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Evolution of the Russian Language in the Tashkent Region's Urban Spaces

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Close to Tashkent, the city of Angren is one of the main coal producing centers of Uzbekistan. Despite the Uzbekification of public life since independence, and dramatic changes in the ethnic composition of the city—the share of the Russian population decreased from 31.4% in 1989 to 2.6% in 2013—Russian language had maintained very strong in Angren public space. This phenomenon can be explained because Russian is still indispensable in the industrial sector. With the ongoing modernization of Angren extraction combines, and the new status of special industrial zone (SIZ) given to the city, the demand for Russian language could increase.

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Although important, ethnic and cultural processes in modern Uzbekistan continue to be understudied. In the nation-building period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, particular consideration and interest was given to the study of the national culture, state language, and history of the Uzbeks. Consequently, little research and analysis addressed issues surrounding minorities in the region, including ethnic and cultural processes among the minorities in the new sociopolitical and economic context of independent Uzbekistan. Among ethnic minorities Russians stand apart, but they can be included in a large ethnolinguistic group of the Russian-speaking population (including Koreans, Tatars, Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, and others).

To date, there are almost no comprehensive studies of the ethnic and cultural processes among Russians and Russian-speaking populations in the city of Tashkent and the Tashkent region. Those few studies that do touch upon the changes in the environment for the minorities in Uzbekistan in the post-Soviet period have mainly been produced by Western researchers. Perhaps the only work that specifically studies the Russian population of the Tashkent oblast is the study done by the American political scientist Scott Radnitz,[1] who analyzed the factors leading to the emigration of minorities, primarily Russians/Russian speakers. According to the author, in deciding to move to Russia these groups are primarily motivated by economic reasons, not by the context of a 'nationalizing' state. These findings are based on interviews the author conducted with focus groups in the small town of Chirchik in the Tashkent region, but Radnitz extrapolated his findings for the entire territory of Uzbekistan.

The British anthropologist Moya Flynn published a similar study in 2007 in which she investigated the identity of the Russian-speaking population in Tashkent.[2] The author's conclusions appeared to coincide with the general perspective of Western anthropological studies on minorities in Central Asia: Russian-speaking people are part of the Uzbek society; they are anchored to Uzbekistan as their home and are concerned about socioeconomic problems. This study was based on interviews with people but unaccompanied by statistical and analytical data analysis, the information for which is usually not available in Uzbekistan.

Recent years have seen a number of anthropological studies producing complex analysis of the urban space in Tashkent. In one of his English-language publications, Artyom Kosmarski traces the history of Tashkent from a colonial city to a socialist metropolis.[3] Along with an analysis of the city's diverse architectural heritage, the author notes important ethnic and cultural changes in the environment of the capital of independent Uzbekistan. While looking at the social fabric of Tashkent, Kosmarski came to the unique conclusion that the Russian-speaking population enjoys a high degree of comfort in the capital city. The author argues that it is the "Europeans," or the Russian-speaking populations, who fully support the policies of Islam Karimov and his uncompromising struggle against Islamists that secures their perception of safety in Tashkent.[4]

It should be noted that ethnic and demographic processes in Uzbekistan are the subject of numerous studies by Uzbek analysts.[5] Among them, one can highlight the work of Evgeniy Abdullayev,[6] a philosopher, poet, and current editor-in-chief of the spiritual, literary, and historical magazine *Vostok svyshe*. His works offer an analysis of all the processes of nation building in Uzbekistan and the changing role and importance of the Russian language in the 2000s. While there is neither much empirical basis nor detailed analysis of the situation across different regions of Uzbekistan, the author is a witness to these developments and records common shifts in the identity of the Russian population in Central Asia.[7]

It is difficult to find distinguished new research on minorities in Central Asia in Russian historiography. Natalia Kosmarskaya's monograph on the Russian population of Kyrgyzstan,[8] which was grounded on a rich empirical foundation, represents something of a breakthrough. Some of the author's conclusions can be extrapolated to cover ethnic and cultural processes among the Russian-speaking population of Uzbekistan.

