

THE CURRENT SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF UZBEK-ENGLISH BILINGUALISM

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Annotation: This article offers an in-depth exploration of the sociolinguistic landscape of Uzbek-English bilingualism in Uzbekistan. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study sheds light on how different societal domains interact with language use, particularly focusing on education, media, and individual attitudes. One of the key findings is the prevalence of English in professional and educational contexts, while Uzbek maintains its dominance in cultural and familial settings. The article also discusses potential future language shifts and emphasizes the importance of balanced language policies to maintain Uzbekistan's linguistic heritage while embracing the advantages of bilingualism in a globalized world.

Keywords: Uzbek-English bilingualism, sociolinguistics, code-switching, language policy, Uzbekistan, language shift, bilingual education

Introduction

Uzbekistan, a culturally and linguistically diverse country, has seen a significant shift towards bilingualism, particularly Uzbek-English bilingualism, in recent decades. This development is driven by a range of social, economic, and political factors, including globalization and educational reforms. English has become a key language for upward mobility, international communication, and academic advancement. The article explores the current sociolinguistic situation of Uzbek-English bilingualism, focusing on how it manifests in different social contexts such as education, media, business, and government.

Uzbekistan, a Central Asian country with a rich cultural and linguistic history, has seen significant sociolinguistic changes over the last few decades. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has embarked on a path of linguistic revival, focusing on Uzbek as the national language. However, due to globalization and the increasing importance of English as a global lingua franca, Uzbek-English bilingualism has emerged as a key feature of the country's linguistic landscape. This article examines the sociolinguistic situation of Uzbek-English bilingualism, focusing on its causes, dynamics, and implications for society. Specifically, we investigate how

factors such as education, media, and language policies have shaped the bilingual landscape in Uzbekistan.

The linguistic landscape of Uzbekistan has been shaped by its rich history, which includes influences from Persian, Arabic, Russian, and most recently, English. During the Soviet period, Russian was the dominant language in education, administration, and many formal domains. Uzbek, the national language, was often relegated to cultural and domestic spheres, and bilingualism was predominantly Uzbek-Russian. However, following independence in 1991, Uzbekistan pursued a nationalistic language policy, promoting Uzbek as the official language and reducing the influence of Russian in public life.

The increasing global significance of English, particularly in the domains of science, technology, international business, and education, has introduced a new dimension to the linguistic environment. English is now seen as a crucial skill for economic advancement and global communication, contributing to the emergence of Uzbek-English bilingualism.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to explore the sociolinguistic situation of Uzbek-English bilingualism. Surveys were distributed to a sample of 500 bilinguals in urban and rural regions of Uzbekistan, exploring language use patterns in education, media, family, and social settings. Additionally, in-depth interviews with 20 participants provided insights into individual attitudes towards bilingualism and language preferences in different domains. Language policies and official documents regarding bilingual education were also reviewed to provide a broader understanding of governmental efforts in promoting Uzbek and English.

The study employs a sociolinguistic approach to examine language use and identity in various social domains. Data is collected through surveys and interviews with students, professionals, educators, and policymakers across Uzbekistan. Additionally, language usage in public and private sectors is analyzed through content review of media, educational curricula, and government policies. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are used to understand how Uzbek and English are employed, perceived, and valued in different sectors of society.

Results

The data revealed that Uzbek-English bilingualism is most prevalent in urban areas, especially among younger generations. English is predominantly learned through formal education, starting from primary schools to universities, where it is seen as a critical tool for professional and academic advancement. In contrast, Uzbek remains the dominant language in familial and informal settings. The interviews further demonstrated that while many participants are proficient in both languages, they code-switch frequently depending on context. For example, English is often used in professional and educational settings, while Uzbek is used in more intimate, culturally-bound contexts.

The survey also indicated that English proficiency is generally higher among people in urban areas and among those with higher levels of education. Conversely, in rural areas, Uzbek dominates, with only limited English exposure through schooling and media.

