalism that governs systematic modifications whenever English material enters the language. This structural profile produces a highly predictable set of loanword correspondences precisely the kind of rule-governed adaptation this study sets out to document.

Georgian language policy adds a further dimension. Amirejibi-Mullen (2012) demonstrated that Georgian has historically been treated as a pillar of national identity, generating a cultural predisposition toward indigenous coinages and semantic calques particularly in domains perceived as culturally central. Klegr and Bozdechová (2019) documented comparable dynamics in Czech, where English sports loanterms coexist with native equivalents in stylistic synonymy routinely exploited by journalists and commentators. As Section 4.3 below demonstrates, Georgian exhibits an analogous doublet pattern for a number of high-frequency sports terms.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods design combining quantitative corpus classification with qualitative phonological description (Winford, 2003). Data collection proceeded across three source types from January to December 2024, with stratified purposive sampling applied to each channel to ensure representation across sport types, text genres, and temporal distribution throughout the twelve-month window.

The primary written corpus was drawn from three Georgian online sports media outlets Sportall.ge, Crystalsport.ge, and Lagazzetta.ge from which a total of approximately 150 articles were systematically extracted (roughly 50 per outlet). Articles were selected to span match reports, analytical commentary, and news items across football, basketball, rugby, tennis, athletics, wrestling, and winter sports, ensuring that the sample reflected the full range of English-derived vocabulary in active journalistic use. Oral data were supplied by approximately 30 televised commentary sessions drawn from UEFA Champions League, NBA, and 2024 Paris Olympics broadcasts in Georgian, chosen so as to represent both established international competitions and the novel terminological demands posed by the

Olympic programme. A convenience sample of approximately 200 publicly accessible Facebook and Instagram posts in Georgian dedicated to sports fandom constituted a semi-formal digital register. All usernames were anonymised in accordance with applicable research-ethics guidelines for publicly accessible social media data.

Identified terms were classified using a four-category taxonomy derived from Haugen (1950) and refined in light of the Georgian data: (a) pure transliteration phonemic conversion into Mkhedruli with minimal semantic modification; (b) full translation replacement by a Georgian conceptual equivalent through calquing or independent coinage; (c) hybrid localization partial transliteration combined with native Georgian morphemes; and (d) full localization complete cultural indigenisation yielding a term with no phonological connection to the English source. Phonological analysis then documented the systematic correspondence rules governing each category of transliteration. The final corpus comprised 57 sport names and over 80 associated technical terms.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Distribution of Adaptation Strategies

Table 1 presents the distribution of adaptation strategies across the full corpus of 57 sport names. Hybrid localisation is the dominant pattern, accounting for 45% of items ($n = 26$), followed by pure transliteration (30%; $n = 17$) and full translation (25%; $n = 14$). No instances of full localization cultural indigenisation producing a term with no phonological connection to its English source were identified in the corpus ($n = 0$; 0%). This null finding is itself substantive: it indicates that even where Georgian cultural investment in a sport is high, speakers do not generate entirely novel labels disconnected from the English source form. The phonological distance between English and Georgian, though considerable, does not sever auditory recognition sufficiently to motivate complete lexical reinvention. The zero count for full localisation is accordingly reported in Table 1, and the discussion that follows addresses the three empirically attested strategies.

Table 1. Distribution of adaptation strategies (n = 57 sport names)

Strategy	Count (n)	Percentage	Example
Pure Transliteration	17	30%	rugby → რაგბი (ragbi)
Full Translation	14	25%	athletics → მძლეოსნობა (mzleosnoba)
Hybrid Localisation	26	45%	volleyball → ფრენბურთი (frenburti)
Full Localisation	0	0%	— (no instances identified)

This distribution is consistent with findings for Czech (Klegr & Bozdechová, 2019) and Ghanaian English contexts (Nartey, 2016), suggesting that hybrid strategies which preserve

phonetic recognisability while conforming to native morphological norms represent a cross-linguistically favoured solution for languages under sustained English media influence. The virtual absence of full localisation across the corpus confirms Matras's (2020) observation that deep structural accommodation, rather than wholesale lexical replacement, is the modal outcome of English influence in the contemporary media environment.

4.2 Transliteration: The Dominant Strategy for Technical Terminology

While hybridisation prevails for sport names, transliteration dominates for the specialised, rules-related, and position-specific vocabulary that constitutes the technical sublexicon of each sport. English source terms undergo phoneme-by-phoneme conversion into Mkhedruli following systematic correspondence rules (detailed in Section 4.5), producing forms that approximate English pronunciation while conforming to Georgian phonotactics. Table 2 documents an expanded set of transliterated technical terms across four major sports.

