

*Journal of Language Pedagogy and
Innovative Applied Linguistics*
January-March 2025, Volume 3, No. 1, pp: 27-36
ISSN: 2995-6854
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The Phenomenon of Multilingualism in Uzbekistan

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to make an approach to the linguistic fact operated in Uzbekistan as a product of the conditioning factors from the beginning of history that will be mentioned, resulting in a multifactorial, multiethnic and polyglot society currently embedded in a single political entity as a State and Nation.

Key Words: *Equilingualism, Multilingualism, Diglossia, Polyglotía.*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1997/z5jkjq74>

Paper/Article Info

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Burkhonov, U., & Carlos Martin-Peñasco Medina. (2025). The Phenomenon of Multilingualism in Uzbekistan. *Journal of Language Pedagogy and Innovative Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 27-36.
<https://doi.org/10.1997/z5jkjq74>



Introduction:

In approaching the subject at hand, it is essential to establish the concept to which we are going to refer in order to avoid biases or inaccuracies due to belonging to different schools or to the risk involved in any translation. To this end, we will summarily define multilingualism as the ability to handle two or more languages. Of course, if we were to remain with this simple statement, we would be plunged into a terrible ambiguity in the face of elementary questions: Who is the subject, an individual or a community? From what level of mastery of different languages do we speak of multilingualism? Is it enough to understand those who speak in other languages? Is it necessary to speak, read and/or write them? Not all these questions have a unified answer from the scientific community; however, we can advance some aspects in the study mentioned in the title of this paper. Let's see.

To begin with, let us distinguish the multilingual phenomenon in relation to the subject: If we are dealing with an individual, the appropriate word is polyglot, since this word indicates that he/she is fluent in several languages. We can use the words bilingual, trilingual, etc. if we want to specify the number of languages; however, we find it particularly appropriate to use the concept of social multilingualism when we want to indicate that the subject is not an individual but a state, a country, a community or an institution. This is the aspect that we are going to deal with in this article in relation to the absolutely peculiar linguistic fact of Uzbekistan. Of course, we are not unaware of the frequency with which situations of linguistic variants of dialectal, phonetic, etc., occur in many countries of the world; but we believe that in our country there are exceptional circumstances that result in

the Uzbek phenomenon. In order to study it, we have to know the historical, religious, social and political factors that have developed over the centuries. Therefore, first of all, let us take a brief look at the timeline from the 6th century B.C. to the present day and then apply the current linguistic taxonomy to these events and finally see what conclusions they lead us to.

Development

A) History of multilingualism in Uzbekistan

History shows that, throughout time, human beings have resorted to various means to communicate with each other, and in this process, the role of language has been fundamental. As peoples have interacted in different spheres, both language and culture have exerted a growing influence. As a result, there are mutual links and remarkable similarities between the world's languages and cultures.

Uzbekistan, in this sense, has established itself as a crossroads of cultures and civilizations with a millenary history. Numerous ethnic groups whose languages and cultures have interacted and influenced each other have coexisted in its territory throughout the ages. In particular, the Samarkand region, having been one of the key centers of the Silk Road connecting East and West, has historically been a place where multilingualism has not only existed, but also developed and enriched over time.

This process can be analyzed in greater detail through eight stages, which we will address one by one below.

I. From the first ancient periods to the Timurid hatching (6th century BC to the 14th-15th century AD).

In ancient times, the territory of present-day Uzbekistan was the center of civilizations such as Sogdian, Bactrian and Khorasmian, where the Sogdian,

Khorasmian and Bactrian languages were widely spoken. At that time, especially in the commercial sphere, it was essential that people, and in particular traders, could communicate effectively in these languages simultaneously, depending on the region. This was because, in the large markets located in these major commercial centers, it was imperative that sellers and buyers speaking different languages could understand each other correctly when dealing with issues such as product quality, prices and the terms of agreements. Consequently, multilingualism - i.e. the active mastery of several languages by traders - became a practical necessity. Thus, learning languages and using them effectively in everyday life, especially in commerce, became an essential social skill.

Ia) The language and writing of the Sogdians. Sogdiana (which covered what are today the regions of Bukhara, Samarkand and even Tashkent) was, from the first millennium BC, one of the most important commercial and cultural centers of Central Asia. The Sogdians spoke an Eastern Iranian language and their writing was based on the Aramaic alphabet. Sogdian became one of the main trading languages along the Silk Road. By maintaining trade relations with China, India and Persia, the Sogdians spread their language widely. Sogdian is mentioned in Chinese and Tibetan sources, and it has been shown that some expressions were written in Sogdian characters in Chinese manuscripts.

