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## THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN THE POLICY OF UZBEKISTAN



**Gulnoza Toshmurod qizi AMONOVA**

PhD-student

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

[msguli.amanova@mail.ru](mailto:msguli.amanova@mail.ru)

### Abstract

Since the independence, Uzbekistan's international relations with the countries of the world community have moved to a qualitatively new level. In the period of globalization of the economy, integration of political and cultural life, contributing to the activation and strengthening of international relations in various fields, foreign languages, in particular, English and Russian as the language of international communication plays a vital role in socio-political sphere of the country.

There are various studies devoted to the role of foreign languages in the modern globalized world. This paper examines the impact of Russian and English as international languages in the Republic of Uzbekistan and its policy. The analysis showed that currently Russian and Uzbek coexist within the post-Soviet space. However there is some evidence that English and Russian are in a race to become the dominant foreign language among the employers of the country in the future.

**Keywords:** politics; foreign languages; Russian; English; Uzbek; language policy; socio-politic sphere; education; language problem.

## ЎЗБЕКИСТОН СИЁСАТИДА ЧЕТ ТИЛЛАРНИНГ РОЛИ

**Гулноза Тошмурод қизи АМОНОВА**

PhD докторант

Ўзбекистон давлат жаҳон тиллари университети

Тошкент, Ўзбекистон

[msguli.amanova@mail.ru](mailto:msguli.amanova@mail.ru)

### Аннотация

Ўзбекистон мустақилликка эришгандан сўнг жаҳон ҳамжамияти мамлакатлари билан халқаро муносабатлар янги босқичга кўтарилди. Иқтисодиётнинг глобаллашуви, турли соҳаларда халқаро алоқаларни фаоллаштириш ва мустаҳкамлашга хизмат қиладиган сиёсий ва маданий ҳаётнинг интеграцияси даврида хорижий тиллар, жумладан, инглиз ва рус тиллари халқаро мулоқот тиллари сифатида давлатимизнинг ижтимоий-сиёсий жабҳасида муҳим аҳамият касб этади.

Замонавий глобаллашув даврида хорижий тилларнинг роли ва аҳамияти ўрганилган тадқиқотлар талайгина. Мазкур мақолада эса рус ва инглиз тилларининг чет тиллари сифатида ўзбек тилига таъсири ва Ўзбекистон Республикаси сиёсатидаги роли ҳақида фикр юритилади. Илмий таҳлил натижалари Россия ва Ўзбекистоннинг собиқ шўролар тузуми давридан бир-бирига таъсир этиб келаётганлигини кўрсатди. Бироқ инглиз ва рус тиллари мамлакатимизда муайян мавқени эгаллаши мумкин бўлган чет тили маъносида бир-бирига рақиб тиллар саналади.

**Калит сўзлар:** сиёсат; хорижий тиллар; рус тили; инглиз тили; ўзбек тили; тил сиёсати; ижтимоий-сиёсий соҳа; таълим; тил муаммолари.

## РОЛЬ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ В ПОЛИТИКЕ УЗБЕКИСТАНА

**Гулноза Тошурод кизи АМОНОВА**  
PhD докторант  
Узбекский государственный университет  
мировых языков  
Ташкент, Узбекистан  
[msguli.amanova@mail.ru](mailto:msguli.amanova@mail.ru)

### Аннотация

С момента обретения независимости международные отношения Узбекистана со странами мирового сообщества перешли на качественно новый уровень. В период глобализации экономики, интеграции политической и культурной жизни, способствующей активизации и укреплению международных связей в различных сферах, иностранные языки, в частности, английский и русский как языки международного общения играют жизненно важную роль в социально-политической сфере страны.

Существуют различные исследования, посвященные роли иностранных языков в современном глобализированном мире. В данной статье рассматривается влияние русского и английского языков как международных языков в Республике Узбекистан. Анализ показал, что английский и русский языки являются соперниками в некотором смысле, чтобы стать доминирующим иностранным языком среди работодателей страны в будущем.

**Ключевые слова:** политика; иностранные языки; русский; английский; узбекский; языковая политика; социально-политическая сфера; образование; языковая проблема.

**Introduction.** Language, which is one of the main symbolic markers of ethnic identity, has always played an important role in the history of international relations because of the frequent discrepancy between language and state borders.

The 21st century has changed many ideas about the laws of social development, including the knowledge of a foreign language by leaders and employers of the country.

Thus, the processes of globalization and geopolitical changes of the last decades, the expansion of the sphere of influence of the world's languages (especially English) has led to the fact that language, as a complex socio-cultural

phenomenon, increasingly came to be regarded as an effective component of the so-called “soft power” (4, 12).

