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## LANGUAGE POLICIES OF THE USSR: THE REVIVAL OF NATIVE LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION IN KYRGYZSTAN

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### Abstract

The language and education policies followed by the USSR were decisive in the use, adoption, dissemination and attainment of the current status of the Russian language, which is widely used in Kyrgyzstan and makes one wonder why Kyrgyz people still speak Russian. The language policies of Lenin's time were glorified and taught to the native nations in terms of learning the Russian language voluntarily, free from pressure. During Stalin's time, the policy became stricter and became mandatory. With Gorbachev coming to power, policies encouraging ethnic awakening were implemented, and with the collapse of the USSR, attempts to create linguistic states in the Republics began. Due to different factors the Russian language still maintains its importance in Kyrgyzstan, while the Kyrgyz state's efforts to revive and popularize its native language in all areas, to develop the language and to gain its national and international prestige continue periodically.

**Keywords:** Nation, native language, language policies, education, management.

## SSCB'NİN DİL POLİTİKALARI: KIRGIZİSTAN'DA ANA DİLİN VE EĞİTİMİN YENİDEN CANLANDIRILMASI

### Öz

Kırgızistan'da yaygın olarak kullanılan ve Kırgız halkının neden hala Rusça konuştuğunu merak ettiren Rus dilinin kullanımı, benimsenmesi, yayılması ve bugünkü statüsüne ulaşmasında SSCB'nin izlediği dil ve eğitim politikaları belirleyici olmuştur. Lenin dönemindeki dil politikaları yüceltilmiş ve yerli halklara baskıdan uzak, gönüllü olarak Rus dilini öğrenmeleri yönünde öğretilmiştir. Stalin döneminde ise bu politika daha da katılaştırılmış ve zorunlu hale getirilmiştir. Gorbaçov'un iktidara gelmesiyle etnik uyanışı teşvik eden politikalar uygulanmış, SSCB'nin dağılmasıyla Cumhuriyetlerde dil devletleri yaratma girişimleri başlamıştır. Çeşitli etkenler nedeniyle Rus dili Kırgızistan'da hala önemini korumakta, Kırgız devletinin ana dilini her alanda canlandırmak ve yaygınlaştırmak, dili geliştirmek ve ulusal ve uluslararası itibarını kazanmak için çabaları periyodik olarak devam etmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ulus, ana dil, dil politikaları, eğitim, yönetim.



## 1. Introduction

Education, one of the ideological tools of a state, is instrumentalized through language (Althusser, 2010). In order to protect their authority against innovation and social movements, political forces can structure language as a cultural tool revealed through education, from a revolutionary perspective from above (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 2012). Language policies emerge as a result of political interests and ideological understandings and are implemented systematically. According to Rannut (1991), language policy with an assimilationist approach ensures the integrity of the state and the national market and external interventions are minimized through linguistic obstacles.

Today's independent Turkic Republics within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) have been under the influence of the political, economic, socio-cultural, educational and language policies implemented by the Russian administration, which is still effective for many years. In this sense, first of all, language and education have played the role of primary means of political interest in governing nations of different origins.

By asserting the idea of unity, the USSR administration carried out policies of teaching and adopting Atheism, Communism, Socialism, Russian culture and Russian language, unlike the nations' own beliefs, ideologies, culture, education and languages. As an indication of this, it was possible to come across Atheism books and important works of Russian literature in the homes of Kyrgyz teachers during the USSR period. The Kyrgyz people were in danger of losing their essence for 40 years under the Russian Tsardom and subsequently under the central administration of the USSR. As a nation, it has been able to maintain its essence, culture and history, but has been greatly influenced in terms of political, economic, socio-cultural, educational and linguistic aspects. The policies carried out during the USSR period also took priority in line with the efforts of the local authorities and the wishes of the people under Russian influence at that time.

Language and language policy, which are an integral part of a nation, are indicators of the level of autonomy of nations. The language policies carried out by the USSR administration were successful at the time. The nations within the USSR administration have deeply adopted the Russian language with an understanding of ideological and political interest, and it still maintains its influence. Today, the language issue is still being discussed and studies on language reforms are continuing, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This research is important in terms of revealing the historical, political, socio-cultural and educational reasons for the intense use of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan and its place in today's political, social, education and science. In this context, answers to the following questions were sought in this research;

- 1) What were the language policies of the USSR and their consequences for Kyrgyzstan?
- 2) What have been the developments regarding the status of Kyrgyz and Russian languages after independence?
- 3) What is the role of Kyrgyz and Russian languages in education before independence and today?
- 4) What is the purpose of today's Kyrgyz language law and implementation program?



