

Moving In the Pain: The Trends and Impact of Language Policy in Central Asian

Miaomiao Han^{1, a}, Heping Wu^{2, b}

¹Department of International Cultural Exchanges, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou, China

²Department of Chinese Ethnic Language and Literature, Minzu University of China, Beijing, China

^amiaohan_ulia@126.com, ^bwuhpnet@gmail.com

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Abstract: "Russianization" and "de-Russianization" are the main themes of the adjustment of language policy in Central Asia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation of the dominance of Russian in Central Asian countries was broken, and the national language consciousness of the dominant ethnic group in each country rose. At the same time, due to complex historical reasons and the multi-ethnic characteristics of Central Asian countries, its language policies and language use are characterized by diversity, variability, complexity, and imbalance. Although the Central Asian countries have successfully enhanced the status of the main ethnic groups' language, the implementation of any language policy will have a significant impact on all aspects of a country's language life. The significant improvement of the main ethnic groups' languages has caused new inequalities among the nationalities in the Central Asian countries, become one of the incentives for the intensification of conflicts among the ethnic groups, and caused the large-scale outflow of Russian-speaking elites, resulting in a decline in the quality of education in the short term. In the long run, the overall trend of de-Russianization and the nationalization of the main ethnic group's language has become irreversible.

1. Introduction

There are many ethnic groups in Central Asia, the language ecology is complex, changeable, and easily affected by external forces. Before and early in Islamization, the main residents of Central Asia were ethnic groups who spoke the languages of the Iranian group, including the settled people - Bactrians, Sogdians, Khwarizmians, and the nomad tribes-Scythian and Aorsoi. After the large-scale expansion of the Turks, Central Asia became the residence of various Turkic nationalities. Among the languages of dominant ethnical groups in the five Central Asian countries, only Tajik belongs to the Iranian group, remaining Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz belong to the Turkic languages.

Observing the changes in language policies and the ecology of language use in Central Asian countries in the last century, Russian is an unavoidable topic. "Russianization" and "de-Russianization" are the main themes of the adjustment of language policy in Central Asia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation of the dominance of Russian in Central Asian countries was broken, and the national language consciousness of the dominant ethnic group in each country rose. Nationalization, de-Russianization, and Latinization of the language are the main dimensions to observe the trend of its language policy. At the same time, due to complex historical reasons and the multi-ethnic characteristics of Central Asian countries, its language policies and language use are characterized by diversity, variability, complexity, and imbalance.

2. "Russianization"-Language Policy in Central Asia during the Tsarist and Soviet Periods

In 1891, entire Central Asia officially incorporated into the territory of the Russian Empire. The Tsarist government vigorously promoted the policy of Russification, tried to build a political and cultural community through language assimilation, vigorously spread Russian culture in Central Asia, and suppressed the original culture, customs and native languages of Central Asia. However, the

Russian language policy in Central Asia has been opposed by many Central Asian elites. Instead of assimilating Russian, the languages and characters of various ethnic groups in Central Asia have shown a strong rebound. Facing this reality, the third Duma was forced to adopt legal provisions to recognize the status of the "mother tongue" of all ethnic groups in Central Asia in the teaching of grades one and two of primary schools. Tsarist Russia's near-failed language policy not only failed to promote the development of the language and culture level of Central Asian society, it even endangered its rule in the region.

At the beginning of the establishment of the regime, the Soviet Union vigorously pursued Lenin's policy of national cultural equality throughout the territory, that is, the culture of "socialist in content, national in form", carried out a large-scale literacy campaign in Central Asia, and the people of all ethnic groups greatly improved their mastery and use of their native language. However, in the mid-1930s, with the establishment of a highly centralized system in the Soviet Union, the Stalinist regime began to change from a previous focus on opposing Great-Russian chauvinism to a simultaneous opposition to Russian chauvinism and local nationalism and then developed to focus on opposing local nationalism. The Central Committee of the Union began to show a tendency to unify the language. At the end of the 1930s, the Central Committee of the Union made a directive decision to popularize Russian. The ethnic groups in Central Asia, like other minorities in the Soviet Union, became part of "Soviet people" with a common language and culture through Russification. The Central Asian Republics were forced to adopt a Russianization policy in language and script. From 1926 to 1940, the Soviet government vigorously carried out the so-called "language building" project to cut off the language "umbilical cord" of Central Asia with Turkic culture and Islamic culture. The scripts of various ethnic groups in Central Asia finally completed the transformation from the Arabic alphabet to the Cyrillic (Russian) alphabet. In 1938, Russian was made compulsory in all schools in Soviet Russia from the first grade. In the resolution of the 22nd Congress of the CPSU, the actual status of Russian as a powerful language was stipulated in the name of "inter-ethnic communication language." Through the popularization of education and the support of policies, Russian has developed strongly. According to statistics from 1989, more than 80% of the 286.7 million people at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union were fluent in Russian [2], which had become a de facto state language and common language in the Soviet Union, including Central Asian countries.

