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## “UZBEK IS THE LANGUAGE FOR UZBEKS”: WHY ARE THERE PROBLEMS WITH THE STATE LANGUAGE IN UZBEKISTAN?

*The article examines the issues of the functioning of the Uzbek language in modern Uzbekistan. It is noted that the level of proficiency in the Uzbek language still leaves much to be desired. Despite the status of the state language, even native speakers do not always speak it perfectly, sometimes they do not know the rules of grammar and speak its dialect variants. The percentage of Uzbek proficiency among those for whom it is not native remains extremely low. How the Uzbek language is used in society, why not everyone speaks it and what awaits it next - this is an incomplete list of questions that the author analyzes.*

**Key words:** Uzbek, sociolinguistics, dialects, writing, communication.

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IN RECENT YEARS, the questions regarding the use of various languages in society, primarily Uzbek and Russian, have started to be raised again in Uzbekistan. Some officials allow themselves to censure Russian-speaking citizens;<sup>1</sup> other workers of culture write a petition in defense of the Russian language, calling for it to be given official status.<sup>2</sup> There is a continuing heated debate on social networks, and the state again aims at changing the alphabet of the Uzbek language.<sup>3</sup>

### The Difficult Language Situation in Modern Uzbekistan: An Excursion into Sociolinguistics

If we open any linguistic encyclopedia, we will learn that the Uzbek language is one of the major and most important Turkic languages with a rich history in which it evolved in close contact with other Turkic and non-Turkic languages.<sup>4</sup> According to the generally accepted point of view, it was finalized in the 1920s; became the only state language in the Republic of Uzbekistan (back then, the Uzbek SSR) in 1989 with a

population of 32 million people who speak this language. However, the reality is much more complex, problematic, and interesting. What characterizes the situation of the Uzbek language in its modern context? Let us first touch on some features of the Uzbek language as such.

One of its underlying features, however, is far from unique, and that is the coexistence of two fairly independent levels at which the Uzbek language functions. The first is the official written and unified language – which is sometimes confused with the literary one – and the other is a living colloquial language which exists in a rich collection of four large dialects, and includes several dozen regional variations.

The heritage of the Soviet system, as well as the authoritarianism of Uzbek society, explains the fact that the state sees itself as the owner and guardian of the Uzbek language. In the personification of the government, it makes decisions about its fate, regulates its norms and sets the rules for its use, sometimes based on the opinion of a small group of respected academics and leaders. Quite often the last word in disputable cases of using the Uzbek language does not belong to a professional philologist, but rather to the head of an organization or enterprise. This state of things seems to many quite natural, but in the modern world the prevailing practice involves completely

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nuz.uz/obschestvo/35629-rektor-universiteta-zhurnalistsiki-okazalsya-v-centre-skandala-video.html>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://vesti.uz/russkij-yazyk-nam-ne-chuzhoj/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/11/06/alphabet/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Узбекский\\_язык](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Узбекский_язык)

different approaches to the relationship between language and state.

It seems that it would be useful for residents of the former Soviet Union who are concerned about the problems of the state status of certain languages to reflect on the fact that English is not an official state language in Great Britain, the United States, Australia, or New Zealand. Moreover, none of these countries has such an authority as the *Academie Française* which oversees the purity and correct usage of the English language. At the same time, there is no need to remind one of the prevalence and role of English in the world.

Another feature that is closely related to the first one is the exceptional regional and social nature of dialects in the Uzbek language.<sup>5</sup> Its reasons are rooted in the peculiarities of national construction in Central Asia from the 1910s to the 1930s, while running simultaneously were the complex and unpredictable processes aimed at isolating and formalizing national cultures, states, and languages from a living and heterogeneous human environment which had been functioning for centuries based on completely different principles. It must be borne in mind that the initiation of nations in our region was the goal of various competing and cooperating groups of reformers, starting from the Jadids to the Bolsheviks.<sup>6</sup> The result of this interaction, which took shape only after the national and territorial demarcation, should be seen as a kind of compromise among various projects. In other words, everything turned out how it developed, but everything could have looked differently. State-forming nations (and languages accordingly) in our region might not have been six (the Karakalpaks should be remembered as well), but three or ten, or might not exist at all if the ideas of the enlightener Ismail Gasprinsky and his associates had received further development and recognition since they strove for the creation of a single common Turkic language back in the 1880s.<sup>7</sup>

Accordingly, the classification and division of local sub-dialects and dialects into national languages and their further normalization were initially very artificial, but they led to the gradual formation of clearer boundaries between languages. Nevertheless, within the Uzbek language, the situation was and remains highly disintegrated, yet, rich at the same time. From

the point of view of both the Soviet and the modern centralized power, this quality has always been perceived as non-normative, and therefore undesirable. A similar situation is observed with the Russian language, where, however, the degree of unification of urban dialects is much higher, and rural dialects and sub-dialects are rapidly dying out.

