

Language Policy in Uzbekistan

The adoption of Uzbek language and the Latin alphabet

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the language policy and its current place in Uzbek society, focusing on the legal basis that the Uzbek government has created for the mother tongue. The adoption of the Uzbek language as the state language 34 years ago was a prelude to the country's independence, setting the stage for the emergence of a new generation proficient in their mother tongue while helping clean and enrich the language's vocabulary.

The scope of the use of this state language remains limited since many prestigious offices still keep documents in Russian, and signs, advertisements, letterheads, receipts, menus, and many other items have yet to be Uzbekized. Another problem is the decline of written literacy in Uzbek among young people, which is associated with the "phased introduction" of the Latin alphabet that led to the circulation of two competing scripts (i.e., Latin and Cyrillic alphabets).

Furthermore, the programs of teaching mother tongue and Uzbek language subjects in primary and secondary schools need serious reform since the state language literacy is low for both Uzbek school graduates and those graduating from Russian-speaking schools. The language literacy of ambassadors and other government personnel must also meet the requirements. More recently, educational reforms are widely taking place across Uzbekistan, including the expansion of foreign language teaching—on top of

the state language training—as a way of integrating into the world community.

The authors put forward proposals and recommendations to tackle these challenges: The oral and written literacy of graduates from secondary schools needs to be improved; to this end, reforms are needed in the assessment and testing system, and new types of tests should be adopted in higher education institutions.

A targeted, unified approach based on international standards is required for foreign language teaching. At the same time, a precise evaluation system should be put into place to determine the professional competence of teachers. While ensuring the effectiveness of foreign language training courses and their coherence with the educational process, Uzbek language training should also continue in higher education.

KEYWORDS: Uzbek language, writing, Cyrillic alphabet, Latin alphabet, official style, service correspondence

Rezyume: Ushbu maqolada O‘zbekistonda til siyosati va uning hozirgi kunda ijtimoiy hayotdagi o‘rni haqida so‘z yuritiladi, O‘zbekiston hukumati tomonidan davlat tili uchun yaratilgan huquqiy asoslarga e‘tibor qaratiladi. Bundan 34 yil muqaddam o‘zbek tilining davlat tili sifatida e‘lon qilinishi mamlakat mustaqilligining debochasi bo‘lib, o‘z ona tilini mukammal biladigan yangi avlodning yetishib chiqishiga zamin yaratdi va o‘zbek tili lug‘at tarkibining tozalanishi va boyishiga xizmat qildi. Shunga qaramasdan davlat tilining keng joriy qilinishi bilan bog‘liq muammolar yo‘q emas. Ko‘pgina nufuzli idoralarda hujjatchilik rus tilida yuritilayotgani, lavhalar, e‘lonlar, blankalar, taomnomalar va boshqa shu xil yozuvlarning hanuz to‘liq o‘zbekchallashtirilmagani davlat tilidan foydalanish doirasi hali talablar darajasida qamrab olinmaganidan dalolatdir. Yana bir muammo – yoshlar o‘rtasida o‘zbek tilida yozma savodxonlikning pasayganligidir, bu lotin alifbosining bosqichma-bosqich joriy etilishi bilan bog‘liq bo‘lib, natijada amalda ikkita raqobatdosh yozuv (ya‘ni lotin va kirill alifbolari) qo‘llanmoqda.

Qolaversa, o‘rta maktablarda ona tili va o‘zbek tili (rusiyzabonlarga) fanlarini o‘qitish dasturlari jiddiy islohotga muhtoj, chunki o‘zbek maktablari bitiruvchilarining ham, rusiyzabon maktablarni tamomlaganlarning ham davlat tilini bilish darajasi past. Elchilar va boshqa davlat idoralari xodimlarining til savodxonligi ham talablarga javob berishi zarurligi hozirgi kunning dolzarb muammolaridandir. Keyingi yillarda O‘zbekistonda ta‘lim sohasida keng

koʻlamli islohotlar amalga oshirilmoqda, jumladan, jahon hamjamiyatiga integratsiyalashuv yoʻli sifatida davlat tili taʼlimi bilan bir qatorda chet tillarini oʻqitishga ham katta ahamiyat berilmoqda.

