

**STATUS OF AN UZBEK LANGUAGE. NATIONAL LITERATURE
OF UZBEKISTAN AND ITS REPRESENTATIVES**

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Abstract: *The notion of national language is frequently referred to as a significant, if not decisive, factor by both linguists and politicians. Nevertheless, all too often it has been left without any comprehensive definition or guidance as to what it is meant to signify. Being as elusive a notion as “nation” is, “national language” appears to be at one and the same time both complex and vague – not least from a linguistic point of view. The article discusses the importance of Uzbek language.*

Key words: *milliy til, richest languages, makhoms and bakhshi, denominational, unity, talaffuz/pronunciation, assimilation.*

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev attended the event on October 21 in 2019 and The head of our state congratulated the audience and by extension all the people of Uzbekistan on this significant date.

“Uzbek, one of the oldest and richest languages, is a symbol of national identity and independence, a grand spiritual value. Anyone wishing to feel the splendor, charm and wealth of our language, its infinite opportunities, may listen to the lullabies of our mothers, ancient dastans and makoms, songs of our hafizes and bakhshi,” the President suggested.

Uzbek is a major Turkic language. It is spoken by almost 50 million people around the world. The totalitarian system saw attempts to displace Uzbek. But our people succeeded in carefully preserving the native language, the national pride. Owing to noble endeavors of the devoted intelligentsia, not indifferent to the fate of our language, the parliament passed a law on 21 October 1989 that afforded the Uzbek the status of state language.

Thirty years on, today, another historic step is taken: President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has signed a decree on measures to radically bolster the role and authority of the Uzbek as the state language. The document declares October 21 as the Uzbek language holiday in our country. The wider public, all the people of Uzbekistan took this news with great joy.

In his speech, the head of our state noted the need to further augment the standing of the state language in the life of society and upgrade the Law on State Language building on contemporary requirements. The President then outlined pressing issues in this area.

“We should consider our attitude to the state language as an attitude to our independence, while devotion and respect for it as devotion and respect for the Motherland. This should become the rule of our life,” Shavkat Mirziyoyev said. “And every one of us must start this noble effort from ourselves, from our family and our working team.”

The festive assembly was attended by deputies and senators, government members, state and public figures, the diplomatic corps, language scholars, teachers and youth.

It is the very subject that “state language” or “official language”, a national language need not be declared as such by law. Consequently, it may become subject to interpretation and opinions to a greater extent than the other two notions. On the other hand, the more emphasis that is put on the nation-state in modern politics, the stronger the tendency to view a national language as representing in some sense the inhabitants of a well delimited territory stipulated to be a unique state. The following example from the current language situation

in Uzbekistan, which will be the focus of attention in the present article, offers a good illustration of this phenomenon. The Arabic adjective *milliy*, ‘confessional/religious/denominational’ (cp. *millat* ‘congregation’), is an old loan word in Uzbek and in a great number of other Turkic languages. What is interesting about this word in the postindependence context of the former Soviet Uzbek Republic is the focal shift from a meaning relating first and foremost to ethnic (and not as strongly religious) differentiation to a meaning associated with the notion of nationstate. For example, the *milliy tillar* of Uzbekistan during the Soviet era were the indigenous languages of the Republic, such as Uzbek, Tajik, Karakalpak, etc. The expression *milliy tillar* meant ‘nationality languages’ rather than ‘national languages’.

After Uzbek was proclaimed the state language of Uzbekistan in 1989, it soon became a language also referred to as the “national” language of the newly independent country from 1991 onwards. This language played a significant role in symbolizing and consolidating the new Uzbek state. Non-governmental political movements, e.g. *Birlik* (‘Unity’), and the Uzbek regime behaved in a similar manner by placing the language issue at the top of their agendas, and *milliy til* in the singular became an epithet pertaining to the state of Uzbekistan as a whole. In the very active and lively Uzbek language debate during the first few years of independence after 1991, there appeared, in addition to *milliy til*, ‘national language’, such expressions as *milliy alifbo*, ‘national alphabet’, and *milliy talaffuz*, ‘national pronunciation’, suggesting the existence of a unique Uzbek alphabet and the assimilation of foreign (mostly Russian) names and words into Uzbek.

In the same fashion, the term Uzbek is increasingly associated with the nation-state rather than with ethnicity. Consequently, “Uzbek language policy” could be interpreted as language policy concerning not only the state language of Uzbekistan but also, more generally, the language situation in Uzbekistan. After a brief comment on the post-independent promotion and consolidation of Uzbek as a symbol of national identity, this language will be investigated along three

dimensions – here called “parameters” – which in my opinion are crucial for an evaluation of the status of national language: distribution, corpus and manifestation. All three can be – and will be – thought of in concrete terms, such as people, territory, physical books containing vocabulary, grammatical rules, literature, etc. Other more abstract aspects interrelated in one way or another with these dimensions are the relationship of the language in question to other languages used for communication in the same geographical area and the legitimacy of the language or – from another perspective – the emotional bonds between the speaker and his language. These aspects would bring us still closer to the intangible facets of the notion of national language.

With regard both to the state of research and to the space allotted to this presentation, we will have to be content with the abovementioned “visible” expressions of the subject. It is my hope, though, that the following account will be useful for further discussions about the capacity of a language to function as a symbol of unity in a given political discourse. For further details on the language situations by the present author, where the notion of national language was commented on in relation to sociopolitical conditions, however, not discussed with regard to linguistic criteria.

On January 19, President Mirziyoyev chaired a video conference during which radical improvement of the system of spiritual and educational work, strengthening the interaction of state and public organizations in this process were discussed. A proposal was made to transform the Victory Park complex in Tashkent into a scientific center to study history. The importance of educating young people in the spirit of patriotism was emphasized. “To achieve this, it is necessary to bring history teaching to a new level and expand scientific research in this area,” the presidential press service quoted.

“It is necessary to teach national history in a national spirit. Otherwise, there will be no effect. We must teach our youth to learn lessons from history and draw conclusions,” Shavkat Mirziyoyev said.

The responsible persons were tasked to develop a concept for the development of historical science in Uzbekistan until 2030. The President instructed to strengthen the status of the Uzbek language as a state language, introduce modern technologies for its study in the country and abroad.

With the general shift in research on language policies away from corpus-related investigations and descriptive accounts to theories involving the functions and accessibility of languages, studies on language planning have typically focused on non-linguistic criteria, such as power relations in a language community and other sociopolitical factors. In contrast to this trend, an attempt was made in the present article to call upon linguistic features, not only for descriptive explorations, but for an estimation of the capacity of Uzbek to acquire and maintain the image and role of a national language. Language history and literary traditions together with the reform work that is being carried out on the current language corpus of Uzbek were the main linguistic topics referred to for this purpose

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