

The Importance of Balancing the Rate of Internal and External Resources in the Development of Kyrgyz Official Language

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Abstract: The article aims to draw attention to the current official language in Kyrgyzstan and the way of enhancing its functional role and balancing its position with all other languages, that are in relation to the official language, both within the country and those from outside within the context of country's language policies.

Kyrgyz language received the status of the state language after Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991. However, in 32 years of independence, it has not yet acquired the status of the state language in the full sense of the word, has not risen to the level of the language of politics, economics, technology, science and higher education on a national scale.

The development of Kyrgyz as the state language, weakened by both internal factors, such as the lack of relevant social policies, and external factors, such as the different effects arising as a result of globalization. The article will identify the obstacles hindering the development of the state language, as well as to highlight some of the ideas attempting to strengthen internal language resources; with a view to find a solution which balances the need to unify a country with multiple ethnicities and solves the problems associated with a double official language.

Keywords: Kyrgyz, Russian, state language, globalization, development, regulating, internal and external factors.

This article aims to draw attention to assess the current official language in Kyrgyzstan and the way of enhancing its functional aspects and balancing its position with all other languages both within the country and those from outside, which are related to the current official language, within the context of country's language policies.

Kyrgyzstan is a multinational country where as many as 80 different communities other than its main community, the Kyrgyz people, live together. Before gaining its independence in 1991, it was one of the 15 socialist republics in the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was one of the strongly integrated countries in the world not only socially and economically but also ideologically. As each socialist republic within the Soviet Union has a language of its own and Russian is the official language in general, bilingualism is adopted in this respect. During the 75 year-long history of socialist republic, Kyrgyzstan has enjoyed great advances in language policies.

Within this particular time period, the Kyrgyz people have not only formulated its own alphabet and literary language, but also raised its literacy rate of 3% in the early 20th century up to 100%. National language had come a long way in terms of culture, education and science during the time of Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz literature has gifted the world civilization with a great writer Chingiz Aitmatov and The Epic of Manas, one of the phenomena of world epics, has taken its place among the world's most valuable cultural heritages. The Kyrgyz language has been studied in every aspect and grammar books at distinct levels, dictionaries, academic and methodology books as well as encyclopedias have been written in this language. Local media organs have come to a position to make more broadcasts in the Kyrgyz language. Given that all these developments took place in such a short time as 75 years, it can hardly be ignored that a remarkable breakthrough has been realized in the fields of culture and education.

However, while all these rapid developments took place in only 75 years, it can also be observed that the Kyrgyz language has fallen from grace and that the new generation tends to prefer Russian as the language of scientific and communicative medium. As the most significant factor of the urban-rural marginalization which started in 1970s, it has for the first time been realized that language is an element that has a distinctive power which can divide a nation's community into two different social groups. As a result, the Kyrgyz people gave priority to Russian voluntarily but not compulsorily.

The gap between two communities, one that has been deprived of its social rights due to not having a good command of Russian despite comprising all the national values of the Kyrgyz people and the other who has a good command of Russian with the advantage of being a city dweller and enjoying all the cultural advantages, has begun to get even wider. Owing to the shortcomings in language policies, the state failed to overcome this problem. This was due to a number of reasons.

Since official language in USSR was Russian, overall communication was provided via this language between the central government and republics. National languages that sufficed with satisfying their cultural and secondary education needs in this medium became limited to being only the tool of local communication. They failed to rise to the level of being the language of politics, economics, technology and higher academic education.

The national politics of the Soviet Union, which is regarded as wise and visionary by some but totally improper and wrong by others, led to its own fall in 1991, liberating a number of countries under its reign, but these newly-independent countries do not seem to recover easily from the heavy damage caused by the Soviet Union. Above all, this state can clearly be seen in the problems that are faced by the languages, which are key to all social issues within the country. Peoples that broke up from USSR in the beginning of the century used to speak the same language and possess the same national spirit at the time, yet today they have been realigned into various social groups, each unable to understand the other's language and spirit, and cannot tolerate the other.