3. Language Policy of Central Asian Countries After the Collapse of the Soviet Union

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Central Asia broke the pattern of a unified national language, and the Central Asian countries constantly sought to find a balance between the language of dominant ethnic groups and Russian, adjusting their language policies. By amending the constitution and popularizing the education of the main ethnic group's language, the countries have upgraded the language of their main ethnic group from the minority language of the Soviet period to the state language and regarded state language education as an important means to establish a national state and enhance national identity, intended to narrow the use of Russian and implement the "de-Russianization" language policy. As early as the mid-1990s, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan removed all references to Russian from the current editions of the Constitution and switched the processing of official documents entirely to Turkmen and Uzbek. Tajikistan abolished the Russianized surname ending in "ov" in 2007 (it was then that the current president of Tajikistan from Rakhmonov turned into Rahmon), most of the place names were "nationalized", changed from Russian to Tajik, and in 2009 the Russian was abolished as an inter-ethnic language in the Constitution [3]. Although Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan define Russian as the "official language", there are also restrictions on its use. According to the Mass Media Law passed in 1999 by Kazakhstan, at least half of the country's radio and television broadcasts should be in Kazakh. In a speech to the People's Congress of Kazakhstan in 2006, former Kazakh President Nazarbayev said publicly that "young people in Kazakhstan must know that without the knowledge of the state language, the work of government agencies, the service sector, law enforcement or the judiciary will not be possible [1]."

The implementation of language policy has not been smooth sailing. After the enthusiasm and clamor of the first few years after national independence and the founding of the new country, both

the country and the people have "rediscovered" the important value of Russian, a language with historical origins and international development prospects. Russian used to be the official language and inter-ethnic language throughout the Soviet Union. It was the most important medium for the construction, improvement, and dissemination of discourse systems in the political, economic, scientific, technological, cultural, educational, and other fields of Central Asian countries. The scientific and technical terms and rhetoric system of the main ethnic groups' language are not yet perfect, and the degree of standardization is not high enough to replace the social and cultural communication function of Russian in high-level fields. The political and economic exchanges, security cooperation and harmonious relationship between the Central Asian countries and Russia require Russian, the integration of the CIS countries needs Russian, the people of central Asian countries also need Russian to obtain a high-quality education, people's economic activities can not be separated from Russian. Russian has a broad and profound mass base.

In this context, around 2000, Russian showed a tendency to return to Central Asian countries. the Law "On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" promulgated by Kazakhstan in 1997 and the Kyrgyz Law "On the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic", enacted in 1997, has become a landmark event of this trend, and its most important feature is the clearer status of the Russian language. In Kazakhstan, Kazakh and Russian are used equally in the work and official processing of government institutions on the state or local level. Kyrgyzstan's Law "On the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic" reaffirms the official language status of Russian and guarantees its use in the areas of administration, justice, and education. For the same reason, Tajikistan also restored the inter-ethnic language status of Russian in the Constitution in 2011.

But looking at the general trend, the "de-Russianization" language policy implemented in Central Asian countries has become irreversible. At present, the number of non-Russian speakers in all countries in Central Asia except Kazakhstan has exceeded 50%. Statistics show that the number of people learning state languages in Central Asian countries has been increasing. Comparing the academic year of 2010-2011 with the academic year of 1990-1991, the number of Russian-speaking learners in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan has decreased by more than 60%, and only in Kyrgyzstan, the number of students in Russian over the years increased by 14% [1]. In Turkmenistan, during the period of S.A. Niyazov's reign, especially between 2002 and 2006, almost all Russian schools in Turkmenistan were closed, and teaching in schools and universities was conducted only in Turkmen language. Although Kurbankuly Berdimuhammedov resumed teaching Russian in secondary schools and universities after his succession in 2007, the development of Russian in Turkey is still at a turning point. Uzbekistan has significantly reduced the number of Russian lessons from 2013. The Russian language courses of secondary education institutions have been postponed from the original first grade to the second grade, and Russian is taught for no more than two hours a week [2]. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan, only 4.4% of the total number of students in secondary schools (about 2 million) receive education in Russian [4]. All secondary and higher education institutions in Tajikistan have been required to write articles in Tajik since 2018 [5]. Kazakhstan also plans to translate full education into Kazakh by 2025, retaining bilingual education only in areas with a small Kazakh population [6].

Parallel to the "de-Russianization" language policy is the reform of the writing system after the establishment of the Central Asian countries. During the Soviet period, most countries in Central Asia experienced the complex course of the Arabic alphabet to the Latin alphabet to the Cyrillic Russian alphabet. After the independence of Central Asian countries in the early 1990s, the characters, as a symbol of language symbols, was also given the symbolic significance of constructing the national image and uniting the people. At the World Congress of Turkic Nations held in Turkey in 1992, scholars from Turkic-speaking ethnic groups, such as Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkey, unanimously agreed to use the Latin alphabet as the basis for their national characters [7], thereby beginning the process of Latinization of the languages of Central Asian countries.

4. Impact of "de-Russianization" language policy

The changes in the language policies of the Central Asian countries are the direct products of the

dramatic changes in Eastern Europe that affected the language policies and language life of the Central Asian countries. This change is a forced adjustment of the language policies of the Central Asian countries to adapt to the sudden changes in their political situations. Therefore, the impact on all aspects of people's lives is complex, profound and unpredictable.