Ib) The culture and languages of Bactria. Bactria (located in what is now southern Uzbekistan, southwestern Tajikistan and northern Afghanistan) was conquered from the 6th century BC by the Achaemenids and later by Alexander the Great. After these conquests, a fusion of Greek and Iranian languages took place. After the arrival of

Alexander the Great, the Greek language spread widely in Bactria, and coins were minted with inscriptions in Greek characters. The Bactrian language was the only Eastern Iranian language that developed on the basis of the Greek alphabet. During the Kushan period (1st-4th centuries AD), Bactrian was the official language of the state, used in government documents and official writings. Subsequently, the Bactrian culture and language mixed with other Central Asian languages, influencing its evolution.

Ic) The civilization of Khorasmia and its language. Khorasmia (which included what is now Karakalpakstan, the Khorazm region and part of Turkmenistan) was one of the oldest states in Central Asia, with a unique language. The Khorasmian language belonged to the Old Iranian group of languages, and some of its words have been preserved in the Uzbek and Karakalpaka languages. The Khorasmian script was based on the Aramaic alphabet and was used until the 1st century A.D., when it was replaced by the Arabic alphabet. In the fields of science and mathematics, prominent scholars such as Abu Rayhan al-Biruni and Muhammad al-Khwarizmi played a key role in the scientific development of this region.

The Sogdian, Corsican and Bactrian languages were of particular historical importance in the development of multilingualism in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan. These languages played a crucial role in trade, religion and the advancement of science, and also later influenced the formation of the Uzbek language.

Even today, the imprint of these languages is preserved in historical sources, place names and certain lexical elements. Uzbekistan's multilingual culture is closely linked to this rich ancestral heritage.

Id). The age of the Turkic tribes (from the 6th century onwards). With the arrival of the Turkic tribes in the region from the 6th century onwards, the Turkic languages began to spread widely and, by mixing with local languages, gave rise to new linguistic forms. In Central Asia, and especially in the territory of what is now Uzbekistan, the entry of these tribes brought about major transformations in the linguistic environment, a process that unfolded over several centuries.

The ancient Iranian languages spoken by the local population (such as Sogdian, Khorasmian and Bactrian) gradually began to mix with the Turkic languages. In the 8th century, with the establishment of the Uyghur Khanate (744-840), the Uyghurs and the Carluks began to settle in Central Asia. The Carluks inhabited the regions of the Fergana Valley, Tashkent and the Zarafshan Valley, significantly influencing the development of Turkic languages. By the 9th century, the Carluks became the main ethnic group of the Karakhanid state. Although Persian and Sogdian languages were still predominant at that time, Turkic languages began to gain strength and the number of local speakers increased.

The Karakhanids (10th-12th centuries) founded the first Islamic Turkic state in Central Asia. Their main language was the Turkic Carluks, which eventually began to be used in official correspondence as well. During this period, Mahmud of Kashgar, in his work *Divanü Lügat-it-Türk*, highlighted the linguistic richness of the Turkic languages. Likewise, Yusuf Khas Hajib wrote *Qutadgu Bilig* in the Turkic language, a work that contains important reflections on government, ethics and administration.

Ie) The arrival of the Arabs and their linguistic influence (8th century). In the 8th century, the Arab Caliphate expanded into Central Asia, establishing

its dominion over a large part of the region. This expansion took place under the policy of the Umayyad caliphs, and between 705 and 715, the Arab armies succeeded in establishing their dominance in the region of Mawarannahr¹ (present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and southern Kazakhstan).

As a result, Arab influence grew in all areas, including language. With the introduction of Islam, Arabic became the main language of faith and religious education, as the Quran and sacred texts were written in Arabic. With the construction of mosques and madrasas, Arabic acquired a central position in the religious education system. The exegesis of the Qur'an, the interpretation of hadith and the study of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) were conducted in Arabic.

Numerous Central Asian scholars wrote their works in Arabic during this period, which strengthened its status as a scientific language. For example:

- Abu Rayhan al-Biruni wrote *Geodesy and India* in Arabic.
- Avicenna (Ibn Sina) wrote *The Canon of Medicine* and other medical works in Arabic.
- Imam Bukhari compiled his famous hadith collection *Al-Jami' as-Sahih* in Arabic.
- Al-Khwarismi wrote his fundamental works on algebra and geometry in Arabic.

