

Speaking and Learning Russian in Different International Contexts

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Abstract

The recent global spread of the Russian language is not solely due to ideological, but also to economic and practical reasons. As a lingua franca, it can be found in different regions of the world. Teaching Russian under new contexts demands alternative strategies and new thinking. Russian is still widespread in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and is the first language for some of its citizens. Russia remains attractive for migrants, and many travel to Russia annually as labour migrants. Although the quality of Russian-language teaching in these countries has deteriorated, as some observers remark, the language is still used in the public sphere, in particular in the mass media, on the streets and in advertising. Multilingualism is a way of life for the vast majority of the population in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This article looks at the current state of the eternal problem of tension in the East-South contiguity in some Asian countries neighbouring Russia with the focus on the use of Russian as a soft power and as an instrument for building and maintaining relationships.

Keywords: Russian language pedagogies, regional varieties of Russian, motivation for language study.

Использование и изучение русского языка в различных международных контекстах

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Аннотация

Глобальное распространение русского языка происходило в последнее время не из-за идеологических, а из-за экономических и практических причин. В качестве лингва франка его можно обнаружить в разных регионах мира. Преподавание русского языка в новых условиях требует альтернативных стратегий и реновации. Русский все еще интенсивно используется

в городах Таджикистана и Узбекистана, оставаясь первым языком для некоторых из их граждан. Россия продолжает притягивать трудовых иммигрантов из этих стран, что является стимулом для изучения языка. Хотя качество преподавания русского в этих странах значительно упало, как замечают некоторые наблюдатели, он продолжает использоваться в публичной сфере, особенно в СМИ, на улицах и в рекламе. Многоязычие – неотъемлемая часть жизни большинства населения Узбекистана и Таджикистана. Мы попытаемся посмотреть на современное состояние вечной проблемы некоторой напряженности при соприкосновении Востока и Юга некоторых азиатских стран, соседствующих с Россией, фокусируясь на использовании русского языка в качестве мягкой силы и инструмента построения и поддержания отношений.

Ключевые слова: преподавание русского языка, региональные версии русского языка, мотивация в изучении языка.

Introduction

As neighbours of the Russian Empire and former parts of the USSR, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have a long history of intensive use of Russian (Aminov et al. 2010, Hogan-Brun & Melnyk 2012, Shelestyuk 2014). Yet, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the status of Russian has fallen. In some domains its use remains strong, while in others it has been curtailed. The number of proficient speakers in these two countries is also in decline (Aref'ev 2020). The unique constellation of majority and minority languages and socio-cultural remnants of belonging to the Soviet Union, which are manifested in communication patterns and the use of Russian, as well as the need to ameliorate the command of the foreign languages (European and Asiatic) still provide grounds for development of various types of multilingualism in these countries (Coleman et al. 2005).

The questions about the quality of education are highly relevant to Central Asia. Joint educational projects with Russian universities are numerous in this region, and the process and results are often published in the journal *Dialog*, as well as in respective national and minority language publications. There are intense migration flows between these countries and Russia (Rosstat, 2019). Due to several changes in the language policies of these countries in the post-Soviet period, teachers in these countries face a dilemma as to whether Russian should be taught as a foreign or as a second language. Moreover, irrespective of their country and institution's policies, language teachers have to know different didactic methods, and take advantage of Internet resources. They have to motivate students, taking into account their linguistic repertoires, differing needs and learning styles. They have to accumulate a rich base of materials and regularly update them. Overall, there is serious progress in all these domains, but, unfortunately, not all practitioners have sufficient knowledge and adequate skills to teach Russian as an international language (Yelenevskaya & Protassova, 2021) and to make the most of the new pedagogical resources.

Goals and research questions

In order to be successful language education has to adjust teaching materials and methodologies to the needs of the learners. These in their turn depend on the sociocultural situation in the country, local language policies, possible contexts of the target language use and learners' language repertoires. The main goal of this article is to analyse what aspects of the sociocultural situation affect Russian-language education in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. We will give a brief history of the Russian-language dissemination in the two countries and reflect on the changes in attitudes to it. We will look at some deviations in Russian as it is spoken in the countries under study from the metropolitan norm as it is prescribed in conventional Russian-language textbooks. Finally, we will discuss why after a serious

decline in the popularity of Russian there is a reverse trend today. With these problems in mind, we pose the following research questions:

- How have attitudes to the Russian language evolved in the post-Soviet times?
- What is the role of migration on the interest in studying languages?
- In what domains does Russian remain important?
- What channels does Russia use to reinforce its soft power?

