

## 9 Language policy and ethnic relations in Uzbekistan

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As elsewhere in the Soviet borderland states, an important watershed in the nation-building process in Uzbekistan was the adoption in October 1989 of the law 'On the State Language', which granted Uzbek the status of the sole state language within the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic. Lying at the heart of the new language politics were issues of power and status rather than communication, for, as Donald Horowitz has pointed out, language is a potent symbol of both new-found group dignity and status.<sup>1</sup> Although the new law made Russian the 'language of inter-ethnic communication', it also required employees in the state sector as well as those serving the population to command enough Uzbek for the fulfilment of job responsibilities. Owing to material and organisational constraints, however, the pace of implementation of language legislation inevitably slowed. In December 1995, more than six years after the passage of the original legislation, a revised version of the Law on the State Language was adopted. The revised edition no longer made knowledge of Uzbek compulsory for public sector employees, yet it also abolished Russian's special status, putting that medium on a par with all other 'foreign' languages.

This chapter examines language policy in Uzbekistan and assesses how legislation has reconstituted ethnic relations between the titular group and key non-titular minorities. The first part outlines the general evolution of language policy in Uzbekistan since 1989, comparing the significant ways in which the first edition of the language law diverges from the revised edition. The second part analyses the responses of the Russian and Tajik communities to their redefined positions within Uzbekistan and the extent to which they have integrated themselves into the nationalising state. The third part examines the attitudes of the three communities towards specific provisions of the language law on the basis of results from a public opinion survey carried out by the author in conjunction with a Tashkent sociological centre amongst roughly equal groups of Uzbeks, Russians and Tajiks in June 1996.



Figure 9.1. Uzbekistan and its regions

### Language legislation

As the primary purpose of the first edition of Uzbekistan's Law on the State Language was to raise the status of the titular group, its provisions primarily addressed issues of language function (delimiting spheres of use) rather than language structure (standardization, development of the lexicon, etc.). In addition to widening the role played by Uzbek in society, other central aims of the 1989 legislation were to utilise the state language as a means of cultivating national consciousness and developing national culture; to 'de-Russify' those Uzbek elites with a weak knowledge of their 'native' language; and to promote the state language as a prominent symbol of republican sovereignty.

Although the Soviet constitution did not accord official or state status to any language,<sup>2</sup> Russian had been given a *de facto* pre-eminent position within the USSR to aid the creation of a universal Soviet culture and facilitate intra-union affairs. More than just the 'language of inter-ethnic communication', it was the medium of success through which one could attain a high level of education in the greatest amount of subjects and secure the greatest degree of social and professional mobility. Uzbek, on the other hand, while a fully functional language, took a clear second place to Russian in public life. The new legislation was in part a reaction to Russification and in part an indictment of the Soviet past; hence, assertive efforts to legislate the use of the Uzbek language in the public sector were viewed as necessary in the early years of independence in order to compensate for past injustices. Uzbek activists and cultural elites were the original and most fervent proponents of a new law that would raise the status of Uzbek – as well as the status of the group that spoke it – and make its use compulsory in the state sector.<sup>3</sup> A renaissance of the Uzbek language was therefore viewed by those groups as perhaps the best means of redistributing both cultural and political power in the republic.

Many ethnic Uzbeks also pointed to the fact that only a very small percentage of the Russian population in Uzbekistan had learned the local language as evidence of the latter's colonial attitude. Particularly from the 1930s onwards, Soviet authorities had promoted a policy of 'bilingualism', which in essence meant that non-Russians were encouraged to learn Russian while most Russians remained monolingual speakers of Russian.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, only 4.6 per cent of Uzbekistani Russians claimed fluency in the vernacular as a second language in 1989, the year of the final Soviet census, despite the fact that many had lived in Uzbekistan for decades. Linguistic inequality had persisted despite clear Uzbek demographic superiority: although Uzbeks had always been the dominant ethnic group in Uzbekistan, by 1989 they constituted 71.4 per

cent of Uzbekistan's population, the vast majority of whom regarded Uzbek as their primary language. Russians, on the other hand, accounted for only 8.3 per cent of the country's population in that same year.

For their part, 22.3 per cent of Uzbeks had claimed fluency in Russian as a second language in 1989. However, Soviet census data on fluency in a second language (a vaguely defined concept in itself) should be treated with caution as they are particularly susceptible to manipulation. Figures from the 1979 census, for example, indicated that 49.3 per cent of Uzbeks had a fluent knowledge of Russian, although the corresponding figure in 1970 had been only 14.5 per cent. This astonishing jump in knowledge of Russian amongst Uzbeks – much larger than those reported in any other republics of the USSR – was in fact most likely due to strategic over-reporting and considerations of political expediency on the part of Uzbekistani officials rather than to improved Russian skills.

*The second edition of the Law on the State Language*

The majority of the articles contained in the second edition of the Law on the State Language, adopted in December 1995, provide for the use of Uzbek in state administration, education, the justice system, the mass media and other spheres of public life, although care has been taken in most instances to allow for the use of 'other languages' as well.<sup>5</sup> As with the first edition, the second is concerned primarily with issues of language function and the tasks it should carry out rather than making changes to the language itself (status vs corpus planning). Yet, the 1995 edition of the law differs from the 1989 edition in at least three noteworthy respects:

*The status of Russian* While the 1989 edition of the Uzbekistani language law accorded Russian a secondary but protected status, the 1995 edition puts it on a par with all languages other than Uzbek, despite the fact that Russian remains the language of convenience for the majority of the country's non-titular population as well as a significant proportion of ethnic Uzbek elites. As Asqar Khalmuradov, the chairman of the parliamentary committee responsible for overseeing the implementation of the law, has remarked, 'The first edition gave Russian a special significance, but now this language will be used in the same way as the languages of the other nations and peoples living in Uzbekistan.'<sup>6</sup>

From the point of view of linguistic reform, Uzbekistan is unique amongst the Central Asian states in that neither its constitution nor its revised language law makes any special provision for the Russian language whatsoever, either as an official language or as the language of inter-ethnic communication. By contrast, in Kazakstan, where non-titulars account for a greater share of the population, the trend since 1995 has

been to upgrade the status of Russian by enshrining it as an official language in the new constitution. In Kyrgyzstan, President Akaev and his supporters have been heavily promoting a similar constitutional amendment, although the parliament has thus far failed to pass it. However, Akaev signed a decree in June 1994 that made Russian an official language in predominantly Russian-speaking areas as well as in 'vital areas of the national economy', and the country's language law also accords Russian the status of the language of 'inter-ethnic communication'.<sup>7</sup>

The elimination of any status for Russian in the new edition stands in sharp contrast to the original law, which had granted wide-reaching powers to that language and expressly guaranteed the 'development and free usage of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication of the peoples of the USSR'. As a consequence, Russian figured prominently in the text of the 1989 law, warranting mention either directly or in its capacity as the language of inter-ethnic communication no fewer than thirty-two times.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the revised text mentions the Russian language only once in a relatively insignificant provision, noting that citizens are able to receive notarised documents in that language by special request (Article 12). Furthermore, whereas the 1989 edition did not specify that state sector employees were required to know Russian in its capacity as the language of inter-ethnic communication (although Article 27 prohibited 'responsible officials' from refusing citizens' petitions, complaints and suggestions on the grounds that they did not know the state language or Russian), the revised law leaves no doubt that monolingual Uzbek-speakers do not need to learn a second language.