One of the consequences of the combination of these two factors, which does not find proper recognition in society, is the discrimination of speakers of the dialects of Uzbek language in the power structure, which, among other things, partly helps to preserve the remnants of the “clan” system in the process of governing the country. At the same time, with the increasing social mobility of Uzbeks, an increasing number of people who have traditionally spent their whole lives in their native *guzars*, *mahallas* and *kishlaks*, travel to other regions of the country and are very interested in local variations of culture, cuisine, and, of course, language. People distinguish each other’s dialects well, develop certain ideas about the character and habits of residents of certain regions and districts, thus, breaking established stereotypes. But, all these linguistic peculiarities and processes are not reflected at the official level at all.

The regional diversity of Uzbek culture is recognized and supported from above almost only in terms of material culture items such as clothing, ceramics, cuisine, and, to a lesser extent, customs. The peculiarity of dialect in Uzbek, so obvious in everyday life, is practically ignored by the native speakers of a “high” national culture. This is evidenced by numerous Uzbek films where the main characters live exclusively in Tashkent (the scenario where she lives in a rich house, and he lives in a village in the Tashkent region). They speak the same dialect of Uzbek (with a few examples of non-normative rural speech, often contrasted with the slang of the Tashkent youth) and communicate only with representatives of the same ethnic and social group. The heroes, of course, visit Samarkand, Bukhara or Khiva, but only to see the local monuments, where they behave like metropolitan tourists. There is practically no contact with local residents, their culture, customs and language on the screen, not to mention the fact that this regional diversity has become a key theme of the film.<sup>8</sup>

The third important feature of the modern Uzbek language is its script. Uzbek is one of the few languages in the world that actively uses three different al-

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.wikizero.com/ru/Диалектология\\_узбекско-го\\_языка](https://www.wikizero.com/ru/Диалектология_узбекско-го_языка)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/30930781/Making\\_Uzbekistan\\_Nation\\_Empire\\_and\\_Revolution\\_in\\_the\\_Early\\_USSR](https://www.academia.edu/30930781/Making_Uzbekistan_Nation_Empire_and_Revolution_in_the_Early_USSR)

<sup>7</sup> <https://ru.krymr.com/a/26911248.html>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/lists/navigator/country-71/?limit=20&tab=best>

phabets: Latin, Cyrillic and Arabic. The latter circumstance is often ignored, although approximately three million Uzbeks live in Afghanistan, and those who are literate use Arabic letters while more than one million Uzbeks who are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan only use the Cyrillic alphabet.

Latin script, introduced in 1993, underwent transformation in 1995 on the basis of the commonly used English alphabet without diacritical marks and was supposed to be the only form of Uzbek script, beginning first in 2005, then in 2010, then in 2015. But, so far, about 70% of printed sources in the Uzbek language are still in Cyrillic. The Latin experiment affected millions of students who were forced to read textbooks written in Latin at school and books published in Cyrillic at home. Frankly, it was costly and unsuccessful due to a number of circumstances.

First, the Uzbek Latin alphabet complicated an already confusing linguistic and literary situation in Uzbekistan which not only exacerbated the linguistic chaos in the country, but also brought the written Uzbek language closer to its living colloquial variants, thus, reducing the impact of normalization. Second, the use of computers and smartphones has been greatly simplified for young people who have mastered the Latin alphabet especially in interpersonal communication. In this situation, there is no longer any need to switch the layout and this often even applies to cases while using Russian.

On the other hand, the introduction of the Latin alphabet, even based on English script, only aggravated the difficulty of finding a conformity between the scripts and the sounds of individual letters and words. If everything with capital letters is more or less clear (for example, *K*, *M*, *E*, and *O* are written and sound approximately the same in Uzbek, Russian, and English), then there are serious problems with lowercase letters, and especially when using italics. For example, the letters *B*, *P*, *H* and *X* indicate different sounds in Cyrillic and Latin letters. Therefore, individual words and combinations of letters, for example, *noman* or *pen*, written in italics, can be read as “potap” / “noman” or “rep” / “pen” depending on the context.