Maqolada mualliflar mavjud muammolarni hal etish boʻyicha qator taklif va tavsiyalarni ilgari surdilar, jumladan, umumtaʼlim maktablari bitiruvchilarining ogʻzaki va yozma savodxonligini oshirish, shu yoʻlda baholash va test tizimida islohotlar oʻtkazish, oliy taʼlim muassasalarida test sinovlarining yangi turlarini joriy etish zarur deb biladilar.

Mualliflar fikricha, chet tillarini oʻqitish maqsadli, xalqaro standartlarga asoslangan yagona yondashuvni, xususan, oʻqituvchilarning kasbiy malakasini belgilashning aniq baholash tizimini joriy etishni taqozo etadi. Xorijiy tillarni tayyorlash kurslarining samaradorligi va oʻquv jarayoni bilan uzviylikini taʼminlash bilan birga, oliy oʻquv yurtlarida ham oʻzbek tilini oʻqitishni davom ettirish kerak.

Kalit soʻzlar: oʻzbek tili, yozuv, kirill alifbosi, lotin alifbosi, rasmiy uslub, xizmat yozishmalari, davlat tili

1. Introduction

A country without a language is a country without a soul.

When language disappears, culture also disappears, because it is language that spreads culture. The cultural identity of each nation is reflected in its language. “National language clearly indicates the national character of a country. If you want to penetrate and understand a society profoundly, you must know how to speak and write their language” (Linda Mandarin, 2022). Therefore, concern for the state of the language, its preservation, development and transmission from generation to generation is an indicator of the level of awareness of the identity of each people. A language gains in status with its speakers and gains strategic importance internationally if the culture in which it is embedded is perceived to be active in fields related to communication, knowledge dissemination, social integration, education and development.

At the same time, it is no secret that globalization threatens the survival of languages. Unfortunately, with the loss of a language, the diversity of the

world's cultural treasure is also damaged. In this way, the traditions, literature, national art, cultural heritage, national thinking - all priceless values will be forgotten without a trace.

As a result, the uniqueness of societies is possible due to the diversity of national mentality. If the language lives, the nation lives. Because language is a symbol of state power and influence.

The decision of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, on the appropriate celebration of the 30th anniversary of the law “On the State Language” (October 21, 1989) emphasizes that the “Uzbek language, one of the ancient and richest languages of the world, is a symbol of national identity and state independence, a huge spiritual value for our people” (PQ-5850, 2019). Great value is thus placed on the extremely important role played by language in the social, spiritual and educational development of the country. It should be recognized that our government has created a strong legal basis for our mother tongue and that it has a high status.

2. Theory

If we look at the past more than 30 years after our language was declared a state language, we can be proud of the achievements made during this period. In particular, the document states that “... the Uzbek language is actively used in all aspects of our life - state and community management, interstate relations, science, education, medicine, culture, and art, and is heard from international platforms” (PQ-5850, 2019).

It should be noted that before independence was won, the first step towards independence was the adoption of the Uzbek language as the state language after a national debate—this was a great event, a great victory, a prelude to independence. Our language, which had lost its official status and had fallen to the level of a “household” means of communication, has blossomed to become the primary language used by Uzbeks in their daily life. In the early years of independence, the efforts of Uzbek intellectuals in writing language policy for all spheres of society should be acknowledged. This movement covered all fronts, The Terminology Committee started working under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, special courses were organized in enterprises and institutions for employees who did

not know the state language, the translation of Russian-language literature of various fields into Uzbek became intense, and the campaign to instill respect for the mother tongue intensified.

As a result, a new generation has emerged which can confidently speak their mother tongue, free from language discrimination and restrictions. The vocabulary of the Uzbek language will be cleaned, words which had fallen into disuse will be revived, and at the same time the language will be enriched with new words. The Uzbek language, which has shown its beauty, wealth, and inexhaustible possibilities of expression in the works of great wordsmiths such as Alisher Navoi, Babur, Mashrab, Cholpon, Abdulla Qadiri, Abdulla Qahhor, has begun to show its potential as a language of science and official communication. It has proved that it is able to satisfy all the linguistic requirements of scientific observation, official communication, economics, law, medicine, science and technology, legal language, and is not limited to demonstrating the power of artistic language.

