

Study on the Historical Changes, Characteristics, and Implementation Challenges of Uzbekistan's Language Policy*

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Language policies are of great significance to a nation's stability, unity, and development. Uzbekistan's language policies have reflected the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of different periods throughout historical changes, influencing social structures and ethnic relations. This paper summarizes the characteristics of Uzbekistan's language policies in different eras: During the Tsarist Russian period, the Russification of language policies hindered the development of local languages; in the Soviet era, policies adopted a dual approach, promoting both Russian and prioritizing ethnic languages; after independence, Uzbekistan established Uzbek as the state language and emphasized foreign language education. The current language policy in Uzbekistan presents a complex landscape: While emphasizing the dominant role of the national language helps preserve its heritage, it may easily spark ethnic and political tensions; promoting pluralism and inclusivity brings benefits but faces challenges in balancing language statuses, resource allocation, management, and communication; modernization efforts encounter difficulties in standardizing dialects and foreign loanwords; and in international exchanges, there is a need to balance relations with global lingua francas. In conclusion, Uzbekistan's language policies have undergone unique transformations and face numerous challenges. In-depth research is crucial for improving the country's policies and enhancing China-Uzbekistan cooperation. Proactive measures are needed to address these challenges, ensuring the sustainability of language policies and fostering greater national prosperity.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, language policy, historical changes, implementation challenges, medical diplomacy

Introduction

Languages, as a crucial carrier for human beings to conduct ideological exchanges, achieve cultural inheritance, and promote social development; the formulation and implementation of relevant language policies undoubtedly hold great significance for the stability, unity, and development of a country.

Uzbekistan, as a pivotal country in Central Asia, has witnessed a complex and far-reaching process of changes in its language policies throughout its long and eventful historical development. This transformation not only reflects the development trends of the country's politics, economy, culture, and many other aspects in different historical periods but also has a profound impact on its social structure, ethnic relations, and so on. An in-depth exploration of the historical changes, distinct characteristics, and various issues faced by Uzbekistan's

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language policies is of great value for a comprehensive understanding of the historical development context and current situation of this country.

Literature Review at Home and Abroad

By reviewing research at home and abroad, it can be found that foreign scholars began studying Uzbekistan's language policies in 1982. Their research achievements span multiple disciplines, including linguistics, education, sociology, and political science, and focus on the following key areas: first, exploration of Uzbekistan's language policies in a multilingual environment. Birgit Schlyter conducted in-depth analyses of language policies and development in Uzbekistan's multilingual context. Her study focused on "Language Policy and Language Development in Multilingual Uzbekistan", examining language policies and conflicts in the country within the broader framework of Afghanistan and its neighbors (Schlyter, 2012). Another study explored language policies in contemporary Central Asia, providing critical insights into Uzbekistan's position within the region's multilingual landscape (Schlyter, 2001). Schlyter emphasized the complexity and diversity of Uzbekistan's language policies in multilingual settings, addressing interlinguistic relations, language education, and language conflicts. Second, research on English language policies and challenges in Uzbekistan. Gulchehra Rahmanova and Shohida Shahabitdinova highlighted the challenges in English language policy and planning, noting English's significant role in education and social development while identifying difficulties in policy formulation and implementation (Rahmanova & Shohida, 2024). Third, studies on the development of the Uzbek language. Shozim Shazamanov and Botir Djuraev proposed strategies for Uzbek language development, offering pathways for its contemporary evolution (Shazamanov & Djuraev, 2024). Sh. I. Shozamonov, S. A. Nazarova, and B. B. Djuraev analyzed challenges in the language's development within current societal contexts, shedding light on its predicaments (Shozamonov, Nazarova, & Djuraev, 2021). Fourth, investigations into linguistic and cultural issues in Uzbek vocabulary. L. K. Nigmatova emphasized the close connection between language and culture, underscoring how vocabulary reflects cultural identities (Nigmatova, 2021). Fifth, the relationship between language policies and national development in Uzbekistan. Vladimir Mesamed explored the link between language policies and the country's democratization process, highlighting their role in political development (Mesamed, 2004). William Fierman examined the implementation of language laws, identifying issues in 1995 (Fierman, 1995) and the declining priority of such implementation after independence in a 2023 study, reflecting the interplay between language policies and national developmental stages (Fierman, 2023). Masahiro Tokunaga, Ravshan Shomurodov, and Okiliddin Alimov focused on conflicts between state-led initiatives and economic rationality concerning the state language and lingua franca, revealing complex economic impacts of language policies (Tokunaga, Shomurodov, & Alimov, 2021). Sixth, research on the relationship between language, national identity, and culture in Uzbekistan. Abuzar Khairi analyzed linguistic revivalism and its connection to national identity, emphasizing language's role in shaping collective identity (Khairi, 2016). Studies also addressed ethnic policy models, such as R. Nazarov's 2021 work, which highlighted the role of language policies within broader ethnic policies, reinforcing the link between language and national culture (Nazarov, 2021). Seventh, education and language policies. F. Carpenter used Uzbekistan as a case study to explore social changes in education and development in Central Asia, offering new perspectives on the relationship between language policies and education (Carpenter, 2023).

