The Functioning of the Russian Language in the Linguistic Space of Uzbekistan

Annotation: This article raises the question of the peculiarities of the functioning of the Russian language in the linguistic space of Uzbekistan, namely, in the city of Samarkand region, while analyzing the ethno linguistic situation in a historical retrospective from the moment the city was founded to the present day. Summarizing the results of field research, the authors identify the reasons for the widespread use of the Russian language and the scope of its application in the conditions of the transforming Uzbek society, where the state language is declared in the official discourse, and the Russian language is widely used in the unofficial sphere.

Keywords: Russian language, state language, sociolinguistic landscape, Russian-speaking minority, ethno-social composition, migration.

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The problems of the functioning of the Russian language in the post-Soviet Central Asian republics were mainly addressed in works focused on the study of ethnicity, identity, ethno-cultural processes among minorities, primarily Russians. Language processes in the other republics of Central Asia are analyzed episodically, mainly in article publications, which touch upon some trends in the use of the Russian language in the sociocultural space of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where the share of the Russian population does not exceed 4% of the population. The article by the American researcher W. Fierman carried out a comparative analysis of the role and importance of the Russian language in the countries of Central Asia. The authors come to important generalizing conclusions that the Russian language still plays an important role in the Central Asian republics, even where there is a minimum of the Slavic population.

This article was written on the basis of a field study conducted in Uzbekistan in 2012-2014 and deals with the ethno-cultural problems of the Russian/Russian-speaking population. The results of field research indicate that the mechanisms of adaptation of Russian-speakers do not fit into the usual patterns of discrimination against Russians in the states of Central Asia; the question of the functioning of the Russian language in the socio-cultural life of the republic is over-dramatized. Within the framework of this article, the role of the Russian language in the sociolinguistic sphere of the Samarkand region is considered. In this regard, the study of the role of the Russian language in the sociolinguistic space of the city of Samarkand becomes relevant.

In the first years of the strengthening of Soviet power, the indigenous peoples of the region were weakly included in the processes of industrialization. The Uzbek population living in rural areas did not have the appropriate education and skills to live in an urbanized area, they did not speak Russian well. Considering the ethnic statistics of Samarkand, one can single out the degree of proficiency in the Russian language among the indigenous population.
Crimean Tatars had a higher level of Russian language proficiency (79.8%), at present they are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking. Among Koreans, 47.3% of the population was fluent in Russian, 41% of Uzbeks did not speak a second language. The data of Soviet statistics once again testify that the urban environment was predominantly Russian-speaking, which forced the population to master the Russian language.

For Uzbeks, Tajik, and other ethnic groups in Samarkand, urbanization meant joining the urban lifestyle through the knowledge of the Russian language, without which it is impossible to be involved in industrial production. Accordingly, the middle and younger generations of Uzbeks and Tajik in the 1980s were more proficient in Russian.

Office work, the system of secondary and higher education, cultural and scientific life, and the mass media in the Uzbek SSR functioned in Russian. The Uzbek language during the period of stagnation was forced out of state institutions, higher and secondary specialized educational institutions in the field of folklore and everyday communication. The publication of textbooks in Uzbek has ceased. The departments of the Uzbek language were closed at the theatrical and art institute, at the institute of culture. Things got to the point that at the Uzbekfilm studio, scripts written in Uzbek were accepted for discussion and production only after they were translated into Russian.

In the 1990s - the first decade of the 2000s, most of the enterprises of Samarkand ceased to function. The stagnation in the work of the city-forming industrial enterprises drastically affected the ethno-social composition of the city and the standard of living of Russian-speaking residents. Total unemployment due to the shutdown of the main enterprises, the economic crisis and the processes of ethno political mobilization in Uzbekistan contributed to the rapid outflow of the Russian-speaking population.

Large-scale changes in the 1990s - 2010s led to fundamental changes in the ethnic composition of the city.

In connection with the outflow of the Russian-speaking population during the period of independence, the situation associated with the use of the Russian language also changed. At the same time, it is possible to identify areas in which the demand for Russian is still extremely high:

I. The system of school education. In fact, schools with the Russian language of instruction are located in all districts of the city and meet the needs of all students. This is despite the fact that there are very few ethnic Russians left in the city. In an interview, a primary school teacher at one of the schools noted that if there are 2-3 Russian students in the class, then this is already a lot.

The population has a high demand for teaching children in Russian. The Russian classes are overcrowded, in the school from the first 5 classes to the 4th the instruction is in Russian, and the 1st class is in Uzbek. Parents deliberately send their children to Russian classes. The reasons for such a high demand for school education in Russian are:

1. Education in Russian is a condition for great opportunities for career advancement both in the Republic of Uzbekistan and abroad;

2. Socio-economic orientation towards Russia in connection with labor migration, it should be noted that in the 2000s Russia regained the symbolic resource of the “big brother”, which gives status to the Russian population of the Central Asian states.

3. Russian-Uzbek bilingualism preserved from Soviet times. The young generation of Tajik in the conditions of post-Soviet Uzbekistan turned out to be trilingual, as it occupies a significant position in the bazaar trade, in private car transport and, in addition to their native language, knows Uzbek and Russian.

4. Russian language is the language of technical and scientific progress. Representatives of the elite of the republic, receiving financial education in the state language, need to improve the Russian
language for the fruitful use of the possibilities of Internet resources, Russian specialized literature, etc.

At the same time, it should be noted that the popularity and prevalence of the Russian language does not always mean its complete mastery. The younger generation, born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, who received their secondary education in the state language while retaining Russian as an elective, does not have a wide vocabulary and is limited to the knowledge of the simplest expressions. The consequence of this is the simplified use of the Russian language both in the domestic sphere and in the media.

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