Material and Methods

Material for this article is drawn from three types of sources. We studied scholarly publications about the use and teaching of Russian in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. We analysed mass media articles about life in these countries published locally and in Russia. We paid special attention to those articles that attracted readers' comments. In addition, we monitored discussions in eight Face Book groups and studied our own photo archives which document linguistic landscape: instructions for residents, street and road signs, shop names and advertising. Thus, we had samples both of formal and informal discourse. Following Ong (1996), we regard online discussions in forums and chat groups as quasi-oral communication. Triangulation in the choice of resources enabled us to look at the Russian-language use and learning from different perspectives. We applied thematic analysis to single out themes relevant to the aim of the articles and we employed critical discourse analysis to place Russian-language use into the socio-cultural context. In addition, we used included observation, relying on our ethnographic diaries kept during our visits to the countries under study.

The role of language in applying soft power

Coined by Nyer in 1990, the term *soft power* was initially used to analyse the post-cold war situation in politics, but since then has come to be widely used in political science and sociology. Although he does not speak specifically about the role of language, Nyer (1990), sees the factors of technology, education, and economic growth as relevant to the countries' abilities to influence others. Clearly, neither of the three can function without a common language. In his later work Nyer (2008) emphasizes that soft power is more than just persuasion; rather it is the ability to entice and attract. So, in terms of soft power resources, it is the assets that produce attraction.

On the personal level, the assets include remaining kinship, friendships and professional ties. Since the last generations of people who grew up and socialized in the Soviet Union are still there, they are ready and willing to activate these ties through private companies, universities and NGOs. It is well known that contemporary publics are often sceptical of authority, and mistrust governments (Nyer 2008). This is true about ex-Soviets living in Russia and in the near- and far-abroad. Numerous joint projects in science, technology and education have been created thanks to common language, both in the literal and metaphoric sense, the latter including past experience and cultural values (Yelenevskaya & Fialkova 2009).

The Russian higher education system has developed various mechanisms to build up its soft power potential. Having introduced the Bologna Process, it has increased the state quota for foreign students to be trained at Russian universities. Moreover, some of the Russian universities have opened branches in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, e.g., Moscow State University and the National University of Science and Technology (MISiS) have branches both in Dushanbe and Tashkent; Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) functions in Tashkent, and the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University trains students in six faculties in a variety of disciplines in humanities and social sciences. At all these universities the language of instruction is Russian. Together with the

language, members of the new generation of the intellectual elite of the two countries absorb Russian values.

The frameworks for academic exchanges are gradually diversifying. Besides the state-funded 'slots' for foreign students there is direct student enrolment through competition at leading universities in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other cities. Moreover, there are collaboration programs with partner universities including joint undergraduate and graduate programs and joint projects (Sergunin & Karabeshkin 2015).

After cutting the use of the Russian language in the public sphere and education and changing local toponymics by removing the names of prominent Russian statesmen, writers and scientists from urban maps, the authorities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had to admit that the quality education required for economic and technological advances still needed the Russian language (Molodov 2017; Rizoyon 2021). While both countries try to pursue multi-vector policies presupposing development of English and Russian skills among the young, it has become clear that the goal of improving English studies is harder to achieve than those of the Russian studies. The recent programs of sending school textbooks as gifts to provincial schools and experienced educators for retraining Russian teachers is aimed at improving the level of language education. The emphasis in the retraining program is on state-of-the-art methods, teaching students with special needs and distance learning.