Table 2. Transliterated technical terms by sport

Sport	English Term	Georgian Form	Romanisation
Football	penalty	პენალტი	penalt'i
Football	offside	ოფსაიდი	op ^h saidi
Football	free kick	ფრიკიკი	p ^h rik'ik'i
Football	hat-trick	ჰეთ-ტრიკი	het-t'rik'i
Football	goalkeeper	გოლკიპერი	golk'iperi
Football	midfielder	მიდფილდერი	midphilderi
Football	striker	სტრაიკერი	st'raikeri
Football	header	ჰედერი	hederi
Basketball	slam dunk	სლემდანკი	slemdank'i
Basketball	playoff	პლეიოფი	pleiop ^h i
Basketball	rebound	რიბაუნდი	ribaundi
Basketball	fast break	ფასტ-ბრეიკი	p ^h ast-breik'i
Rugby	scrum	სკრამი	sk'rami

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Rugby	try	თრაი	traï
Rugby	lineout	ლაინაუტი	lainauti
Rugby	tackle	თეკლი	t'ekli
Tennis	serve	სერვი	servi
Tennis	ace	ეისი	eisi
Tennis	backhand	ბექჰენდი	bek'hendi
Tennis	forehand	ფორჰენდი	p ^h orhendi
Tennis	deuce	დიუსი	diusi

The widespread adoption of these forms across formal journalism and informal social media indicates that they have achieved the status of established loanwords no longer perceived as foreign intrusions but as naturalised elements of Georgian sports discourse. This trajectory exemplifies Haugen's (1950) account of successful lexical integration: terms borrowed to fill genuine lexical gaps undergo regular phonological adaptation and stabilise through habitual use across multiple registers. Franks and Saeed (2023) observe that digital media accelerates this stabilisation by multiplying encounters with transliterated forms across platforms simultaneously, effectively compressing the conventionalisation process that historically required decades into a matter of years.

4.3 Translation and Lexical Resistance

Where established Georgian equivalents exist, full translation prevails, reflecting what Thomason (2001) terms lexical resistance a community preference for native forms in culturally salient domains. Table 3 documents the most productive translated and localised terms in the corpus.

Table 3. Translated and localised terms

English	Georgian	Romanisation	Notes
victory	გამარჯვება	gamapjveba	Native root
training (sport)	ვარჯიში	varjishi	Athletic sense retained

athletics	მძლეოსნობა	Mzleosnoba	Indigenous derivation
wrestling (trad.)	ქართული ჭიდაობა	Kartuli Chidaoba	Fully indigenous
corner kick	კუთხური	kutkhuri	Calque (corner)
free throw	თავისუფალი სროლა	tavisupali srola	Calque
championship	ჩემპიონატი	chempionati	Partial loanblend
referee	მსაჯი	msaji	Indigenous term
coach	მწვრთნელი	mts'vrthneli	Native; kouchi also circulates
match	მატი / შეხვედრა	matchi / shekhvedra	Doublet: loanword + native

The case of "coach" is particularly instructive. The transliterated form კოუჩი (kouchi) circulates alongside the indigenous მწვრთნელი (mts'vrthneli) in contemporary Georgian sports discourse, forming a stylistic doublet whose register distribution mirrors the pattern Klegr and Bozdechová (2019) describe for Czech: formal journalism and official federation documents consistently prefer the native form, while fan commentary and social media favour the loanword. This register-stratified synonymy constitutes strong evidence that lexical resistance and transliteration are not mutually exclusive but coexist in a socially patterned division of labour.

Traditional Georgian wrestling retains its wholly indigenous designation ქართული ჭიდაობა across all registers an unmistakable instance of the cultural-salience-driven lexical resistance Amirejibi-Mullen (2012) associates with Georgian language policy. The contrast between this designation and the straightforwardly transliterated rugby → რაგბი reveals that Georgian borrowers calibrate their adaptive strategies against the perceived cultural proximity of each sport: genuinely foreign activities are assimilated phonologically, while activities bearing national symbolic weight are insulated from English encroachment.

4.4 Hybrid Localisation

Hybrid localisation, the largest single category, combines transliterated elements with native Georgian morphemes to produce terms that are simultaneously globally recognisable and morphologically integrated. The most productive hybridisation mechanism in the corpus is the systematic substitution of the Georgian root -ბურთი (burti, "ball") for the English word ball and its cognates in sport names:

volleyball → ფრენბურთი (fren-burti; ფრენ- from the verb "to fly" + ბურთი "ball")

tennis → ჩოგბურთი (chog-burti; ჩოგ-, a traditional Georgian racket-play root, + ბურთი)

football → ფეხბურთი (pekh-burti; ფეხ- "foot" + ბურთი)

handball → ხელბურთი (khel-burti; ხელ- "hand" + ბურთი)

basketball → კალათბურთი (kalath-burti; კალათ- "basket" + ბურთი) [formal register]

American football → ამერიკული ფეხბურთი (Amerikuli pekhburti; transliterated adjective + native compound)

These forms embody what Matras (2020) terms morphological nativisation: borrowed material is re-analysed as conforming to recipient-language structural rules, such that the resulting forms are opaque to English speakers yet fully transparent to Georgian ones. The -ბურთი pattern is demonstrably productive: it continues to generate coinages for emerging sports including informal eSports compound terms demonstrating that hybridisation is not a historical residue but an active, generative adaptive mechanism in contemporary Georgian.

