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Sociopolitical changes and language:
A retrospective view of Azerbaijanian

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Language reflects the changes taking place beyond it. This becomes more important when it concerns sociopolitical settings that are completely different. For less than two centuries the Azerbaijanian language has faced three of them: colonial, imperial and global. The paper intends to analyze the language situation in Azerbaijan with brief recourse into its language in both colonial and imperial settings, and also the impact of the linguistic globalization language on the Azerbaijanian language.

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Introduction

The last two decades of the twentieth century left the members of all societies face to face with a new phenomenon: globalization. The world once again after the Cold War was divided into two camps: those who considered globalization a new stage of integration or internationalization of values, beliefs and relations, and those who found it an oppressive machine of supranational powers that must be blamed for all misfortunes.

Many sociolinguists began speaking of *linguistic genocide* (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000) committed by a *killer language, Tyrannosaurus Rex*, who is found guilty of "cannibalism, a common feature of dominant language" (Phillipson 2000: 1). Moreover, the conventional belief that language contact makes languages rich and colourful has been found wrong due to 'unidirectionality of borrowing', "since loan words can be the tip of a cultural iceberg, symptoms of a wider malaise" (Phillipson 2000: 2). On the one hand, "globalization is a 'killing agent' because the 'free market' ideology demands homogenization and, thus, kills diversity" (Skuttnabb-Kangas 2000). On the other hand, "never before in history have there been as many standardized languages as there are now: roughly 1,200" (Fishman 2002: 4). Globalization is said to be a foe of diversity; however, from Risager's (2002) point of view, the emergence of a great number of 'nation states' built on the principle of a 'state language' are the products of globalization.

Thus, it can be assumed that linguistic globalization takes place when a global language, English, replaces and displaces local languages in many of the domains in which they had originally been used including education. Moreover, linguistic globalization or Anglo-Americanization is responsible for linguistic homogenization due to its influence on the vocabulary of the local languages since the local languages lose the competition due to the lack of power and prestige. Subsequently, due to globalization, English has become the most widely used language in the world. The attitude toward globalization is not unanimous. For those who consider English a language which has to play the role of the widest lingua franca with dozens of local Englishes, "globalization is a unity of the global and local, a unity of homogenization and heterogenization" (Risager 2002: 3). Concerning the history of globalization, it goes back as far as "1000 A.D., when the global spread of science, technology and mathematics was changing the nature of the world ..." (Sen 2002: 6). Our aim is not to justify the friends or foes of globalization. The aim is to analyze the language situation in three subsequent settings including globalization.

The peripheral language in the colonial setting

The history of language contact between Azerbaijanian and Russian goes back to the early 1800s, when the Russian Empire kept expanding and capturing more and more territories. Russia's assimilationist language policy was based on the wide-range relocations of populations. Furthermore, efforts to create favourable conditions for people who had newly immigrated to the region forced the locals to leave their lands (Mamedov 2000). Also the oil boom in the19th century caused the influx of various ethnic groups to Baku.

These processes radically changed the ethnic and linguistic situation in that region (Mamedov 2000). It would be difficult to speak of deliberate language planning by the colonizers. The dissemination of the hegemonic Russian language would be the result of imposition. As a matter of fact, Russian did not seem to be an explicitly dominant language in Azerbaijan during the early period of conquest. But later, when relocations necessitated a lingua franca and the language of the center, Russian gained power and thus, gradually became the dominant language. The relationship between the local language and the language of the center reflected the constructs of the colonialist cultural mythology, which characterized local languages as tribal languages. It must be pointed out that the Azerbaijanian language was also used as a lingua franca in the region (Balaev 1992).

The second half of the 19th century was the period when the formation and standardization of the Azerbaijanian language got its impetus. After many centuries, the idea that the existing Arabic alphabet failed to meet the linguistic requirements of Azerbaijanian was put forward (Əliyeva 1996). This could not be explained by the linguistic considerations alone, as the sociopolitical movements taking place in Europe had cultivated pro-Western sentiments even in the suburbs of Tsarist Russia. As the connection with Europe could only be established through the center, Russia, the Russian language began to be considered a window to Europe. The changing

balance of power in the world in the second half of the 19th century was reflected in the linguistic balance of power. The European languages began to be associated with progress and development, while the Oriental languages including Arabic were equated with backwardness.