*Deregulation* The second edition of the Law on the State Language is markedly more compact than the first edition, having eliminated Russian's role as the medium of inter-ethnic communication and further entrenched the hegemony of the Uzbek language within the state. Furthermore, the revised text seeks to deregulate the use of language in Uzbekistan to a significant degree by removing many of the specific provisions included in the 1989 law. Perhaps most notably, the new version discarded the controversial Article 4, which had required managers (and workers, according to the Russian text) employed in the state sector as well as those serving the population to command enough Uzbek for the fulfilment of job responsibilities. Similarly, managers of state and other organisations no longer 'carry personal responsibility' for the observance of the requirements of the language law within their areas of competence, as stipulated under Article 28 of the old law.<sup>9</sup>

In another instance of streamlining, the new law covers the issue of education in one article (Article 6), whereas the first edition had devoted six articles to language-related issues within the educational system (e.g.

the language of instruction at various levels, Uzbek and Russian as compulsory subjects, the presentation and defence of dissertations, etc.). Unlike the first, the second edition makes no provision for the study of the Arabic-based script, which was in use throughout the region until the late 1920s and is still regarded as a potent symbol of Islam. The removal of this article was particularly logical in light of the decision taken by Uzbekistani authorities in September 1993 to replace the Soviet-era Cyrillic script by the Latin (in 1928–9 the Arabic script was replaced by the Latin script, which was in turn replaced by the Cyrillic script in 1939–40).

*Slowdown in implementation* As in other post-Soviet Central Asian states, the sobering economic and social concomitants of independence have required officials in Uzbekistan to back-pedal on the implementation of language legislation. Originally, all provisions of the language law – including those relating to statistical and financial documentation and knowledge of Uzbek by employees in the state sector – were to have been fully introduced by the end of 1997. The revised law, however, stipulates that Articles 9 and 10, which concern the use of the state language for the work of state and administrative organs and for office work and statistical and financial documentation, respectively, are to go into full effect only from September 2005, to coincide with the deadline established for the completion of the transition to the Latin script. Uzbekistani officials have also been forced to re-think the original timetable set out for the introduction of the new script: according to the 1993 law, the Latin script was to be phased in gradually over a seven-year period, with work being completed by September 2000, at which time the republican law of 1940 decreeing the switch from the Latin to the Cyrillic script was to be rendered null and void.<sup>10</sup> In June 1995, however, a parliamentary resolution pushed the deadline back five years to September 2005 on the grounds that the necessary preparatory measures for the switch had not been completed within the established time period.<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the fact that changes in patterns of language use are not easily legislated and require a significant number of years to accomplish, the Uzbekistani government has been limited in its ability to implement linguistic reform owing to a panoply of organisational and material constraints, such as a shortage of qualified Uzbek teaching staff and equipment, the lack of a modernised terminology and inadequate translations of scientific and technical literature.<sup>12</sup> Khalmuradav has admitted that the state has thus far been unable to work out quick and effective methods of teaching Uzbek as a foreign language.<sup>13</sup> The lack of standardisation in Uzbek may also have been a factor slowing down implementation, for, as

with the first edition, the revised text expressly stipulates that the 'scientific rules and norms' governing the use of literary Uzbek must be observed (Article 7). (Despite the promotion of a standard written and spoken Uzbek language over the last seventy years, there are still many dialects in use throughout the country.)<sup>14</sup> Finally, as Russian remains the lingua franca for many Uzbekistani elites, particularly in business, science and the professions, a more rapid pace of implementation would undoubtedly have given rise to disruptions in the work of the state and concomitant negative economic consequences. As William Fierman has observed, problems in implementing linguistic reform have led the regime to give precedence to 'symbolic' over 'substantive' measures.<sup>15</sup> As a result, like the early Soviet regime, the Karimov government has been zealous in its efforts to overhaul the country's toponymy and eliminate the Russian language from public view.

### *The politics of linguistic reform*

In a move which vividly illustrated the growing authoritarianism of the current Uzbekistani regime, the draft of the new edition of the law was not published or laid open to public discussion before its adoption by the parliament in December 1995. In 1989, by contrast, the presidium of the Uzbek SSR Supreme Soviet had passed a decree several months before the law's adoption requiring the publication of the draft bill as a means of setting in motion a republic-wide discussion.<sup>16</sup> The draft bill proved highly controversial, and the ensuing passionate public debate played a crucial role in the decision ultimately to adopt a stronger language law that considerably reduced the role of Russian in comparison with the draft.<sup>17</sup>

Noting that 1989 was a year of growing Uzbek nationalism and violent inter-ethnic conflict (in May of that year rioting had broken out between Uzbeks and the local Meskhetian Turk population, resulting in more than 100 deaths), Uzbekistani president Karimov stated in 1996 that the regime had adopted the first language law under duress, with the consequence that it had 'in fact infringed the rights of part of the population, especially those of Russian-speakers'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, William Fierman has argued that it was a sense of *Realpolitik* rather than conviction that prompted President Karimov to lend his support in 1989 to the stronger version of the language law that downgraded Russian's status.<sup>19</sup> Whatever his true convictions at the time, there can be little doubt that the fully revised 1995 edition – which eliminates any special status for Russian whatsoever rather than simply reducing its role – fully bears Karimov's imprint and unqualified stamp of approval. Hence, despite Karimov's

protestations to the contrary, with hindsight it appears more likely that he was in fact genuine in his support of the stronger version of the bill advocated in 1989 by the nationally minded cultural elite in so far as he viewed it as a means of proving his newly found nationalist credentials.

The second edition of the language law was adopted a full six years and two months after the passage of Uzbekistan's first one, although the newly independent regime had originally planned to revise the law in 1992.<sup>20</sup> Official statements have not gone far towards explaining this delay: according to Khalmuradav, the first law was revised because it contained out-of-date phrases, such as the 'Uzbek SSR' and 'the Russian language – the language of inter-ethnic communication', as well as phrases that smacked of communist ideology.<sup>21</sup> President Karimov's explanation that it was only 'the change in the attitudes of the people' that enabled the Uzbekistani parliament to amend the law appears particularly disingenuous in light of the authoritarian methods his regime has been employing with particular vigour, beginning with the crackdown on the political opposition in 1992.<sup>22</sup> Although only speculative, a probable explanation for the delay is that ruling elites wanted to achieve a certain distance from authorities in Moscow before eliminating the *de jure* position of the Russian language in the country, which, if removed earlier, could have been interpreted as an undisguised affront on Uzbekistani–Russian relations. As such, the demoted status of Russian reflects Uzbekistan's heightened independent stance in regard to the Russian Federation and CIS structures. Moreover, the premature downgrading of Russian might have hastened the departure from the country of skilled Russophone specialists, who were already emigrating at a rapid rate.

Uzbekistan's original language law was adopted when that republic's leadership still envisaged itself as part of a revamped union. In the context of independence and economic crisis, however, the systematic implementation of language legislation has naturally become less of a priority. This approach is all the more understandable given that demographic momentum, current educational trends and the passage of time are all bound to further entrench the pre-eminent position of the state language within Uzbekistan.