The problem of foreign language knowledge in politics is also relevant for many countries with a multi-ethnic composition of the population in the context of the formation of the foundations of a modern nation-state, the basis of which, as we know, is a single political nation made up of equal representatives of different ethnic communities. And while the discuss on the ambiguous role of language in the formation of Nations still continues, none of the serious researchers does put the fact into doubt that the universal language is one of the necessary conditions to create a stable nation-state. As the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan noted at the meeting on the activities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embassies of our country abroad in February, 2018, our government is going to learn and introduce foreign experience into our policy (<https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news>).

Naturally, the strengthening of the position of the state language should not be carried out due to the gradual narrowing of the range of application of other languages, and in this regard, the harmonization of relations between the state language and foreign languages remains one of the main tasks of language policy in this area.

The Republic of Uzbekistan, which has always paid special attention to the creation of conditions for the preservation, comprehensive development, free choice and use of a language in the country is not an exception.

At the same time, our country cannot remain as an outsider in the processes of distribution, study and use of foreign languages on the territory of the country. If we do not take into account the specific role of the Russian and English languages, due to the special strategic relations between the Russian-speaking and English-speaking countries and Uzbekistan, now two foreign languages manifest actively in the language space of Uzbekistan: Russian and English, as the world lingua franca.

**Main body.** As we know, the Russian language is the 6<sup>th</sup> working language among the UN member-countries. It is the only language of interethnic communication in C.I.S. and has had a leading position in the linguistic space of Uzbekistan for many years, but English along with other foreign languages, practically did not use to have significance within the education system because of the lack of the international cooperation. The article discusses some elements of the language policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the present stage in the context of

the interaction of the Uzbek language as a state language with Russian and English languages, claiming the right to be the main foreign languages in the country.

***Uzbek vs. Russian: yesterday and today***

Uzbekistan, located in the center of Asia at the crossroads of ancient trade routes, has always stood out for its multi-ethnic population, which to a large extent made a contribution to the spread of elements of bilingualism and even multilingualism. Under these conditions, the Uzbek language until the mid of the last century successfully fulfilled its functions as a regional language, the zone of influence of which spread not only in the territory where the Uzbeks live, but in some border areas, for example, some parts of Tajikistan (9).

Naturally, with the strengthening of the Soviet Union center, the Uzbek language was being replaced by Russian in large cities, for example, in Tashkent and Samarkand, which always differed in the international population content. In particular, in the 1988/1989 academic years the number of pupils in Tashkent with Uzbek language of learning was only 45% of the total number of pupils (8).

Great interest in the Russian language, first of all, testified that within the framework of a single state good knowledge of the Russian language greatly facilitated the possibility of obtaining high-quality education, rapid career growth, familiarity with the achievements of modern science and culture.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of independent Uzbekistan, the rupture of socio-economic and humanitarian relations between the former Soviet republics, the difficulties of the transition period had a serious impact on the demographic situation in the country.

As we know, the spread and strengthening of the position of the Russian language in the world is one of the most important issues of Russian foreign policy, and in the Russian expert community and the media attitude to this language is traditionally considered as the main indicator of the level of bilateral cooperation between Russia and the rest of the post-Soviet countries. The lack of official status of the Russian language in the former Soviet republics is frequently criticized in the analytical materials, which is considered as a trend “displacement of the Russian language, which acts in the most destructive way on the social and communicative aspects of the lives of citizens of Russia and CIS” (1). Moreover, it is sometimes argued that in the post-Soviet space “national languages are not ready and will not be ready yet to fully replace the Russian language” (3, 69).

However, world practice shows that not all problems present in language and language relations can be solved with the help of political and legal instruments.

As an example, we can recall the fate of the Irish language, which, despite its state status, is daily used by about 14%, and excluding communication in the educational process only 2.6% of the population of this country (8). Therefore, when the language policy is carried out, it is important to consider the real moods and expectations of different social and ethnic groups, as in the public consciousness the popularity of the language is connected not only with the cultural heritage and ethnic identity, but also depends on the degree of moral and material advantages that the knowledge gives.

On the other hand, according to above-mentioned thesis about the unwillingness of national languages to fully replace the Russian language, it is worth noting that unlike many other Union republics, in 1989 there was already a Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the status of the Uzbek language as the state language of the Republic. Of course, at that time the Uzbek language could not compete with Russian in the official sphere, however, in such areas as art, culture and education, the service of the population quite successfully competed with it.