One of them is a group of "Mankurt" type, which was introduced to world literature by Chingiz Aitmatov, and another group who suffered the tyranny of the "Mankurts".

Points that have been inherited from the Soviet period and which still remain as hindrances in state's language policies can be introduced under the following titles:

- ❏ The Kyrgyz language has failed to become the general language of communication for all the peoples living in Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, it is hard to say that all Kyrgyz people have wholeheartedly adopted the Kyrgyz literary language. It is evident that language differences have led to a deep social disparity. This has also cast a shadow upon the respect shown by other peoples living in Kyrgyzstan to the state's official language.
- ❏ Throughout 75 years during the Soviet Union period, Russian language showed remarkable progress and gained strength as both the official and common language of peoples living in the country. This progress has mainly been nourished by the languages of all the communities under the Soviet Union as an internal source, and all the developments taking place in the world as an external source. Words and terms borrowed from external sources could penetrate into national languages only through Russian. The Russian language, which adopted borrowed words from internal and external sources by adapting them to its own pronunciation patterns, has not granted this freedom to national languages.
- ❏ Turkic languages had broken a record in the same century in this respect by trying out the three great alphabets in the world – Arabic, Latin and Cyrillic. People of the previous generation, who used the Latin alphabet by revising it three times between 1928 and 1940, always spoke highly of this alphabet, stressing that it is the most suitable one for the Kyrgyz language. Letters in the Cyrillic alphabet, which do not normally fit into the Kyrgyz pronunciation and phonetic rules, have been adopted so as to be able to clearly pronounce Russian phonemes. However, Kyrgyzstan still prefers to be a part of Cyrillic alphabet and language, unlike other republics who adopted the Latin alphabet and formulated a union of Turkic orthography after gaining their independence.
- ❏ All the new concepts and terms that came into the Russian language during the time of Soviet Union were welcomed either in Russian or in its adapted form into Russian orthography. This principle underlying the Kyrgyz orthography has made Turkic languages, including the Kyrgyz language, dependent upon a language with a totally different typology. As a result, words and word formations have come into being, totally unfit to the nature of the national language and distorting the morpho-phonological pattern.
- ❏ Scientific and technical terms have been imported into Russian either directly or through mot-a-mot (verbal) translation. Borrowing terms as they are has prevented the Kyrgyz terminology from developing its own production techniques and functionality. As a result, many field terminology dictionaries that have been prepared by the Terminology Commission have become doomed to stay on dusty shelves, not having been assimilated into the colloquial language. This has also led to a slowdown in the development of scientific literature, and resulted in either a total lack of academic books in any related field or very few, if any.
- ❏ The Kyrgyz language, which has been limited to being the language of mostly the national literature and culture as well as being the language of secondary education and local government, has failed nationwide to become the language of politics, economics, law and high technology. That is because certain mechanisms that will stipulate all the citizens to know state's official language at the desired level have not been constituted in the country's language politics.
- ❏ Since the Kyrgyz national language is not used in the higher education, academic books and scientific studies are not printed in the Kyrgyz language and Kyrgyz academicians who can teach in various scientific fields are not raised, young people from the countryside helplessly turn their heads to faculties of social sciences providing education in the national language, and those with Russian as

their first language go to prestigious faculties providing education in technical fields. As a result of this, most technical people are either Russian-speaking Kyrgyz people or those from other national origins.

While the state of language was in this position in the country, Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991. Upon gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan adopted the Kyrgyz language as its official language and thus multinational community living in Kyrgyzstan became aware of the importance of learning this official language. In the period after gaining independence, a substantial campaign was launched in academic and scientific institutions and large industrial organizations, and several language courses were initiated at the demand of thousands of people working in various workplaces, as they found it necessary to learn the official language of the state.