### **Ethnic minority responses to language reform and the nationalising state**

#### *Russian responses: collective action, exit or integration?*

Transformed from elder brother to erstwhile coloniser, Uzbekistani Russians have been experiencing an especially acute sense of psycholog-



ical unease as a result of the collapse of the Soviet empire, for it was their language that had been the tongue of progress and social mobility and their culture that had formed the basis of Soviet society.

This is all the more true in Uzbekistan where, despite significant backtracking in the pace of implementation, the shift to the titular language has been faster and fuller than elsewhere in Central Asia. This can be partially attributed to the fact that, even before the collapse of the USSR, Uzbek was the dominant language in the republic's press and mass media, and the majority of the republic's children were studying in schools with Uzbek as the medium of tuition.<sup>23</sup> While less prevalent in higher education, Uzbek was still in greater use than the titular languages of the other Central Asian republics within their respective higher educational systems.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, whereas Russian is the first language of nearly two-thirds of urban Kazaks,<sup>25</sup> a clear majority of urban Uzbeks have either an excellent or good command of Uzbek. As already noted, demographic trends are only fortifying Uzbek's position.

None the less, the Russian language still acts as a unifying force between disparate cultures in Uzbekistan, as in the rest of Central Asia. The diminution of its status, however, has brought differences between indigenous and settler cultures into sharp relief. As is explored below, the responses of Uzbekistani Russians in the face of the political and social vicissitudes that have accompanied the collapse of empire have not necessarily broken down into the all too neat categories of 'exit, voice and loyalty'.<sup>26</sup>

*Collective action* While language and other nationalising policies have created a sense of grievance amongst Uzbekistan's Russian population, as will be discussed below, it has not been a sufficient condition to spur a politics of reaction in defence of minority interests. According to resource mobilisation theory, would-be activists require, *inter alia*, political opportunity and material resources in order to facilitate political mobilisation.<sup>27</sup> Uzbekistan is in effect an authoritarian state and, as such, has placed severe restrictions on the ability of ethnic minorities to successfully launch collective action. Despite constitutional guarantees, Uzbekistani citizens are in fact unable to exercise a number of basic civil rights, such as freedom of speech, association, assembly and political participation. As a consequence, Russians and other minorities who may harbour a sense of deprivation are unable to express it, much less mobilise in order to achieve collective rights.

Given the prevailing repressive political backdrop coupled with the overarching demographic superiority of the Uzbeks, it is not surprising that the Russian community in Uzbekistan has failed to put forward political

Table 9.1 *Net out-migration of Russians from Central Asia to the Russian Federation (1989–1996)*

	Total number of Russians at beginning of 1989 (× 1,000)	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total number of Russians at beginning of 1997 (× 1,000) <sup>1</sup>	Net Russian out-migration 1989–1996 (× 1,000)	Percentage by which Russian population decreased 1989–1996
Tajikistan	388		382.6	350.9	336.5	289.6	248.7	222.9	200.5	185.4		
Decrease by % of Russian population		5.4	31.7	14.4	46.9	40.9	25.8	22.4	15.1		202.6	
		1.4%	8.3%	4.1%	13.9%	14.1%	10.4%	10.0%	7.5%			52.2%
Uzbekistan	1653		1635.3	1595.1	1567.3	1502.7	1452.0	1358.5	1294.3	1271.3		
Decrease by % of Russian population		17.7	40.2	27.8	64.6	50.7	93.5	64.2	23.0		381.7	
		1.1%	2.5%	1.7%	4.1%	3.4%	6.4%	4.7%	1.8%			23.1%
Kyrgyzstan	917		913.2	897.1	881.7	840.2	773.7	730.8	717.4	710.1		
Decrease by % of Russian population		3.8	16.1	15.4	41.5	66.5	42.9	13.4	7.3		206.9	
		0.4%	1.8%	1.7%	4.7%	7.9%	5.5%	1.9%	1.0%			22.6%
Turkmenistan	334		331.1	326.7	322.0	311.2	304.5	291.5	279.3	265.3		
Decrease by % of Russian population		2.9	4.4	4.7	10.8	6.7	13.0	12.2	14.0		68.7	
		0.9%	1.3%	1.4%	3.4%	2.2%	4.3%	4.2%	5.0%			20.6%
Kazakstan	6228		6202.1	6165.9	6140.3	6058.0	5953.6	5719.3	5575.5	5477.3		
Decrease by % of Russian population		25.9	36.2	25.6	82.3	104.4	234.3	143.8	98.2		750.7	
		0.4%	0.6%	0.4%	1.3%	1.7%	3.9%	2.5%	1.8%			12.1%

*Notes:*

Calculations are based on the 1989 census and data provided by State Committee on Statistics of the Russian Federation.

<sup>1</sup> Russian population figures after 1989 do not take into account natural population increase.

demands to the state or even press for greater cultural autonomy. There are no Russian-based political parties in Uzbekistan, and Uzbekistani Russians were permitted to establish their own cultural centre only long after other ethnic minorities had already done so; two years later, the centre had still not managed to begin publishing its own newspaper.<sup>28</sup> A dearth of leadership skills, organisational structures and experience in forming social movements are other possible reasons for the low level of political activity on the part of Uzbekistani Russians.

*Migration* Faced with growing economic and social pressures, migration to Russia has been the response of choice for a significant number of Central Asian Russians. Since the collapse of the USSR (1992–6), 59 per cent of all net migration to Russia from the former Soviet republics has been from the Central Asian states; of that, 25 per cent has come from Uzbekistan in particular.<sup>29</sup> Ethnic Russians constituted approximately 70 per cent of all migrants from the Central Asian region to Russia between 1989 and 1996, while Tatars, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans and Jews accounted for most of the remainder. The net population transfer of ethnic Russians from Central Asia to Russia during that same period was equal to over 17 per cent (1.6 million people) of the ethnic Russians permanently resident in the region in 1989, the year of the final Soviet census.<sup>30</sup> Uzbekistan registered a net loss of 381,400 ethnic Russians from 1989 to 1996, or 23.1 per cent of the Russian population resident in that republic in 1989 (table 9.1).

While language policy has been but one factor inducing the large-scale out-migration of ethnic Russians from Central Asia,<sup>31</sup> it would appear to have had a significant influence on the timing and volume of the outflow. While all of the countries in the Central Asian region had been experiencing positive net out-migration rates with the Russian Federation (a greater number leaving for the Russian Federation than arriving from that country) since the second half of the 1970s, the outflow of Russians and other non-titular groups began to accelerate rapidly in the late 1980s. The migrational boom commenced just after the adoption of language laws in all of the Central Asian republics in 1989 (save Turkmenistan, which passed its language law in May 1990). If net out-migration levels in 1989 were comparable to those in 1988, in 1990 they rose by more than 80 per cent. The outbreak of inter-ethnic violence and, in particular, the conflicts between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in the Farghana valley in 1989 and between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 1990 were perhaps an even more important factor in spurring the exodus of Russians and other non-titulars from the region at that time. Although Russians have not been the targets of inter-ethnic violence in Central Asia, the nearness of Tajikistan

for Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani Russians, the proximity of Afghanistan and the constant tension on the southern border has engendered a feeling of vulnerability amongst them. Other oft-cited reasons by Russian out-migrants for their departure have been economic decline and severe dislocations in the workforce, fear for their children's future, manifestations of nationalism, growing indigenisation and cultural differences. A certain amount of migration was to have been expected in any event, given that less than one-half of Russians resident in Central Asia in 1989 were born there and were therefore lacking firm roots in the region.<sup>32</sup> Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that the set of factors inducing an individual to emigrate can rarely be reduced to only one or two variables.