## **2. Language Policies of the USSR and Their Results**

Language policy was one of the important policies during the years of Soviet power. Soviet language policies initially encouraged non-Russian nations to continue using their native languages (Pavlenko, 2008). At the beginning of the establishment of the Soviet Union, the approach to language and language autonomy was in the context of the concept of Proletarian internationalism. The essence of this approach was the content of Lenin's article; 'Is a compulsory state language necessary? For sure, we support that every person living in Russia has the opportunity to learn the great Russian language. We don't want only one thing: the element of oppression. "We don't want to push people into heaven with a stick" (Lenin). The concrete expression of the idea of linguistic pluralism consisted in the observance of two basic principles; teaching in 'vernacular languages', glorifying the absence of a compulsory state language, and viewing the school as 'an instrument of the rebirth of communist society'. The main conditions for the full implementation of communist ideas were determined as 'full implementation of the principles of a single workers' school, teaching in the native language' (Ленин, 1973).

After Lenin's death in 1924, although not a de jure official language, the heavily centralized Soviet system demanded a de facto official language for the purpose of governing the union, and only a single language could effectively fulfill this purpose. Post-Lenin policies, language inequality and the promotion of the state language can be seen as a radical change, right up to the imposition of Russian (Kreindler, 2015). After the 1930s, the balance of Russian and national languages declared by Lenin was gradually violated (Artyunova, 2012). According to Stalin, nations could be successful in cultural, political and economic development only through indigenous languages (Сталин, 1949). During the Stalin period, language policy was changed to emphasize that fluency in Russian was the 'key to super-Sovietism' and the 'second native language' for all nations (Pavlenko, 2008).

On the eve of World War II, the Kremlin's discourse changed from a liberal language policy to Russification. The Kremlin initiated harsh persecution against nationalists in the Republics (Большаков & Фарукшин, 2022). At this time, the development of the Kyrgyz language was stopped and a policy of Russification was implemented (Korth, 2005). According to Grenoble (54), the language was used to manipulate and divide the Turkish people. The Kremlin's aim, in addition to spreading Soviet ideology, was to radically conquer the Turkic peoples by declaring their languages separate (Schiffmann, 2002). Russification of indigenous languages; It consisted of 1) a colonization attempt to control national sentiments, 2) devaluing and weakening indigenous cultural artifacts, including history, language, and literature.

The first decade of Soviet language planning concentrated on dialect and alphabet issues. Other areas such as simplification and codification were emphasized in the second decade with the publication of dictionaries, grammars, and texts (Fierman, 1985). The Academic Center, established by the Kara-Kyrgyz Scientific Commission at the end of 1924, carried out the necessary work on the development of the alphabet and literary language norms based on the national language and the compilation of terminology for scientific branches. The Latin alphabet, which was used in all Kyrgyz schools in 1928-29 (Proyekt Kyrgyzskiy Fotoarhiv), was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet in the 1940s.

Although the center did not have any plans for language policy in the 1950s and 1980s, Russification continued by inertia. Parallel to Russification in the republics, nominal languages



replaced other indigenous languages. Printing in many indigenous languages slowed down or stopped completely, and Russian education began to be taught in schools (Yazıkovaya politika SSSR). The language policy established in the USSR in the 1940s-1950s has remained unchanged; Despite the development of national media (national periodicals, radio and television broadcasting), the Russian language dominated and strengthened its position in the Republics (Апүтүнова, 2012).

Based on purely practical considerations, citizens of the USSR countries mostly made a choice in favor of the Russian language, according to which the language not only contributed to an increase in communication abilities, but also embodied a large number of social expectations. In 1979, USSR General Secretary L.I. Brezhnev stated that 'in the conditions of developed socialism, the country's economy transformed into a single national economic space, a new historical community emerged in the form of the Soviet people, and in this sense, the Russian language became a language of communication between ethnic groups, a tool in the establishment of Communism, and an objective means of upbringing and education of a new individual (Апүтүнова, 2012). Between 1970 and 1979, 29.5% of ethnic Kyrgyz spoke Russian as a first or second language, while only 3.5% of ethnic Russians spoke another Soviet language (Kirkwood, 1991).

Moscow used national leaders to eliminate illiteracy and standardize language differences. The central government established the basis for what the language policy should be and expected these orders to be carried out by local governments in Kyrgyzstan (Fierman, 1991). According to Huskey (1995), for the rulers of the Kyrgyz SSR, 'the Russian language and the Communist Party were the twin sources of their power and legitimacy'. According to Das (2011), as these rulers gained political power and prestige, they encouraged Russian values and the use of the Russian language.

For a variety of reasons, including the tightening of policies during and after Stalin's reign, Russian has become the most important language in academia, government, and public life, especially in the more literate urban areas of Kyrgyzstan (Huskey, 1995). Starting in the 1920-1930s, there was not only a decrease in illiteracy, but also an increase in the number of people who perceived the Russian language as their own (Апүтүнова, 2012). The role of the Russian language Given the specificity of imperial relations in Central Asia and the violent Russification of the region's natives, both titular elites and titular populations maintained a persistent, pragmatic, if not sentimental, interest in preserving what could at least be called the 'Russian language and Russian cultural space' (Kosmarskaya, 2014).

Official documents were written in Russian, and Kyrgyz letters and documents from rural areas were translated into Russian in regional centers (Orusbaev et al., 2008). Russian was seen as the way to succeed internationally, as well as in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz people who did not fully understand the Russian language or spoke with an accent were often looked down upon and viewed as backward. Kyrgyz retained its official status, but Kyrgyz was not understood on the streets and was not used in daily life, especially in urban areas (Alert Series: Kyrgyzstan).