Tajikistan

The sociolinguistic situation

The first Russians settled in Tajikistan in the 1860s when it became part of the Russian Empire. The settlers were the military and traders, later joined by workers and engineers involved in building a railroad. In the Soviet times migration of Russian speakers intensified, and still followed the same trend of bringing in educated people, engineers, doctors and teachers who became an important part of local elites. In the education system, the Russian language gradually grew in importance. Parents who wanted their children to have multiple opportunities preferred to sign them up for schools in which the language of instruction was Russian. The socio-political and economic situation in the post-Soviet period has been constantly changing. Bugajski and Assenova (2016: 426-433) show that the country depends heavily on remittances from labour migrants employed in Russia. In 2018, they sent around \$2.5 billion home, which is about one-third of Tajikistan's GDP. Gusejnova (2017) ascribes to the Russian language humanitarian functions of being an interethnic, inter-state and interpersonal communicative tool, although the number of citizens who are native speakers of Russian diminished greatly in the years of independence and is now only about 3%. Still, it is a common second language for Tajiks (80 per cent of the population), Uzbeks (18 per cent), Kyrgyzs (1.5%) and other ethnicities (0.5%) (Demographics of Tajikistan 2021). The state policy supports the Russian language and undertakes measures to facilitate and support its teaching. Russian language learning is also encouraged by quotas to apply to Russian universities for studies, internships and advanced training courses run in major cities of Russia, and in branches of Russian universities in Dushanbe (Karimova 2012, Shambezoda 2014). Yet, despite these efforts the number of proficient speakers is dwindling. The quality of teaching has deteriorated in the post-Soviet period, and due to a growing demand to study English, it is becoming increasingly difficult to meet the needs of parents and students (Umarova 2014, Rozhkina 2016). The current law on language in the Republic was adopted in Soviet times, on 22 July 1989. Its main provisions concerning the status of the Russian language were subsequently fully preserved when the Constitution of the already sovereign state of Tajikistan was adopted in 1994. The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan 'On education' was

passed in 2004, and article 2 on language states that Russian as the language of interethnic communication functions freely in the territory of the Republic of Tajikistan. The 'State program for improving the teaching of Russian and English in the Republic of Tajikistan for 2004-2014 and 2015-2020' was issued by President Emomali Rahmon. The program is designed to cover all aspects of methodological and socio-pedagogical problems, including the training of the researchers and pedagogical staff, creating appropriate materials and a technical base for teaching Russian.

Russian is not a foreign language for many students. It is a required subject at school and normally it is studied from the 2nd grade on. Although second and foreign language development share considerable procedural similarities, they differ in two main aspects: (a) the amount of exposure to input and opportunities for output, and (b) the learner's probable motivation to engage in the additional language learning event. Exposure to and opportunities for target language interaction are most often restricted to the classroom. The second language learner may be immersed in the target language and culture and thus be provided with greater opportunities to use the target language. Regarding motivation, the foreign language learner's interest may range from the minimal input needed to meet a course requirement to a sincere desire to become fluent in the foreign language. However, the foreign language learner's motivation does not include the immediacy or the survival nature of the second language learner. For the second language learner, the need for language learning occurs not only in the safe confines of the language classroom, but in everyday situations that bring the learner into social interaction in the target culture (Hall & Verplause 2000). Moreover, in situations of natural communication second language users habitually engage in trans-languaging. The context of the communicative situation determines when participants use their L1 or L2. Both foreign- and second-language learners make mistakes caused by the interference with their L1. But while English interference guides are available (Swan & Smith 2001), their counterparts for Russian are not.

In schools where Russian is the primary language of instruction, classes are very big, and the majority of children cannot speak the language. The schools would require thousands more Russian language teachers. Not all teachers are competent; moreover, the textbooks used are obsolete and do not take into account changes in the sociolinguistic situation in the country (Nagzibekova 2016). Now, a new series of textbooks more appropriate to the needs of pupils is being written (Nagzibekova & Hodzhimatova 2019). In the cities and industrial zones, Russian continues to function, not only as the native language of Russians and people of other ethnicities, but also as the language of science, education, culture, mass media, tourism, sports, etc., although its use has significantly decreased. Academic life is still close to Russia, e.g., PhD theses have to be approved by the Russian Higher Attestation Commission, and research literature arrives mostly in Russian. Tajik linguists continue conducting comparative analyses of the functioning of the two contact languages in oral speech and in texts (Mukhtorov 2020), and Russian is used on TV and radio, although with some restrictions. There are newspapers, magazines and books published in Russian. About 40% of internet publications are in Russian. Citizens can write applications and fill in forms required by state agencies not only in the official language, but also in other languages, usually in Russian. Yet, in multi-ethnic groups with a predominance of Tajik speakers, the advantage is given to the Tajik language.