Though the Russian language began to gain power in the region, the awareness of the Azerbaijanian intelligentsia of the importance of the mother tongue increased. In spite of the assimilationist policy of Tsarist Russia, it could not establish Russian, the language of the Empire, as an international language because of its social significance in the minds of native peoples, especially in the countryside. Thus, Azerbaijanian was widely used in pre-revolutionary Azerbaijan. The colonial setting with the dominant Russian language could not impact local languages significantly due to the fact that language contact was significant in a few domains only. In fact, it was almost impossible to speak of the direct 'physical' contact of the dominant language with the languages of the 'tribes'.

Language policy in an imperial setting

The Soviet Empire's language policy was also based on the idea of assimilation, though it was subjected to certain 'corrections'. The main difference seems to be the fact that its expansion was not based on imposition or neglect, as it was before. Unlike colonial Russia's inconsistent pragmatic language policy, the communist regime had worked out a well-organized scientifically justified language planning based on the ideologization of the Russian language, the demonic policy of Russification. As the idea of communism was based on creating a classless society with collective values, this could be achieved by establishing a new type of social entity, a *Soviet man* or *Soviet people*, whose language might be the *Great Russian language*, whereas the other languages could co-function with Russian in their own territories as peripheral languages.

It was not difficult to observe that Moscow implemented a two-stage language policy. In stage one, the early policy of the Soviets, the emphasis was to develop various languages by using them in education and in public and professional domains. One of the aspects to such a policy was the elevation of regional dialects into 'languages', a policy of 'divide and rule'. Its goal was to prevent the formation of large language blocks and allow the central government to insist that Russian be used as a lingua franca. But it was not an easy task, since the illiteracy rate was very high. Moreover, many of the languages were not written. Additionally, some languages, including Azerbaijanian, were using Arabic scripts. By introducing alphabets other than Arabic, Russia could solve some other problems as well.

The second stage was to 'universalize' the knowledge of Russian. With this came forced Cyrillicization of the former Latin and Arab scripts. Covertly this was Russification but overtly it was used to glorify and unify. Language planning design looked like a Russian *matrjoška* doll: the largest *matrjoška* had a national language that appeared as a result of the policy of *korenacija* ("rooting" policy). The largest *matrjoška* was the ideologized Russian while the 'rooted' smaller one was in her.

The minority languages within the territory of the domain languages were arranged on the basis of their ethno-territorial ranks. Consequently, their vulnerability depended on the status they possessed. The language lacking power and prestige could not win the language competition. As a result, its habitat would gradually disappear. The existence of more than 80 small nations has been threatened by the Russian and Soviet Empires during recent history (Vahtre & Vikberg 1991).

To realize its plan of assimilation, the Soviet Empire used policy of relocation, either voluntarily or by imposition. As a result, there appeared a unique ethnolinguistic situation in the USSR. In such a situation, the politically empowered Russian, a language of interethnic communication, became dominant in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the national languages in the republics could only perform limited functions. As a result, the Great Russian language was about to swallow their language by Russifying them through the exportation of words to local languages when words were needed. Consequently, all the languages were subjected to strong influence by the Russian language as a donor language, which led to their homogenization. In other words, it would not be quite correct to assume that homogenization of languages is the specific feature of globalization. In fact, linguistic imperialism was the first stage of linguistic globalization. The ethno-linguistic situation in Azerbaijan was a mirror reflection of that of the Soviet Union as a whole.

During the years of the communist regime, Azerbaijan was one of the most multiethnic republics. With Azerbaijanian as a majority language, Azerbaijan was (and still is) a home for indigenous ethnic minorities such as Lezgins, Avars, Talyshs, Tsakhurs, etc. According to the 1989 census (Goskomitet SSSR 1989), the whole population of Azerbaijan was 7,021,200 of which 82,7% were ethnic Azerbaijanians. The remaining 17.2 % were Russians, Armenians, Lezgins, Avars, Ukrainians, Tatars, Jews, Kurds, Georgians, Udins, Tats, Mountain Jews, Tsakhurs and others.

One of the actions taken by the Soviet language policy was corpus planning: to replace the existing modified Latin alphabet by the Cyrillic one in order to establish uniformity within the Soviet Union and also to isolate the Azerbaijanian language from Turkish. Unable to withstand the overwhelming political power of the Russian language, Azerbaijanian was stripped off many of its functions.