Although these scholars mainly used Arabic, they also contributed to the development of Turkic and Persian languages.

After the Arab arrival, Mawarannahr was incorporated into the Caliphate and Arabic became the official language. Fiscal systems, documents and official correspondence were conducted in Arabic. Also, many Arabic words were incorporated into Persian and Turkic,

especially in the scientific, religious and administrative fields.

For example:

- Scientific terms: azimuth(en uzb.: azimuth), algebra(en uzb.: algebra), algorithm(en uzb.: algorithm), alchemy(en uzb.: kimyo), zenith(en uzb.: zenit);

- Religious terms: as-Sirat(Uzbek: sirot), Qur'an(Uzbek: Qur'on), ayah(Uzbek: oyat), imam/imam(Uzbek: imom), Islam(Uzbek: islom), mosque(Uzbek: masjid);

- Administrative terms: mayor (Uzbek: qozi/hokim), vizier (Uzbek: vazir), emir (Uzbek: amir), caliph (Uzbek: xalifa).

If. The Mongolian period (13th century). During the 13th century, the Mongol invasion also left its linguistic mark on the region. Although the Mongolian language influenced certain areas such as state administration, the military system and some social sectors, it did not replace the local languages. Instead, Turkic and Persian languages continued to evolve and interact.

The Mongol invasion began between 1219 and 1223, when Genghis Khan's troops stormed into Central Asia, conquering cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand and Khorazm. The Mongols established their own system of government and used their language for official business. Some local nobles and officials were forced to learn Mongol language and military terminology, although the language did not spread widely among the population.

Mongolian was used as the official language in state administration. The orders of Genghis Khan and his descendants were issued in Mongolian and then translated into Persian or Turkic. In the military and governmental sphere, numerous Mongolian terms were used, such as:

- **Noyan** - military commander
- **Tumen** - military unit of 10,000 men

- **Minglik** - unit of 1,000 soldiers

- **Ordu** - military camp (this word passed into Turkic as *orda*).
Administrative terms:

- **Kan (Jan)** - ruler
- **Bek** - official, noble
- **Ulus** - State, people
- **Kurultay** - supreme assembly, council

Although the Mongol language had some relevance during Mongol rule, it did not become the dominant language. As early as the 14th century, its influence waned, and Persian and Turkic languages once again took center stage. In the time of Amir Temur (late 14th - early 15th century), Turkic was again consolidated as the language of the state. During the time of the Timurids (15th century), the Mongolian language lost its administrative function, leaving Persian and Turkic as the dominant languages.

The age of the Timurids (XIV-XV centuries).

During the rule of Amir Temur (Tamerlane) and his descendants, the Turkic and Persian languages developed as major languages in science, literature and state administration. Under Timurid rule, the culture, science and literature of Central Asia reached a new stage of splendor.

During the empire of Amir Temur (1370-1405) and later during the Timurid dynasty, the Turkic and Persian languages were used as official state languages. Persian was used mainly in diplomacy, official documents and scientific correspondence, while Turkic was common in military administration

and among the people. Arabic, on the other hand, remained the language of religious science and academic texts.

Amir Temur carried out the administration of cities such as Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent and Herat in the Persian language, although among the Timurid princes and commanders the Turkic language was in frequent use. At this time, knowledge, art and culture underwent a great development. Temur turned Samarkand into a scientific and cultural center, attracting scholars from India, Iran, China and the Arab world.

Under the patronage of Mirzo Ulugbek (1394-1449), the Samarkand astronomical observatory was founded, where research in astronomy, mathematics, medicine and history was carried out. Scientists such as Qadi Zade al-Rumi and Ali Qushji conducted their research in Arabic and Persian. Historians such as Abdurrazzaq Samarcandi and Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi wrote about the history of the Timurids in Persian.

Moreover, at this time the Turkic language established itself as a literary language. Alisher Navoiy (1441-1501) developed Turkic (Uzbek) as a literary language and wrote *Muhokamat al-lug'atayn* (The Comparison of Two Languages) to demonstrate that Turkic was as rich and expressive as Persian. With his work *Jamsa* (Quintet), he raised the Turkic language to a high literary level, highlighting its lexical richness and artistic ability.