Peculiarities of the Russian language in communication

As mentioned earlier, in Internet communication conducted in Russian participants often trans-language, inserting phrases and whole sentences in Tajik. Quite often these

express feelings and emotions or use speech clichés: *Э қандта зан* ‘Oh, sweet woman’, *Аллох барака тияд* ‘Be healthy’, *Худобаишукр хамикаишдам* ‘Blessed be god, I sighed (with relief)’ and proverbs, e.g., *Неши ақраб на аз рӯи кин аст. Муқтазои табиатаи ҳаин аст* ‘The scorpion does not sting out of malice. It is in its nature’. Besides Tajik words, users sometimes insert English words in Cyrillic transliteration: *Это правда или фэйк?* ‘Is it true or a fake?’, *в формате таймлапс* ‘in the time lapse format’, *присоединиться к нашему челленджу* ‘to join our challenge’, *Что вы все с бушувалис это же маркетинг и не более* ‘Why are you all raging? This is no more than marketing’.

Many texts are written according to the official norms of the use of Russian language. Some grammar and spelling mistakes are similar to those made by Russian speakers in the metropolis and elsewhere in the diaspora. Other common mistakes in Russian are those caused by interference with the mother tongue. Among them are confusion between singular and plural: *выпуск этих продукции, медицинские оборудования* ‘non-countable nouns *production* and *equipment* are plural and agree with pronouns and adjectives in the plural’; problems with choosing gender: *они с такой путем* ‘in this way’; *Возьмите справку от врача что у Вас хронический болезнь* ‘Get a letter from your doctor that you have a chronic illness’; declension: *идите в прокуратура* ‘go to the public prosecutor’s office’, *ищу работу неподалёку от деревня Голубое* ‘I am looking for a job near Goluboye village’; verbal aspect: *ехать – поехать, терять – потерять*, e.g., *не дайте нам терять надежду* ‘don’t make us lose hope’; confusion in prepositional noun phrases: *организовать уход больным* instead of *организовать уход за больными* ‘arrange care of the sick’ (this usage can be also found among Russian speakers in Russia), *смотрели в телеку* instead of *смотрели по телеку* ‘watched on TV’, *сейчас всем дали приказ вакцинация* instead of *всем дали приказ вакцинироваться*, and others. There are many deviations from the dominant standard in the discourse related to government, administration and economics, e.g., *председатель города* ‘chairman of the city’, *уровень доходности населения* ‘the rate of return of the population’ instead of *уровень доходов населения* ‘the level of income of the population’, *налог на добавленную стоимость* instead of *налог на добавочную стоимость* ‘added value tax’, and others.

Some internet users resort to phonetic spelling. Apparently, these are people who have reasonable command of oral Russian but did not study the language in formal settings. Some examples are: *ты вызываешь о помощи у людей, Про вайну таджики тоже ваевали, сыревая база, во истину таджикское женское платье, не обходимые антибиётики*. Notably, it is archaic and academic vocabulary and metaphorical phrases that are often written with mistakes, pointing to the 1st language interference and confusion with other familiar words. At the same time, we come across idioms and speech metaphors that clearly point to the familiarity with clichés of contemporary informal talk in Russian: *главное надо вписаться в их среду* ‘the main thing is to integrate into their midst’, *мне тоже здесь комфортно. И не раз мне некто не сказала эй чурка... или что-то вроде. А если голова шарит то вообще можно хорошо зарабатывать* ‘I also feel comfortable here. Never has anyone said to me gook or anything of the sort. And if you are streetwise, you can even make good money’, *нужно стараться и всё будет в шоколаде* ‘one has to try hard and will be able to live large’, *крутой рецепт* ‘a cool recipe’, *квота – это просто хорошая кормушка* ‘quota is nothing but a gravy train’. The most likely sources of these words and expressions are Russian-language internet resources and circular migrants working in Russia, picking up new words and expressions and using them when they are back home.

The choice of the language used by the participants of online discussions depends on the interlocutors’ knowledge of each of them. In a widely circulated documentary, three taxi-drivers from Tajikistan (one an ethnic Uzbek in Moscow, two others working in New