The availability of fragmented research on the ethno-cultural peculiarities of the Russians/Russian-speaking population of Uzbekistan is a start. However, scholars have not yet produced generalizing, comprehensive research covering all aspects of life for the Russian-speaking population in the regions of Uzbekistan in the context of a 'nationalizing' state. Moreover, field studies suggest that the way the Russians adapt to this context differs from the conventional perceptions of discrimination against Russians in Central Asia, and the question of the role of the Russian language in social and cultural life of the republic is overly dramatized.

Ethnic and Social Background of Angren in 1946–80

Angren is located approximately one hundred kilometers from Tashkent in the Akhangaran valley between the Chatkal and Kurama mountain ranges in the floodplain of the Angren river. Historically, the Angren valley links Tashkent with the pearl of Central Asia, the Ferghana valley. Today Angren is the last city of the Tashkent region on the way to the Ferghana valley, located on a strategically important highway. The city was developed after lignite deposits were discovered there in 1933 as part of a comprehensive exploration and development of natural resources in Central Asia. The exploration of the Angren valley began in 1940, and a year later construction of the Angrenugol mine was launched with an emerging village called Angrenshahtostroy nearby.[9] Archival documents indicate that exploration efforts in the Akhangaran valley were led personally by Josef Stalin and Lavrentiy Beria. On the eve of the Second World War, the Soviet Union was speeding up the pace of industrialization in Central Asia and Kazakhstan and actively engaged in the development of new mineral deposits in order to turn the region into an independent national economic complex.

From 1940–43 several coal-producing mines were developed and the first coal trains arrived in Tashkent during the war. Angren had actually become the second Donbass. In 1946, it was transformed into a city subordinated to a region. A new industrial city was added to the map of the Tashkent region. Workers from many areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Russia came to take part in the construction of this new industrial coal site.

The city became home to many large industrial facilities such as coal mines, a rubber plant, Angren State District Power Plant (GRES), Novo-Angren GRES, a ceramic factory, machine-building plants, a gold-processing plant,[10] cement, asphalt, concrete, chemical, and metallurgical production, Podzemgaz, and others. The history of Angren, according to the remembrance of its residents, suggests that the city was flooded with immigrants from various regions of the Soviet Union, including many mining experts, sinkers, miners, builders, etc.

The majority of the city's population was Russians or Russian-speaking. A Soviet source recorded that during the process of Angren's industrial development in the late 1950s and early 1960s it was difficult to urbanize the Uzbek population.[11] Uzbeks had been less engaged in industrial development and less urbanized, as the data in table 1 below indicates.

Therefore, the cities of the Akhangaran valley—Angren and Almalyq—were predominantly "European" in their early years of development. In Angren there was a high proportion of Russians, Tatars (Crimean Tatars and Volga Tatars are most likely combined in table 1), Ukrainians, and Koreans. At the same time, Angren had traditionally hosted a high number of Tajiks (in 1959, 7.4 percent of the population). The Akhangaran valley has many place names derived from the Persian language (Akhangaran means for instance "a master blacksmith").[12]

Table 1
Nationalities of the cities in Tashkent region in 1959 (given as a percentage of total population)[13]

Cities	*Uzbeks*	*Russians*	*Kazakhs*	*Kyrgyz*	*Tajiks*	*Tatars*	*Ukrainians*	*Koreans*
Tashkent	33.8	43.9	0.9	0.05	0.5	6.7	2.7	0.4
Almalyq	10.5	53.8	1.1	0.05	0.2	18.4	4.9	6.0
Angren	15.7	42.9	0.6	0.03	7.4	17.9	3.7	2.6

Table 2
Population of Angren by nationality in 1979 and 1989 (overall population and percentage of total)[14]

Years	*Total*	*Uzbeks*	*Russians*	*Crimean Tatars*	*Tajiks*	*Tatars*	*Ukrainians*	*Koreans*
1979	105,757 (100%)	30,248 (28.6%)	36,011 (34%)	3,613 (3.4%)	13,142 (12.4)	9,967 (9.4%)	2,181 (2%)	2,065 (1.9%)
1989	137,615 (100%)	43,374 (31.5)	43,218 (31.4%)	4,912 (3.5%)	18,163 (13.1%)	11,503 (8.3%)	2,794 (2%)	3,266 (2.3%)