The study of language policies in Central Asia in China began in 1984. Through literature review, it can be found that research on Uzbekistan's language policies mainly focuses on the following aspects: first, the studies

on the status of foreign language education in Uzbekistan after independence. Lin Tingyu pointed out that since independence, Uzbekistan has actively developed foreign language education, continuously reforming and improving curriculum design, teaching methods, and teacher training to meet national development and international communication needs (Lin, 2022). Second, research on Uzbekistan's national language development policies. Sun Wenxian focused on the national language (Uzbek) development policies in the new era. Uzbekistan has vigorously promoted Uzbek as the primary official language, strengthening its status in education, administration, media, and other fields. Through formulating language policies, it aims to standardize, regulate, and popularize the national language (Sun, 2022). Third, studies on language competition and planning in Uzbekistan. Wang Xi analyzed language competition and planning in Uzbekistan, where multiple languages—including Uzbek, Russian, and minority languages—coexist in a competitive landscape. The government coordinates linguistic relations and balances interests among different language groups through language planning to achieve national linguistic harmony and stable development (Wang, 2020). Fourth, research on Uzbekistan's language policies from a linguistic ecology perspective. Feng Lulu analyzed these policies through the lens of linguistic ecology, emphasizing the interaction between language policies and social, economic, and cultural environmental factors. Uzbekistan's policies promote linguistic diversity while protecting and developing the national language to maintain national linguistic ecological balance (Feng, 2020). He Junfang studied the linguistic situation in the five Central Asian countries, discussing aspects such as the demographic structure of ethnic languages, the status and functions of different languages, residents' linguistic abilities, and the prevalence of bilingualism/multilingualism (He, 2001). Fifth, research on the impact of Uzbekistan's language policies on Chinese teaching. Azis pointed out that with deepening China-Uzbekistan exchanges, Chinese has gained increasing attention in Uzbekistan's education system. The language policies present opportunities and challenges for Chinese teaching, requiring continuous exploration and innovation in areas such as teacher training, textbook compilation, and teaching methods (Azis, 2020). Sixth, research on multilingual education in Uzbekistan's higher education. Zeng Ting noted that Uzbekistani universities actively promote multilingual education, integrating Uzbek, Russian, and other foreign languages into the curriculum to cultivate talents with global perspectives and cross-cultural communication skills (Zeng, 2020). Seventh, studies on the historical evolution of Uzbekistan's language policies. Yang Miaomiao and Wu Airong analyzed Uzbekistan's language policies from different angles. Wu Airong focused on the changing status of Russian in Uzbekistan, reflecting shifts in language policies across historical periods. With national independence and rising ethnic consciousness, the status of Uzbek has gradually increased, while Russian's role has adjusted (Yang, 2014; Wu, 2014). Zhang Hongli highlighted that Uzbekistan's language policies play a crucial role in safeguarding national sovereignty, promoting national identity, driving economic development, and enhancing international exchanges (Zhang, 2015).

In summary, existing research on Uzbekistan's language policies features scattered themes, with a lack of comprehensive analysis on: (1) the characteristics of Uzbekistan's language policies in different historical periods; (2) the characteristics of the current language policy; and (3) the challenges faced during its implementation. Based on this, this paper aims to analyze these three aspects—historical policy characteristics, current policy features, and implementation challenges—to deepen understanding of the historical evolution, cultural, and social development of Uzbekistan's language policies. It seeks to provide rich materials and theoretical support for academic research in related fields and contribute to promoting exchanges, cooperation, and mutual understanding between China and Uzbekistan.