The corpus of the language had undergone serious deformations both structurally and lexically. There were all the symptoms of an abnormal diglossia: *High Azerbaijanian*, which was heavily Russified, was mainly used in science and administrative domains, and *Low Azerbaijanian* was used in rural areas mainly. The population could roughly be divided into three main groups in terms of language use. The first group consisted of people who lived in urban areas. Russification was very high there due to the fact that, first of all, in urban places the rate of indigenous people was low and, second of all, nearly all administrative bodies were located there. Suffice it to mention that schools where Azerbaijanian was the language of instruction comprised only 45% of the total in Baku. This happened in a republic where the indigenous people comprised 82.7% of the total population (Pašaeva 1997).

The use of Russian within the different layers of the population varied. Russian almost became a dominant language in institutions of higher education. It was the working language in almost all institutional activities. The rural population of Azerbaijan belonged to the second group where Russian had a very limited functional domain. In villages mainly the male population had a certain command of the Russian language. The Azerbaijanian language they used could preserve its purity to a certain degree. Certain parts of the national intelligentsia who tried to make the people aware of the graveness of the situation were usually called *nationalists* or *pan-Turkists*.

As a result of the devastating Russification machine, Russian had become the native language for many representatives of the language minorities, whereas the reverse was not true for the Russian immigrants. They never experienced a need to learn the language of the indigenous nation. Only 0.4% of Russians spoke the languages of indigenous ethnic groups (Goskomitet SSSR 1989).

It should be mentioned that Russian also intruded into the areas of everyday Azerbaijanian language use. Alongside code switching, code mixing was a usual practice. Even those who did not have any command of the Russian language used Russian words in their everyday speech.

The other function of the Russian language was that it was a donor and filter language for national languages including Azerbaijanian. Such a situation could be explained by the fact that, first of all, the heavily centralized system made Moscow (and thus Russian) a place where things were coined (e.g., *kolxoz, sovxoz, rajkom, kompartija, perestrojka, glasnost'*, etc.) and, second of all, the access to foreign languages occurred mainly through Russian. Thus, the Soviet Union was an empire village with Russian as its imperial language.

National language policy of independent Azerbaijan

After the collapse of the Soviet Empire, Azerbaijanians obtained a chance to rebuild their nation in which language could play a mobilizing role. The nation had to be very careful since the language issue "in the developing countries is of crucial importance in their economic, political, and social development" (Ferguson 1996: 272). It was vitally important for Azerbaijan to take correct decisions "in terms of at least three important goals", as Ferguson stated, namely, for establishing "national unity and national identity", "access to modern science and technology", and for "international communication" (Ferguson 1996: 272). Moreover, it was vitally important to take correct decisions because language policies are usually planned for relatively long periods and could definitely have further sociopolitical implications. In other words, as Daoust states, "the devising of a language planning policy implies a vision of a future sociolinguistic situation that should be brought about" (Daoust 1997: 440).

The newly established nation-state focused its language policy on two directions: status planning and corpus planning. Status planning was crucial for the new state since it intended to change "the function of a language or a variety of a language and

the rights of those who use it" (Wardhaugh 2002: 353). The status of Azerbaijanian has been defined by *The Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the State Language* adopted in 1991. The Law established the legal status of the Turkic (later Turkic was replaced by Azerbaijanian) language as a state language. According to the Law, the use of the state language was obligatory in all governmental establishments as well as in all spheres of political, economic, public, scientific and cultural life and in the function of international communications on the territory of the republic. Also, the Law defined the state's official attitude to ethnic minority groups. The Law guaranteed all citizens of the republic of Azerbaijan the right to choose the language of education, to organize schools in any language (Article 3). In 1992, the National Assembly of the Azerbaijanian Republic adopted two decrees: *"On the State Language in the Republic of Azerbaijan"* and *"On the protection of the rights and liberties of national minorities, small-numbered peoples and ethnic groups living in the Republic of Azerbaijan and on rendering assistance for the development of their languages and cultures"* (Pašaeva 1997).

Later, the Constitution adopted in 1995 also defines the Azerbaijanian language as an official language and guarantees the free use and development of other languages spoken by the population. It guarantees the citizens' right to educate in their native language.