York and in Dushanbe) use languages on the scale from several Russian words in Tajik to locally spoken Russian with some insertions from Tajik, to normative ‘Moscow-like’ Russian with insertions from English. Tajiks who studied some Russian have difficulties in pronunciation of Ы, ІІ, ІІІ etc. They fail to differentiate between hard and soft consonants, confuse stress and intonation, gender, and cases which are absent in their language. In Russian, animals are animated, in Tajik, only nouns denoting people may be used with pronouns ‘who, she, he’, and adjectives do not agree with nouns. Russian personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns are alien for Tajiks. Verbal aspect and different forms of numerals seem to be specific. In Tajik, verbs of motion are not differentiated, so, they try to replace all Russian verbs of motion with one verb or confound them. A Russian living in Tajikistan uses Russian in a way influenced by the Russian of his/her environment: *желающих посетить Таджикистан каждым годом возрастает; Россияне могут пересечь границу ПО ВОЗДУХУ общероссийскими паспортами и загранпаспортами; Въезд гражданам других стран по загранпаспортам при наличии визы; свою просьбу «сделать быстро» подогреть небольшой суммой. Если есть время ждать 1-2 сутки, пока будут готовить документы, платить мзду не нужно. Никто у вас его не попросит.*

Many Russian trade, cultural and language agencies operate in Tajikistan. Recruitment to Russia, ranging from low-paid jobs to university education, is actively underway, including the provision of places for free language and professional training (Khoperskaya 2016). The numbers of migrants from Tajikistan vary from 3,500 in 2004 to 89,000 in 2019. This suggests that they learn at least a minimal degree of Russian and have command of the language enabling them to survive in the Russian-language medium. New secondary schools operating in Russian are welcoming thousands of students ready to study.

Uzbekistan

The sociolinguistic situation

The Turkestan Governor-Generalship was established in 1867 when Russian troops invaded Central Asia (Morrison 2008). The economic growth of the Russian Empire required more cotton, oil, gold, coal, natural gas, and later uranium and other strategic resources which were abundant there (cf. Monaghan 2011). Turkestan became a Soviet Republic in 1917, but civil struggle continued for four more years. The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic existed from 1924 to 1991. This period includes fast industrialization, expanding urbanization, the eradication of illiteracy, and the end of traditional ways of life. Like other peoples in the USSR, residents of Uzbekistan suffered from the Great Terror and participated in World War II. Tashkent became the evacuation hub for inhabitants of the European parts of the USSR. In 1966 the city was largely destroyed by a powerful earthquake but was quickly reconstructed thanks to the joint effort of the whole country. Each of these events brought an influx of Russian-speaking teachers, engineers, artists, architects, musicians and scientists. Most of them settled down in Tashkent, making it even more multicultural and dubbed the “city of peoples’ friendship” with many ethnic groups living together in harmony. The non-indigenous population used Russian as the vehicle of intercultural communication. In 1989 Uzbek was declared the state language and Russian the language of international communication. Raging interethnic riots in the Ferghana Valley in 1989 (Borthakur 2017) led to mass emigration from Uzbekistan and gave rise to nationalist ideas.

Having become a presidential republic, Uzbekistan sought to develop a market economy (Melvin 2005). In 1992, the knowledge of Uzbek became obligatory for holding positions in government institutions. Uzbekistan and Russia agreed on the mutual

protection of the rights of their citizens; one could choose between them as one's country of citizenship (Nikolaev 1994). Nevertheless, Russians were considered equal residents in the country, not a national minority. In 1995, Russian lost the status of an official language. Ethnic Russians were allowed to stay, but experienced difficulties as many lacked proficiency in Uzbek (Landau & Kellner-Heinkele 2001). Islam has a specific role in relationships with other states and inside the country (Rasanayagam 2011). Many ties still work between the two countries in the spheres of trade, education, science, mass media, mobile connections, the military, etc. The historical and contemporary political and socioeconomic situation in Uzbekistan is the subject of diverse multifaceted analyses (Schlyter 2014, Miles 2015, Bugajski & Assenova 2016).

Some Russian-speaking minorities have left the country. In 1991, 1.594 million Russians (7.7% of the population) lived there; in 2017, 730,000 Uzbekistan residents (2.2% of the population) were registered as Russian nationals (Demographics of Uzbekistan 2021). Today's culture is a conglomerate of different influences and traditions where Russian still plays a significant role (MacFadyen 2006). Rjazancev et al. 2018 showed that Russians largely feel comfortable in today's Uzbekistan and can continue to be Orthodox. There are still quite a few printed editions in Russian, and many agencies have parallel information in at least two languages (e.g., website *sputniknews-uz.com* posts in Uzbek Cyrillic, Uzbek Roman and Russian).