Most of the Kyrgyz philologists were encouraged to promote this campaign, which had caused a great stir in the country in 1992 and 1993. As one of the volunteers of this movement, I was also assigned to teach the official language of the state to Russian-speaking staff of three great institutions in Bishkek (Agroprom, Fizpribor and Ministry of Internal Affairs). I never heard any complaint or objection to this government decision from any of my students. In fact, most of them were doing their best to learn the state language with great enthusiasm and determination, believing that this was a belated attempt. Now, it can apparently be seen that it would be wise to accentuate the importance of this step, which had been made in the early years of independence when there was a great interest for the state language and this was a great opportunity for the Kyrgyz language to become common language of communication for all the peoples of Kyrgyzstan, as stated in the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan.

However, this excitement faded away when Russian language was given the status of official language of the state nine years later in 2000, putting forth the emigration of technical people, intellectuals and businessmen and the weakening of communication among communities within the country as the main pretext for this. Now on the 32th anniversary of independence, there are several reasons for failing to maintain the Kyrgyz language as the official state language and preventing it from falling into the state of a local language. Yet, the most significant factor is the fact that a language that had not yet been fully developed was put in a position to compete against a fully-developed language like Russian, which was used as the official language in the region for many years. This has eventually prevented the Kyrgyz language from becoming the official state language and eliminated the need to be adopted by every citizen in the country.

Although it has been a quarter of a century since the Independence Day, the Kyrgyz language has failed to fulfill its duties as stated in the Constitution and the Act of State Language of the Kyrgyzstan Republic. On the other hand, Russian language has become the privileged language by becoming the official language of the country. This has three significant internal and external reasons:

- ❏ The status of official language and state language has not been clearly defined;
- ❏ The inefficiency of the mechanisms of conserving and developing state language;
- ❏ In the age of globalization, the increasing influence of foreign languages like English, Chinese and Turkish as obstacles before the Kyrgyz state language due to the weak economic status of the country.

In international law, although concepts of official and state languages are generally defined differently in accordance with the structure of the country, most of them agree on the following definition: *“In any state or territory with legally defined boundaries, it is the language with the highest status granted by the Constitution compared to other languages.”*

With the declaration made by UNESCO in 1953, the contentious definitions of state language and official language have been clarified. According to this declaration, it was stated that *“as one of the sublime symbols of the state, state language is the language that is responsible for integrating political, social and cultural domains.”* As for official language, it was stated that *“It is the language of state administration, law and jurisdiction.”*

In accordance with the 1st Clause of the 5th Article of first Kyrgyz Constitution which was enacted on 5 May 1993: ***The language of the Kyrgyz Republic is Kyrgyz language.***

However, according to the 2nd Clause of the 5th Article of the Kyrgyz Constitution, which was amended by a referendum conducted on 2 February 2003: ***Russian language is used as the official language of Kyrgyz Republic.***

With the adoption this law, Kyrgyzstan has become a bilingual country and the status of state language and official language has been defined by separate laws. With reference to Article 54 of Kyrgyz Constitution dated 2 April 2004¹, the status of state language has been defined as below: ***Kyrgyz language is compulsorily***

used in all state affairs and by all local administrations as foreseen herein this law and other laws of the Kyrgyz Republic as one of the fundamentals of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In the Act of Official Language of the Kyrgyz Republic, which was passed on 25 May 2000, the status of official language has been defined as below: ***The official language of the Kyrgyz Republic is the language that is used together with the state language in state administration, in all spheres of legislative and judicial bodies as well as in other fields of social life as foreseen herein this law and other laws of the Kyrgyz Republic.***

However, in these explanations for Kyrgyz language ... **in all state affairs and local administration;**

For Russian ... **in all spheres of state administration, legislative and judicial bodies; ...and ... in other fields of social life ...**

Since the underlying meaning in these expressions is more or less the same, significant discrepancies have occurred in the use of state language and official language in Kyrgyzstan. It is certain that such discrepancies in the language policy of a country have resulted in to the detriment of state language.

The shortcomings in the language policy of the Kyrgyz State have clearly been verbalized in the **National Program of Developing and Improving State Language of Kyrgyz Republic between 2014 and 2020**, which was publicized by Decree 119 of the Kyrgyz President on 2 June 2014.