Characteristics of Language Policies in Different Historical Periods of Uzbekistan

Characteristics of Language Policies in the Tsarist Russian Period

During the period of Tsarist Russian rule, the language policy in Uzbekistan showed a strong tendency of Russification. In the field of education, great efforts were made to strengthen Russian language education. The status of the Uzbek language in schools was gradually marginalized, with a significant reduction in teaching resources. As a result, students had very limited opportunities to learn their native language. In terms of administration, the Russian language became the dominant language. The scope of application of local languages such as the Uzbek language kept shrinking, and local administrative staff had to learn Russian to meet the job requirements. This kind of language policy severely restricted the development space of local languages like the Uzbek language. It hindered the cultural and social development of the Uzbekistan region and also affected the cultural identity and national sentiment of the local people.

Characteristics of the Language Policy During the Soviet Period

During the Soviet period, the language policy in Uzbekistan exhibited a dual nature. On the one hand, to strengthen ties and communication among the Soviet republics, the Russian language was vigorously promoted. Russian became the primary lingua franca for interaction between republics, occupying a dominant position in education, scientific research, and culture. Many schools adopted Russian as a key teaching language, opening up broader intellectual horizons for students; it also served as the main language for academic exchanges, facilitating collaboration among researchers. A large body of literary works, artistic performances, and cultural productions were disseminated through the Russian language. On the other hand, the Soviet Union also prioritized the development of ethnic minority languages. In Uzbekistan, the Uzbek language was protected and nurtured. In literary creation, numerous outstanding Uzbek-language works emerged, showcasing the region's customs, history, culture, and people's lives. In the education sector, Uzbek-language instruction received attention and support, with schools offering Uzbek courses that cultivated talent familiar with their native language and culture. In cultural activities, media, and public communication, the Uzbek language gained more space for application and development, enhancing the national pride and cultural identity of the Uzbek people.

Characteristics of Language Policies in the Post-Independence Period

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has actively promoted the Uzbek language as the national language. In the education sector, increased investment has been made in Uzbek language teaching, from textbook compilation to teacher training, to comprehensively enhance the quality and standards of Uzbek education. School curricula for the Uzbek language have been made more scientific and rational, allowing students to fully appreciate the charm of their native language. In cultural development, the government actively supports literary creation, artistic performances, and other activities in Uzbek, showcasing the unique characteristic of the nation's culture.

Meanwhile, Uzbekistan recognizes the importance of foreign language education. The government mandates English instruction starting from primary school, designating English as the first foreign language, the "National English Reading Program" has been implemented to improve English teaching standards in schools. Additionally, Uzbekistan is among the first Central Asian countries to introduce Chinese education, establishing a complete Chinese education system spanning from preschool to higher education. While vigorously promoting the Uzbek language, the country actively teaches foreign languages such as Russian and English, emphasizing the cultivation of students' multilingual abilities to lay a foundation for future international exchanges and

cooperation. In terms of writing, Uzbekistan has advanced the Latinization of the national language's script, respecting historical and cultural heritage, embracing different writing forms, and reflecting respect for the diversity of language development. Recognizing regional linguistic variations within the country, the government embraces these differences while striving to promote national linguistic unity and communication.

Characteristics of the Current Language Policy in Uzbekistan and the Challenges Faced in Its Implementation

Emphasizing the Dominant Position of the National Language Has Led to the Politicization of Language

Uzbekistan adopted language laws in July, September, and October 1989 designating the language of the titular nation as the state language. On December 8, 1992, the country's Constitution explicitly stated, "The state language of Uzbekistan is the Uzbek language". A new Law on the State Language of Uzbekistan was promulgated on December 21, 1995, and amended in 2004, legally reaffirming the status of Uzbek as the state language and mandating its use in state bodies, administrative agencies, enterprises, and organizations. By emphasizing the dominant role of the state language across sectors—education, government institutions and public services, culture and media, and economic and commercial activities—Uzbekistan has promoted the inheritance and development of the Uzbek language, strengthening national cohesion and ethnic identity.