Table 3
Population by nationality and knowledge of the second language in Angren in 1989 (overall population and percentage of total)[15]

Nationality	Total	including those who speak fluently the second language of the USSR nations					
		Native language	Russian	Uzbek	Tajik	Tatar	No second language
Total population	137,615 (100%)	771 (0.5%)	49,359 (35.8%)	8,293 (6%)	695 (0.5%)	97 (0.07%)	77,747 (56.4%)
Uzbeks	43,374 (100%)	171 (0.3%)	24,657 (56.8%)	-	654 (1.5%)	46 (0.1%)	17,800 (41%)
Russians	43,218 (100%)	15 (0.03%)	-	596 (1.3%)	14 (0.03%)	77 (0.17%)	42,292 (97.8%)
Ukrainians	2,794 (100%)	101 (3.6%)	841 (30%)	42 (1.5%)	3 (0.1%)	2 (0.07%)	1,748 (62.5%)
Tajiks	18,163 (100%)	118 (0.6%)	5,294 (29.1%)	6,666 (36.7%)	-	6 (0.03%)	6,039 (33.2%)
Tatars	11,503 (100%)	259 (2.2%)	7,688 (66.8%)	348 (3%)	7 (0.06%)	-	3,181 (27.6%)
Crimean Tatars	4,912 (100%)	23 (0.4%)	3,921 (79.8%)	227 (4.6%)	4 (0.08%)	13 (0.2%)	718 (14.6%)
Koreans	3,266 (100%)	-	1,546 (47.3%)	50 (1.5%)	-	1 (0.03%)	1,622 (49.6%)
Germans	4,766 (100%)	-	2,335 (48.9%)	25 (0.5%)	2 (0.04%)	1 (0.02%)	2,355 (49.4%)

The census data from Angren in 1979 and 1989 (see table 2 above) underlines the trends that had become common to all Central Asian republics for that period. By the end of the 1980s, the share of autochthonous groups (Uzbeks, Tajiks) had increased, while the share of Russians and Russian-speaking populations had gradually decreased with the slowdown of natural growth and increasing emigration out of the region. It is difficult to analyze the ethnic statistics of industrial cities like Angren because the headcount methods for determining individual administrative units are not quite clear. It is most likely that in 1979 and 1989 Angren's population would have included the population from nearby villages (Ablyk, Dzhigiristan, Karabau, Teshiktash, Apartak, Saglom, Gulbag, and Katagan), which were predominantly Uzbek. Even now most of the population in Karabau is Tajik. Therefore, according to the statistics, the share of the urban Uzbek population had increased, but in reality Uzbeks were living in the villages outside of the city proper. In one interview a respondent noted that in the Soviet period almost no Uzbeks lived in Angren itself.[16]

The data in table 3 proves that the main population of the city and surrounding villages inscribed within the city limits was Russian-speaking. A similar situation was observed for all industrial centers. Russians (97.8 percent) did not speak a second language, which was explained by their "status of extraterritoriality," a concept introduced by the Norwegian researcher Paul Kolstø. In one of his articles he stressed that during the Soviet time, Russians in any of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, even where there were few of them (as in the case of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic), felt free to use their native language, with was spoken in all Soviet administrations.[17] Accordingly, in the Soviet Union, nationality was territorialized for all except Russians. Russians did not speak the language of the titular population and did not aspire to learn it.

Similar processes had been taking place among other Russian-speaking groups: 66.8 percent of the Volga Tatars spoke Russian fluently. Crimean Tatars demonstrated a higher level of proficiency in Russian (79.8 percent), and the vast majority belong to the Russian-speaking group. 47.3 percent of the Koreans spoke Russian fluently. These statistics show that the urban environment was predominantly Russian-speaking, forcing the indigenous Uzbek population to learn Russian. In Angren 56.8 percent of Uzbeks spoke Russian fluently, while 41 percent did not speak a second language.