The one who travels around Uzbekistan should remember that it is possible to see four (!) forms of writing for the name of the same city: Қўқон (Uzbek Cyrillic), Коканд (Russian), Qo`qon (Uzbek Latin) and, finally, Kokand (English).

Taking into account the fact that children often forget which words to use *N* and *R*, and in which – *И* and *Я*, as well as where the sound for “x” – is denoted by the letter *x*, *h* and *kh*, we have a rather complicated

and confusing picture, which is often difficult to understand even for an educated person. This situation concerns teachers and scientists, but, on the other hand, gives the use of language in real life a certain flexibility and freedom.

### **The Status of the Uzbek Language in Society: Who Uses It and How?**

Answering this question, my American friend Christopher Fort, a specialist in Uzbek language and literature,<sup>9</sup> gave a simple answer, “Uzbek is the language for Uzbeks.” He further noted that although there is some abstract idea that Uzbek should be known and used by all citizens of Uzbekistan, regardless of nationality, in practice this does not happen for a number of reasons. In the Russian-speaking environment of Uzbekistan, it is usually justified by an extremely low level of instruction of the Uzbek language due to the lack of teachers and textbooks. This is true, but this is not the only reason why only ethnic Uzbeks speak the Uzbek language. This can be considered from several different points of view.

The main and most important function of language is communication, the exchange of certain information between people, i.e. knowledge, data, facts and emotions. The primary environment in which such communication takes place is the family. This is followed by neighbors and relatives then school, work, public and private institutions, etc. International languages include a large proportion of those who use this language not as a mother tongue, and accordingly, not for family, but exclusively for education, social or professional communication. Consequently, about two billion people are currently studying English, of which about 1.7 billion use it as a second or foreign language, which determines the nature and content of communication within it.

Given the above-mentioned peculiarity concerning the use of Uzbek, it is possible to outline its two considerable and partially overlapping spheres of communication. The first is the sphere of everyday communication that comes from below, from the primary family environment, in the living, colloquial language. It is almost entirely determined by the characteristics of the family, its *makhalla*, *kishlak*, or district, gradually expanding and dissolving into the second sphere which is the sphere of state and national use. The only access to this communication, to this level of concepts is to be part of a specific family,

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ry7Zmvg6wHY>

a certain environment, or a given locality. If you are from another region, city, or country then you are a stranger or, at best, a guest.

This kind of interfamilial communication is the basis of Uzbek culture, but despite its ubiquity, it remains quite closed to the outside world, which is clearly illustrated by the “deaf” fences of the *makhalla* houses. The standard “windows” for extended communication are numerous *tui* (“events or celebrations”), whose main purpose is usually to socialize among a large number of members of various close groups, families and communities. This system is self-sufficient, it does not need any special state support or the outside world. It seeks neither development nor expansion but creates an extensive and comfortable environment for the potential prosperity of its members by strengthening internal ties among them. Family and neighborly relations prevail over friendly and professional ones, and there is no talk of any internationalization of this environment and communication within it. There is no need, desire and opportunity for this.

The second sphere of communication is determined by the state and spreads from the top down through strictly controlled texts in the form of orders, declarations, messages, news, numerous legal documents and the entire amount of communication that occurs during management and administration starting from the meetings of the *Oliy Majlis* and ending in a conversation with the resident’s committee. This sphere extends downward and in all directions, merging and intersecting with the first one which forms various contexts and modes for communication, the most common of which are professional and educational activities.

A characteristic feature of the use of Uzbek in this area is a combination of normalization and centralization with an understanding of the objective need to go beyond the narrow national discourse. The latter is determined not only by the presence of representatives of other ethnic groups and linguistic communities in the country, but also by the presence of a vast semantic strata in which ideas and meanings are generated in another language and only then relayed to Uzbek society via the Uzbek language.

In the Soviet period, various notions in the spheres of socialist management, production, education, services, urban planning, etc., were formulated primarily in Russian. This created a forced situation in which a large number of Uzbek speakers, having mastered Russian, were more comfortable to work in these contexts on their own, rather than expecting a

translation into Uzbek and, most importantly, their naturalization within an Uzbek discourse. This resulted in the development of functional bilingualism in which certain problems and topics could be discussed in Uzbek, while others took place in Russian, often by the same participants. In many aspects, this system has survived to the present, although in a situation where there are fewer people from a non-Uzbek ethnic group and an increase in the number of Uzbeks who independently used Uzbek professional language, this balance between Russian and Uzbek is reversed.