III. Post-Murid period and its linguistic changes (XVI-XVIII centuries).

After the fall of the Timurid dynasty in 1501 at the hands of the Shaybanids, a new linguistic context emerged in Central Asia. The Shaybanids, coming from the Kipchak (Dashti Qipchoq)

steppe, promoted the use of the Turkic language. Turkic (Uzbek) was consolidated as an administrative and literary language. Although Persian continued to be used in scientific and diplomatic documents, its use in administration declined in favor of Turkic and Arabic remained the main language in religious contexts.

Muhammad Shaybani Khan himself wrote poetry in the Turkic language, and this literary tradition was continued by later rulers.

The Ashtarjanid dynasty and the Bukhara Khanate (17th-18th centuries). After the Shaybanids, the Bukhara Khanate was ruled by the Ashtarjanid dynasty. Turkic remained the main language in administration and military affairs. Persian was used as a scientific and literary language, especially in the scientific center of Bukhara. Arabic was the official language in madrasas and religious settings. Institutions such as the Nodir Devonbegi Madrasah and the Kukaldosh Madrasah operated mainly in Persian and Arabic.

The Khanates of Jiva and Kokand (18th-19th centuries). As the Khiva and Kokand khanates consolidated their independence, their language policies changed slightly. In the Khiva Khanate, Turkic (Uzbek) was declared the official state language, and all official documents began to be written in this language. Although the use of Persian gradually declined, it remained in scientific environments. Historians and poets such as Agahi, Munis and Bayani wrote in the Turkic language. The Kokand Khanate also relied on the Turkic language, in both administration and written literature. In madrasas and religious schools, Arabic and Persian were used, but the language of daily use and government remained Turkic. Poets such as Nodira, Uvaysiy, Gulkhaniy and Muhammad Siddiq Qandi created their literary works in this language.

IV. The Russian conquest and changes in language policy (19th- 20th centuries).

In the second half of the 19th century, the expansion of the Russian Empire in Central Asia had a profound impact on the linguistic environment. In 1865 Tashkent was conquered, in 1868 Bukhara, in 1873 Khiva and in 1876 Kokand, marking the beginning of Russian domination in the region.

Russian began to be used in official documents and administration. However, Turkic (Uzbek) continued to be the language of the people and of cultural life. The Persian and Arabic languages were maintained in the religious and scientific spheres, although their influence was waning. As part of the colonial policy, Russian was progressively introduced into the administration and educational system. During the 20th century, with the incorporation of Uzbekistan into the Soviet Union (1924), language policy changed radically. In 1929, the Uzbek alphabet was adapted to the Latin alphabet, but in 1940 it was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet. Russian became the language of state administration and science. Uzbek was used in education and among the population, but Russian maintained a dominant position. Although multilingualism was officially promoted during the Soviet era, Russian was the main state language.

V. The era of independence (from 1991 to the present).

Following Uzbekistan's independence in 1991, the Uzbek language was declared the official state language. In 1993, the decision was made to switch to the Latin alphabet. Russian is still used in areas such as tourism, construction and certain scientific and administrative fields. Persian-Tajik is preserved in some areas of the Bukhara, Samarkand and South Khandariya regions. Arabic continues to be used in religious

education and related academic studies. English has become increasingly popular as a language of international communication and modern science.

Multilingualism is still a reality in Uzbekistan today.

B) Linguistic periodization

In this second part of the development, we will try to assimilate each period visited in the previous section to the current concepts of social multilingualism. To do so, we will use the concepts that linguists use in the study of different communities depending on the functional distribution of languages:

- Diglossia: a situation in which two languages coexist in the same community but in which the superiority of one language over the other is recognized, whether in administrative or commercial terms, in terms of culture, religion, etc.

- Equilingualism: A situation in which two languages coexist on equal terms without specific predominance in any social, political or family area. In this status, the language used at any given time is usually compartmental with the acquiescence of the speakers who assume one of the languages in force with the intention of rapid and spontaneous understanding of the concurrent speakers at a given time. It is clearly differentiated from diglossia in that the speakers may be obliged, for example, to use the official administrative language if the predominant language has official status.

- Polyglot: This refers to the use - not always standardized- of several languages, basically for reasons of practicality. There is not necessarily a complete mastery of the different languages. We can add that historically the main justification was commercial although, at present, the acceptance of foreign languages, especially English, is an event derived from the inexorable

globalization and the overwhelming power of the media.

