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# THE TAJIK LANGUAGE AND THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC SITUATION IN THE MOUNTAINOUS BADAKHSHAN

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The population of the Autonomous Region of Mountainous Badakhshan speaks different Pamir languages: Shughni, Rushani, Khufi, Bartangi, Roshorvi, Sariqoli, Yazghulami, Wakhi and Ishkashimi. These are spoken languages *par excellence*, having no script and written tradition. Nearly all Pamir languages to a certain extent can be characterised as “endangered”. Some of them are already extinct.

These languages live in close interaction with the state language of Tajikistan—Tajik. Almost the whole population of Badakhshan is multilingual or bilingual. The second language is usually the official language of the state, Tajik. It is used in Badakhshan as the language of education, press, media, and culture.

By early 20th century, the Tajik literary language had considerably deviated from the colloquial usage. The vocabulary was rather archaic and overloaded with Arabic loan words. Forms widely used in literary language were not used in colloquial speech, or were only partly used in dialects and local idioms. 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 the literary Tajik language closer to colloquial speech and dialects. In the late 1920's, the language started being 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 of the Tajik Autonomous Republic in November 1924. On the pages of this newspaper, discussion arose over problems of literary Tajik language, in particular, whether the language of press should be based on the standards of commonly spoken speech, which was closer to local dialects. Among the requirements for the newspaper writers were: the bringing of the literary language closer to the

colloquial speech, and the democratisation and simplification of the written language (especially of media). They also called for literary language to be purified from incomprehensible foreign words (“kalmahoi begona”), as well as for an active struggle against Arabic forms and archaisms.

The 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 the language of mountainous Tajiks, as their language is easily 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 a modern language. The first congress of the “Tajik alphabet” in 1929 was focused on the problem of literary Tajik language. There were several opinions on this issue: one group considered that the basis of the literary Tajik language should be the classical Persian-Tajik language of Rudaki. Another gave preference to the Persian language of modern Iran. A third group was convinced that the modern literary Tajik language could be created only on the basis of simplification, bringing it together with commonly spoken language, purified from Iranian influence.<sup>1</sup> The result of this debate was the victory of the trend towards democratisation 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 the northern dialects spoken outside Tajikistan, in Uzbekistan, including Bukhara and Samarqand. These dialects were native to a group of leading scholars, writers and poets, who played a key role in this process. Among them: Sadridin Ayni, Jalol Ikrami, T. Zehni, and Rahim Hashim, as well as Muhammadjon Shukurov, Bobojon Gafurov, Sharofiddin Rustamov, M. Niyazmammedov, and Abdugadir Maniyazov.

Later in the process of changing the literary Tajik language (especially its colloquial form) the Leninabad (Khujand) dialects have played a significant role. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Sadridin Ayni, “Ob učebnikax tadžikskix škol”, *Ovozi Tojik*, Stalinobod, 1924, N3.; idem, “Matbuoti Tojik”, *Ovozi Tojik*, 1926, N 9.; T. Berdieva, *Lingvističeskie i ekstralingvističeskie pričini arab-skix zaïmstvovanij*, Dushanbe, 1971:20-24.

Dushanbe had virtually superdialectal features; it was already a sort of *koine*.

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 the status of the language of international communication. The Law defined the status and guarantees the sphere of the usage of Tajik, Russian, and other local languages 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. The autonomous Region of the Mountainous Badakhshan self-dependently decides the questions regarding the functioning of local languages”.<sup>2</sup> This act was a further step towards the sovereignty of Tajikistan, also as an attempt to mobilise language as an instrument to establish an ethnic monopoly. In 1991, when Tajikistan became an independent 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 the Republic of Tajikistan” were printed in Tajik, Russian and Uzbek.

The collapse of the USSR and the consequent sovereignty of Tajikistan 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 terminological vocabulary from Persian and Dari. The intellectuals and representatives of the new political elite, who were influencing the norms of the language, were now Tajiks living inside Tajikistan, especially in the south: Qurghonteppa, Kulob, and Qarategin.

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.<sup>3</sup> With the change of government in Tajikistan in 1993, a new group of political elite emerged. These were the speakers of the mostly Kulob dialect. This was a time of rapid social change, of civil war and mass migration from one re-

<sup>2</sup> *Qonuni zaboni Jumhurii Tojikiston*, Dushanbe, 1989, 1993: 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> See J. Bečka, “Problème de l’écriture au Tadjikistan”, *Pand-o sokhan. Mélanges offerts à Ch.-H. De Fouchécour*, éd. par C. Balay, et al., Téhéran, 1995: 43-51; cf. also J. R. Perry, “Script and Scripture: The Three Alphabets of Tajik Persian, 1927-1997”, *Journal of Central Asian Studies*. II/1 (1997): 2-18.

gion to another. The period had a considerable impact on the speech of the population of Dushanbe, and Badakhshan area.

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, which can be divided into four sub-dialects: 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 sub-dialect has been virtually replaced by the Shughni language. It appears that the population of neighbouring villages speaks the 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 centre of Badakhshan) has become mostly Shughni speaking.

