

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ASPECTS OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN UZBEKISTAN: HISTORY AND MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
The article examines the sociolinguistic aspect of the Russian language in Uzbekistan, covering its historical development, modern functioning, and influence on interethnic communication. Special attention is paid to its role in educational, scientific, and cultural spheres, as well as its status under the strengthening position of the Uzbek language. The processes of adaptation of the Russian language in a multilingual environment, its perception among various social groups, and prospects for further use are analyzed.	Sociolinguistics, Russian language, Uzbekistan, interethnic communication, cultural ties, education, language policy, historical development.

Introduction

The Russian language occupies a special place in the modern world. Being one of the most widespread languages, it plays a key role in international communication, as well as in scientific, technical, cultural, and business spheres.

In addition, Russian is among the six official languages of the UN, CSTO, EurAsEC, BRICS, and other international organizations, which emphasizes its significance at the global level.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev noted that Russian culture remains an integral part of the spiritual life of Uzbek society, and the development of cooperation in the field of education contributes to strengthening cultural ties, improving teachers' qualifications, and the overall growth of the level of education. This, in turn, positively affects workforce training and the socio-economic development of the country.

The history of the Russian language in Uzbekistan begins in 1850, when the Russian Empire actively explored Central Asia, which led to Russian becoming an important means of communication between ethnic groups, as well as a tool of administrative governance. Russian was consolidated as a means of administration, introduced into official documents and educational institutions, thanks to which many Uzbeks and representatives of other ethnic groups began to study it. This had a significant impact on interethnic relations and cultural exchange, making the language a kind of bridge between the peoples of the region.

The period of colonization strengthened the association of Russian with power, providing those who studied it with access to new information and social opportunities, while its penetration into everyday life laid the foundation for stable Russian-Uzbek bilingualism.

With the establishment of Soviet power in 1924, Russian took a central place in public life, becoming the main language of interethnic communication, science, education, and culture. As N.A. Mustafaeva notes, “the accelerated spread of the Russian language in the 1920s–1930s, caused by cultural-educational, economic, and socio-political transformations, was reflected in its predominant teaching in schools and universities” [1, pp. 194–207], despite the parallel development of Uzbek culture, which contributed to its dominance in politics and the economy.

Soviet policy of encouraging language study and active migration of the Russian population further strengthened its position as the language of interethnic communication and the main medium of instruction in educational institutions.

After gaining independence in 1991, despite new challenges related to building national identity, Russian continues to remain an important means of communication in a multinational society, although its status has undergone changes:

Law “On the State Language of the Republic of Uzbekistan” of October 21, 1989. Uzbek was declared the state language, while Russian was recognized as the language of interethnic communication. Law “On the State Language of the Republic of Uzbekistan” of December 21, 1995. Article 1 stated: “On the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the development and free use of the Russian language as the language of interethnic communication of the peoples of the USSR is ensured.”

In the current 2016 edition of the law, Russian no longer has the official status of a language of interethnic communication. However, its use is mentioned, for example, in Article 12, which stipulates that upon citizens’ request, a document certified by a notary or an official performing notarial actions must be issued in Russian. The law also allows citizens who do not know the state (Uzbek) language to apply to government and judicial authorities “in their native language or another language they know.” [3, p. 10]

Entering the era of independence, Uzbekistan began actively developing Uzbek as the state language, which was reflected in the country’s language policy and led to many schools and universities switching to Uzbek as the language of instruction, reducing the number of institutions operating in Russian.

Despite this, Russian continued to remain the language of interethnic communication and retains its importance in such spheres as education (about 1,000 out of 10,000 schools teach in Russian, i.e. 10%), business, and mass media. It remains in demand for access to global information and international dialogue. In national schools and universities, it is taught as a second foreign language, and proficiency remains relevant for youth, making Russian an important tool of cultural exchange and interethnic interaction.

Russian in Uzbekistan remains an important aspect of cultural identity and interethnic communication. Despite changes in the political and social context, its role continues to adapt to modern realities and remains in demand in various spheres of life.

As Yu.N. Tsyryapkina notes, “The Russian language has become self-reproducing, a ‘local’ product in Uzbekistan,” which emphasizes its inseparable connection with the culture and art of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, serving as a calling card of the country abroad [2, pp. 18–28].

In Uzbekistan, branches of prestigious universities such as the Russian Economic Academy named after G.V. Plekhanov, Mendeleev University of Chemical Technology, as well as branches of Moscow and other Russian higher educational institutions operate. The country has about 15 branches of Russian universities, covering fields from economics and humanities to engineering and technology. These educational standards not only provide access to quality Russian education for Uzbek students but also serve as an important tool of integration, strengthening cooperation between the educational systems of the two countries and contributing to the development of joint scientific and cultural projects.

In a multinational society such as Uzbekistan, issues of identity and the importance of actively supporting linguistic diversity arise due to the historical coexistence and interaction of many ethnic groups, each of which preserves its culture and language.

This diversity of languages—where, alongside Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, and others are actively used—creates a complex linguistic ecosystem that plays a key role in shaping collective identity. Supporting and developing all components of the linguistic palette is necessary to strengthen intercultural dialogue, ensure equal access to educational and socio-economic resources, and preserve cultural heritage in the context of globalization and competition from dominant languages.

For Uzbekistan, it is extremely important to develop the state Uzbek language, as well as to support and develop other languages, including foreign ones. Such a comprehensive approach expands access to global information, stimulates international communication and intercultural dialogue, and strengthens national identity and social unity.

This, in turn, contributes to mutual understanding among representatives of different ethnic groups and becomes the foundation for stable economic growth and development of the country.

References

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