Industrialization in Soviet Central Asia and Kazakhstan was led by Moscow, developing the use of Russian language and engaging skilled workers from the European parts of the Soviet Union. In the first years of Soviet power, the indigenous peoples of the region had been little engaged in the processes of industrialization. For the Uzbeks of Angren to urbanize meant to join the Russified lifestyle through adoption of the Russian language, without which it was impossible to participate in industrial production. Accordingly, middle-aged and younger generations of Uzbeks and Tajiks in the 1980s generally learned the Russian language.

Changes in Ethnic and Social Processes of the Tashkent Oblast in the 1990s and Early 2000s

According to the data from 1991, there were about 132,000 people living in Angren, mostly Russian, Tatars, Crimean Tatars, Germans, Koreans, and Ukrainians, who were employed by local industries.[18] Angren was built in quarters and the Russian-speaking (multiethnic) population was prevalent within the city limits. Several rural settlements surround it: Dzhigiristan (in 1940 this was a settlement of workers), Ablyk, Guram, Teshiktash, Apartak, Saglom, Gulbag, Katagan (a predominantly Uzbek and Tajik village), Karabau (currently part of the city), a settlement of geologic explorers (*Geologorazvedchikov* or geologists), as well as the German village.

Between 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s most businesses in Angren ceased to function except for the Angren office of the Almalyk Mining Metallurgical Combine (AMMC) and the coal mines, as well as the Angren and Novo-Angren power stations (GRES). The stagnation of core industries had seriously affected the ethnic and social composition of the city as well as the living standards of the Russian-speaking residents.

Widespread unemployment caused by economic crisis and the shutdown of the core enterprises along with processes of ethno-political mobilization in Uzbekistan contributed to the rapid outflow of the Russian-speaking population. Angren had become populated by the residents of nearby villages.

Economic growth in Uzbekistan had had a weak effect on Angren in the 1990s and 2000s, and as a result the city had lost its industrial status and the structure of employment had changed. The years from 1995 to 2003 had been particularly challenging for the city as the Soviet system of urban infrastructure collapsed, entailing year-round shutoffs of electricity, heating, and hot water. Everyday problems aggravated the difficult situation: lack of available jobs, decay of the old structure of employment, and shifts in the information and communication environment. Employment in various sectors went through serious deformation. By the 2000s sectors such as the service industry and trade gradually began to develop, partly due to the fact that Angren is located along the trade route for goods from the markets of Kokand headed to Tashkent. In 2008, a new bazaar, "5/4," was built in one of Angren's quarters, featuring modern shopping pavilions.

The changes of the 1990s–2000s in Angren brought about a ruralization of the urban space and the appearance of sheep, goats, and cows on the streets. For the population of nearby villages, cattle became one reliable source of income (every day women from villages come to the city market and sell homemade dairy products). Yet none of fifteen individuals interviewed during 2011–13 fieldwork mentioned that everyday rural practices are moving into the urban space along with the spontaneous market trade. There is no visible tension between the Russian-speaking population and the new city residents, while these tensions are common in Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan. The Russian-speaking community seems more concerned with the massive emigration of Russians from Uzbekistan, which drastically impacted its local communication environment.

Today Angren is undergoing important changes, particularly in regard to its status: In April 2012, President Islam Karimov signed a decree on the establishment of the special industrial zone (SIZ). The city of Angren was not chosen accidentally: the important industrial complex built there during the Soviet period still has valuable potential. Additionally, Angren also has a gas-production station, the only one in the country that operates using the underground-angle pyrolysis method. The cities of the Tashkent region also have a large untapped labor pool.

