

UZBEK MEDIA DEVELOPS ACCORDING TO ITS COUNTRY LAWS

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In Uzbekistan, the media is less and less meeting literary language standards; and the ethnic minorities' need of editions in their mother tongues is not satisfied.

The Constitution and two laws govern media activities in the Uzbekistan language space: 'On the State Language' and 'On the Introduction of the Uzbek Alphabet Based on Roman Graphics'. The law on the State Language adopted during the USSR era on October 21, 1989, runs that making Uzbek the state language does not infringe constitutional rights of nationalities and peoples living in Uzbekistan in terms of use of their native languages. This provision is stipulated in Article 20 that runs that books, newspapers, magazines and bulletins are printed mainly in the state language. Given a need, literature and periodicals are printed in Russian and other languages. Broadcasts of the republican TV and radio are principally produced in the state language, Russian and other languages of ethnic communities residing in Uzbekistan.

However, changes have happened in the republic's language policy since the decay of the USSR. In order to improve the process of continuous introduction of the state language a new edition of the Law was approved on December 21, 1995. Article 20 is split into two and reduced: "TV and radio broadcast in the state language and in other languages" (Article 16) and "Publication activities are exercised in the state language

and given a need in other languages" (Article 17).

Article 4 of the Uzbek Constitution guarantees a respectful attitude to languages, customs and traditions of the nationalities and peoples living in the country and conditions for their development. In other words, according to current Uzbekistan laws, Russian - formerly regarded as the language of interethnic communication - now has no legal status. The Law unequivocally defines the legal mode of functioning solely for Uzbek as the state language. In accordance with this the bulk of newspapers and magazines are published in Uzbek. This is also the case for broadcasting. At the same time one cannot say that Russian and other languages are oppressed.

Eg. there are radio channels broadcasting in both Uzbek and Russian. These channels are both governmental (Dustlik) and non-governmental (Grand, Echo Doliny, Uzbegim taronasi and others). Two of the Uzbekistan TV and Radio Company's four TV channels - TV-1 and Yoshlar - broadcast in Uzbek alone. Some 60%-70% of TTV air is allocated to Uzbek broadcasting and some 30%-40% to Russian. About 50% of the International Channel TV-4 broadcasting is in Russian (including ORT transmission), the rest is in other languages (Tajik,

Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur and others). However, the issue that has become notable in both TV and newspapers should not be disregarded.

SACRIFICED TO MONEY

Many journalists say quality of the media has decreased in terms of both contents and grammar: orthography and stylistics are worsening. "Formerly we used to learn correct writing from the newspapers," says Abdukayum Yuldashev, *Mokhiyat* newspaper editor-in-chief. "Now it's the other way round: even the most authoritative newspaper is no orthography standard anymore. This is particularly notable in Uzbek translations from Russian and other languages. Sometimes it's impossible to understand what is meant. Sentence structure is distorted; grammar rules are not observed. The most terrible thing is that this is becoming a norm. The media strongly influences people's minds, especially those of children. Probably a journalist knows foreign languages and can use the Internet but he cannot write in his native language. Good materials meeting journalistic requirements have become a rarity." He believes it is a great loss for the Uzbek press.

Yuldashev points to the low living standards of journalists as one of the reasons why this situation has emerged: they do not want to edit the materials brought to the editorial office for such small payments. They would rather write a PR article. This income-generat-

ing genre has of late become especially popular among journalists.

Abdumajid Azimov, editor-in-chief of the republican information department of Turkiston-press news agency, is of the same opinion. He believes that both print and electronic media pay no attention to text quality anymore. "Materials of such information programs as *Ahborot* (TV!), *Davr* (Ioshlar) and others is a sort of Uzbek-Russian mixture. The announcer speaks Uzbek but the sentence structure remains Russian. Let's take the program name itself: *Davr informatsion dasturi* (information program *Davr*) whereas it could be said: *Davr ahborot dasturi* (meaning is the same but in Arabic – *authors*). Besides that we often hear a sort of dialect instead of literary Uzbek."