As for corpus planning, the aim is to develop the language so that it could serve "every possible language function" (Wardhaugh 2002: 353). The Azerbaijanian language had already developed rich lexical resources and a highly standardized grammar that completely meets all the needs of the modern society. That was why priority in corpus planning has to be directed towards modernization, which implies extending the lexicon, either by coinage or by borrowing, and introducing new expressions. As with other languages, Azerbaijanian uses internal and external sources of lexical expansion. On the one hand, the standard language used dialects to enrich its lexical stock, on the other hand, foreign words have entered the language as loanwords or calques. But a certain part of these words remain *quantitative borrowings* (Osam 1997).

Nevertheless, the most politicized issue in corpus planning, alphabetical reform, had to be re-addressed. The point was that to transform back to the Latin script was important for Azerbaijan for different reasons, both linguistic and non-linguistic. The change could be of great sociopolitical importance. In 1991 the National Board of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued a decree on the renewal of the Azerbaijanian alphabet with Latin graphics. The decree suggested a stage by stage implementation of the new alphabet gradually broadening its functional range.

Considerable changes have taken place in the socio-political sphere during the period, which has considerably changed the ethno-linguistic situation in Azerbaijan. According to the data of the State Statistical Committee, after ten years of independence the titular nation, Azerbaijanians comprise 91% of the total population. In other words, the share of the titular nation grew from 82.7% in 1989 to 91% in 1999. In comparison with other newly established nation-states this figure is not considerable.

In some of them the share of non-titular (generally Russian-speaking) nations comprises less than 1% (Strel'cova 2001). The policy of building nation-states on the basis of the titular language seems to be the main reason that the countries emerging in the territories of the former USSR are becoming more and more monolingual.

Parallel to monolingualism, it is not difficult to witness something that logically seems impossible: the knowledge of minorities of their mother tongue is very high. According to data provided by the State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijanian language is the mother tongue for 99% of Azerbaijanians while 99.7% of Russians consider the Russian language as their mother tongue. Mother tongue competence of Udins (99.3%) and Tsakhurs (99.3%) is extremely high. Approximately the same is true for Avars and Georgians, whose competence in their mother tongue is more than 98%. A great majority of Lezgins (96.1%) and Talyshs (89.6%) consider the respective languages as their mother tongue. However, for only 32.1% of Ukrainians is the Ukrainian language the mother tongue (Statistical Yearbook 2002).

The legal actions on minority languages, especially those directed toward acquisition planning seems to be highly effective. It is noteworthy that the Azerbaijanian government has taken effective measures in language acquisition planning. For instance, "in the 1996-1997 academic year, 23,919 pupils were taught the Talysh language, 16,600 pupils were taught the Lezgin language, 4,082 pupils were taught the Avar language" (Pašaeva 1997). Moreover, newspapers, magazines, books, and dictionaries are published in the native languages of these ethnic minority groups. In 1996 alone there were published "books in the minority languages with the total circulation of 57,000 books". Among them were alphabets in six languages like Talysh (15,000 copies), Tat (5,000 copies), and Kurdish (2,000 copies) (Pašaeva 1997).

"Liberated" by globalization

Two developments are characteristic of the Azerbaijanian language in the age of globalization. On the one hand, the Russian language keeps decreasing its function as a donor language. On the other hand, linguistic imperialism has obtained a direct access to all domains of the Azerbaijanian language avoiding Russian as a filter language. The influence of the global language, English, can be witnessed in two main directions: replacement and displacement.

Empirical observation of language use in various means of mass media over the past ten years has revealed certain interesting tendencies. First of all, Anglicisms (i.e., English words or phrases that are used in another language) are used as synonyms to words previously borrowed from Arabic or Persian while the frequency of use of the latter has gradually decreased, which implies that at later stages Arabic and Persian words are likely to become archaisms. For instance, words like *konflikt* (conflict), *informasiya* (information), *provokasion/provokasiya* (provocation), *auksion* (auction) and *kompromis* (compromise) tend to be used more frequently than their previously borrowed synonyms *münagişə, məlumat, təxribat, hərrac* and *güzəşt* correspondingly. Moreover, it has been observed that nearly all recent neologisms are