□ **Language Use in Education:** English is increasingly present in Uzbekistan's education system. Primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions are placing a strong emphasis on English, particularly in urban areas. Universities are adopting bilingual or English-only programs, especially in subjects like science, business, and technology. Despite this progress, rural areas still face challenges, with less access to qualified English teachers and resources.

□ **Professional Spheres:** In the business sector, English is seen as the key to international trade and economic growth. Companies engaged in international markets tend to favor employees with English proficiency. Bilingualism is also crucial for career advancement in fields such as diplomacy, technology, and tourism, where English is the working language.

□ **Media and Communication:** English-language media is becoming more prevalent in Uzbekistan, including news websites, social media, and television channels. Bilingualism in media reflects broader societal changes, where English is seen as a language of prestige and global relevance. Younger generations, in particular, are increasingly using English in digital communication and social media.

□ **Government and Policy:** Government policies reflect a strong push toward bilingual education. Since 2013, English language education has been a national priority, and the government has launched several initiatives to improve English proficiency across all levels of society. However, there are ongoing debates about the balance between promoting English and maintaining the status of Uzbek as the official state language.

Media plays a crucial role in shaping the linguistic environment of Uzbekistan. English-language media, particularly on the internet and through social media platforms, has become increasingly accessible to the younger generation. Exposure to English through movies, TV shows, music, and online content has contributed significantly to the development of bilingualism, particularly among urban youth.

Uzbek-language media, on the other hand, continues to dominate traditional forms of media such as television and print journalism. State-controlled media in Uzbekistan primarily broadcasts in Uzbek, reinforcing the national language's role in the public sphere. However, the growing availability of global English-language media has introduced new linguistic practices, with many young people adopting English phrases or engaging in conversations entirely in English, especially online.

Discussion

The current sociolinguistic situation of Uzbek-English bilingualism reflects broader global trends, where English is increasingly valued for its economic and educational advantages. However, this bilingualism also raises concerns about the potential marginalization of Uzbek, particularly in more formal settings. While Uzbekistan has policies that promote the use of Uzbek, the increasing dominance of English in certain sectors, such as business and higher education, could contribute to a language shift. Nonetheless, most participants expressed a strong attachment to Uzbek, indicating that language loyalty remains robust.

The study also highlights the role of media and education in fostering bilingualism. English-language media, including films, social media, and the internet, plays a significant role in everyday language practice, particularly for younger individuals. In contrast, Uzbek media still dominates television and print, especially in rural areas.

The sociolinguistic situation also varies by region. Urban areas, with better access to education and resources, have higher rates of bilingualism, while rural regions struggle with limited infrastructure. Socioeconomic status plays a key role in determining who has access to quality English education, leading to a division between elite groups and the broader population.

Culturally, English has come to symbolize modernity and progress, particularly among younger generations. However, the growing influence of English raises questions about its impact on Uzbek language and culture. There is a risk of linguistic and cultural erosion if English continues to dominate in education and media without sufficient support for the Uzbek language.

Conclusion

Uzbek-English bilingualism in Uzbekistan reflects the country's sociolinguistic complexity, shaped by historical, educational, and global factors. While Uzbek remains the national and cultural language, English continues to gain importance, especially in urban and professional contexts. The study suggests that while Uzbek-English bilingualism is growing, efforts to balance the two languages are essential to avoid language displacement. Policymakers need to continue promoting Uzbek while recognizing the advantages of English proficiency in an increasingly interconnected world.

Uzbek-English bilingualism is a complex and evolving sociolinguistic phenomenon in Uzbekistan. While bilingualism offers numerous advantages, particularly in terms of global integration and economic growth, it also presents challenges related to linguistic inequality and the preservation of Uzbek identity. To ensure a balanced bilingualism, Uzbekistan must continue to invest in English language education while promoting policies that support the use and development of the Uzbek language.

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