Debates concerning the underlying causes of the outflow of Russians and other non-titular groups from the region have tended to pit those who argue that the emigration has been economically determined against those who contend that ethnopolitical and ethnosocial factors have played a more important role. The former point of view has been advocated most strongly by leading members of the ruling regimes of the Central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan excepted), who have pointed to the relatively low levels of net out-migration of Russians from the more prosperous Baltic states – despite the introduction of exclusionary citizenship laws there – as evidence to support their argument. At the other end of the continuum, nationalist-minded Russian groups as well as some titular elites have asserted that the exodus of the non-titular population is the direct consequence of the discriminatory policies being carried out by the Central Asian leaderships.

Such a polarised debate underemphasises the *interplay* of economic and ethnopolitical factors, and, in particular, the ways in which nationalising policies can directly impinge on perceptions of wage expectations and economic security. Certainly a young, skilled Uzbekistani Russian who believes his or her chances for professional advancement are limited by virtue of ethnicity rather than ability is unlikely to place great store in a future in that state. Moreover, while economic arguments may take precedence in spurring migration from poorer to wealthier countries (as in the case of the ethnic Germans leaving Central Asia for Germany), the ethnocratic impulses of newly independent states would appear to play a crucial if not primary role in determining out-migration trends when (a) the country of destination of the disaffected minority is only marginally more prosperous (or less prosperous) than the country of origin and (b) the dominant culture of the nationalising state is apprehended by the ethnic minority as an alien and 'backward' one.

Particularly since 1996, however, the stream of migrants from all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan has decreased substantially, as

Central Asian Russians have become fully aware of the hardships that await them in their 'historic homeland'. Many emigrants have resettled in neglected rural areas of Russia, where conditions have proved particularly inhospitable for these former urban professionals. New arrivals have been known to wait months to receive housing, employment and social services. Moreover, emigrants have reported being labelled as outsiders by locals, who 'exclude them from the common ethnic and thus civic community'.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Russians in Central Asia have frequently described themselves and the particular values they hold (e.g. drinking less, working harder, stronger family orientation) as 'different' from those held by their co-ethnics in Russia. In certain regions of Russia, especially those with labour surpluses, the newcomers have been regarded as intruders and have been particularly vulnerable targets of criminal activity.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps an even more logical explanation for the recent drop in out-migration from Central Asia is simply that the most mobile and skilled Russians for whom emigration has posed the fewest difficulties and the greatest benefits have already left the region.<sup>35</sup> Tatiana Regent, the head of the Russian Federal Migration Service, has noted that Russia's economic problems and the war in Chechnya have also contributed to the decline.<sup>36</sup> Yet, despite the reduction in numbers, a certain proportion of Central Asia's non-titular population is likely to continue its exit from the region into the next millennium, albeit on a much smaller scale.

*Assimilation* While the Central Asian states have registered unprecedented net outflows of Russians and other Russophone minorities in recent years, the stream of out-migrants has still been smaller than many observers had initially anticipated. As migrational flows have dropped off, particularly beginning in 1995–6, it has become clear that the majority of Russians resident in Central Asia in 1989 would remain in that region, at least for the time being. The decision to stay, however, is not necessarily a portent of assimilation, which David Laitin has defined as 'the process of adoption of the ever-changing cultural practices of dominant society with the goal of crossing a fluid cultural boundary separating [minorities] from dominant society'.<sup>37</sup>

Separated by a cultural and religious chasm, the Uzbek and Russian communities of Uzbekistan have traditionally lived in relative isolation from each other. The majority of Uzbekistani Russians migrated to the region during Soviet rule, where they by and large settled in urban areas and undertook the industrialisation of the republic. The indigenous population remained concentrated in agriculture in the rural regions, retaining a traditional way of life; consequently, a society bifurcated along ethnic lines evolved. Everyday contact and communication between the

two groups remained limited even in Tashkent, where Uzbeks constituted only 44 per cent of the population in 1989.

A circumstance which has particularly militated and continues to militate against the assimilation or even integration of Russians into the dominant Uzbek society has been a striking lack of fluency in the local language. Widely regarding Uzbek as a medium less advanced than their own, the majority of Russians have been disinclined to trade what they believe is a wealthier linguistic heritage for a poorer one. As with the Bengalis in Assam, the Chinese in Malaysia and the Kewri in Mauritania upon being required to work and study in the language of a 'backward' group,<sup>38</sup> Russians in Uzbekistan have pointed to the inadequacy of Uzbek as a medium in scientific and technical fields and its overall 'inferiority' to Russian as disincentives to learn the local language.

The decisions that Uzbekistani Russians make in regard to their children's education will be an important factor determining the degree of language shift that is to occur in this group, if any. According to Laitin's theory of 'competitive assimilation', a non-titular resident of a given state is likely to feel compelled to enrol his child in a school with the titular language as the medium of instruction in order to increase his child's upward mobility potential, especially in so far as he anticipates that other non-titulars will also place their children in titular-language schools. Such a pattern is likely to occur, it is argued, if 'the expected lifetime earnings of a young person are substantially greater when that person is fluent in the language of the state in which the family now resides'.<sup>39</sup> While this hypothesis might hold true for Yiddish-speaking migrant families in New York or for Castilian-speaking migrant families in Catalonia (to cite Laitin's examples),<sup>40</sup> it is problematic when applied to Russians in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. First, it is widely believed by non-Uzbeks (and many Uzbeks, too) that schools with Uzbek as the language of tuition offer a lower standard of education than that provided by Russian-language schools in Uzbekistan. Hence, Uzbekistani Russians are unlikely to encourage the linguistic assimilation of their children at the expense of what is believed to be a superior education. Secondly, many Russian parents are determined to preserve or even maximise their children's chances to seek a higher education or employment *outside* Uzbekistan, and in Russia proper in particular, and are therefore likely to continue to send them to Russian-language schools.

*Adaptation without assimilation: a fourth alternative?* As we have already noted, the decision to remain in Uzbekistan does not necessarily presage assimilation or even integration in so far as many Uzbekistani Russians have stayed – at least for the present – owing only to a lack of

opportunity to leave. Still others, particularly those who are gainfully employed, have determined that their prospects for the future are better in Uzbekistan than elsewhere. Although acknowledging the pre-eminence of the Uzbek nation within the state, many of these Russians intend to preserve their cultural self-identification in the post-independence era in much the same ways as they did during Soviet rule. Encouraged by the slackened pace of language law implementation, they hope to be able to continue to rely on Russian in their professional and personal lives while adjusting to possible losses in economic and social status. Furthermore, these Russians can underpin their hopes with the experience of other former 'colonies', such as India, in which the language of the colonists has continued to be used in an official capacity. Yet, even Russians who are willing to learn Uzbek are unlikely to attempt to cross the high cultural barriers that stand in the way of full assimilation, since most tend to regard traditional Uzbek culture as a regressive link to the third world rather than a bridge to the more 'civilised' states of Europe and the West.