The latter fact is explained by a journalist's need to use a dialect to obtain more information from the interviewee. Although this is criticised by Ms. Mukarram Nazarova, TTV's *Nigokh* studio editor-in-chief. Presently TV is losing the 'filter' to screen program texts. "The all-alike texts of the broadcasts have settled so much into TV editorial practice that the young journalist full of creative ideas automatically begins to write like all the rest with the passage of time. Only those very strong and talented can break away from this circle," Mukarram Nazarova emphasized.

TIME HAS CHANGED

Speaking about press language, Abdumajid Azimov said that no genre materials could be found in the press. Both experienced and starting journalists provide information usually as a report. He believes this may result in the depletion of the rich Uzbek vocabulary.

"Newspapers use the language of clerks," asserts Bobomurod Abdullaev of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). "Presidential decrees or governmental decisions are published without any journalistic comment. Whereas previously there was the [communist] party's set phrase stock now we have the governmental one. Newspapers use the leaders' language. Meanwhile newspaper language must be understandable for the mass and keep to literary language norms." This is because governmental interests instead of those of ordinary people are the priority, believes Abdulloev. Secondly, journalism is now a low-reputable and low-paid profession. The experienced 'fourth power' workers do not want to work for low remuneration. "Besides journalists, especially in TV, are employed through personal contacts rather than skills. The newspapers mainly employ youngsters without higher education," Abdullaev said. According to him some nongovernmental radio channels distort the Uzbek language. "I'm only satisfied with *Mash'al* state radio channel, whose workers have a professional command of language and diction. The other radio channels exemplify the way one must not speak," Abdullaev concludes.

ROMAN TYPE ENFORCED

Following the institution of Uzbek as the state language, a legal base has been laid to introduce the Uzbek alphabet based on Roman type instead of Cyrillic: the law was adopted on September 2, 1993. The Law emphasizes the positive experience of using Roman type for the Uzbek written language between 1929-1940, and that broad public wishes have been taken into consideration. The Law

is intended to create good conditions for accelerating all-round progress of the republic and its joining the world communication system. The document stipulates step-by-step transition to Roman type. In this connection the Supreme Council of the Republic of Uzbekistan has adopted the Decree on the Order of Bringing into Force the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Introducing the Uzbek Alphabet based on Roman Type."

As per the document, ministries and governmental agencies are responsible for developing programs and plans for particular actions and the procedure of switching to the new alphabet - (time frame; publication of textbooks and other manuals to learn Roman type; establishing special groups in companies and agencies to organize learning of the new alphabet for the staff). Composition of the Republican State Commission on the New Uzbek Alphabet, including high-ranking state officials, has been approved. The decree emphasizes that the companies and agencies themselves undertake all expenses related to the new alphabet introduction campaign, regardless of their types of ownership (except budget-supported agencies).

As per the Law, the Roman type introduction campaign should have been over by September 1, 2000. However the new edition of the Law, adopted on May 6, 1995, extends it until Sept 1, 2005. In addition, amendments introduced to Article 1 provide that the alphabet will have 26 types and three type combinations instead of 31 types and apostrophe as it was in the previous edition. Along with the new alphabet Article 2 of this Law secures necessary conditions "to master and use Arab and Cyrillic

type based on the priceless spiritual heritage that has been created; which is the national pride of the people of Uzbekistan.”

In reality there are several approaches to introducing Roman type; all greatly dependant on objective reasons. Abd McKayum Yuldashev, cited above, believes the process of switching to Roman type to be a long and expensive process. In addition, he believes that its immediate introduction, especially for print editions, will cause great social issues. Adults read newspapers very seldom but they may well stop reading them altogether. According to him there are many other points, some not so serious. “There is no uniform standard of spelling names of towns, family names and others. Eg., they write ‘Yangier’ instead of ‘Yangiyer’ (name of the town). And such points are numerous,” he believes.