Later, in the conditions of independence, the widespread use of the Uzbek language by state bodies, the armed forces, educational and medical institutions, the media led to a natural narrowing of the area of distribution of the Russian language.

At the same time as repeatedly mentioned at the highest level, in the development of cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan strategic humanitarian cooperation plays a great role, which is the basis of a friendly and mutually beneficial, predictable and stable relations between the two countries. (7). In this context, it is obvious that in the medium term the level of humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia will largely be determined by the role of the Russian language as the main means of interstate and intercultural communication.

The Chairman of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan Yuldashev N. on December 13, 2018 at a meeting of the upper house of Parliament noted that the implementation of the law "On the State language of the Republic of Uzbekistan" set adrift (<https://kun.uz/ru/news/2018/12/13/nigmatilla-uldasev-zaavil-cto-v-strane-neuvazitelno-otnosatsa-k-uzbekskom-azyku>). It proves that there is a growing need in Uzbekistan to use the Uzbek language as the language of power. How far will the Uzbek language be able to become truly national or state?

What role does the Russian language play in the modern society of Uzbekistan? Is there a purposeful state language policy?

In recent years, despite the importance of the Russian language in state structures, the document flow in the Uzbek language has growing tendency. Some politicians suggest translating all paperwork into Uzbek. Although it is clear that when the Central Executive bodies and the Parliament of the Republic actively use Russian in the office, it is difficult to expect a shift in this area. In the provinces, the “grassroots” administration uses Uzbek, but when they are to send a serious report to higher authority, they use the Russian language.

The use of the Russian language in Parliament also has its justification. The legal Uzbek language (juridical terminology) has not developed yet. Everything rests on the impossibility of using Uzbek as a legal and political language, since the Uzbek language has not formed into a “modern understandable” language.

The influence of the Russian language became especially noticeable in the early 20th century, although at the beginning of the 17th century, due to the development of international trade, technological progress and people’s political interaction, Slovenian words began to appear in Uzbek dialects.

All this ultimately affected the development and expansion of the social functions of the language, its qualitative component. There was a rapid increase in lexical composition, neologisms and a lot of borrowed words, especially from the Russian language appeared at that time.

Traditionally the expansion and enrichment of the Uzbek language took place in two directions:

1. Assimilation, borrowing of foreign words and their adaptation, including the emergence of “semi-words”,
2. Word-making, which can include the emergence of new words based on the vocabulary of other languages.

We consider the most noticeable borrowings from the Russian language, which took root in Uzbek:

1. Names of months earlier months were calculated according to the lunar calendar and had very different names: for example, the month of July was called “саратон”. Later all months acquired the usual names for the Russian person, but since there is no “ъ” sign in Uzbek alphabet, the spelling is as follows: *декабр, январ, феврал, сентябр*.

2. Some rare-used Uzbek words displaced by their Russian equivalents. For example, there is a term *Ўзбекистоннинг географик ҳолати*. Although the word *географик* has the Uzbek equivalent *жўроғий*, almost nowhere it is used, Russian term is used instead. The same applies to the term *президент администрацияси*, not the word *маъмурияти*.

3. In political and economic vocabulary most borrowings come from Western European languages: *портал, брокер, аудитор, контракт, менежмент, грант, аккредитив*, etc.

In the socio-political sphere the impact of the languages to each other is noticeable. For example in the Uzbek language the word *Uchtepa* means *три холма* (“three hills”) (*uch* — три (three); *tepa* — холм, возвышенность (hill, upland)).

Currently, one of the urban areas in Tashkent is called *Uchtepa tumani* (Uchtepa district). The official name of this district in Russian is written and pronounced as *Учтепинский район*. In the Uzbek language, the word *uchtepa* is a common noun, but, as the name of the district became a proper name (*Uchtepa tumani*).

In Russian the word is in the form of *Учтепинский* became an adjective but as the name of the district has remained as a proper noun. It bends and varies by gender and numbers: *в Учтепинском районе; Учтепинская районная больница; учтепинские жители* and etc.

It is proved that Russian regional speech with morphological adaptation of the Uzbek lexical material is carried out according to the rules of Russian morphology.

Uzbek words with cultural colour, orthoepic and grammatical adaptations are quite common in the Russian language in Uzbekistan. They are used in colloquial speech as well as in other speech situations.

### ***Russian vs English: today and tomorrow***

Human history shows that the spread of languages always reflects the distribution of power (9) and, in this context, the wide spread of English is rightly associated with the non-alternative dominance of the United States at the end of the last century, as well as with the formation of a global economy, the reliable functioning of which requires a homogeneous linguistic environment.