In general, it is impossible to decisively discuss the place and status of the Uzbek language in Uzbekistan without touching upon its interaction with other languages, which is a very interesting, but poorly developed topic. In simpler terms, we can say that within the framework of the first communication sphere in some regions of Uzbekistan, the language coexists with or is replaced by Karakalpak and Tajik. These situations are comparable, but unequal. While the vast majority of native speakers of Karakalpak live in a relatively remote and clearly defined territory, native speakers of Tajik inhabit the central and southern parts of Uzbekistan in many locations (not only the well-known Samarkand and Bukhara areas, but also Denau, the Ferghana Valley and several other areas). Almost all of them are bilingual.

The situation concerning<sup>10</sup> Russian in Uzbekistan is much more complicated and confusing. In the first place, the importance of the Russian in the country utterly exceeds its role as the language within the first sphere, the language of interfamilial and communal communication.

Ethnic Russians constitute no more than 3% of the population of Uzbekistan, all the so-called “Europeans” or “Russian-speaking” (inappropriate terms that greatly distort the real picture) comprise perhaps about 10%.<sup>11</sup> It seems inconceivable, but the main native speakers and users of the Russian language in Uzbekistan are ethnic Uzbeks. Thus, it is necessary to make a point concerning such an important concept as language competency.

Let us start with a simple but often ignored truth concerning such definitions as “Turkic,” “Germanic,” “Slavic,” and “Semitic,” which with the “delicate hand” of politicians from the 19th and 20th centuries

<sup>10</sup> [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Русский\\_язык\\_в\\_Узбекистане](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Русский_язык_в_Узбекистане)

<sup>11</sup> <https://stat.uz/ru/433-analiticheskie-materialy-ru/2055-demograficheskayasituatsiya-v-respublike-uzbekistan> <sup>13</sup> <http://tapemark.narod.ru/les/527a.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://tapemark.narod.ru/les/527a.html>



began to designate ethnic groups, peoples, and their cultures primarily as linguistic categories.<sup>12</sup> Turkic languages are spoken in Abakan, Andijan and Antalya, but there are people of various ethnic groups and cultures who live there. In the same way, Yiddish, Volga German and Afrikaans are the languages of the Germanic family, but again, their speakers belong to different ethnic groups and cultures. The same relates to the languages that are global in scope. Therefore, to equate, for example, all native speakers of the Russian with ethnic Russians is completely wrong.

Moreover, even the very concept of “a native speaker” is also often used incorrectly in its absolute meaning, which greatly misrepresents the real situation when communicating in one or another language. For many decades, English was distinguished between such categories as “English as a mother tongue”, as a second language (ESL), or as a foreign language (EFL) and the methodology of teaching them also differs. It should be understood, then, that all people who more or less use the language are native speakers. According to reports, approximately 85% of the population speaks Uzbek, and it is native to 80% of the population,<sup>13</sup> most of whom are Uzbeks.

However, it is very important to take into account the level of linguistic competency, including within the Uzbek population. One of the most widespread scales for language competency is the *Common European Framework of Reference*, which gives six levels (from A1 to C2) of various language skills: reading, writing, listening, dialogue skills, etc.<sup>14</sup> If one applies these categories to the linguistic situation in Uzbekistan, the number of people who speak Uzbek to a varying degree will increase at the expense of people who do not consider themselves to be “native speakers” of the Uzbek language, but have language competency to varying degrees. While it is believed that the so-called “Russian-speaking” population of Uzbekistan does not speak Uzbek at all, it turns out that many of its representatives understand Uzbek at the A2 to B1 level and can maintain a simple dialogue at the A1 to A2 level. At the same time, for many ethnic Uzbeks there are certain difficulties associated with communication in the literary language, especially on unfamiliar or more abstract topics, not to mention written communication. In other words, not all Uzbeks, including those for whom it is their native

language, speak it at the C2 level. This state of affairs is characteristic to a various extent for all languages. However, although these circumstances are of great importance both for native speakers of Russian and for the development of teaching Uzbek (as discussed below), in general, they do not greatly change the characteristics of the use of the Uzbek. Despite the fact that Uzbek is spoken not only in Uzbekistan, in the north of Afghanistan or in southern of Kyrgyzstan, but also in many countries of the world as well, including Russia and the USA, it was and still remains predominately a “language for Uzbeks.”

