



THE SOCIO LINGUISTIC SITUATION AND LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE AUTONOMOUS REGION OF MOUNTAINOUS BADAKHSHAN: THE CASE OF THE TAJIK LANGUAGE*

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The paper deals with the problem of closely related languages of the Eastern and Western Iranian origin that coexist in a close neighbourhood in a rather compact area of one region of Republic Tajikistan. These are a group of "minor" Pamir languages and state language of Tajikistan - Tajik.

The population of the Autonomous Region of Mountainous Badakhshan speaks different Pamir languages. They are: Shughni, Rushani, Khufi, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Sariqoli; Yazghulami; Wakhi; Ishkashimi. These languages have no script and written tradition and are used only as spoken languages in the region. The status of these languages and many other local linguemes is still discussed in Iranology. Nearly all Pamir languages to a certain extent can be called "endangered". Some of these languages, like Yazghulami, Roshorvi, Ishkashimi are included into "The Red Book " (UNESCO 1995) as "endangered". Some of them are extinct. Information on other idioms up to now is not available.

These languages live in close cooperation and interaction with the state language of Tajikistan - Tajik. Almost all population of Badakhshan is multilingual or bilingual. The second language is official language of the state - Tajik. This language is used in Badakhshan as the language of education, press, media, and culture. This is the reason why this paper is focused on the status of Tajik language in Republic Tajikistan and particularly in Badakhshan. The Tajik literary language (its oral and written forms) has a long history and rich written traditions. By the early 20th century, it had become quite distinguished from colloquial speech. The vocabulary was rather archaic and overloaded with Arabic loanwords. Forms widely used in literary language were not used in colloquial speech, or were only partly used in dialects and sub-dialects. Some of the most archaic features were contained in these dialects. At the same time, numerous lexical forms and grammatical models that were used in the most local dialects were not part of literary language, whether written, oral or colloquial. Only after the October revolution, work began on bringing literary Tajik language closer to colloquial speech and dialects. In the late 1920s, the language began to be purified of its archaisms and Arabic borrowings. Instead, variants of words were introduced to literary Tajik, along with grammatical and even some syntactical models from dialects.

The first Tajik newspaper "Owozi Tojik" appeared not long after the formation in November 1924 of the Tajik Autonomous Republic. On the pages of this newspaper, discussion arose over problems of literary Tajik language. In particular, whether press language should be based on the standards of commonly spoken speech, which was closer to local dialects. Among the demands of the newspaper writers: the bringing of literary language closer to colloquial speech; the democratisation of written language; and the simplification of language (especially in the press). They also called for literary language to be purified of incomprehensible foreign words ("kalimahoi begona"), as well as for an active struggle against Arabic words and archaisms.

Famous Tajik writer Sadridin Ayni argued for this necessary democratisation of the press and reference literature, in particular manuals and textbooks. He said: "the basis of this language should be



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the language of mountainous Tajiks, as their language is easy generally accessible, free from Arabic loans and Persian decorations and ornamentations". The problem of the democratisation of the Tajik language began to encompass the whole problem of constructing modern Tajik. The first congress of the "Tajik alphabet" in 1929 was focused on the problem of literary Tajik language. There were several opinions on the problem: one group considered that the basis of literary Tajik language should be the classical Persian-Tajik language of Rudaki, a prominent poet of Tajik origin. Another gave preference to the Persian language of modern Iran. A third group was convinced that a modern literary Tajik language could be created only on the basis of simplification, bringing it together with commonly spoken language, purified from Iranian influence [Aini 1924; 1926; Berdieva 1971:20-24]. The result of this debate was the victory of the trend towards democratization, and the norms and standards of commonly spoken language and dialects. From this time on, the standard language, especially in its oral form, in Dushanbe (the capital of Tajikistan) was based on northern dialects that are spoken outside of Tajikistan, in Uzbekistan. These dialects include Bukhara, Samarqand and others. They were spoken by a group of leading scholars and professionals in language and literature, including writers and poets, who played the key role in this process. Among these figures were: Sadridin Aini, Jalol Ikrami, T.Zehni, and Rahim Hashim. Important influences were Muhammadjon Shukurov, Bobojon Gafurov, Sharofiddin Rustamov, M.Niyazmuhammedov, and Abduqadir Maniyazov.

