

THE HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPORTANCE OF THE UZBEK LANGUAGE

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Annotation: The article explores the history, development, and modern significance of the Uzbek language. Uzbek belongs to the Turkic language family and has ancient roots. It evolved based on the Chagatai language and is now actively used as the state language. The article reveals the different stages of its development and its role in society.

Keywords: Uzbek language, language history, ancient Turkic language, language development, state language, independence, official language, Alisher Navoiy, written monuments.

The development of the Uzbek language has gone through various historical phases, from ancient Turkic periods to the present day. Throughout this process, it has been influenced by various factors, enriching its lexicon and evolving into a modern literary language. In particular, during the 15th century, under the leadership of Alisher Navoi, the Chagatai language developed as a literary language, significantly impacting the evolution of the Uzbek language. The status of Uzbek as a state language was further solidified during the years of independence. The adoption of the "Law on the State Language" in 1989 played a crucial role in granting official status to Uzbek. Today, the Uzbek language is widely used in science, technology, and cultural fields. This article thoroughly examines the historical development of Uzbek, its contemporary significance, and its future prospects.

Key Periods in the History of the Uzbek Language

Ancient Turkic Period (5th–10th centuries): During this time, the roots of the Uzbek language trace back to Old Turkic. Notable literary works such as the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Compendium of the Languages of the Turks," and Yusuf Khos Khojib's "Kutadgu Bilig" are considered the earliest written examples of Turkic languages. For instance, "Kutadgu Bilig" ("Wisdom of Royal Glory") is a philosophical and didactic novel composed in 1069 by Yusuf Khass Hajib in the Karakhanid Empire. It is one of the oldest surviving works in the Turkic language and is a treatise on governance, justice, and ethics.

As a dialogue among allegorical figures representing some of the major virtues of wisdom, justice, fortune, and contentment, the book offers an insight into statecraft, leadership, and ethics. "Kutadgu Bilig" stands out for its synthesis of Turkic traditions and Islamic influence, rendering it a valuable cultural and historical source. These texts laid the foundation for the lexical and grammatical principles of modern Uzbek. The ancient Turkic language is primarily associated with history, especially ethnic history. Differences among Turkic tribes were mainly identified through their languages. Therefore, language played a crucial role in narrating the history of these tribes. Additionally, the ancient Turkic language is linked to paleography. Paleography examines the origins of the ancient Turkic script, the diversity of alphabets, and



the influence of other scripts on Turkic runic writing. For example, in the beginning of the “Kul Tigin” inscription, it is written that ancient Turks considered Tengri (the sky) their father and earth their mother. In addition, the Yenisei inscriptions indicate that the celestial bodies were considered in a similar manner to deities, as was considered by the Assyrians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Amorites, and the Parthians of the East. The association between the ancient Turkic philosophical nature of language and the ancient Turkic tribes' beliefs can be seen through the fact that there are numerous mythological names. The majority of celestial objects were assigned mythological meanings within ancient Turkic texts. The above expressed ideas could contribute to developing the Uzbek language in next steps.

Classical Uzbek Period (14th–19th centuries): The Classical Uzbek language period spans the 14th to the 19th century and is considered a turning point in the development of the Uzbek literary language. During this time, a new literary language emerged based on Chagatai and was used widely in written literature, science, and culture. The Chagatai language was the main written literary language of Turkestan from the 14th to the 19th century. Many famous literary works were written in this language. Alisher Navoiy played a key role in elevating Chagatai to a high literary level, making it equal to other major languages of the time. The Chagatai language adopted many Arabic and Persian loanwords, complex grammatical structures, and poetic devices. In this period, written literature evolved. Alisher Navoiy's works, such as “Khamasa” and “Muhokamat al-Lug'atayn”, became the foundation of Uzbek literary tradition. Babur's “Boburnoma” is also an important historical and literary source. Lutfiy and Ogahiy were also major figures in the literature of this period. Classical Uzbek left a strong influence on modern Uzbek. Literary standards and the status of Uzbek as a high and expressive language were established with Alisher Navoiy's works. Nowadays, scholars are still studying Classical Uzbek literature to learn about their contribution to the formation of the Uzbek language. Generally speaking, the period of Classical Uzbek language played a significant role in the development of the Uzbek language. The literature of this period not only contributed to the development of Uzbek, but also enriched its linguistic and literary heritage.