of Anglo-American origin. They cover nearly all spheres of life: *eksklusiv* (exclusive), *tok-şou* (talk-show), *konseptual* (conceptual), *biznesmen* (businessman), *mer* (mayor), *korrektə* (correct), *imic* (image), *ofis* (office), *korrupsiya* (corruption), *mesaj* (message), *prezentasiya* (presentation), *missiya* (mission), *seminar-trening* (seminar-training), *monitoring* (monitoring), *brifing* (briefing), *grant* (grant), *blef* (bluff), *elektorat* (electorate), *spiker / eks spiker* (speaker / ex-speaker), *legitim* (legitimate), *loyal* (loyal), *şou-biznes* (show-business), *killer* (killer), etc.

Alongside the direct intrusion into the Azerbaijanian language, words of Anglo-American origin have obtained access as calques. For instance, money laundering is translated directly as *pulların yuyulması* or *kirli* or *çirkli pulların yuyulması* (*pul* 'money', *yuyulmasi* 'washing', *kirli / çirkli* 'dirty'). Yellow press is also directly translated as *sarı mətbuat* (*sarı* 'yellow', *mətbuat* 'press').

The ever-increasing influence of Anglo-American linguistic imperialism can be witnessed even in the facades of buildings in big cities. Bilingual inscriptions with Russian and Azerbaijanian are not seen anymore. English has already replaced Russian. In other words, English seems to be replacing Russian as a second language in Azerbaijan. Moreover, the pair *mağaza – magazin* ('shop' in Azerbaijan and Russian) has almost disappeared. The words 'market' (e.g. *Elektro market, Home market, Gloria mini-market*), 'shop' (e.g. *Carpet shop, Shop 777*), 'store' (e.g. *King's store*), *oil / oyl / petrol* (e.g. *Səlyan oyl, Həmid petrol*) are but a few examples.

The other direction, displacement of the Azerbaijanian language by the English language is obviously felt in education. Over the last ten years departments of English language teaching and translation have been mushrooming. Moreover, English as the language of instruction in the teaching of certain subject matter courses has become commonplace. Also, there is a tendency to establish 'American' universities where the language of instruction is English. 'English' elementary and secondary educational institutions are appearing on the basis of traditional elementary and secondary education. Language centers and private teachers of English, both native and nonnative, who promise to teach English within an extremely short period of time have been occupying a significant part of the advertisement sections of the local mass media.

There have been radical changes in the balance of the linguistic situation in Azerbaijan. According to the results of our questionnaire carried out with 500 students from five universities in Baku, the Russian language is a first language or second language for 17.8% of the respondents, while the percentage for their parents is 57.2% for the same questionnaire item. On the other hand, 47.8% of the respondents stated that they knew two languages, English and Russian, but for their parents the share of English is 5.8%. This implies that the process of replacing Russian with English has gained impetus in Azerbaijan. As for other European languages, German and French, the number of those who know them is very insignificant. Arabic and Persian, traditionally popular languages in the region, keep steadily decreasing.

Due to sociopolitical reasons, Russian has been diminishing its role as a filter mechanism for loanwords taken into the Azerbaijanian language directly from Eng-

lish. The survey covering the changes in the recent decade has clearly revealed a massive intrusion of Anglicisms into Azerbaijanian. As a result, the lexical stock of the language expands mainly at the expense of adding Anglo-Americanized words. Additionally, due to the power it possesses, English has become the most prestigious language in Azerbaijan since the knowledge of English relays moral and psychological power (Diamond 1999). The users of the English language symbolize the popular Western culture. Second of all, the English language has more instrumental value than the Azerbaijanian language. It means access to a better education or a good job. Thus, if the present situation continues for longer periods, the Azerbaijanian language may find it hard to compete with the English language on equal terms.

Conclusion

As can be inferred, a peripheral language is subjected to serious impacts of the dominant language no matter what setting it is in—colonial, imperial, or global. In all these settings, the peripheral language is the evident loser since it lacks power. While the imperial setting allows the existence of multi-centers, the global setting recognizes the legitimacy of one center. In other words, in the imperial setting there could be several dominant languages, whereas in the global setting, there is only one globally dominant language, English. Moreover, this global language leads local languages to homogeneity since it is the only donor language. Due to the acceleration of integration processes taking place both in the economical and social domains, the acceleration of homogenization seems inevitable.

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