

LANGUAGE POLICY AND LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN UZBEKISTAN ON THE
EVE OF INDEPENDENCE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the language policy pursued in Uzbekistan on the eve of independence and the current linguistic situation. It highlights the legal status of the state language at the last stage of the former Soviet period, its functional role in the life of society, and the specific aspects of the language environment formed under the influence of socio-political factors. Also, the process of recognizing the Uzbek language as the state language, the interdependence of language and national identity issues, and the relationship between linguistic consciousness and social activity are analyzed on a scientific basis.

Keywords

language policy, linguistic situation, state language, national identity, socio-political process, legal status of language, language and society, linguistic consciousness, functional bilingualism.

By the end of the 20th century, fundamental changes in the socio-political life of Uzbekistan left a deep mark on the country's language policy and linguistic landscape. The eve of independence was a difficult period when the Soviet government began to collapse, ideological pressure weakened, and the processes of national self-awareness intensified, and it was precisely these conditions that made language issues one of the most pressing topics in the life of society. During this period, language was reinterpreted not only as a means of communication, but also as a social institution expressing national identity and reflecting the content of political changes.

Although the dominant position of the Russian language in the republic was maintained in the last decade of Soviet power, the social functions of local languages began to expand, and the need to revise the status of the language in public administration, education, the press, and cultural life increased. The Law "On the State Language" adopted in 1989, legally strengthened the state status of the Uzbek language and brought the language policy of the republic to a new level. As a result, issues such as multilingualism, bilingualism, the linguistic status of local ethnic groups, the role of the Russian language, as well as the functional capabilities of the Uzbek language in the official and social spheres have intensified.

On the eve of independence, the language policy and the linguistic situation in Uzbekistan were complex and multifaceted, and in the last years of Soviet power, official language policy continued under the influence of the ideology of the Soviet government. Although the Uzbek language exists in official documents, in many areas, in particular in science, technology, administration, and the higher education system, the Russian language occupied a dominant position¹. In studies, there is information confirming the high social status of the Russian language. For example, public libraries were dominated mainly by literature in the

¹ Асатова Г.Р. Языковая политика в Узбекистане в XX веке: суть, последствия и уроки: Дисс. ...канд. ист. наук. – Ташкент, 2004. – С. 129.



Russian language. In the 1980s, approximately 80% of the library's collection consisted of books in the Russian language, while books in the Uzbek language constituted 18 – 16%².

The document “Main Directions of Reforming General Secondary and Vocational Schools” approved by the Central Committee of the Party and the Soviet government on April 10, 1984, specifically emphasized the need for a standard of fluency in the Russian language for young people graduating from secondary school³. In our opinion, the establishment within the framework of the 1984 school reform of the requirement for high school graduates to be fluent in Russian is a logical continuation of the language policy and centralization strategy of the Soviet government of that period.

By the 1980s, the party leadership sought to strengthen the Russian language as a single means of international communication in order to strengthen “all-Union integration” between the republics. The dominant position of the Russian language in personnel training, higher education, military service, and public administration required the formation of a layer of specialists in remote republics who could work actively in Russian, subordinate to the center⁴.

The Central Committee of Uzbekistan introduced a formal approach to the study of Russian and the native language. On September 9, 1987, within the framework of ensuring the implementation of the resolution of the III Plenum, the Central Committee of the party approved a comprehensive program “Russian Language” which defined conceptual measures aimed at improving the study of the native language⁵. In our opinion, in this program for improving the teaching of the Russian language and native language, the main attention is paid to the Russian language, and the essence of this policy served to further strengthen the dominant position of the Russian language.

Studies have shown that during the Soviet era, the combined use of the Uzbek and Russian languages was widespread mainly in large cities, including Tashkent, Samarkand, Fergana, Bukhara, and Andijan. This situation was formed as a result of the complex combination of socio-political and cultural factors⁶. First of all, in most spheres of public administration and the education system, office work was conducted in Russian, which increased the social prestige of the Russian language. At the same time, the Russian language was perceived as the main means of ensuring professional growth, scientific progress, and social status. As a result, the active use of the Russian language in the cultural environment and administrative system of the city made bilingualism a natural phenomenon among the intelligentsia, teachers, engineers, and civil servants⁷. At the same time, in rural areas, this process was slower, and the local population continued to use the Uzbek language in everyday communication and activities.

Although local languages were preserved to some extent during this period, their social status was low. As a result, the difference between the official and cultural norms of the literary language and folk dialects deepened. At the same time, the desire to restore national identity through language has intensified, and the number of publications, books, and printed materials in the Uzbek language has increased. However, the priority of the Russian language in socio-political life remained a limiting factor in the process of formation of the Uzbek national identity.

² Арутюнян Ю.В., Дробижеева Л.М. Многообразие культурной жизни СССР. – М. 1987. – С.43 – 44.

³ “Советская культура”, 1984-йil 14-aprel.

⁴ Мустафаева Н. Русский язык в школах Советского Узбекистана (30-80-е гг. XX века) // Историческая этнология, 2021. Т. 6. – № 2. – Б. 205.

⁵ Правда Востока”, 1987-йil 12-sentabr.

⁶ Дятленко П. Языковые реформы в Центральной Азии: тренды – цели – итоги. – М., 2008. – С. 93.

⁷ Мустафаева Н. Русский язык в школах Советского Узбекистана (30-80-е гг. XX века) // Историческая этнология, 2021. Т. 6. - № 2. – Б. 199.