Later a significant role in the process of changing literary Tajik language (especially its colloquial form) was played by Leninabad dialects. This was because the senior politicians were mostly from this Northern area, and the prestige of their dialects was relatively high throughout the Republic. On the whole, the literary Tajik (written and oral) that evolved by the beginning of the 1990s in Dushanbe had supradialectal features. However, unofficial colloquial speech differed more from written and oral official language, because it reflected the dialect of a speaker through phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features. From this particular type of speech emerged dialect features, as follows: - lexical models: sap-safed, zab-zard; - indefinite pronouns used in colloquial speech: kim-ki, kim-chi - interrogative particle - mi - secondary personal pronoun: -ton [Kerimova 1996:19-20; 1977:197,206].

In the 1970-80s, a large number of philologists - specialists in Tajik and Persian languages - worked in Iran and Afghanistan. They became acquainted with vernacular Iranian languages and learned about the development of languages in these countries. Alongside moves towards the sovereignty of Tajikistan, this gave a new impetus to the development of Tajik along the lines of modern Persian and/or Persian-Tajik classical model. During this period, Tajik was enriched by new and wide terminological vocabulary from Persian and Dari. The intellectuals and representatives of the new political elite, who were influencing use of the language were now Tajiks living inside Tajikistan, especially in the south: Qurghonteppa, Kulob, and Qarateghin.

On this basis the process of change of the dialect base of the Tajik language evolved naturally. In 1989, Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic adopted the "The Law on Language" according to which Tajik became a state language. The name "Farsi" was placed in parentheses after Tajik. Russian was given a status of language of international communication. The Law defined the status and language guarantees of the sphere of usage of Tajik, Russian, and other national languages of other people living in Tajikistan: Uzbek, Kirghiz, and Turkmen, etc. A special article was devoted to Pamir languages: "Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic creates the conditions for the free development and usage of the Gorno-Badakhshan (Pamir) languages and preservation of Yaghnob language. Autonomous Region of Mountainous Badakhshan self-dependently decides the questions regarding the functioning of local languages" [1989: 15-16]. This act was a further step towards the sovereignty of Tajikistan, and can be considered part of a strategy aimed at leaving the Soviet Union, also as an attempt to mobilise language as an instrument to establish an ethnic monopoly. In 1991, when Tajikistan became a sovereign state, Tajik finally gained the status of the sole state language. Russian became international, and Uzbek just another ethnic language, though the "Law on Language" and "Constitution of Republic Tajikistan" were printed in Tajik, Russian and Uzbek [1989; 1993; 1994]. The influence of the southern dialect base has continued. In 1992 the implementation of a plan to change graphics from Cyrillic to Arabic (Persian) was considered, but no decision was taken or even officially noted in any document. With the change of government in Tajikistan in 1993, a new dialect group emerged. These were Kulob speaking people. This was a time of rapid social change, of civil war and mass migration from one region to another. The period had an important impact on the speech of the population of Dushanbe, and Badakhshan area.

There were to be repercussions throughout Tajikistan.

To the north of the Badakhshan Mountainous Region are the dialects of Wanj and Darwaz. To the south, part of the population speaks Badakhshan Tajik dialects. These dialects can be divided into four subdialects: Ghoron (from Khas-Kharagh to Barshor), Ishkashim (Sist, Muwoj, Awj, Nud, and Dasht villages), Wakhan (Drizh, Chiltok, Yamg,Udit villages), and Munji located in Shahdara valley (Corj village). By now the Munji subdialect has been virtually replaced by the Shughni language: in several families, the elder generation preserves some special expressions and uses separate words. The population of Ghoron is composed of descendants of Tajik-speaking migrants that went there from Afghanistan in 13-14th centuries, and were employed in mining. It appears that the population of neighbouring villages speaks Tajik because of the spread of Tajik Badakhshan dialects. However, at present, as a result of mixed marriages, the population of Khas-Kharagh village (the nearest to Khorogh - administrative center of Badakhshan) has become mostly Shughni speaking.

By classification of Tajik dialects, dialects located in Tajik Badakhshan (Tajikistan) are considered as two different groups of dialects: Southern (Badakhshan - about 9000 people), and South-Eastern (Wanj - about 19,900 people, Darwaz - 25,000). On the whole Badakhshan dialects are relatively close to Kulob Tajik dialects. They are also close to rural dialects of Afghanistan, and are considered transitional between southern Tajik dialects and the Tajik (Dari) rural dialects of Afghanistan [Rastorgueva 1982:12; Rozenfeld 1971:38; Lorrimer 1922].