Modern Uzbek Period (20th century – present): The 20th century was a turning point in the history of the Uzbek language, marked by significant changes brought about by political, cultural, and social influences. These changes affected the writing system, grammar, and vocabulary, lending shape to the modern Uzbek language.

Changes in the Writing System

Perhaps the most important occurrence in the 20th century was the change among numerous writing systems. Uzbek has experienced three major script changes:

1. Arabic script (until 1917) – Conventionally used in the Chagatai literary language. Traditionally employed for Chagatai book language, itself the standard script from of written Turkic in Central Asia. The script then had pronounced Islamic and Persian –Arabic influences.
2. Latin script (1929–1940) – Used as part of Soviet language reforms in order to modernize. Adopted in Formed Soviet Union language planning initiatives in order to standardize and modernize script for USSR's Turkic-speaking people.
3. Cyrillic script (1940–1993) – Implemented by Soviet authorities in order to offer an integration of linguistic policies throughout the USSR. Once Uzbekistan became independent in 1991, the government again used the Latin alphabet in 1993, and the change is still ongoing.

Uzbek as a State Language during the Soviet Era. During the Soviet period, Uzbek as an official language maintained its position but was overshadowed in government, science,

education, and technology by Russian. Consequently, Cyrillic witnessed the entry of many Russian terminologies and features into the vocabulary of Uzbekian. For example, words like “samalyot” (airplane), “telefon” (telephone), and tractor (tractor) become commonly used. Despite the prevailing status of Russian, Uzbek literature continued to flourish at this period. Alisher Navoiy, Abdulla Qodiriy, G'afur G'ulom, Oybek, and Hamid Olimjon were among the well-known authors who contributed to Uzbek literary heritage. Literacy and education were encouraged by Soviet policy in Uzbek, but Russian prevailed in higher education and administration.

The "Law on the State Language" (1989)

One milestone in the Uzbek language's history was achieved in 1989, when the Law on the State Language was passed, and Uzbek became the official state language of Uzbekistan. The law paved the way for broader usage of Uzbek in government, education, and culture. Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan intensified the promotion of the status of Uzbek, upholding its official language status for use in official institutions. Revival of the Latin script in 1993 was part of a broader move to modernize the language and eradicate Soviet legacies. The 20th century was a time of revolution for the Uzbek language, with a number of script reforms, gaining official status, and impressive literary and scientific growth. Since independence, Uzbek has consolidated its position as the state language and continues to develop to serve the needs of an independent and modern Uzbekistan. The 1989 language law played a crucial role in reviving Uzbek linguistic and cultural heritage, which had been overshadowed by Russian during the Soviet era. By declaring Uzbek the official state language, the law reinforced national identity and created a strong foundation for post-independence nation-building. This move was also symbolic, as it aligned Uzbekistan with other former Soviet republics seeking to restore pre-Soviet cultural traditions. The revival of the Latin script in 1993 was an extension of this effort, distancing the Uzbek language from Soviet influence and reconnecting it with historical Turkic linguistic traditions.

Today, Uzbek is the official language of Uzbekistan, as stated in Article 4 of the Constitution. It is used in official documents, education, media, and science. Uzbek serves as a bridge for social interaction and national identity. Universities and schools continue to expand Uzbek-language education, and academic research in Uzbek is growing. Furthermore, the language is gaining global recognition. There is a rising interest in learning Uzbek in various countries, including Turkey, the United States, South Korea, and Russia, where Uzbek language centers have been established. Digital and mass media platforms also promote Uzbek content, contributing to its global presence. The Uzbek language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of cultural, historical, and national identity. It plays a crucial role in literature, film, diplomacy, and international relations. As Uzbek continues to develop, it is essential to further promote it globally and advance its role in scientific and technological fields. Every citizen has a responsibility to support and popularize the Uzbek language, ensuring its continued growth and significance.

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