As I noted above, the situation with Russian is much more complicated. There is no exact data on its use in Uzbekistan and what is available varies, therefore, it can be hypothetically assumed that along with the so-called “Europeans” (descendants of immigrants to Central Asia during the years of colonization and the Soviet regime, among whom in addition to Russians were also Tatars, Ukrainians, Jews, Germans, Armenians, etc.), an indefinitely large number of ethnic Uzbeks (possibly at least half of the urban population) use the Russian language as their native or second language, which they speak at the C1 or C2 level.

In addition, even more Uzbek speakers have a command of Russian to a limited extent ranging from A1 to B1, presumably about 50-60% of the population, which exceeds twenty times the number of ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan. All this data is approximate, and is of great value for the development of language policy, however no large-scale research in this area has been conducted. It should be recognized that it is extremely important that, despite its wide and uneven distribution among various social groups, Russian does not have any official status and its use is not regulated at all, apart from a practical need. This contributed to the consolidation of Russian in certain areas of communication and the establishment of a reasonable balance in its use, the violation of which can be fraught with various negative consequences, which we will discuss below.

### Question of Status: Why the Uzbek Language Is Not Widely Spoken

Thus, the Uzbek language is certainly the dominant and most widely spoken language in Uzbekistan, especially in the field of interfamilial and communal communication. Its position as a state and official language is also inviolable, but in many areas of modern urban life it coexists with Russian and, in recent

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/what-languages-are-spoken-in-uzbekistan.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages>

years, with English. The nature of this coexistence and interaction requires a deep and thorough study, which, however, has not been carried out anywhere. Therefore, inexact conclusions on this topic can only be made based on subjective impressions, and thus may be flawed.

Nevertheless, it is possible to say that these problems are not limited only to the static issue of proficiency or non-proficiency in Uzbek (or Russian) language and not even to the level of this proficiency. It is primarily about the presence or absence of a choice in the use of one or another language. As mentioned in the above data, approximately 50% of the population who have command of two or more languages to varying degrees have this choice. For most ethnic “Europeans” and about half of ethnic Uzbeks (mainly living in rural areas), this choice is greatly limited by the lack of command or low level of knowledge of languages other than their native one.

The situation with Russian in Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole recalls, in some ways, the role of English in its global context.<sup>15</sup> Given the low percentage of ethnic Russians among native speakers of Russian in Uzbekistan, it can be assumed that most acts of communication in this language do not occur between Russians, and not even between “Europeans,” but between ethnic Uzbeks who can use it both in communicating with each other and with representatives of other ethnic and linguistic groups, including remotely (for example, on the Internet, when watching Russian television or reading books in Russian). In this regard, a question of exception remains: In what cases and in what contexts do people choose Uzbek, and in what cases do they favor Russian? Only by answering this question, it is possible to talk about the reasons for certain choices and only after that to ask the question about what to do with it.

Without any reliable data concerning this, I would venture to repeat the assumption made above: A native speaker of Russian and Uzbek will choose Russian if there is a communicative need for information exchange which is more difficult to accomplish in Uzbek. One example might include when the necessary information is not available in Uzbek at all, as in the case of a conversation with a Russian-speaking friend or when watching Russian television. Another example might be when Russian enables faster and more convenient access to information. The reverse is also

possible. Therefore, in order to assess how fully and adequately the Uzbek language covers all areas of human activity in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to research the question as to what kinds of information provide more convenient and quick access than Russian (or, perhaps, English), beyond interfamilial communication and government documents and for whom.

### **Total Control Impairs the Language**

Here again, in the absence of data and research, it is only possible to put forward hypotheses and assumptions. One of the more obvious answers to the above questions may sound as though Uzbek is inferior to Russian (or English) in those areas where the exchange of information in Uzbek requires its translation from Russian (or English) into Uzbek. In those areas that are directly related to the “uzbekchilik” (uzbek-ness) or administrative management, especially in those places, there is almost no competition.

It seems to me that total state control over the Uzbek language ultimately had an unfavorable impact on it, thus, seriously limiting the scope of its use. This is especially evident in bookstores, where until recently, one could find only numerous textbooks, the works of Islam Karimov, legislative documents, and very few fiction books in Uzbek.