During the migrations of the 1950s, part of the Yazghulami and Wakhi ethnic groups moved to the south valleys of Tajikistan, where they had compact settlements before the civil war. Specific forms of Tajik speech evolving from local ethnic surroundings emerged from the interaction of local Tajik subdialects. In 1992, these groups returned temporarily to Badakhshan, and brought with them variants of Tajik speech. Some of the Yazghulamis settled in the upper Yazghulam valley, where some families still live. The Wakhi people lived in different villages with local families and the influence of their Tajik was not so important.

Apart from these variants of Tajik in Badakhshan, there exists a special Tajik variant of speech that is used as intermediate language between Tajik and Pamir populations, and between populations speaking different Pamir languages. This special variant evolved over many centuries. Russian scholars call it "interPamir Forsi" [Rozenfeld 1971:5]. The local population calls their Badakhshan dialect "Porsi" or "Forsi". Despite this term, these are just variants of Tajik speech in contrast with Pamir languages.

This specific variant of Tajik evolved historically in this geographically closed space and isolated region because Tajik dialects had moved to the region from two different directions: North (Tajik dialects of Tajikistan) and South-West (Tajik (Dari) dialects of Afghanistan). Another characteristic feature of this variant was that it was a second language for native speakers, and a language for the elite. This elite spoke Pamir languages and their Tajik was interfered by their mother languages. Tajik was an intermediate language, a language of writing, religion, culture and civilization. Most local people had little knowledge of Tajik. The population of Wanj and Darwaz was traditionally oriented to the North and did not use the intermediate variant of the Badakhshan Tajik language.

This relative isolation led to certain inertia in language development in contrast to the more rapid evolution of dialects located closer to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. Occasionally some prestigious linguistic trends emerged within the region. This could be due to the prestige of a poet, writer, religious leader, or to prevailing state structures and institutions. For example, Soviet schools introduced the pronunciation of Tajik majhul u. As a consequence, pupils who studied in Badakhshan schools still pronounce this u as it is pronounced in northern dialects. In the second half of the 20th century these mechanisms of adaptation were strengthened by mass literacy, education and the media. On the other hand, the influence of local Pamir languages is clear. Local Tajik dialects have Pamir languages as a substratum, and as such fall under their influence. The influence is especially evident in phonetics, vocabulary and syntax.

The vocabulary of this Tajik variant has much in common with regular Tajik vocabulary. As well as sharing a common stratum with Tajik words, it preserved forms and meanings from other origins. Part of

the historical vocabulary that came to Badakhshan dialect through Wanj and Darwaz dialects has been preserved in local Tajik, with semantics that were lost in modern literary Tajik. In other cases, the meaning or form of the lexeme has changed.

The vocabulary of Badakhshan dialects of Ishkashim region is close to the Tajik (Dari) dialects of Afghanistan as well as to the south Tajik dialects (Kulob and Rogh). Part of the vocabulary is identical.

In Badakhshan Tajik dialects, there are many loans from neighbouring Pamir languages, because part of the vocabulary came to Tajik language via cultural and material models. A group of regional words that can be found in several languages of Pamir-Hindukoosh and neighbouring regions consists of local material and spiritual terms, cultural words, etc. Another part of the vocabulary is of Turkic origin, especially connected with nomadic cattle-breeding and milk management.

Traditionally, the Tajik (Persian) language was the language of religion for the region. From approximately the 11th century, the local population was converted to Ismaili Shiyya Islam. This was propagated by the famous poet and popular Pir Nasir-i Khusraw. Despite an interruption of about 70 years in the 20th century, the language of religion has had a substantial impact on the characteristic features of local speech. Some of the words of Arabic origin came to the region together with Ismaili teaching, through classical Persian. Part of the classical Persian vocabulary preserves its specific meaning for Ismaili tradition, and applies only to this local variant of Tajik.

Reinforcement of religious activity, and the active restoration to the region of religious Ismaili institutions, took place on the basis of Persian and with the help of native Iranians mainly from Khorasan and Kerman regions. At present, the process of universalising language is taking place, as well as the conforming of conceptual and ritual components of religious procedure to Persian patterns. Interest in Ismaili traditional texts and medieval commentaries appeared to be a strong motivation to learn more about classical Persian. This interest is supported by religious institutions. A special course on religious education "Akhloq va maarifat" in Tajik was also implemented in Badakhshan schools. Manuals for this course were translated from English and Persian, and were adapted for Badakhshan from Persian models, with perceptible Persian influence. This draws on the internal resources of native Tajik speakers (Badakhshan and Darwaz dialects), as well as encouraging Pamir speaking groups to find an example in Persian language.