First of all, the changes in the language policies have strengthened the ethnical consciousness and national identity in Central Asian countries, which is also the most important consideration for each country to formulate its language policies. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries of Central Asia have declared independence, their top priority is to establish the image of an independent country to unite people, strengthen the national cohesion, and strive for citizen's support for the new regime. Promoting the language of the main ethnic group into the state language of the country, changing the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin or Arabic alphabet, implementing a "de-Russification" policy in both language and script, cutting off the umbilical cord between Russian and the languages of various countries, has become a common choice for Central Asian countries in the formulation of constitutions and national language policies. If only from this dimension to evaluate the effect of the implementation of language policies in Central Asian countries more than 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is clear that the original intention of these policy designs has been achieved.

However, the implementation of any language policy is a complex and systematic project, which will have a significant impact on all aspects of a country's language life. The Central Asian countries, forced by the political environment at that time, were forced to adopt radical and tough "shock therapy" in their national language policies. They tried to fundamentally cut off the influence of the Russian language for more than a century, which inevitably has some negative effects on the language and life of their people, causing short-term "pain". The main effects are as follow:

First, the status of the main ethnic group's language of each country has been significantly enhanced, which has caused new inequality among the languages of the various ethnic groups in Central Asian countries and has become one of the causes of the intensification of the contradictions among the ethnic groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the language policy adopted by Central Asian countries put the language of the five main ethnic groups in a particularly advantageous position, but there are still 46 non-subject national languages in central Asia, these languages have lost the protection of the national language policy of the Soviet period, their use and development were greatly restricted, which has led to new language inequalities. First, this inequality is manifested between the main ethnic group's language and Russian. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the status of Russians in Central Asia has changed drastically, especially on the issue of nationality and Russian status. The Russians living in Central Asia have clashed violently with the main ethnic groups, and some even turned into bloodshed. Second, relations with other non-main ethnic groups are also often strained, such as Uighurs in the Chui region of eastern Kazakhstan, Uzbeks in Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, and Tajiks in the Fergana region of Uzbekistan. This basic pattern of non-main ethnic groups compactly living in large communities constitutes a major hidden danger of the political system dominated by the main ethnic group and ethnic relations in Central Asian countries, and the introduction of language laws in these countries has contributed to this tension.

Second, due to the deterioration of the language environment, large-scale outflows of Russian-speaking elites have been caused. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian was the official language of Central Asia. Proficiency in Russian is both a tool and a medium for people to move upward through job promotion, and also a status symbol for well-educated elites. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a wave of immigration from Central Asia broke out in the European nationalities represented by the Russians. The main reason is that the rising nationalism after the independence of the Central Asian countries has reduced the status of Russian and other ethnic groups, and the Russian language environment has been deteriorating so that the Russians and Russian-speaking residents feel uncomfortable with their national culture because they do not understand "the state language", their career prospects in Central Asia are bleak, and their children's education is not guaranteed, which has

led to a large-scale immigration wave with Russia as the main destination. It has affected the quality of the labor resources' development in Central Asian countries, caused a shortage of professional and technical personnel in various sectors of social production, and adversely affected the fields such as science and technology, culture and education, and government management.

The third is the decline in the quality of short-term education. The policy of the coexistence of Russian and native languages in Central Asian countries during the Soviet Union was essentially a bilingual policy of "Russianization", Russian and native languages were given different social and cultural functions. In 1961, the 22nd Congress of the CPSU pointed out that the native language was mainly used to protect, inherit and develop local and native cultures, and its use was greatly restricted, while Russian is the only language that used to record and interpret Marxist-Leninian classics, used in the political, economic, literary, military, industrial, scientific, technological, educational, media and other public fields, assumes the function of strong language and common language, and is given the supremacy of higher than other ethnic languages

In the decades since the implementation of this policy, the functional division of native languages and Russian has been solidified and strengthened in the language life of Central Asia, so that when the de-Russianization policy was implemented after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the main ethnic groups' languages in Central Asian countries lacks a complete set of scientific and academic discourse methods, as well as a comprehensive and rich set of standardized vocabulary and standard terminology systems, to express the rapid development and progress in science, technology, academics, education, and other fields.

5. Conclusion

In short, more than 20 years after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries have successfully enhanced the status of the main ethnic group's language through the "de-Russianization" language policy, and to build the national image, establish the image of independent state, rally the hearts of the people, promote national identity, the status of Russian in this context is generally on a downward trend. At the same time, we should see that "de-Russianization" is the language policy choice that the Central Asian countries were forced to make under the background of the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, driven by nationalist ideology, which is also the reason why the Russian's return has occurred in some Central Asian countries and the language policy needs to be revised and adjusted continuously. From a general trend, the implementation of "de-Russianization" language policies in Central Asian countries is not smooth. In the foreseeable future, Russian will still be widely used in Central Asian countries. This is the "pain" that Central Asian languages must go through to become independent from the dominant Russian. In the long run, the overall trend of de-Russianization and the nationalization of the main ethnic group's language has become irreversible.

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