In Uzbekistan, after gaining independence, the need for active use of the English language was primarily due to the necessity of finding solutions to urgent problems in the field of foreign policy and international relations. However, in recent years, after the implementation of international projects in our country and arrival

of the largest multinational companies in our industrial area, whose working language was mainly English, interest in learning this language has become a visible economic aspect.

The natural desire of the state to provide its employees with more opportunities for their social growth stimulates interest in learning English. English was introduced into the entrance examination system as well as the selection criteria for managers and employees.

As for the state secondary schools, at the beginning of 2012/13 academic year, the number of English language teachers exceeded the similar number of Russian language teachers (as a foreign language) more than twice and amounted to 13.9% of the total number of teachers (6).

At the same time, there is a tendency to maintain some parity with regard to the study and use of Russian and English in the education system. In particular, in October, 2017 the Minister of education signed a law to continue the implementation of projects (including a joint project with the British Council) on intensive study of English at schools, on conducting courses for 520 teachers of English, providing these schools with textbooks. At the same time the project of the Ministry of education for the intensive study of the Russian language in grades 1–4 and 59 is continuing till present days (6).

On the other hand, the internationalization of educational processes has increased interest in undergraduate and postgraduate education abroad, primarily in English. The most popular universities are in the UK and the USA among Uzbek students studying in the framework of the State Program on education abroad, which over the period 2007 to 2014 reached to 676 (5).

Despite this, English still comes through Russian into Uzbek. English literature is commonly translated from Russian in Uzbekistan.

The reasons of the impact of English are:

1. Strengthening of information flow;
2. The Internet system appearance;
3. Expansion of cooperation and international relations;
4. Development of the world market, economy, information technologies;
5. Participation in the olympic games, international festivals, fashion shows;
6. Expanding the horizons and knowledge of russians;
7. Flourishing of foreign tourism.

It should be noted that modern media becomes the main source of a language. Looking through the newspapers or watching TV anyone is inevitably run into a lot of words of English origin. As a rule, they take place in Uzbek daily speech through Russian and form an image in people's perception:

*Президент видеоселекторида маҳаллийлаштиришида сусткашликка йўл қўйган корхоналар фаолияти танқид қилинди.*

*Айнан сайловолди жараёнлари, сиёсий партияларнинг парламентдаги иштироки ва уларнинг доимий фаолиятидаги рақобати шу индикаторларга асосланади. Сиёсий жараёнлар субъекти ҳисобланган электорат, сиёсий партиялар, давлат ва фуқаролик жамияти институтлари ҳам мазкур тизим асосида шаклланган ва фаолият олиб боради.*

However, despite the growing practical interest in learning English, the level of its knowledge and the proficiency of use of this language by leaders in various fields, such as education and the media, is poorer than Russian. This is primarily a consequence of poor knowledge of English. In particular, according to the 2009s statistics, the number of Uzbek citizens speaking fluently in Russian exceeds the number of English speakers by 9.5 times (10).

Surveys show that English remains the most popular language of choice for numerous foreign language courses in Uzbekistan. One of the reasons for this demand is the expansion of political, economic and humanitarian ties between our country and the outside world, in which English is the main language of communication. Another reason is socio-economic character and is related to the well-established public opinion that knowledge of the English language is a determining factor in ensuring a high standard of living. Based on this, it should be assumed that in the medium term in Uzbekistan, namely, the foreign economic sphere will be a very important practical area in which the English language can be dominant language at all.

The priority issue of modern Uzbekistan, located at the crossroads of the West and the East, is to ensure national interests through a balanced foreign policy based on the effective transformation of the country into an arena for fruitful cooperation of world and regional factors. An important element of this policy is the positioning of Uzbekistan as a country with a diverse cultural and historical heritage and great tourism potential, favorable conditions for doing business, rich traditions of tolerance and hospitality.

**Conclusion.** In order to achieve goals, stated in the Strategy of actions in five priority directions of development of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2017-2021 it is necessary to conduct such a long-term balanced language and educational policy, which, first of all, should help most of the leaders, along with Uzbek as a state language, to master at least two foreign languages.

As for the problem of state support for the study of certain foreign languages, pragmatism and linguocultural approach should remain the main criterion of choice in these cases. Knowledge of foreign languages in this context is seen not so much as a potential channel of influence of a state, but as a significant advantage that will allow a new generation of Uzbek youth to integrate into the modern world and compete with their peers from other countries, both in regional and global labor markets, which can be considered as a necessary condition for the further development of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

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