### *Tajik responses*

While language legislation has fortified Russian–Uzbek group boundary markers, the bulk of the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan has responded to the new laws with relative equanimity. Several factors appear to have underpinned this reaction. First, although the Uzbekistani Tajiks overwhelmingly regard Tajik as their native language, a far greater number of them have acquired a facility in Uzbek in comparison to Uzbekistani Russians. Secondly, already accustomed to minority status, the Tajiks do not regard the laws as having either diminished or elevated their standing in relation to other groups. Given that language legislation has been primarily concerned with reducing the spheres of use for Russian while expanding the use of Uzbek, most Tajiks have not been inclined to view the policy as an exclusionary one.

Thirdly, although some ethnic entrepreneurs claiming to speak for the two groups have emphasised group differences, Tajik–Uzbek group boundaries are still fluid and imprecise. Indeed, as the civil war in Tajikistan has dramatically illustrated, the Tajik nation is far from consolidated, and, as Muriel Atkin has argued, 'the very notion of who is a Tajik contains ambiguity'.<sup>41</sup> While the valley Tajiks share a common material culture, social structure, cultural heritage and historical memory with the Uzbeks, they regard themselves as having little in common with the 'peripheral Tajik' – namely the Pamirian peoples, mountain Tajiks and Yagnobis of Tajikistan. Similarly, the valley Uzbeks differ less from the Tajiks in terms of culture than from the Lokais, who comprise nearly one-

third of all Uzbeks in Tajikistan. Despite the institutionalisation of nationality under the Soviet regime, different forms of self-identification, whether based on region, neighbourhood or extended family, still exist in contemporary Uzbekistan. In carrying out field work in the Tajik-dominated city of Samarkand, two researchers of Moscow's Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology found that some Uzbeks and Tajiks understood the term 'our nationality' to refer to the region's indigenous population rather than to any particular ethnic group. Moreover, many Tajiks in particular were reported to have 'spontaneously referred to themselves sometimes as Uzbeks, sometimes as Tajiks, *without seeing any contradiction in this* [emphasis added]'.<sup>42</sup>

To be sure, before the advent of Soviet rule Uzbeks and Tajiks were not conscious of forming nations distinct from each other, as the urban communities in the heart of Central Asia had shared a common culture at least since the fifteenth century that employed three literary languages: Turki (Chaghatay),<sup>43</sup> Farsi (Persian) and Arabic (for the educated classes), all of which were written in the Arabic script although they belonged to unrelated language groups. Just as the concepts of 'nation', 'nationality' or 'ethnicity' held little meaning, the notion that the various peoples inhabiting the region should be distinguished by their language was an alien one, particularly given the long prevailing tradition of multilingualism in the region.<sup>44</sup> Rather, since the most salient distinction was between sedentary oasis dwellers and pastoral nomads, the term 'Sart', which referred to the region's sedentary population (whether speaking a Turkic or Iranian tongue), was widely used to distinguish it from the nomadic Turks. However, language became the guiding principle of the Soviet regime during the National Delimitation of the Central Asian republics of 1924. Following the National Delimitation, the category 'Sart' was eliminated and census-takers in 1926 were instructed to interpret that response to the question on *narodnost* (people) as 'Uzbek (Sart)'.<sup>45</sup> Thus, sedentary peoples who lived in essentially the same way but spoke a Turkic or Iranian language found themselves identified as either 'Tajiks' or 'Uzbeks'.

As in pre-Soviet times, many if not most Tajiks would still find it difficult to differentiate Uzbek oasis culture from 'their own'. High levels of mixed marriage between Tajiks and Uzbeks have made group entities all the more amorphous, rendering official nationality irrelevant in many instances. Moreover, the concept of 'official nationality' is particularly suspect when applied to Uzbekistani Tajiks, given that local Soviet authorities in the 1920s recorded much of the Tajik-speaking populations of Samarkand, Bukhara, Shahr-i Sabz and other cities as Uzbeks in their passports in order to make the divisions between the new administrative units neater.<sup>46</sup> 'Passport Uzbekisation', which often facilitated profes-



sional advancement, continued under the Soviet regime. As a result of all these factors, it is impossible to determine with any degree of certainty the number of individuals who consider themselves members of the Tajik ethnic group in Uzbekistan, particularly given that some original Tajik-speakers were linguistically Turkicised long ago. While Tajiks officially accounted for only 4.8 per cent of Uzbekistan's population in 1993, the actual proportion of Tajik-speakers was undoubtedly much larger (some Tajiks put the figure as high as 25–30 per cent).<sup>47</sup> As a further indicator of the inaccuracy of official statistics in regard to Uzbekistan's Tajik population, Soviet census data indicated that the number of Tajiks in Samarkand region had ostensibly grown by more than 140 per cent between 1979 and 1989, while the number of Uzbeks in that region had grown by only 26 per cent during that same period.<sup>48</sup>

Particularly in Samarkand and Bukhara, which are ancient bastions of Persian–Tajik culture, 'Tajik' and 'Uzbek' are neither clear-cut nor immutably bounded identities. Yet, as national consciousness strengthened during the decades of Soviet rule, ethnic entrepreneurs sought both to manufacture differences and to magnify relative ones in an effort to solidify group boundaries. Wary of Uzbek hegemonic aspirations in the region and the promotion of Turkic pride, Tajik elites have argued that the Uzbeks are Turkicised Iranians while some Uzbek elites, for their part, have maintained that the Tajiks are simply Turks who have forgotten their original language.<sup>49</sup> Tensions have centred on two primary points: accusations by each side that the other has arrogated unto itself various aspects of the common Central Asian cultural heritage, and the dearth of cultural and educational facilities (e.g. Tajik-language schools, publications and broadcasts) for Uzbekistani Tajiks. Shortly before the collapse of the USSR, Tajiks in Samarkand and Bukhara began a hunger strike to protest against their 'Uzbekisation', after which authorities allowed the demonstrators to change the nationality registered in their passports from Uzbek to Tajik.<sup>50</sup> As with other forms of independent political activity, however, since 1991 Tajik activists pressing for greater cultural autonomy and an official status for the Tajik language have been systematically suppressed.<sup>51</sup>

While some ethnic entrepreneurs may regard current language legislation as a continuation of a decades-long policy of forced assimilation, it is difficult to determine the degree to which that sentiment finds resonance amongst Uzbekistani Tajiks as a whole. To be sure, Tajik culture has not flourished in Uzbekistan under either Soviet or independent Uzbekistani rule;<sup>52</sup> yet it would appear that most Tajiks do not regard their language and culture – which has managed to endure in the region despite many centuries of Turkic rule – as under any particular threat.