Changes related to this new SIZ status are already noticeable today. A new pipeline plant has been built in the city, along with factories for the production of silicon tiles, sugar, flour, cardboard, etc. But modern mechanized production did not have a noticeable effect on the employment situation. Major construction projects use foreign labor; the Angren-Pap railroad (Pap district is located in the Namangan region), for instance, is being constructed by the Chinese and will be the first railway linking the cities of the Tashkent oblast with the Fergana valley. According to unofficial sources, this construction involves one thousand Chinese workers. The Spanish firm Isolux Corsan is leading the reconstruction of a seventy-six-kilometer span of the road running from the checkpoint at Kamchik to the checkpoint at Chinor, which is entirely located in the mountains. It employs about two hundred Spaniards. Major construction projects from 2012–14, as a result, did not radically improve the employment situation in the city itself.

Large-scale socioeconomic changes in the 1990s-2010s led to fundamental transformations of the ethnic composition of the city. According to the official data of the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, the population of Angren on January 1, 2013, was 172,880 people, of whom 126,247 were Uzbeks (73 percent of the city's total population), 28,653 Tajiks (16.8 percent), 4,621 Russian (2.6 percent), 1,284 Tatars (0.7 percent), and 8,282 Koreans (4.7 percent).[19] Accordingly, the share of the "European" population, which was formerly dominant in the city, is now less than 10 percent. Since its independence, Uzbekistan had not held a census and the headcount of its residents had significant errors. For example, the official statistics did not include residents of Angren who received Russian citizenship and

have residence permits in Uzbekistan—so-called returnees—whose numbers are significant.

Russian Language in the Sociocultural Space of Angren

Due to the outflow of the Russian-speaking population during the period of independence, the use of Russian language in the urban public space dramatically evolved. However, Russian still has a strong position in Angren's social and cultural arenas. Demand for Russian education remains extremely high. Currently there are five schools in Angren that provide education in two languages, both Russian and Uzbek. This is impressive given the fact that there are only 4,621 Russians left, and few of them are children. By comparison, as of January 1, 2013, there were 28,653 Tajiks living in Angren (16.8 percent),[20] while there are only five schools that instruct in Tajik.

In an interview Lucia Shamilevna Rebechenko, director of school no. 33 and chairperson of the Angren branch of the Russian Cultural Center, suggests that the indigenous population developed a high demand for children's education in Russian. Russian-instructed classes are overcrowded; in a school with five classes, four classes are instructed in Russian and only one in Uzbek.[21]

The reasons for such a high demand for education in Russian are:

1. Perception of the quality and benefits of education in Russian;
2. Education in Russian is a prerequisite for career opportunities both in Uzbekistan and abroad;
3. The socioeconomic orientation towards Russia due to labor migration. Evgeny Abdullayev had rightly noted that Russia in the 2000s has regained a symbolic status as "big brother," [22]
4. Russian-Uzbek bilingualism maintained from the Soviet era.

It would seem that because of the change from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet for Uzbek in the 1990s and the ongoing 'Uzbekification' of public life the position of the Russian language had been completely undermined, but it turns out that Russian is booming in the cities of the Tashkent region.

The officers of Rossotrudnichestvo (an agency working under the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) in Uzbekistan mentioned that representatives of the country's elite seek to improve their Russian-language skills to better take advantage of Internet resources, and specialized literature. In Tashkent, the Russian Cultural Center and Rossotrudnichestvo provide courses to train students at community colleges (in Uzbekistan schooling continues until ninth grade, followed by three years of specialized school) to enroll in Russian universities. For example, for the 2011–12 academic year the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation had allocated 297 places for these students.[23]

At the same time, it should be noted that the popularity and dissemination of the Russian language does not necessarily entail its widespread use. The younger generation, born in the late 1980s and early 1990s, has been educated in schools with state language, while Russian might have been maintained as an elective language. As a result, Russian is used in domestic spheres and the media in a rather simplified way.

For the Russian-speaking residents of Angren it remains unclear how best to educate their younger generation. Currently, the Tashkent region is the only one in the country that has no higher-education institution. Out of Angren's postsecondary-education institutions there is only one with a "European group" (i.e. with Russian-language instruction), the Medical College. In July 2011, on the eve of entrance exams, the Tashkent Regional Pedagogical Institute, named after Mahmud Kashgari (TOGPI), closed its doors unexpectedly.[24] The Pedagogical Institute provided training not only for educators, but also for city law-enforcement agencies. Because of the TOGPI closure, the opportunities to obtain higher education dropped dramatically for all Angren residents. A branch of the Navoi Mining and Metallurgical Institute operates in Almalyq, forty-five kilometers from Angren.