Along with the great victories achieved in the field of language, however, there are also a number of problems related to the knowledge and use of the state language.

It is not for nothing that the “Atlas of World Languages in Danger of Disappearance” (Wurm, 2001) was created on the basis of the UNESCO project. The aim of this project is to attract the attention of government representatives, language communities and the general public to this problem; the atlas is, so to speak, a kind of warning about the danger of the world losing its linguistic diversity. The project mentions important factors for the preservation of the language, among which the most important factor is the transmission of the language from generation to generation, ensuring succession. Based on this, languages are given different statuses: safe, vulnerable, endangered, critically vulnerable, critically vulnerable and dead.

What is the point that needs serious attention here?

As one of the signs that the language is in danger of disappearing, the project states that “the language is spoken by many people, especially the younger generation, but the level of its use is limited to certain areas.” If we approach the problem from this point of view, there is reason to worry and worry about the state of our language today.

In general, the statuses of state language and official language are sometimes used interchangeably, meaning that the fact that a language is the state language gives it official status.

In order to clarify these concepts, the terms state language and official language were defined by UNESCO in 1953 (Rosi, 2008). Of course, this definition is of a recommendatory nature, and it is not necessary to apply it exactly to all countries. According to him, a state language is a symbol of the state that unites political, social and cultural spheres within a specific state, and is, first of all, the language of the constitution. The official language is the language of state administration, legislation and court proceedings.

World experience shows that the status of a state language does not always mean that the language is widely used in official proceedings. There are cases where one language is given the status of a state language and another language is used as an official language.

The status of the state language is more prestigious than the status of an official language, because it is used not only in official communication, but also in the field of culture and art. At the moment, one of the above-mentioned “dangers” – the use of the language only in certain domains, for example, in domestic life, informal communication, literature and art - indicates that it may gradually disappear. A completely risk-free language can equally claim the status of state and officialdom.

If we analyze the scope of the use of our state language based on these criteria, is the Uzbek language in a stable position in all fields as an official language? Is our language, which has received the status of a state language, really used in international documents at the level of its status? Are we fully using the opportunities given to our language by the law on the state language?

Unfortunately, we cannot answer “yes” to these questions with full confidence. In many prestigious offices, documents are still kept in Russian, signs on the streets, announcements and advertisements are not in the state language, and company and institution letterheads, receipts in stores, tickets, menus, etc. are not yet Uzbekized.

Recently, another problem - the decline of written literacy in Uzbek among young people who have graduated from high school and entered higher education institutions - is causing serious concern. This problem is often associated with the Latin alphabet.

After independence, the issue of the alphabet arose. “In order to avoid misinterpretations, it should be noted that every alphabet is sacred to the language for which it was created: it is necessary to worry about improving, not replacing such an alphabet. But we had a different problem—the need to

choose a suitable one for our language from the alphabets created for other languages”, wrote professor Shavkat Rakhmatullaev (Rahmatullayev, 2002, p. 5).

Transitioning to the Latin alphabet symbolizes independence and was an important part of building a strong national identity.

“We chose the Latin alphabet. Many factors were taken into account. First of all, it showed that choosing the Latin alphabet would be correct to do business, thinking about the socio-political development of our society, especially the future. The Republic of Uzbekistan is entering the world stage. As we move towards western civilization, we must consider it when choosing an alphabet. Almost all developed nations in the Western world use national alphabets based on the Latin alphabet. In general, the Latin alphabet is the most common alphabet in the world.” (Rahmatullayev, 2002, p. 5)

It seems that even if there were shortcomings in its implementation, somehow this Latin alphabet has already taken root. We say this without considering the economic and social aspects of this issue: the new alphabet will definitely require large investments. But the changes in the alphabet will not affect the grammar of the language.

And we do not agree with the statement that there are difficulties in information and communication technology (ICT). As far as we know, the difficulty is that the sign above the letters G' and O' should look like the number 6, and it is supposedly difficult to achieve such a result on a computer. It turns out that it is easier to change the entire alphabet than to create a program? Some language difficulties are no reason to change the alphabet.