4.5 Systematic Phonological Adaptations

Transliterated forms in the corpus undergo a set of principled phonological modifications that reflect rule-governed correspondences between the English and Georgian phonemic inventories, summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Systematic phoneme correspondences in transliteration

English phoneme	Georgian realisation	Example	Motivation
/f/ (labiodental fr.)	ფ [p ^h]	free kick → ფრიქიკი	Nearest approximant
/v/ (labiodental fr.)	ვ [v]	volleyball → ვ- (partial)	Close match
/t/ (plain plosive)	თ [t ^h] aspirated	team → თიმი	Three-way plosive remapping
/k/ (plain plosive)	კ [kʰ] ejective	kick → კიკი	Ejective default for /k/
/p/ (plain plosive)	პ [pʰ] ejective	penalty → პენალტი	Ejective default for /p/

/θ/ (dental fric.)	თ [tʰ]	throw → სროლა (transl.)	Fricative → aspirate
/oʊ/ (diphthong)	ო /o/	goal → გოლი	Vowel simplification
/æ/ (front vowel)	ა /a/	match → მატჩი	Nearest vowel
Final consonant /C/	C + ი [-i]	dribbling → დრიბლინგი	Word-final vowel repair

The most pervasive single adaptation is epenthetic /-i/ insertion at word-final position. Applied systematically to all English words terminating in a consonant, this repair strategy satisfies Georgian's strong typological preference for vowel-final word forms (Aronson, 1990) a preference so deeply entrenched that its violation would render a loanword phonotactically ill-formed. The three-way plosive remapping is equally systematic: the English voiced/voiceless binary is projected onto Georgian's voiced/aspirated/ejective tripartition, with /p/ and /k/ defaulting to ejective realisations (ჰ, კ) and /t/ typically mapping to the aspirated counterpart (თ), though variation across commentators and media outlets is attested.

Georgian's absence of /f/ replaced throughout by aspirated [pʰ] is the most immediately audible divergence from English source pronunciation and marks transliterated sports terms as distinctively Georgian even to untrained ears. This correspondence is categorical in the corpus: no attestation of /f/ preservation was found in any source type, confirming that the substitution has been fully conventionalised rather than remaining in free variation with more target-like forms.

4.6 Semantic Shift: The Case of ტრენინგი

An illuminating instance of semantic narrowing arises with the English term training. In English, the word spans athletic conditioning, skills practice, military drill, and professional development indifferently. When borrowed into Georgian as ტრენინგი (treningi), the form has undergone semantic specialisation: contemporary usage associates it predominantly with professional or educational workshop sessions a sense familiar from corporate and NGO contexts rather than with athletic preparation. The latter concept is now expressed exclusively by the indigenous ვარჯიში (varjishi), whose established position in the sports lexicon created functional pressure on the incoming form to occupy a distinct semantic niche rather than compete as a synonym. The Georgian case is notable in that the divergence has been total ტრენინგი and ვარჯიში no longer share any semantic ground in standard journalistic usage suggesting that the differentiation process was rapid once the loanword gained a foothold in the professional development domain.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has documented the systematic integration of English sports terminology into Georgian across a corpus of 57 sport names and over 80 technical terms drawn from online sports media, televised commentary, and social media discourse during 2024. The findings

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establish three empirically attested adaptive strategies: hybrid localisation (45%), pure transliteration (30%), and full translation (25%). Full localisation yielded no instances in the corpus, a null result that is theoretically significant in suggesting that phonological distance alone does not motivate the complete reinvention of borrowed terminology so long as auditory recognition of the source form remains viable.

Phonological analysis identified a structured set of correspondence rules aspirated substitution for English /f/, epenthetic /-i/ as word-final repair, and ejective defaults for /p/ and /k/ demonstrating that loanword integration in Georgian is principled and systematic rather than ad hoc or speaker-variable. The semantic shift affecting ტრენინგი illustrates that borrowing reshapes meaning as well as form, driven by competition with pre-established native vocabulary.

Taken together, these findings confirm that Georgian sports lexicography follows globalisation-driven borrowing patterns documented cross-linguistically (Nartey, 2016; Franks & Saeed, 2023; Klegr & Bozdechová, 2019) while exhibiting language-specific features shaped by Georgian phonology and a robust tradition of linguistic identity politics (Amirejibi-Mullen, 2012; Matras, 2020). The persistence of indigenous coinages for culturally central sports traditional wrestling and athletics demonstrates that Georgian speakers exercise deliberate, context-sensitive borrowing choices, resisting English influence precisely where national cultural investment is highest.

Three directions remain for future research: diachronic tracking of how individual loanterms evolve following initial adoption; experimental sociolinguistic investigation of speaker attitudes toward transliterated versus translated sports terms across age, education, and regional variables; and cross-typological comparison with other Kartvelian or non-Indo-European languages facing analogous pressures from English sports vocabulary. As digital platforms continue to accelerate the international circulation of English sports terminology, the Georgian case offers a valuable and underexplored vantage point for monitoring the long-term dynamics of globalisation-driven language change.

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Declaration of Artificial Intelligence Assistance

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI, GPT-4o) for two specific tasks: (1) formatting and cross-checking the reference list for APA 7 compliance, and (2) improving the readability of selected passages in the Introduction and Conclusion.