Language is closely intertwined with national culture. Vigorously promoting the Uzbek language in Uzbekistan may trigger a series of ethnic relations issues. Firstly, for ethnic minorities, their ethnic languages carry the history, traditions, and values of their respective ethnic groups. If they feel that the promotion of the Uzbek language comes at the expense of their own ethnic languages, they are likely to develop a sense of resistance. For example, in the field of education, overemphasizing the dominant position of the Uzbek language may reduce the opportunities for ethnic minority languages to be used in school education. This makes ethnic minority groups worried that their cultural inheritance will be threatened. In such an educational environment, their children may gradually lose their mastery and identification with their ethnic languages, and as a result, they will be dissatisfied with the policy of promoting the Uzbek language. Secondly, in social life, the use of language is related to communication and integration among ethnic groups. If ethnic minorities feel uncomfortable or restricted due to language issues in public places or workplaces, it may lead to conflicts and tensions among ethnic groups. For instance, in government departments, business activities, or the media, if the Uzbek language becomes the only or main language of communication, ethnic minorities may feel marginalized, thus creating a sense of estrangement from the titular ethnic group. In addition, on the political stage of Uzbekistan, different political forces often engage in a game around language issues to gain political support. Some political forces use language policies as a means to obtain the support of specific ethnic groups. They emphasize the importance of protecting ethnic minority languages to attract the support of ethnic minority voters. Others advocate strengthening the status of the Uzbek language to cater to the nationalistic sentiments of the titular ethnic group. This conflict of political interests makes the formulation and implementation of language policies complicated and difficult. At the same time, Uzbekistan's language policies also face pressure from the international political environment. Some external forces may use language-related human rights as an excuse to interfere in Uzbekistan's language policies, accusing the country of having discriminatory language policies and not fully protecting the language rights of ethnic minorities. However, such accusations often stem from political motives rather than a genuine concern for language-related human rights issues.

Emphasis on Linguistic Diversity and Inclusivity

Since its independence, while vigorously promoting the Uzbek language, Uzbekistan has actively carried out the teaching of foreign languages such as Russian and English. Schools offer a variety of language courses for students to choose from, cultivating students' multilingual abilities and laying a foundation for future international exchanges and cooperation. In addition, the government encourages students to learn multiple foreign languages, especially placing great importance on English to enhance the country's internationalization level. Languages such as Chinese and Korean, which are used in close exchanges with neighboring countries, are also receiving increasing attention. Schools and educational institutions have increased the teaching resources and course offerings for these languages.

Uzbekistan actively participates in international language and cultural activities, such as hosting international linguistics conferences and cultural exhibitions. Scholars and cultural figures engage in exchanges and discussions with their counterparts from other countries, showcasing the unique features of the country's language and culture while drawing on the experiences of other nations. It also organizes various language and culture festivals at home. For example, activities themed "The Chinese language is a bridge of friendship between Chinese and Uzbek youth" have been held to promote the exchange and integration of different languages and cultures.

Uzbekistan has undergone a transformation in its writing system. During the process of promoting the Latinization of the writing of the national language, it respects the inheritance of historical and cultural traditions and tolerates different writing forms, which reflects its respect for the diversity of language development. There are linguistic differences among different regions within the country. The government is inclusive of these differences, allowing the linguistic characteristics of different regions to exist and develop within a certain range. At the same time, it makes efforts to promote the unity and communication of the national language.

Uzbekistan's language policy emphasizing linguistic diversity and inclusivity carries significant positive implications. Firstly, this policy effectively strengthens national cohesion. When the linguistic cultures of various ethnic groups are respected, their sense of identity and belonging to the nation increases, thereby promoting inter-ethnic understanding and integration while reducing conflicts arising from language differences. Secondly, the policy enriches the cultural connotation. Multiple languages carry the history, traditions, values, and literary arts of different ethnic groups, and their mutual integration provides abundant material for cultural innovation, driving the prosperous development of culture. Moreover, such a language policy helps enhance Uzbekistan's international influence, making it more likely to gain recognition and respect globally. This creates favorable conditions for foreign exchanges and cooperation, attracting international investment and tourists, and boosting economic growth. Additionally, a diverse and inclusive linguistic environment is conducive to cultivating high-quality talent. In such an environment, people develop enhanced capabilities, including language expression, cross-cultural communication, and logical thinking, giving them a competitive edge in the global arena and enabling them to contribute more significantly to national development.

However, this language policy also faces numerous challenges and potential negative consequences during its implementation. Firstly, there are difficulties in balancing the status of different languages. If excessive emphasis is placed on other languages, it will have an adverse impact on the promotion of the national language. On the contrary, overemphasizing the status of the national language may trigger dissatisfaction among speakers of other languages, thus affecting the overall implementation effect of the language policy. Secondly, there is

pressure on the allocation of educational resources. Meeting the educational needs of different language groups requires more resource investment, which may increase educational costs. Moreover, when resources are limited, it is likely to lead to an uneven distribution of resources, thus having a negative impact on the quality of education. Thirdly, the complexity of administrative management will increase. When the government carries out its work, whether it is formulating policies, issuing documents, or providing public services, it needs to consider the needs of different language groups and conduct translations and publicity in multiple languages. This undoubtedly requires the investment of more human, material, and financial resources. In the judicial field, multilingual legal documents and litigation procedures will further increase the difficulty of judicial work. Fourthly, there will be obstacles to social communication. Different language groups have differences in language understanding and expression, which may lead to inaccurate and unsmooth information transmission. In emergency situations, such language barriers may pose greater risks.