Overall, higher education in Uzbekistan is gradually becoming elitist, as the system of stipends

acts on a case-by-case basis and the majority of students enroll on a contract basis, with a high tuition fee. In this system, only those who can afford to pay tuition get education and most of the Russian-speaking population of Angren—industrial workers, teachers, drivers, etc.—miss out on such opportunities. It must be noted that it is this 'closed' system of higher education that acts as a major factor pushing the middle-aged Russian-speaking residents to participate in the repatriation program in Russia, where access to higher education is significantly easier.

During twenty-three years of independence, dramatic changes have occurred in Angren's urban space, including shifting ethnic composition and transformation of the industrial and manufacturing sector, but the use of Russian in the public space seems largely unchanged. This phenomenon can be explained by the functional stability of the Russian language in industrial production.

This is confirmed by three interviews recorded with the employees of Angren's leading industrial enterprises. A driver for a local logistics company confirmed that internal documentation is kept entirely in Russian.[25] An electrician from one of Angren's gold-processing plants also confirmed that all internal documentation is compiled in Russian, and that company regulations are also maintained in Russian: "For example, I worked in energy management. All negotiations there between the controllers had been led in Russian. Because a dispatcher does not know many electrical terms in Uzbek, while he, for example, must pass the instruction to disable or enable any line, his colleague may not perceive the Uzbek properly, can make a mess and may bring the people under death, so everybody is forced to speak in Russian."[26] Elsewhere in that interview the following exhange took place*:*

> A: "My whole shift must be fixed in the log."
> Yu.Ts.: "In Russian?"
> A.: "In Russian, yes, and Uzbek shift, who work with me, they also write in Russian. Firstly, nothing is recorded in Uzbek. Secondly, we have two Russians, one Tatar, and three Uzbeks. They write in bad Russian, but this is Russian. They usually can write everything in Russian. He writes in bad language and it is funny to read, of course, when you take the shift, but this is clearer than their Uzbek."

The third example is related to the activities of an employee from an Angren coal mine. He too confirms that the managers give all commands to load and unload the coal in Russian and that the technical documentation is compiled entirely in Russian.[27]

Therefore, since Angren retains its industrial status, employees of big enterprises, including Uzbeks and Tajiks, must be bilingual. With the ongoing modernization of local industries, the demand for Russian will probably increase as the Russian language remains the language of the industrial world. In this regard, it would be useful to further investigate the issues surrounding new businesses built in the Angren industrial zone after 2012. In what language would production be directed in the new facilities? For example, a cardboard factory purchased a huge workshop and new equipment, but while the project was supervised by Czech entrepreneurs, the head engineers were invited from Novosibirsk, Russia.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, it is worth noting that, despite the Uzbekification of all spheres of public life and the introduction of the Uzbek language in the official documentation, Russian retained its central position in the public space of Angren. William Fierman suggests that the Russian language in Central Asia plays a much more important role than in the Baltic states or even the South Caucasus, where the Russian population is small.[28] Tightening immigration legislation in Russia, in particular a requirement demanding Russian-language proficiency for migrant workers, will further consolidate the perception that is still valuable to learn Russian. These changes entail shifts in values and priorities, as a choice for the future becomes associated with obtaining education in Russian. As a result, the cities of the Tashkent region may preserve a Russian information and communication environment even in the context of a 'nationalizing' state.

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[12] Ibid.
[13] E. A. Akhmedov, "Novye goroda Tashkent - Chirchiq - Angrenskogo promyshlennogo raiona" (PhD diss., 1962), 25.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Author's field materials. Angren, March 29, 2013.
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[17] Population Census 1989 Angren.
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[21] Author's field materials. Angren, April 18, 2014.
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