Language use in Uzbekistan has been widely studied (e.g., Alpatov 2004, Cyrjakina 2012). In the current socio-political situation, the influence of Russian is diminishing. In the schools with Russian as the language of instruction (836 out of 9,680 schools in 2017 compared to 739 in 2015), 80–90% of students come from Uzbek families (Perspectives 2017). The reasons to put children in such schools are quality of education, multicultural communication habits, variety of reading possibilities and future jobs in Russia. Among 4,808,058 students, 85.61% study in Uzbek, 9.94% in Russian, and 1% in Kazakh. About 1.5 million Uzbeks are estimated to be employed in Russia, sending their remittances to Uzbekistan (about \$2.7 million in 2016, or 4% of the state income). That is why, despite efforts to increase the prestige of English in education, Russian courses for adults are more popular than English ones. Today, Russian is turning *de facto* into a foreign language, which makes Russia apprehensive about losing its influence in Central Asia (Cooley 2012).

Peculiarities of the Russian-language in communication

In urban areas Russian is audible and visible. Many elderly and middle-aged people speak fluently and without any accent. Tourists addressing young people will have no trouble being understood and getting answers, though sometimes the hosts hesitate choosing words. The typical errors of Uzbeks in Russian are gender, animacy, declension, verbal aspect, reflexives, semantic categories of verbs and adjectives, and comparatives. Some examples from internet discussions are: *любая бизнес хороша, сколько нужно терпение, учёба в низком уровне, тут не имеет разницы в национальности, оставили без средств существования* etc. Even those who make few mistakes tend to confuse prefixes with prepositions and spell them separately: *на лицо попытка, государство который на плевал на свой народ, по закрывали нам магазины*. In the Uzbek view of the world, connotations of some of the key concepts, such as *house, stone, steel, bread, useful, beautiful, sweet*, and others, differ from those in Russian, and have been absorbed by the regional variety of the Russian language. The word order and word formation also affect the syntax of the speakers (Zaykova & Tayranova 2019). Uzbek writers insert Uzbekisms into their Russian (Kazakova 2015): sometimes they use parallel translations or explanations, but many Uzbekisms have been integrated into everyday language and

Russified through the use of affixation and formation of derivatives. Words like *dzhajljau* 'highland pasture' entered Uzbek Russian. Words like *divan* Rus. 'sofa' have several meanings in Uzbek: State Council, State chancellery, and administrative institutions. The word *sultan* means an Eastern ruler in Uzbek. This word is also used in this meaning in Russian, but it has acquired additional meanings: a plume made of feathers and decorating an officer's cap or a decoration attached to a horse's head during ceremonies. Uzbek *djigit* means a good guy, a courageous man; in Russian *dzhigit* denotes an able and brave horseman but it is also a slang ethnonym for a person from the Caucasus or Central Asia used ironically. Communicating in Russian, people often insert Uzbek toponyms, names of administrative bodies and documents, names of foods and objects related to the traditional way of life such as *ляган* 'serving dish', *самса* 'meat pie' (this word has entered Russian language officially, and it is part of the National Corpus), *махалля* 'neighborhood', *хоким* 'mayor', *хокимияты* 'municipalities', *чапан* 'gown' etc. Most of the frequently used Uzbekisms have been well integrated and supplied with Russian affixes. A relatively new phenomenon is insertion of anglicisms: *коворкинг-центр*, *дата-центр*, *инвазивный*, *хостелов*, *онлайн-уроки*, *фитнес центр*, *билборды*, *баннеры* and others.

Language issues are a subject of public concern. One of the liveliest discussions we recorded concerned the competency of a language teacher whose online lesson, or rather its fragment was posted on the internet. While some considered the quality of teaching inadequate, others were ready to be tolerant of her heavy accent but attacked those Russian speakers who did not bother learn Uzbek. At the same time there are many instances of derision of Uzbek accent in the Russian language: *Садис пят! Наш парявоз пирёд литит...* Both of these phenomena suggest tensions accompanying changes in the statuses of Uzbek and Russian in the country.

Online discussions demonstrated that the words and clichés incorporated into Russian in the post-Soviet period in the metropolis have also entered Russian as it is spoken in Uzbekistan: *рекламодатели, это было нереально круто, противостоять этому беспредела, беспределычики, вкусняшки, Он просто не дружит головой, Наши белинкие и пушыстые*. These and many other clichés testify that Russian in Uzbekistan is not isolated but keeps developing and absorbs Uzbek words that are needed in formal communication with the institutions functioning in Uzbek, but also borrows words, reflecting new phenomena of post-Soviet life in Russia.