Table 9.2 Comparison of 1989 census data and survey sample in Uzbekistan

	Uzbeks		Russians		Tajiks	
	Census 1989	Survey 1996	Census 1989	Survey 1996	Census 1989	Survey 1996
Urban	30%	45%	95%	82%	32%	37%
Rural	70%	55%	5%	18%	68%	63%
Male	50%	54%	45%	54%	50%	58%
Female	50%	46%	55%	46%	50%	42%
Age 16–29	27%	32%	21%	32%	27%	30%
Age 30–9	11%	27%	17%	23%	11%	22%
Age 40–9	5%	23%	11%	18%	5%	24%
Age 50–9	5%	13%	11%	16%	6%	17%
Age 60+	5%	5%	13%	11%	6%	8%
Higher education	4%	26%	12%	16%	4%	19%
Secondary education	25%	39%	19%	22%	26%	29%
Unfinished secondary	11%	11%	14%	11.5%	11%	7.5%
Tashkent	7.6%	31%	19.0%	61%	9.6%	6%
Farghana	12.3%	26%	7.5%	25%	12.3%	12%
Samarkand	12.5%	10%	6.9%	4%	22.4%	81%
Khwarazm	6.8%	33%	0.9%	10%	0.0%	1%

### Attitudes towards language legislation

In order to examine the views of Uzbekistan's largest ethnic groups on language legislation, a public opinion survey of roughly equal groups of Uzbeks, Russians and Tajiks was undertaken by the author in conjunction with a Tashkent sociological centre in June 1996 in four regions (*viloyätlär*) of the country (Tashkent, Farghana, Samarkand and Khwarazm).<sup>53</sup> The survey was based on 600 structured interviews conducted in one of the three relevant languages with interrelated controls for several major indicators in addition to self-ascribed ethnic nationality:<sup>54</sup> urban/rural settlement type, gender, age, level of education and region (table 9.2). Members of linguistically Russified non-titular minorities that are not indigenous to the Central Asian region composed 10 per cent of the total sample (referred to hereafter as 'Russophone minorities').<sup>55</sup>

It should be borne in mind that survey work carried out in Uzbekistan is likely to be a less precise indicator of public opinion than in other, less authoritarian political regimes. To enhance the willingness of respon-

dents to answer freely and without regard to political considerations, interviews were conducted in the language of convenience of the respondent by local survey-takers rather than 'outsiders'. The revised edition of the Law on the State Language had been adopted only six months before the survey was carried out; consequently, language-related discussions which had appeared regularly in the press and other media during the months leading up to the survey were still relatively fresh in the minds of the respondents.

As could be expected, there was a strong correlation between level of knowledge of Uzbek and support (or lack thereof) for the language law. In order to determine levels of language knowledge with greater precision, in addition to indicating their native language all respondents were asked in separate questions to name their language of primary use both at home and at work and to evaluate their facility in Uzbek, Russian and Tajik (tables 9.3 and 9.4). (Particularly in the Soviet and post-Soviet context, the term 'native language' (*rodnoi iazyk*) can be an ambiguous one that may serve more as a measure of ethnic group attachment than as an indicator of linguistic ability.)

Generally speaking, there is an inverse relationship between the number of Russians living in a given region in Uzbekistan and that group's facility in the Uzbek language. In 1989, there were fewer Russians in Khwarazm region than in any other region in Uzbekistan; accordingly, nearly one-quarter of all Russians resident there claimed to have a fluent command of Uzbek compared to 4.6 per cent for the republic as a whole, according to 1989 census data. Likewise, according to our 1996 survey results, more than a third of Russians in Khwarazm claimed an excellent or good command of Uzbek, while only 7 per cent of Russians in Tashkent did the same.<sup>56</sup> Over 90 per cent of all Tajiks surveyed claimed either an excellent or a good facility in Uzbek.

In examining attitudes towards specific provisions of the language law, a divergence of views arose between 'indigenes' (Uzbeks and Tajiks) on the one hand and the 'settler' communities (Russians and Russophone minorities) on the other. Despite categorical assertions by Uzbekistani authorities that the new edition of the law had removed all trace of discrimination,<sup>57</sup> three out of five Russians surveyed believed that the granting of sole state language status to Uzbek infringes the constitutional rights of minorities living in Uzbekistan. The vast majority of Uzbeks and Tajiks, however, were united in the opinion that Uzbek's status as the sole state language does not constitute a violation of minority rights (figure 9.2). Similarly, although President Karimov has stated that 'there is not and cannot be discrimination on the basis of ethnic affiliation or religion in Uzbekistan',<sup>58</sup> the majority of Russians (58 per cent) maintained that certain ethnic groups in that state, and Uzbeks in particular, enjoy greater

Table 9.3 *Native language and primary language at home and at work by ethnic group (survey sample) in Uzbekistan*

	Native language				Primary language at home				Primary language at work			
	Uzbek	Russian	Tajik	Other	Uzbek	Russian	Tajik	Other	Uzbek	Russian	Tajik	Other
Uzbeks	96.5%	3%	0.5%	0%	92%	5%	3%	0%	85%	13%	2%	0%
Russians	0.5%	96.5%	0%	3%	1%	99%	0%	0%	3.5%	96.5%	0%	0%
Tajiks	5%	0%	94.5%	0.5%	5%	2%	93%	0%	24%	9%	67%	0%
Tatars	0%	48%	0%	52%	4%	84%	0%	12%	32%	68%	0%	0%
Koreans	0%	87.5%	0%	12.5%	0%	94%	0%	6%	10%	90%	0%	0%

Table 9.4 *Knowledge of state language and Russian by ethnic group and region (survey sample) in Uzbekistan*

	Uzbek (facility claimed by respondent)					Russians (facility claimed by respondent)				
	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	None
<b>Uzbeks</b>										
(total)	73%	24%	3%	0%	0%	18%	25.5%	44%	8%	4.5%
Tashkent	73%	20%	7%	0%	0%	30%	27%	40%	1.5%	1.5%
Farghana	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%	4%	26%	50%	10%	10%
Samarkand	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%	20%	50%	20%	10%	0%
Khwarazm	66%	31%	3%	0%	0%	17%	17%	51%	11%	4%
<b>Russians</b>										
(total)	2%	9%	28%	39%	22%	78%	21.5%	0%	0%	0.5%
Tashkent	0%	7%	28%	40%	25%	80%	19%	0%	0%	1%
Farghana	4%	7%	32%	39%	18%	84%	16%	0%	0%	0%
Samarkand	0%	14%	0%	57%	29%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Khwarazm	6%	29.5%	29%	29.5%	6%	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Tajiks</b>										
(total)	27%	66.5%	6%	0.5%	0%	8%	46%	32%	9%	5%
Tashkent	40%	60%	0%	0%	0%	0%	70%	30%	0%	0%
Farghana	20%	80%	0%	0%	0%	0%	45%	35%	5%	15%
Samarkand	28%	65%	6%	1%	0%	9%	45%	31.5%	10%	4.5%
Khwarazm	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Russophone minorities</b>										
(total)	3%	27%	40%	25%	5%	52%	45%	1.5%	1.5%	0%
Tashkent	4%	13%	50%	29%	4%	54%	42%	4%	0%	0%
Farghana	17%	0%	50%	33%	0%	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Samarkand	0%	0%	0%	67%	33%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Khwarazm	0%	48%	33%	15%	4%	41%	57%	0%	2%	0%

*Did the conferral of state status on the Uzbek language infringe the constitutional rights of non-Uzbeks living in Uzbekistan? (responses as a percentage)*