Bobomurod Abdullaev notes that the media mainly uses Roman type in titles, column names and in TV captions. This is good for the print media because it attracts an adult reader, he believes. Also, if they had started introducing Roman type immediately people would probably have got used to it. Abdumajid Azimov is also for speeding up the transition to Roman type. “The earlier we transit the quicker we’ll master it,” he says. “Certainly it will be difficult for some sections of the population. Nevertheless, this process will give us another chance to approach the world community.” According to Mukarram Nazarova there’s no problem for TV to switch to Roman type as it is only used in captions; and TV workers have already undergone Roman type training courses following the Law adoption.

Currently (as of June 1, 2001), some 721 mass media have been

registered in Uzbekistan, including 507 newspapers, 157 magazines, four news agencies and 53 electronic media (TV and radio). For comparison: in 1990, before the Declaration of Uzbekistan Independence was adopted, the republic had about 300 newspapers, 60 magazines, and one news agency. The total of newspapers is up 60% and that of magazines has almost doubled over the decade. This increase is strongly due to the wishes of Uzbekistan’s many ethnic communities to have their own editions. The Tajik community ranks third in number; however there has been insufficient progress in Tajik-language media development.

PENDING CHANGES

In the late 1980s, by the decision of Uzbekistan’s Central Committee of the Communist Party, Tajik pages in solely regional and district newspapers and Tajik broadcasts on radio and TV were launched (in Bukhoro Khakikati in the Bukhara Province; and in Dehkanabad, Kitab, Choost, Kasansai, Pap, Samarqand, Nuratin, Shafirkan, Urgut, Sariasai and Bysoon districts of different provinces). They decided not to expand editorial staffs for Tajik departments but create new newspapers: Ovozi Samarqand and Sadoi Surkhon. Also Samarqand municipal newspaper began publishing articles in Tajik along with those in Uzbek and Russian. In Sokh District of the Ferghana Province, the local administration began to publish its newspaper in Tajik alone after this district was separated from Rishtan District.

“A Tajik page in Dehkanabad district newspaper was an achievement of the perestroika years as it was the republic’s first-ever one,” said Juma Eshonov, one of its

creators. “Initially it was in every issue; now it appears seldom although it still enjoys reader interest.” These pages do not remain anymore in many places. In some administrative centers they are published once a month whereas the editions are out at least once a week. This isn’t a staff issue: all Tajik journalists responsible for Tajik pages continue to work with these newspapers. The lack of willingness to go further with this business is evidently what matters. Meanwhile the Tajik community strongly needs mother tongue editions. This fact is exemplified by the great popularity of Ovozi Samarqand newspaper, published in Tajik. It has dozens of supplements for different reader categories. As Samarqand State University has a Tajik Philology Department (Uzbek universities do not train Tajik-speaking journalists) these editions suffer no shortage of staff and Tajik-language materials.

Things are somewhat better with the electronic media in Tajik. The republican radio has been broadcasting in Tajik for decades in some provinces (Samarqand, Bukhara, Surkhandarya). Since 1989, Uzbekistan State TV has offered a broadcast intended to satisfy the spiritual needs of the country’s Tajik population. Over its period of existence it has several times changed host channels and airtime. Presently, every Saturday the TV-1 channel offers the feature broadcast ‘In the One Family’; the fourth (international) channel twice a month offers a 20-minute ‘Rhangintamon’ for the Tajik. “It is daytime when the first and fourth channels broadcast these programs, i.e. when the would-be TV viewers, especially rural residents, are working outside their homes,” says Ms. Sharofat

Ermatova, editor-in-chief of the *Dustlik* office of Uzbek TV, responsible for Tajik-language broadcasting. According to her, only about 10 percent of the expected audience can watch 'Rhanginakamon'. Both journalists and the au-

dience speak about the necessity to expand TV and radio broadcasting. They also believe that periodicity of the country's Tajik newspapers, especially *Ovozi Tajik* (the oldest Tajik-language newspaper that will turn 80 in two

years), should be increased. Now it is a newspaper published by Oliy Majlis (parliament) and the Cabinet of Ministers and is out twice a week. Meanwhile the governmental newspapers in Uzbek and Russian are out five times a week.