Tajik dialects located in Tajik Badakhshan (Tajikistan) are divided into two different groups: southern (Badakhshan, about 9000 people), and southeastern (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 transitionally considered between southern Tajik dialects and the Tajik (Dari) rural dialects of Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup>

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 sub-dialects. 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 several 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 dialect that is used as intermediate language between Tajik and Pamir populations, and between the groups speaking different Pamir languages. Russian scholars call it “inter-Pamir Farsi”.<sup>5</sup> The local population calls their Badakhshan Tajik dialect “Porsi” (or

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<sup>4</sup> V. S. Rastorgueva, V. A. Efimov, A. A. Kerimova, “Persidskij, dari, tadžikskij”, *Osnovy iranskogoazykoznaniya*, Moscow, 1982:12; A. Z. Rozenfeld, *Badaxšanskije govory tadžikskogoazyka*, Leningrad, 1971: 38; D. L. Lorimer, *The Phonology of the Bakhtiari, Badaxshani and Madaglashti Dialects of Modern Persian*, London, 1922.

<sup>5</sup> Rozenfeld, *op. cit.*: 5.

“Forsi”), which is in fact a variant of Tajik speech in contrast with Pamir languages.

It evolved historically in this geographically closed space and isolated region as a result of the penetration of the Tajik dialects from two different directions: north (Tajik dialects of Tajikistan) and southwest (Tajik (Dari) dialects of Afghanistan). This dialect always was a second language for the indigenous population, and a language for the elite. This elite spoke Pamir languages, and their Tajik was influenced by their mother tongues. Tajik was an intermediate language, a language of writing, religion, culture and civilisation. Most local people had little knowledge of Tajik. The people of Wanj and Darwaz were 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 with 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 lexical system of this Tajik variant has much in common with regular Tajik vocabulary. 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 lexemes 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, and there are many loans from neighbouring Pamir languages.

A group of regional words that can be found in several languages of Pamir-Hindukush and neighbouring areas consists of local material and spiritual terms, cultural words, etc. Another part of the vocabulary

is of Turkic origin, mostly connected with the nomadic cattle-breeding and milk management.

Traditionally, the Tajik (Persian) language along with Arabic was the language of religion for the region. From approximately the 11th century, the local population was converted to Isma'ili Shi'a Islam. Despite an interruption of about 70 years in the 20th century, the Tajik (Persian) language has had a substantial impact on the characteristic features of the local speech. Some of the words of Arabic origin came to the region together with Isma'ili teaching, through Classical Persian. Part of the Classical Persian vocabulary preserves its specific meaning for Isma'ili tradition, and applies only to this local variant of Tajik.

Reinforcement of the religious activities, and the restoration in the region of the religious Isma'ili institutions took place on the basis of Persian and with the help of native Iranians mainly from Khorasan and Kerman provinces of the present day Iran. At present, the process of universalising language is taking place, as well as the conforming of conceptual and ritual components of religion to Persian patterns. Interest in Isma'ili traditional texts and medieval commentaries appeared to be a strong motivation to learn more about Classical Persian. Religious establishments support this interest. A special course on religious education "Axloq 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.

As a consequence, the influence of Persian has become stronger. This, apart from because of religious activities, is also because the Modern Persian has been implemented as a foreign language in schools, on the basis of Arabic script. It enables them to gain a higher level of culture and general education.

One can clearly observe a trend towards a special variant of Tajik closer to Persian than to the Tajik of Dushanbe.

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

The present situation of bilingual-diglossal 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 the Badakhshan variant of Tajik is that it is historically closely related with oral Pamir languages; these serve as a substratum for local Tajik, and interrelate closely with them. Secondly, the Tajik ethnic groups use different local Tajik variants, dialects and sub-dialects. Finally, various social, cultural and ethnic groups in the community use different variants of literary Tajik—"inter-Pamir Forsi", or literary Tajik.

The problem of Tajik-Persian language or languages has no precise solution. Whichever variant is used depends on personal choice. 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 the Republic of Tajikistan and the language of education, literature, and media. But it is also influenced by Modern Persian (the language of the Islamic Republic of Iran), as well as by the language of religion (the Persian of classical Isma'ili scriptures, modern religious texts, and speeches). 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 a sort of *lingua franca* for different ethnic groups, the Tajiks and Pamiris, and also between the speakers of the Pamir languages themselves. It is the language of education, literature and media in Badakhshan, but also the language of the diaspora living in other parts of Tajikistan. In Badakhshan it serves as literary language. Yet, 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. With its lofty, almost bombastic style, it traditionally marks a high level of culture corresponding 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 status was determined by birth, and could not be changed. In the last century, however, education, and especially re-



ligious education, has given individuals from lower layers of the society the opportunity to gain higher rank or religious authority.

In the socio-linguistic 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 the others. In Badakhshan, the literary Tajik variants (Tajik, inter-Pamir Forsi, Persian) have a traditionally higher status than the Pamir languages (Shughni, Rushani, Wakhi, etc.). In the 1980s, at the time of claims for sovereignty and republic status for Badakhshan, a movement of activists and intellectuals attempted to change the code structure, to take account of the social changes between the ethnic groups. This was an effort to revise the status of the 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 the Badakhshan (Pamir) languages". According to the Law, the Region's government itself would solve "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 the local Pamir languages. However, for the time being, the resolution of the ethnic conflict in Tajikistan and the establishment of a stable central government in Dushanbe have considerably reduced this problem.

The specific feature of the educational policy in Badakhshan is the absence of a special preliminary course for children who are native speakers of the Pamir languages. In primary school, children who do not know Tajik are disadvantaged when they come to learn this language, because they have no appropriate training. 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 socio-linguistics. This gap has a detrimental effect on language planning in this multilingual region.