Gradually Promoting Language Modernization Has Led to the Issue of Language Standardization

With the continuous development of society and the rapid advancement of technology, Uzbekistan has actively pursued language modernization, with a key initiative being the transition of its writing system to Latinization. On October 21, 2020, Uzbekistan signed a presidential decree requiring the government to form a working group within just three months to develop a specific timetable for the full transition of the Uzbek language from the Cyrillic script to the Latin script. This effort aims to vigorously promote the modernization of the Uzbek language while effectively strengthening national identity. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan has continuously enhanced foreign language education. The government has set a goal that every graduate from schools, lyceums, colleges, and universities should master at least two foreign languages proficiently. This not only significantly improves the population's linguistic capabilities and international communication standards but also cultivates more globally oriented talent for the country's modernization. Additionally, Uzbekistan has designated October 21 of each year as "Uzbek Language Day" to elevate the status and influence of the Uzbek language, thereby enhancing citizens' identification with and pride in their native language. The country also actively hosts various language and cultural festivals, such as the Chinese Language and Culture Festival themed "Chinese: A Bridge of Friendship Between Chinese and Uzbek Youth". These events provide a broad platform for the Uzbek people to understand diverse linguistic cultures, strongly promoting the exchange and integration of languages and cultures.

In Uzbekistan, language standardization faces numerous challenges. On the one hand, dialectal differences in Uzbek across different regions pose difficulties in formulating a unified language standard. Balancing the respect for dialectal diversity with the need for standardization remains an urgent issue to address. On the other hand, with increased international exchanges, a large number of foreign words have poured into the Uzbek language, potentially undermining its purity and normativity. How to reasonably absorb loanwords while maintaining the language's uniqueness is another significant challenge. Additionally, although the government has established language standards, ineffective implementation in practice has led to widespread non-standard language use, making it a common issue in daily linguistic practices.

Contradictions Arising From the Needs for International Communication in Language Policy

Uzbekistan attaches great importance to the international nature of languages, which is specifically manifested in the following aspects. With the increasing frequency of economic and cultural exchanges with neighboring countries, in addition to a high level of attention to English, Chinese and Korean are also gradually

gaining popularity in the country. Learning these languages can provide a solid linguistic foundation for cooperation between Uzbekistan and its neighboring countries, and promote regional exchanges and collaboration. Moreover, Uzbekistan actively participates in various international language and cultural activities, fully showcasing the unique features of its national language and culture, while also earnestly learning from and drawing on the language and cultural experiences of other countries. Furthermore, in international exchanges and cooperation in fields such as diplomacy and business, Uzbekistan actively promotes the use of its own national language, and at the same time, places great emphasis on language communication with other countries. For example, during diplomatic negotiations, business talks and other activities with other countries, officials, and business people of Uzbekistan are proficient in using multiple languages for communication. This not only fully demonstrates Uzbekistan's high regard for international exchanges but also greatly helps to enhance Uzbekistan's influence on the international stage.

In international exchanges, the importance of international lingua francas such as English cannot be overstated. While emphasizing its national language, Uzbekistan faces the challenge of balancing Uzbek with international languages and cultivating talents who are proficient in both their mother tongue and international languages—a key issue to address in implementing its language policy. Failure to do so could hinder the country's foreign exchanges and development.

Discussion

Uzbekistan's language policy has undergone historical changes, demonstrating unique characteristics while facing numerous challenges. Historically, the Uzbek language was marginalized during the Tsarist Russia period, co-developed with Russian during the Soviet era, and became the national language after independence with a focus on foreign language education. The current language policy emphasizes the dominant position of Uzbek, prioritizes pluralism and inclusivity, promotes modernization, and embraces internationalism. However, its implementation faces challenges such as difficulties in Chinese language education, a complex linguistic environment, obstacles to language standardization, and ethnic relations and political pressures arising from the politicization of language. An in-depth study of its language policy is of great significance for Uzbekistan to refine its policies and foster exchanges and cooperation with China. The country should actively address these challenges, balancing dominance of the national language with pluralism, modernization, and internationalism to achieve sustainable development of its language policy and ensure national stability and prosperity.

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