We think that the problem with the current alphabet is that it was introduced gradually over a very long period of time. The so-called “phased introduction” turned out to be ineffective, because no one defined the stages themselves, no one knew how each stage should end. In addition, the date of the full introduction of the Uzbek alphabet based on the Latin alphabet moved three times. It is the chaos in the execution of the law that is one of the reasons why the Latin alphabet has not taken root in Uzbekistan.

Due to the fact that until now there are two scripts in circulation, official offices and organizations prefer to write official correspondence in Russian rather than in Uzbek. Every year, the problem with writing is getting more

serious. It seems that the reason for the decline of general literacy, the decline of reading culture, can be found in the alphabet. It is no secret that the development of a language depends on the perfection of uniform writing and spelling rules. It's time to come to a conclusion. In our opinion, the problem is not that the new alphabet is imperfect, but that we cannot abandon the old one, the Cyrillic alphabet.

Another important problem is related to language training in personnel training. It is commendable that learning from the world's advanced experiences has become widespread in the field of education today. At the same time, we think that the teaching of the Uzbek language should not be limited to an approach based only on foreign experience.

In many developed countries, the mother tongue is not taught in higher education institutions, it is limited to primary and secondary education. If basic education in primary and secondary schools has provided a solid foundation in mother tongue literacy, switching to instruction in a foreign language at the tertiary level will not cause irreparable harm to the status of the mother tongue. Unfortunately, the current situation in Uzbekistan is that the language preparation of high school graduates is in an unsatisfactory state.

The observation and experience of teaching the Uzbek language to students who have completed their education in the Russian language lead to the conclusion that the programs of teaching mother tongue and Uzbek language subjects during secondary and secondary special education need serious reform. We have to admit that the state language literacy of Uzbek school graduates, as well as young people who graduated from secondary school in Russian, is at a low level. The goal of modern language education should be aimed at the development of the student's personality, in particular, the formation of communicative, linguistic, and cultural competencies. Especially in Russian groups, the lack of opportunities for immersion and use on a daily basis completely extinguishes the students' interest in learning the Uzbek language and produces graduates who are illiterate in terms of the language. So it needs to be taught again at the university level.

So, what is the status of Uzbek language teaching in higher education?

It is no secret that the level of language literacy of government personnel does not meet the requirements. In a meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, spoke about this with a smile: "How can an ambassador introduce Uzbekistan

to the world if he does not know the rich history, value and culture of the Uzbek people, the pains and concerns of his compatriots, if he does not take them from his heart?” How can he be a true ambassador if he cannot recite two lines of poetry from Alisher Navoi, Abdulla Oripov, and Erkin Vahidov, if he does not know our mother tongue perfectly? How have you become an ambassador? If you do not know the language of our nation perfectly, you have no right to work in this position” (Kun.uz, 2018).

Today, an ambassador has to be able to respond to the strict demands of the global human resources market. He or she has to have a perfect knowledge of international languages in addition to their specialty and at the same time, government personnel must possess competency in oral and written Uzbek, since it is not only a state language, but also a language of official communication.

The process of reforms taking place in Uzbekistan on all fronts is increasingly covering the field of education more widely and deeply. In particular, the choice of teaching foreign languages as a priority for the development of science is worthy of recognition.

At this point, the ideas and views of our ancestors at the beginning of the last century come to mind. For example, writer and journalist Makhmudhoja Bekhbudi emphasizes the importance of knowing a foreign language for development, to be aware of the works of the world’s wise men, to truly enjoy the masterpieces of world literature, as well as to understand the times. For example, the leader of the reform-minded political group of the early 20th century known as the Jadids spoke about the need for the children of the nation to learn a foreign language in order to gain an important position and prestige in society, and firmly put forward the view that “In conclusion, today we need editors and proofreaders in four languages” (Bekhbudi, 1913, p. 14).