By depriving Russian of any status in 1995 and restricting its teaching and official use, the authorities hoped to stimulate the use of the Uzbek language. The opposite happened with Russian deprived of state support but also free from state control, it remained and consolidated only where it was really needed. Therefore, it largely replaced Uzbek in those areas that do not fall under the categories of interfamilial or communal communication and as the language of governmental control. This circumstance was overlooked by the authors of the scandalous petition calling on the government to give Russian an official status that would inevitably return Russian to increased state control and censorship.

Nevertheless, the development of English in the country in recent years – although not supported by the presence of a lively context for communication since we still have a very small number of English-speaking foreigners in Uzbekistan – In comparison with Russian, promises even shorter and more convenient access to all the concepts and meanings that are generated in the modern world. Not controlled by any state, it has a special potential for global communication. In fact, Uzbek, in spite of its wide distribution and stability, runs the risk of remaining

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/12530018/English\\_Next\\_by\\_David\\_Graddol](https://www.academia.edu/12530018/English_Next_by_David_Graddol)

on the periphery of the modern world, turning into a huge folk artifact which is greatly facilitated by state policy with its emphasis on “national traditions.”

### **There Is No Solution to a Problem without Research**

In order to rectify something, one should first imagine what needs to be rectified. It is impossible to prescribe a treatment without diagnosing the case. In our situation, there is neither diagnosis, nor even described symptoms. All that I wrote above was spun out of thin air. It is just speculation and wandering in the dark, based on subjective impressions and virtually absent data. In fact, no field linguistic research is conducted within Uzbekistan. We do not know scientifically what the modern, living Uzbek language is like or who communicates in it and how. Neither do we know what resources and forms are used, what information is transmitted or by what means? How and where do regional dialects of Uzbek develop? What are the dynamics of its use in various social groups, age categories, and other groups? How does Uzbek interact with other languages? How do processes of its hybridization, borrowing and adaptation take place? What communicative needs (and whose needs) does the Uzbek language meet? Which can meet those needs and which cannot?

These and thousands of similar questions should be the focus of attention of our linguists, sociologists, anthropologists and cultural specialists. Reliable, in-depth, large-scale, and professional studies should be carried out and should at least describe the real linguistic situation in the country. But, none of this exists. Until this happens, we will not even be able to get closer to analyzing this situation and we will not be able to speak competently about the problems and their reasons. However, only by asking these questions will they enable us to efficiently and adequately propose some measures to improve the situation. It is completely pointless to pass any laws in the field of education without understanding what is really happening there.

### **So Why Don't We All Speak Uzbek?**

The answer is simple: Those who do not speak Uzbek simply do not have a communicative need for it, or it is a limited need. Before one attempts to take any steps, one needs to understand why the need does not exist and what kind of need there is. Only then can discussion proceed about what kind of needs can

arise and how they can be stimulated. Here we come close to the issue of education, but this is far from the first question. The first is to use the language. The point is not only that “lazy Russians do not want to learn Uzbek,” although this is also a reason. I have already shown above that the vast majority of cases when people choose Russian (or even now English) rather than Uzbek as instrument of communication or access to information refers to situations of choice made by Uzbeks. And here many questions arise for different participants in the communication process.

For Russians and other “Europeans” living in Uzbekistan, the actual, and somewhat unsuccessful task is to abandon their prejudices, including those that concern using Uzbek language. The state’s task is to gently stimulate this process.<sup>16</sup> In this regard, giving Russian an “official status” would not only return the right of ownership and control over this language to the state, but would also exacerbate political differences in society and politicize the issue of language, especially in light of the decades-long attempts by the leadership of Russia to use the language map in their neocolonial politics.

Therefore, supporting the idea of expanding and deepening the use of the Russian language in Uzbekistan, should happen, I am convinced, exclusively on a voluntary basis and not become an instrument of political manipulation. Neither the Russian language, nor the Russian-speaking population in Uzbekistan need “protection.” The improvement and liberalization of language policy in the country is the surest means of developing multilingualism and multiculturalism within it.<sup>17</sup> It seems this is not advocated by any single leader who speaks about the issues of language policy.

Meanwhile, I would like to ask the zealots and guardians of the Uzbek language the following question: Do you really want to turn the “Uzbek language” into an international language so that it would be spoken by a large number of people who do not have a good command of it? Do you want to hear it with an accent, mangling words and sentences, but expressing those thoughts, attitudes, and feelings that might not be available in the conservative and patriarchal concept of *uzbekchilik*?