Code-switching. This fourth linguistic form is extremely frequent in multilingual countries where not all inhabitants are fluent in the living languages, i.e. in the development of a given discourse, the language is switched with various intentions:

a. because the subject matter is better suited to a particular language (technical terms, theological concepts, economic concepts...)

b. By reason of prestige, in which the speaker assumes a preponderant role by mastering several languages in his field.

c. By change of audience; that is, when different people are addressed at specific times, as occurs, for example, at airports where the familiar language of travelers is replaced by English to request information.

Well, let us now try to identify the periodization visited in section I with the linguistic options indicated.

The Sogdian, Bactrian and Chorasmian languages -as already mentioned-, constitute centers of languages that although sharing Iranian origin, allow the different peoples the use of polyglots given the peremptory need to meet the commercial obligations of the area, deeply inserted in the Silk Road and other currents of exchange. This phenomenon is naturally not unrelated to the different influences brought by the different peoples who participated in the ancient history of Central Asia. Greek and Aramaic elements played a role at the time. The religion itself, prior to the arrival of the Arabs, had contributions from Buddhism coming from the East as well as from Nestorian Christianity coming from what we know today as the Middle East. The arrival of the Turkic tribes initiated a coexistence with the languages of Persian origin in the area accompanied by Arabic, which became

predominant with the definitive prosperity of Islam, this language being the vehicle for educational and theological matters. The appearance of Mongolian had a lesser linguistic impact. In any case, interrelationship currents continue to take place, making it possible to speak of multilingualism and code-switching.

- The time of the Timurids (XIV-XV centuries). But it is in this period when, as is well known, the three dominant languages were established in the different fields: Turkic languages, which meant the consolidation of the language that we could call protouzbek as it was the one used and standardized by the people, Persian in official and scientific documentation and, of course, Arabic in the Koranic terms mentioned above, by. It is clearly a decisive moment in the search for identity as a country.

- Post-Murid period and its linguistic changes (XVI-XVIII centuries). Moment of idiomatic consolidation with a tendency to a diglossic multilingualism in favor of Uzbek, even though the other languages maintain their presence (see section III).

- The Russian conquest and linguistic changes (19th-20th century). This historical event in its two aspects: the second half of the 19th century with the Tsarist domination and especially in the 20th century with the integration into the USSR brought with it a situation of imposition for political reasons so that Russian became official for the Uzbek republic both in administrative and educational matters. Thus we arrive at an equilinguistic multilingualism in which the majority of the population uses both languages indistinctly and presenting usual code-switching changes in the cases described in the previous paragraphs.

- The era of independence (from 1991 to the present). It is clear that relatively little time has passed since

the emergence of Uzbekistan as an independent country, so it can be estimated that the equilingual situation of the previous period is maintained, but with clear evidence of the preponderance of the Uzbek language over the others, one of the most important decisive elements being the adoption of the Latin alphabet to the detriment of the Cyrillic alphabet. It is, therefore, one of the determining issues that we will consider in section 3 of the conclusions.

Conclusions

1.- It is a fact that Uzbekistan is home to representatives of more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups, including Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, Turkmen, Koreans, Ukrainians, Tatars and others, who have preserved their languages, which places us in a truly exceptional scenario: This great diversity of origins being important, what distinguishes our country from other examples is the standardization of at least three languages that we would call alive: Uzbek, Russian and Tajik counting on their origin to such an extent disparate that we can well affirm that coexist despite not sharing grammatical or phonetic structure given the Turkic, Slavic and Persian origins of these languages (even, as is notorious, neither alphabetic). This is what allows us to speak of a linguistic phenomenon

in Uzbekistan as indicated in the title of this article, without prejudice to other emerging languages that may be the object of study in the country for academic, social, communicative, etc. reasons.

According to our proposals, Uzbekistan is ambilingual since its society admits, encourages and provides means and freedom for the ad libitum use of the different languages and at the same time we can affirm that its citizens are polyglots given the individual mastery in such a high percentage of the population; that is to say, these special circumstances are present in the personal, family, media and in sum in everything that involves the country, its citizens and its institutions.

In spite of the answers that the future holds, it is possible that gradually this equilingualism that we have described will give way to a diglossia in which the Uzbek language will finally take the definitive leading role in the life of the country.

In any case, it is up to its people to evaluate all the possibilities, although the authors of this work advocate the survival of this magnificent heritage, since multilingualism is not only a historical legacy, but also a valued cultural wealth that decisively shapes the identity of Uzbekistan.

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