At the same time, the influence of Persian has become stronger. This is because of religious activity, but also because modern Persian has been implemented as a foreign language in schools, on the basis of Arabic script. This allows students to learn Persian, the traditional language of culture and prestige in the region. It enables them to gain a higher level of culture and general education.

One has observed a clear trend towards a special variant of Tajik closer to Persian than to the Tajik of Dushanbe. This trend is partly due to the use of the Tajik language by the political regime in place since 1992.

Different social groups in Badakhshan use language differently. Some social groups are closer to the Republic Tajikistan and their goal is to enable standard Tajik or its local dialect to be mastered by those Badakhshanis living in Leninabad or Khatlon. The collapse of the Soviet system made Russian a less widespread language. Inside RT it is used mainly for contacts with the military. With the growth of international employment, as well as cultural and commercial exchanges, interest in English and Persian has expanded rapidly.

The present situation of bilingual-diglossal speech communities in Badakhshan has some characteristic features. First, Badakhshan is a multilingual region, where much of the local population speaks different East-Iranian Pamir languages (140,000 out of the total Badakhshan population of 211,000 in 1999). The characteristic feature of Badakhshan Tajik is that it is closely related historically with oral Pamir languages; these latter serve as a substratum for local Tajik variants, and interrelate closely with them. Secondly, Tajik ethnic groups use different local Tajik variants - Tajik dialects and sub dialects that are also oral. Finally, various social, cultural and ethnic groups in the community use different variants of



literary Tajik - "interPamir Forsi " or literary Tajik.

The problem of Tajik-Persian language or languages [Ostrovskiy 1997] has no precise solution. Whichever variant is used depends on personal perspective. Most Tajiks cannot distinguish whether Tajik and Persian are two different languages, or whether they are simply one language based on different scripts.

At present, the Tajik of Badakhshan is influenced by literary Tajik, the national language of Republic Tajikistan and the language of education, literature, and the media. But it is also influenced by modern Persian (the language of the Islamic Republic of Iran), as well as by religious Persian language (the Persian of classical Ismaili scriptures, modern religious texts, and speech variants). In fact, for Badakhshan these language variants correspond to two poles in the continuum of the Tajik-Persian language and Iranian cultural traditions.

The Tajik of Badakhshan is the intermediate language for different ethnic groups, such as Tajiks and Pamirs, but it also used between speakers of different Pamir languages. It is the language of education, literature and the media in Badakhshan, but also the language of the diaspora living in RT. In Badakhshan, it serves as the literary language. There, the establishment of Khorogh State University strengthened the status of the national Tajik language.

In the region, the Tajik language is a sign of education and prestige. It is used in all official oral communication. With its lofty, almost bombastic style, it traditionally marks a high level of culture that corresponds to high social status.

The aspiration towards Persian-Tajik culture, with its traditionally high status, is expressed in a desire to master its written and oral heritage, and thus gain higher cultural and social prestige. Historically, the social system that prevailed in the region for centuries meant that an individual's social group was determined by birth, and could not be changed. However, in the last century, knowledge, and especially religious knowledge, has given individuals the opportunity to gain higher rank or religious authority.

In the sociolinguistic situation of Badakhshan most of the population can use more than one code (up to five). There is not only functional distribution between these codes, but also a strict convention that one should be higher than another. In Badakhshan, the literary Tajik variants (Tajik, interPamir Forsi, Persian) have a traditionally higher status than Pamir languages (Shughni, Rushani, Wakhi, etc.). In the 1980s, at the time of claims of sovereignty and republic status for Badakhshan, a movement of activists and intellectuals attempted to change the code structure, to take account of social change between ethnic groups. This was an effort to revise the status of Pamir languages, to establish a Cyrillic base for them and to use them as full value literary languages. The "Law on Language" gave the Region's government the right to create conditions for the free development and usage of Badakhshan (Pamir) languages". According to the Law, the Region's government itself would decide "all the questions regarding the functioning of local languages". Badakhshan's Region newspaper "Soviet Badakhshan", later "Badkhshan" and some regional newspapers had in 1980s special division in local Pamir languages. Today, the resolution of ethnic conflict in Tajikistan and the establishment of a stable central government in Dushanbe have a bit reduced the problem.

The specific feature of educational policy in Badakhshan is the absence of a special preliminary course for children who are native speakers of Pamir languages. In primary school, children who do not know Tajik are disadvantaged when they come to learn the language, because they have had no preparation. This prejudices their ability to master Tajik, and thus has a negative effect on their education as a whole.

There has been little study of the effects of law and political developments in the area of sociolinguistics. This gap has a detrimental effect on language planning in this multilingual region.



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