The attention paid to the issue of language in our country, in particular, the efforts to raise the prestige and reputation of the state language, and the efforts to preserve our mother tongue are incomparable in terms of their essence and practical efforts to realize the unfulfilled dreams of our enlightened forefathers. It is known to everyone that in the process of integration into the world community, at the time of bold and active entry into the world market, the need for knowledge of foreign languages naturally increases. Therefore, today, the criteria of all-round maturity of a specialist in the field require that he should know not one, but several foreign languages in addition to his native language.

3. Conclusion

It is a fact that our national education system needs serious reforms. In particular, the level of language literacy of the personnel does not meet the required standards. There is a great need for a specialist who has a high culture of oral and written speech, logical thinking and the ability to express it, who can distinguish speech styles, who can express his opinion correctly, and who has developed analytical thinking skills. In this regard, a number of issues await their solution.

One of the issues that needs to be addressed in mother tongue education is literacy. It is no secret that the oral and written literacy of graduates of general secondary schools has decreased. This unfortunate situation creates obstacles for students of higher education institutions during the teaching of the state language at the higher academic level. It is difficult to ask a student who has not mastered the rules and norms of his native language to master a foreign language at a high level. Therefore, improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching the mother tongue in high school not only serves to preserve the prestige and vitality of the state language, but also serves as a basis for students to acquire a foreign language at the required level. For this purpose, it is necessary to develop a step-by-step system of assessment of the Uzbek language knowledge and to use modern advanced methods and means of checking the oral and written literacy of graduates, as well as knowledge of foreign languages in this regard. It is necessary to clearly define the criteria of which level of knowledge of the mother tongue entitles a graduate of a general secondary school to study at a higher educational institution (as well as in which higher educational institution, depending on the differences in level). This calls for reforms in the assessment and testing system and shows the need to introduce tests such as interviews and writing original works (motivational letters and academic research papers for example) in higher education institutions.

The requirements for future higher education specialists in terms of foreign language skills are to provide teachers with a targeted approach to language teaching, to create a unified approach based on international standards aimed at determining the level of language proficiency of students; pedagogues, professors and teachers need to establish standards for the criteria of professional qualification and the mechanism for qualification improvement. In order to strengthen the requirements for language skills, it is advisable to introduce a mechanism for confirming (certifying) the proficiency

level in foreign languages (especially Russian and English) in the recruitment of graduates of higher education institutions and in particular, those graduates who will become teachers. For this, in turn, a clear system of evaluating the professional competence of the teacher should be established.

It is also necessary to ensure the effectiveness of training courses and their coherence with the educational process. As there is a rich reserve of educational information on teaching foreign languages, it is necessary to create educational manuals and textbooks based on the methodology of this pedagogical literature and approach it from the point of view of our national culture, national mentality and national values. It is desirable that the group of authors consists of highly qualified specialists in foreign language teaching methodology, working jointly with foreign experts. In the modern methodology, the goal of language education is aimed at the formation of competencies that serve to develop the student's personality, in particular, communicative, linguistic, and cultural competencies. Only when a student has these competencies, will they become an all-round literate specialist who has perfectly mastered the language not only for communicative purposes, but also for professional use in their field.

This, in turn, requires the continuation of Uzbek language education in higher educational institutions, the need to introduce educational subjects aimed at forming the skills of free literate thinking in the state language. It is true that foreign higher education programs do not include the subject of the mother tongue, but a number of subjects in the curriculum at such institutions are taught which foster the formation of language skills listed above.

In particular, there are higher education institutions which teach courses such as "Introduction to the study of speech", "Rhetoric and written communication", "Political speech", "Public speaking", "Social speech communication", "Written communication for legal purposes", "Business correspondence", "Linguistic culture", and "Diplomatic correspondence". Such courses are aimed at the formation of certain professional skills of the student, in particular, the language of business communication, academic or scientific register, written speech literacy, speech culture and public speaking skills. After all, it is necessary for the future specialist to have perfect language competence, that is, to be able to conduct qualitative and productive communication in accordance with the norms of the state language in various fields of activity. Therefore, in the educational process, it is necessary to

develop a variety of language skills. To foster these competencies in the Uzbek language, qualification requirements of the teaching personnel need to be revised and courses in specific language skills need to be organized in order to ensure a thorough acquisition of the language.

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Professional Profiles

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