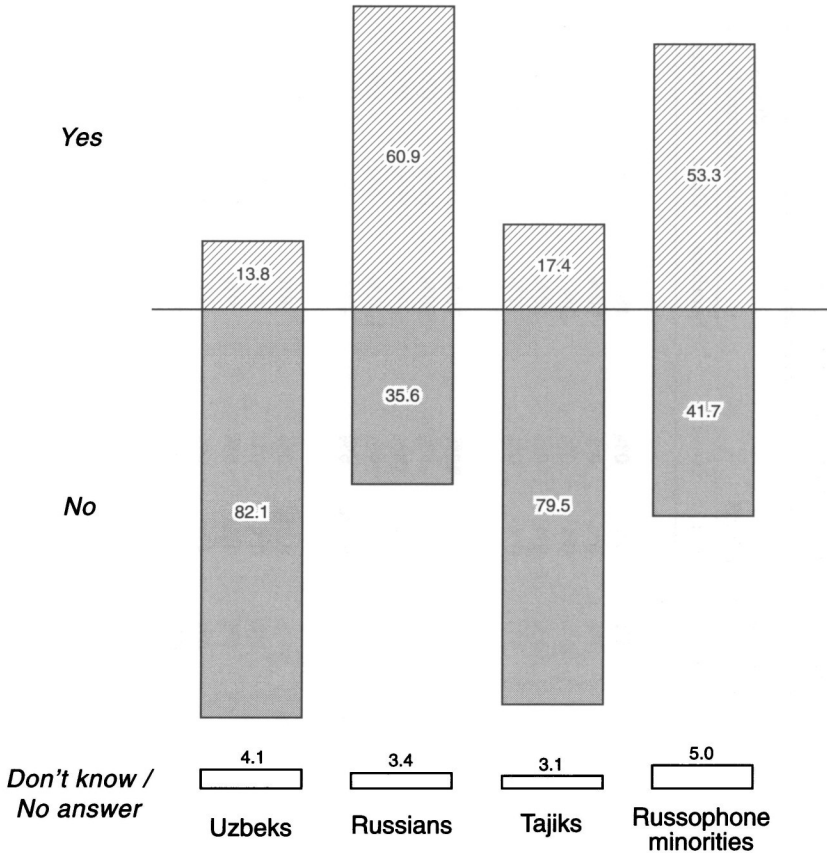


Figure 9.2. State status of Uzbek and rights of non-Uzbeks

rights than others in spite of constitutional guarantees. This view was particularly prevalent amongst Russians in Samarkand and Farghana, whereas the majority of Russians in ethnically homogeneous Khwarazm (59 per cent) held that no single ethnic group enjoys more rights than any other.

Russian and Russophone minority groups had particularly strong views concerning the normative status of the Russian language in Uzbekistan. The overwhelming majority of those two groups (96 per cent

*Which language or languages, if any, should have state status in addition to Uzbek in Uzbekistan?*

*(multiple responses allowed, responses as a percentage)*

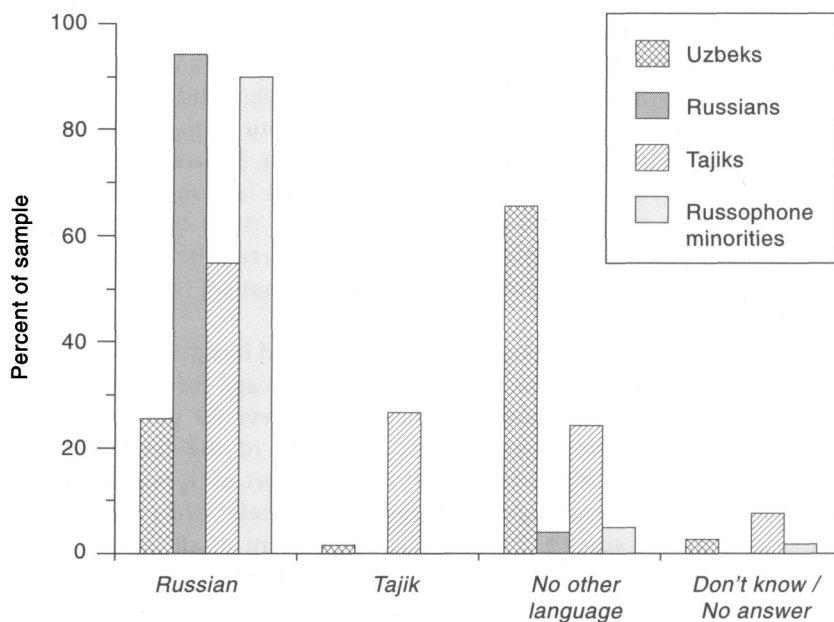


Figure 9.3. State language status in Uzbekistan

and 93 per cent, respectively) believed that Russian should be accorded state status in addition to Uzbek, while only 32 per cent of Uzbeks had the same opinion (figure 9.3). (As expected, all Uzbeks whose primary language of use at home was Russian felt that that language should also be given state status, while only a minority of Uzbeks whose primary language at home was Uzbek had the same opinion.) Uncharacteristically, the largest group of Tajiks (39 per cent) concurred with the Russians rather than the Uzbeks on this issue, maintaining that both Uzbek and Russian should have state status in Uzbekistan; 15 per cent of Tajiks believed that Uzbek, Russian and Tajik should all have state status, and only 11 per cent of Tajiks were of the opinion that Tajik and Uzbek should be the two state languages of the country. Even in the Tajik-speaking stronghold of Samarkand, only one in four Tajiks wanted Tajik to have state language standing together with Uzbek, while twice as many believed that Russian should have that status in addition to Uzbek.

However, in regard to the question of re-establishing Russian's official status as the 'language of inter-ethnic communication' (as stipulated in the 1989 edition of the language law but eliminated in the 1995 edition), Tajiks and Uzbeks once again took the same stance, with a clear majority of both groups holding the view that *no* language should carry that status. Whereas only one in three Uzbeks in Samarkand and Farghana was against the designation of an official language of inter-ethnic communication, however, three out of four Tashkenti Uzbeks held that opinion. Amongst the Uzbeks and Tajiks who were in favour of re-implementing an official medium of inter-ethnic communication, Russian was the language of choice. Keen to ensure that the Russian language would continue to play a role in the new political order, three-quarters of the Russian and Russophone minority groups supported the restoration of that language's former status as the official language of inter-ethnic communication.

This same polarity of views between settlers and indigenes was also in evidence with respect to the use of the state language for statistical and financial documentation and for office work. Over 80 per cent of all Uzbeks and Tajiks approved of this provision of the language law, although the Uzbeks were stronger in their support of it, particularly in Tashkent (most Uzbeks responded 'agree completely' while most Tajiks responded 'rather agree'). Predictably, 80 per cent of all Russians disagreed with the shift to Uzbek for office work and financial documentation. Whereas the renaming of administrative-territorial units, squares, streets and other geographical objects – a process that has been more visible in Uzbekistan than elsewhere in Central Asia – was supported by the overwhelming majority of Uzbeks and three-quarters of Tajiks, the Russians were divided into equal groups over the replacement of Russian and Soviet toponyms by indigenous ones. Regional differences amongst them were pronounced: three-quarters of Russians in Khwarazm were in favour of toponymical changes compared to 57 per cent of Samarkandi Russians, 54 per cent of Tashkenti Russians and only 25 per cent of Russians in Farghana.