Are you ready to recognize the social fragmentation and dialect peculiarity of the Uzbek language as

<sup>16</sup> <https://uz.sputniknews.ru/society/20200428/14018186/Novyy-zakonoproekt-o-gosyazyke-v-Uzbekistane--mnenie-ekspertov-i-grazhdan.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://novainfo.ru/article/16641>

a living reality and stop pretending that there is only the correct, “pure” Uzbek of Abdullah Kakhhar and Khairuddin Sultanov, while all the rest is jargon and “bazaar language” that needs to be eradicated and corrected? Are you ready for a situation when the possessor of the Uzbek language will not be the state and government, or even the Uzbek people, but any person who considers it necessary to speak, write, and read in Uzbek and that you will not control it?

It will be very difficult to talk about some explicit educational programs for teaching the Uzbek language as non-native until satisfactory answers to these questions are given.

### **What Could Be Done to Popularize the Uzbek Language?**

I have already tried to answer this question above, and now I want to formulate the problem in a slightly different way: What can be done now? Once again, first and foremost, there is a need for systematic studies of the real situation and diagnosis of problems. Unfortunately, the search for a solution to these problems, in fact, immediately rests on education. This can be discussed at length, but in general, education in our country, despite all efforts – Including international and local organizations – remains terribly archaic and static in its principles. It is still primarily perceived as a kind of institution (school, college, university), where these institutions “give” knowledge and status along with a diploma. Meanwhile, formal education is just a learning tool, which is the process of moving from point A to point B to point C and so on and in actuality the process is complex and non-linear.

Languages are still taught here as they were taught centuries ago – by memorizing grammatical structures and words in the hope that, by substituting the right words in the right form in the right place, a person will communicate in the language.<sup>18</sup> Yes, sometimes this works after a few years. However, at the institute I had an “excellent” mark in Uzbek, because I could parse sentences and analyze what suffixes or other word forms consisted of without a good understanding. Of course, this way of learning Uzbek is completely senseless.

If we return to language competency, then it is easy to understand that different situations require not only a different level of language proficiency,

but also different skills. At the institute, I had to do a grammatical analysis of sentences and words, whereas at school, when picking cotton, I had to ask the locals for directions and understand their answer.

Modern Uzbek courses should be based on the initial level of students, and this requires clear diagnostic tests to determine that level with the clear purpose of training. Why do you need the Uzbek language? To read governmental decrees? To give complimentary toasts? To read Abdullah Kadyri in the original Uzbek? To communicate with builders at the site? Or with Uzbek relatives from Kashkadarya? Each of these situations requires different skills and approaches to learning which implies the availability of appropriate materials such as modern communication textbooks for each level (A1, A2, B1, B2, etc.), audio and video materials, as well as relevant standards and curricula, and, most importantly, qualified teachers.

There is another major problem related to the need for strategic long-term planning and the refusal to adhere to short-term orders that can never solve anything properly. In order to have a large number of teachers capable of teaching adult Russian-speaking students the modern Uzbek language, they need to be prepared, a training and employment system must be developed, the development of private entrepreneurship in the field of education needs to be stimulated so that such compact and purpose-oriented courses are offered on almost every corner. All this requires development, adoption, and consistent implementation of an intelligible training strategy and their corresponding material incentives. Taking into account the need for a comprehensive study as mentioned above, it is unclear who, how, and when this will be implemented. But, without it, things will not move forward.

To sum it up in market terms, the complex task is to study the demand for the Uzbek language and develop methods to increase this demand together with improving a package of proposals on teaching the Uzbek language for the target audience. Although, it deserves repeating, that there is no sense in solving the second aspect of the problem without solving the first one.

It is not a huge leap of the imagination to understand that with the current approach to reform, there will be no long-term, gradual and well thought out strategies for the development of the Uzbek in Uz-

<sup>18</sup> <https://thewarwickeltezine.wordpress.com/2017/01/31/124/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://centralasia.media/news:1556630>



bekistan in the near future. However, there are several suggestions such as the appeals to read Zulfiya's poems in the bazaars.<sup>19</sup> Hence, we just have to watch the most interesting processes of language hybridization, the dilution of language standards and rules, the transformation of some language forms into others,

and the emergence of new social classes against this background all united at the language level whether that is the English-speaking elite or the fully Uzbek-speaking urban diasporas from the suburbs, etc. For sociolinguistics it is extremely interesting, but for an ordinary resident of the country, not so much.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://centralasia.media/news:1556630>