By the end of the 1980 – 1991, the English language was used in Uzbekistan, mainly within the framework of limited diplomatic, scientific, and international relations. The use of English in public, administrative, or political spheres was very limited, but it began to be studied in some universities, research centers, and international publications⁸. During this period, English gained its place among the scientific elite and specialists engaged in foreign relations, but did not become popular among broad social strata.

In 1980 – 1991, the Uzbek language was the official state language in Uzbekistan, while Russian was widely used in the political, scientific, and social spheres. During this period, the Russian language retained its leading position in government bodies, educational institutions, including schools and universities, as well as in the legislative process. The Russian language served as the main means of communication not only in large cities and central offices, but also in higher education, scientific journals, and professional fields. Local Kazakh, Tajik, and Karakalpak languages were mainly used in regional communication and local publications.

Among the urban population, the level of knowledge of the Russian language was high, and there was a significant difference between the urban and rural population. Surveys showed that in Tashkent and other central cities, the population actively uses the Russian language in professional and everyday communication. In rural areas, the Uzbek language prevailed, and the level of knowledge of the Russian language was relatively low.

According to data provided by S. Peyruz, the number of Russians in Uzbekistan and their share in the total population changed as follows: in 1959 - 1.1 million people (13.5%); In 1970 - 1.473 million (12.5%); In 1979 - 1.665 million (10.8%); In 1989 - 1.653 million (8.3%). In the post-independence period, their number significantly decreased: in 1999 – 2000 - about 900 thousand people (3%), and in 2007 - about 800 thousand people⁹. Based on these data, it can be said that between 1979 and 1989, more than 1.6 million ethnic Russians living in Uzbekistan naturally constituted the Russian-speaking segment. Moreover, considering the active use of the Russian language among local Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and other nationalities living in cities, it can be assumed that the number of Russian speakers was even higher.

It is gratifying that, according to the results of the last Soviet census of 1989, less than 5 percent of Russians in Uzbekistan know the Uzbek language. However, as a result of the mandatory teaching of the Uzbek language in schools, especially among young people, the level of language proficiency has increased significantly in recent years¹⁰.

On the eve of independence, the parallel use of Uzbek and Russian languages was clearly observed in the press sphere of Uzbekistan. According to research and internet sources, the number of newspapers and magazines operating in Uzbek and Russian languages in the country was almost equal. At the same time, each newspaper and magazine published at the republican level has Uzbek and Russian publications, which clearly demonstrates the bilingual functioning of the press. For example, the Russian version of the popular newspaper “Xalq so‘zi” was published in parallel with “Pravda Vostoka”. The newspaper “O‘zbekiston ovozi” was also published in Tashkent in Uzbek and Russian.

In addition, newspapers and magazines also operated in local languages. In particular, in some issues of the newspaper “Farg‘ona haqiqati” published in the Fergana region, information is also provided in Kazakh and Tajik. This made it possible to exchange information with

⁸ Zaripov R. Mustaqillik yillarida O‘zbekistonda til siyosati: bilingvizm va pluralingvizm: Filol. fan. bo‘yicha fals. d. ri. ...diss. avtoref. – Andijon, 2021. – B. 19.

⁹ С. Пейруз. “Русское меньшинство в Центральной Азии: миграция, политика и язык”, 2007. // [Каракалпаки, Таджики, Русские и другие группы в Узбекистане | Факты И Подробности](#)

¹⁰ С. Пейруз. “Русское меньшинство в Центральной Азии: миграция, политика и язык”, 2007. // [Каракалпаки, Таджики, Русские и другие группы в Узбекистане | Факты И Подробности](#)



regional cultures and different ethnic groups. Thus, on the eve of independence, the press of Uzbekistan operated not only in national and official languages, but also in local ethnic languages, covering various segments of society.

During this period, special attention was paid to local languages in the education system. In particular, schools teaching in local languages also operated in the regions. For example, in the territory of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, education was conducted in the Karakalpak language in primary and secondary schools, as well as in partial boarding schools. In the Fergana region, classes were conducted in the Kazakh language through Kazakh national schools and local joint schools. In the Syrdarya and Jizzakh regions, education in some primary grades was conducted in the Tajik language, while in the Surkhandarya region, the educational process in local ethnic schools in primary and secondary grades was organized using Turkic languages (mainly on a Tajik and Arabic basis).

The adoption of the Law “On the State Language” in 1989 laid the foundation for significant changes in the press system. As a result of the legal consolidation of the status of the Uzbek language, the number of Uzbek newspapers and magazines increased, and their functional significance in socio-political, cultural, and scientific life began to expand. This process clearly reflected the transformations in the language policy of the republic, in particular, the trends aimed at strengthening the position of the Uzbek language in the mass media.

On the eve of independence, the situation of the local Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik languages in Uzbekistan was as follows: these languages did not have official status, that is, they were not used in state affairs or documents at the republican level. They were mainly used in everyday communication by ethnic groups living in local areas, remote districts, and villages. During the Soviet period, some schools had the opportunity to teach in local languages, but this was limited and often subjected to the dominance of the Uzbek language. In the activities of the press, publishing house, and theater, the main language was the Uzbek language, and there were very few publications in local languages.

Thus, on the eve of independence, the language policy and linguistic situation in Uzbekistan were complex and multifaceted. During this period, the Russian language occupied a dominant position in political, scientific, and social life and was used as a leading language in public administration, higher education, and the media. The Uzbek language was actively used in official, cultural, and everyday life, but its full social and political possibilities were limited. English was used in a limited circle, mainly in academic and international relations, while local dialects remained as a means of everyday communication, but had a low official status.

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