When asked what effect, if any, language legislation had had on their professional lives, nearly 60 per cent of Uzbeks and Russians stated that the law had had no impact whatsoever (table 9.5). An even greater number of Tajiks had been unaffected professionally by the language law (83 per cent). This circumstance was most likely a result in part of the slackened pace of implementation and in part of the jaundiced view that many Uzbekistanis appear to have taken of the law's all-encompassing promises and legalistic guarantees. However, one-third of Uzbeks believed that the law had had a positive effect on their professional lives,



Table 9.5 *Effect of language legislation on professional and other spheres of life in Uzbekistan*

## Effect of language legislation on professional life

	None	Positive	Negative	Don't know/ No answer
Uzbeks	59.5%	32.8%	4.6%	3.1%
Russians	57.5%	0.0%	40.8%	1.7%
Tajiks	82.6%	9.3%	6.2%	1.9%
Russophone minorities	65.0%	0.0%	33.4%	1.6%

## Effect of language legislation on other spheres of life

	None	Positive	Negative	Don't know/ No answer
Uzbeks	67.2%	30.3%	1.5%	1.0%
Russians	54.0%	0.6%	44.3%	1.1%
Tajiks	88.8%	4.3%	3.1%	3.7%
Russophone minorities	73.3%	0.0%	26.7%	0.0%

primarily in terms of expanding their educational opportunities and possible choice of professions. By contrast, not a single Russian or member of a Russophone minority group had been positively affected by the law in the workplace. Amongst the 41 per cent of Russians who had been negatively affected, decreased job security was cited as the most common adverse consequence of language legislation in the professional sphere. A larger proportion of Russians in Samarkand and Farghana had been negatively affected than Russians elsewhere, which was most likely a reflection of the relatively faster rate of implementation of the language law in those two regions. Just as inside the workplace, outside the workplace a majority of all respondents had also remained unaffected by language legislation. Russians who had felt the impact of the law, however, primarily complained that communication with state governmental organs had become more difficult for them.

More than half of all respondents were of the opinion that language legislation had had some impact on ethnic relations, whether positive or negative (figure 9.4). Not surprisingly, more than half of Uzbeks and nearly one-third of Tajiks believed that the law had had a positive or somewhat positive influence, while half of Russians and nearly two-thirds of Russophone minority group members believed its effect had been neg-

(responses as a percentage)

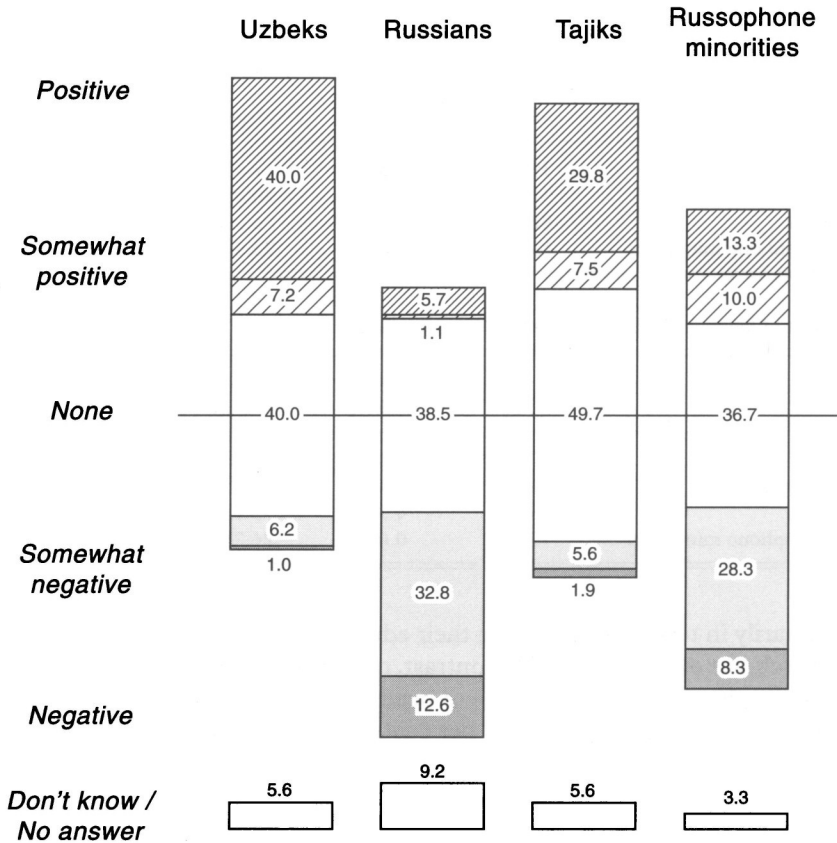


Figure 9.4. The effect of language legislation on ethnic relations in Uzbekistan

ative or somewhat negative. Amongst the Russians, recent settlers – whose Uzbek skills were the weakest – were inclined to regard the law’s impact on ethnic relations as particularly negative. Conversely, those Russians with the strongest Uzbek skills viewed the law’s impact on ethnic relations as minimal.

Although the revised edition of the language law adopted in 1995 no longer made knowledge of Uzbek a precondition for employment in state organisations and in the service sector, nearly half of the Russian and linguistically Russified groups none the less believed that language legisla-

tion had made their position in the republic more tenuous. Yet, despite this vulnerability, *70 per cent of Russians with poor or non-existent Uzbek skills had no intention of learning that language.* While there were no marked regional differences, Russians who had moved to Uzbekistan within the last twenty-five years showed a greater willingness to learn Uzbek than those who had lived there for longer periods of time. This unwillingness to learn the state language was no doubt strengthened by the belief amongst the vast majority of them that Uzbek was a less advanced (*razviti*) language than Russian.

### Conclusions

As with so many laws promulgated in the post-Soviet states, language legislation in Uzbekistan proclaims to fulfil two competing objectives: it seeks to entrench the hegemony of the language of the titular nation on the one hand while claiming to safeguard the rights of non-titular minorities on the other. In so far as a substantial proportion of the country's Russian population has come to view it as a hallmark of the nationalising state, language legislation has served to rigidify Uzbek–Russian group divisions. However, it has had little, if any, impact on Uzbek–Tajik group boundaries, which are remarkable for their high degree of fluidity. Although Tajik (and Uzbek) ethnic entrepreneurs have promoted the principle that ethnicity and language must coincide, in regions where concentrated groups of Tajiks and Uzbeks live side by side most are still able to regard themselves as united by a common culture and religion, thereby signifying that language need not always serve as the primary marker of ethnicity. Likewise, groups whose languages differ only slightly can regard themselves as distinct ethnic communities, a case in point being the Bosnians, Serbs and Croats.

Despite a slackening in the pace of implementation of the more substantive provisions as well as the elimination of certain controversial ones, Uzbekistani Russians and other Russophones do not find the revised 1995 edition of the language law an improvement over the first edition in so far as it gives no normative status to the Russian language, which, they argue, is still the medium of convenience of millions of former Soviet citizens. Legislation aside, however, the higher birthrates amongst the indigenous population coupled with the migration of part of the non-titular population will leave only a relatively small Russophone minority in Uzbekistan, virtually guaranteeing that linguistic ‘Uzbekisation’ will proceed of its own accord.