The educational status of Russian is a non-native language but an obligatory discipline at school and at university. Since the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Uzbekistan has created programs for schools in seven languages: Uzbek, Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Karakalpak and Turkmen. This can be interpreted as evidence of Uzbekistan being a multi-ethnic and multicultural state before the arrival of the Russians. Uzbekistan switched to the Romanized alphabet and intensively introduced languages like English, Chinese, Turkish and Arabic into the curriculum (Dzhusupov 2017, Gabdulhakov, Gabdulhakova 2014, Nishonov 2018).

Discussion

In the big cities, some core values jointly developed in the times of the USSR are alive in Central Asia, such as the need to study and get a profession, joys of reading classic literature in Russian, going to watch drama, opera and ballet. Although Russian has stopped being an official language in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, its legal status of the language of inter-ethnic communication formulated in the state laws for the time being secures functioning of the Russian language in most domains, although primarily in urban areas. In the old contact situations with Tajik and Uzbek, the borrowed words are

well integrated. They are used with Russian affixes and form derivatives. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where there are still many people who have not learned English, English loan words penetrate idiolects through Russian as it is used in the metropolis, rather than directly from English (Ergashev 2019, Khuddaykulov 2020, Kudratov 2019). But as young people go to study and travel abroad and have more hours of English language learning, the situation may change and there will be more direct borrowing. Looking at the countries in Central Asia and their language policies we can see that their proximity to China and Afghanistan plays a crucial role (Mustajoki et al. 2019). Russia, nevertheless, is still attractive and important for this region because of the possibilities of work and higher education. Moreover, Russian cultural products continue to attract intellectual elites in both countries. Russia's attempts to increase its soft power in the region do not remain unnoticed and sometimes meet opposition on the part of nationalists. At the same time there are many people who still miss the lack of borders between the countries of the former Soviet Union and are nostalgic for it. Soft power can reside both in the realm of the imagination and within institutional and operationalized action. It involves the assimilation of thoughts, beliefs and values, through sometimes subtle and imperceptible means (Nisbet 2016).

Serving as a *lingua franca*, Russian is a compulsory subject at all schools and universities operating in the Uzbek, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Tajik languages. Currently, Russian-language schooling is increasingly in demand. Students are motivated by the scope of literature in various fields of knowledge available in Russian and by career opportunities due to bilateral and multilateral economic ties with Russia. Another important factor for young people is the spread of circular migration. At school, Russian has to compete with English, which is introduced at an earlier age than before. The goal of functional multilingualism within a renewed set of languages set by the countries' educational systems still does not have a sufficient material base or enough motivation on the part of the population, but the tendencies are clear. New projects promoting multilingual education in multiple languages have been planned but pose methodological challenges for teachers who pilot them. Publication of textbooks and dictionaries reflecting local deviations and serving to teach young generations can be considered a new form of codification. Since language is never static but is constantly developing, one cannot live by rules that are seldom reconsidered. Language ideologies and language policies give food for thought to multilingual teachers, and their observations and self-reflections are fertile ground for research. In both countries we see confirmation of the familiar fact that individuals and language communities today are seldom mono- or even bilingual, but tend to operate with bigger language repertoires and have dominant language constellations enabling people to meet all their needs in multilingual environments (Aronin 2019), which is rather new for Russian speakers.

Conclusions

Russian has become an important resource of soft power. Since ideologies in Russia and Central Asia are largely different, it is the educational opportunities, cultural richness and a wide scope of internet materials in Russian that attract young Uzbeks and Tajiks to Russian studies.

Multilingualism is one of the most visible features in informal communication in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. All discussion forums we have monitored use titular languages, Russian and English. Trans-linguaging is the norm of communication and a source of linguistic creativity. The use of Cyrillic facilitates this because it does not require switches on the keyboard and keeps communication fast and smooth.

Like in other CIS countries, the Russian language in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has changed and continues changing under the influence of nationalist language policies and changes in the political and socio-economic structure of the societies. At the same time, it absorbs lexical innovations from metropolitan Russian. Like in other countries of the former Soviet Union, Russian in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan demonstrates centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in development (Mustajoki et al. 2021). It would be important to document language changes and innovations systematically and establish new codified rules that would reflect the regional use of the language rather than imitate the Moscow norm. At the same time, based on analyses of these deviations, interference guides should be developed for Russian in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Such a project would be an essential source for instructors and developers of teaching materials.

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