The program, which analyzed and summarized the 23-year long language policy of the Kyrgyz Republic, has found that the development of state language is quite problematic within the scope of Kyrgyzstan language policy and points awaiting immediate solutions have been listed as below:

- There has not been any remarkable progress in the fields of Kyrgyz language, state administration, business transactions, professional communication and higher education;
- Although state language is being taught nationwide in secondary education, it has been found out that only ten percent of people speaking other languages do have a good command of state language;
- It has been established that Russian language as the official language of the country has a superior position nationwide in both secondary and higher vocational education, science, media, internet, business environments, international talks and administrative affairs;
- As for the fields where state language is spoken, fields of only primary and secondary education, national literature, culture, Kyrgyz media, commercial and social policy have been introduced.
- It has also been seen that Kyrgyz language is inadequate in economics, higher education, scientific research and upbringing of specialists in modern fields.

State language has become ineffectual not only because of mismanagement but also because Kyrgyz linguists and intelligentsia failed to fulfill their duties properly. These are, failing to:

- Promote the internal sources of Kyrgyz language;
- Broaden language studies well enough to breed practical solutions;
- Prepare practical grammar books, dictionaries and guidebooks in conformity with the spoken language;
- Publish literature and translation books for children that are suitable for their age groups;
- Prepare terminological dictionaries in line with the properties of the national language.

The factors that restrain the development of state language in Kyrgyzstan stem not only from the subjective approaches of the country's social policies, but also from the objective causes of the globalization prevailing all around the world. With the influence of globalization, influential languages like English, Chinese and Turkish, which have recently started to have a strong influence on the Kyrgyz language, also create additional obstacles in the use of Kyrgyz state language. In the multinational environment that is prevalent in the country, languages are certainly preferred in accordance with the degree of necessity. In this respect, nobody gives any priority to the state language, which does not impose any obligation on people so as to be able to live in that country and benefit from all their rights. Kyrgyz people who make a great effort to learn the languages of other countries for new job opportunities do not regard it necessary to learn the state language of the country where they were born, grown up and took advantage of all its benefits.

In conclusion, it is unlikely for the Kyrgyz language to have due respect and responsibility unless it is regarded as the official language that will give the right to live and work in this country and make the integration of communities living in Kyrgyzstan. For this reason, the following objectives were set in National Program of Developing and Improving State Language of Kyrgyz Republic between 2014 and 2020 for the future of the state language and making it compulsory to learn:

- Developing effective language policy which will make state language an important communication tool in promoting the integration of Kyrgyz people;

- Aiming for a new multilingual generation who can speak state, official and foreign languages fluently besides their native language;
- Raising the level of state administrative bodies (execution, legislation, jurisdiction) to the level of international language measurement quadrant (C1)¹, so as to be able to speak the state language;
- Ensuring the writing of all business papers and presentation of them on their web pages in the state language.

These are some of the objectives considered important in the multifaceted studies which are part of the Program that aims to improve the state language of the Kyrgyz Republic. It is necessary that political and social will be close surveillance for the program to be implemented in the scheduled time¹.

Footnotes

¹The law has later been amended for five times. (8 December 2009 Act No. 307, 21 December 2010 Act No. 8, 6 October 2011 Act No.8, 6 October 2011 Act No. 165, 25 February 2013 Act No.33, 23 June 2015 Act No.135)

²The law has later been amended twice. (28 July 2008 Act No. 170, 25 February 2013 Act No. 33)

³International Measurement Scales of Language Command (The measurement scale of language command foresees the following levels in Europe as a whole: A-elementary (A1- the level of survival, A2-prethreshold level); B- independent user (B1- the threshold level, B2 - threshold advanced level); C- fluency (C1-proficiency level, C2-the level of perfect proficiency).

⁴The program has been foreseen to take place at three stages: 1st Stage 2014-2016 Preparatory; 2nd Stage – 2017-2018 Main; 3rd Stage 2019-2020 Corrective.

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