Kyrgyz was often seen as a lesser language and having to speak it was devaluing. Russian was considered the most 'elite' among the languages prevalent in the region. There was a perception among Russian speakers, especially in Bishkek, that Russian was superior, more modern and much more urban. Ethnic Russians viewed Kyrgyz culture as backward and therefore did not want to assimilate across cultural differences (Bahry, 2016).



Sovietization became increasingly associated with Russification in Central Asia, as Moscow imposed the language, industry, society, culture, and glory of the Russian people on a civilization perceived as inferior. Russians were presented as generous friends who rescued Muslims from their barbaric Medieval past and brought them into the bright light of Socialist progress and modernization. General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR N.S. Khrushchev expanded the Russification of the Soviet model. Pre-Soviet identity fluidity in Central Asia meant that Russification was able to penetrate deeper and create greater social distortions. The language has not fully penetrated into rural Kyrgyzstan, but urban areas with large concentrations of Slavs developed as Russian-speaking towns, and most urban Kyrgyz subsequently received Russian education. Frunze (Bishkek) was one of the best places to find XIX century Russian literature in the Soviet Union (Everett-Heath, 2003).

By the late 1980s it was clear that Kyrgyz was one of the weakest languages in the USSR. Russification policies and the different interests of the Kyrgyz rulers at that time, the large number of non-Kyrgyz population, the late emergence of literature and the concentration of Kyrgyz speakers in rural areas gave Kyrgyz a position far below Russian in the official and cultural life of the Republic. Russian became the first language of the urban Kyrgyz elite, with all but the most isolated Kyrgyz becoming familiar with Russian (Huskey, 1995). Enclaves of Russians and Russian speakers contributed to the penetration of the Russian language deep into local communities, and especially urban communities (Kosmarskaya, 2014).

### **3. Developments Regarding the Status of Kyrgyz and Russian Languages After Independence**

The fate of the Republics of the USSR changed in the early 1990s, when M.S. turned towards social democracy. It changed with Gorbachev's Perestroika (restructuring) and Glasnost (openness) reform efforts (Gorbachev, Mikhail Sergeyevich). Gorbachev's political reforms encouraged ethnic awakening, and campaigns to reform language legislation began to develop throughout the USSR (Everett-Heath, 2003). The most frequently used solution in post-Soviet countries to align state interests with the public use of languages has been to establish the official status of languages for the purpose of 'linguistic state building' (Нерознак, 2002).

The Kyrgyz language was given the legal status of 'state language' of the Kyrgyz SSR in 1989. The law states that Russian managers and experts must use the state language to the extent necessary to fulfill their professional duties, and this has been met with objections, especially from Russians. Kyrgyzstan quickly purged Russian and Soviet terms from its language environment. In December 1990, 'Kyrgyz (Киргиз) Republic' was changed to 'Republic of Kyrgyzstan', ostensibly to clearly reflect the pronunciation of the name in its own language but also to mark a symbolic break with the past. The Republic's Supreme Council was renamed the Zhogorku Kenesh, a Kyrgyz title evocative of pre-Soviet tribal councils. Towns with new names include Karakol, formerly Przhevalsk, and Balykchy, formerly Rybachy. The most obvious change was the change of the capital from Frunze (the name of the Russian soldier) to Bishkek in 1991 (Everett-Heath, 2003).

After 1991, the pressure on Kyrgyzization intensified. The country's first President, Askar Akayev, has spearheaded comprehensive economic, political and educational reforms since 1991. While Kyrgyz is considered the national language, a symbol of state sovereignty and nation-building, Russian has been given the status of the language of inter-ethnic





communication. The policy of 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' encouraged the support of minorities (Orusbaev et al., 2008).

The Law adopted in 1992 and the Constitution adopted in 1993 declared Kyrgyz as the only public language as of 1997. It also stipulated that the President must be fluent in Kyrgyz (Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan). The adoption of a new Constitution led to a large-scale emigration of people of Russian origin who felt that their language rights had been abolished (Alert Series: Kyrgyzstan) and did not speak Kyrgyz.

In May 1994, Akayev issued a decree allowing the official use of Russian in workplaces and Russian-majority areas. In June 1994, in order to stop immigration to Russia, he issued a decree postponing the introduction of the Kyrgyz language as the official language of Kyrgyzstan until 2005. It declared that Russian has official language status and can be used in the workforce in predominantly Russian-speaking regions. Additionally, attempts have been made to give ethnic Russians more jobs in the Kyrgyz government to help prevent Russian immigration (Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan).

The Russian language reached official status in 1996. The status of Russian in Kyrgyzstan is guaranteed by the Law on the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic dated 2000. This law defined Russian as the language of interethnic communication and access to education, culture, information and technologies of Russia and the CIS (Orusbaev, 2003). During a session of talks between Russian President Yeltsin and Akayev, he expressed his satisfaction with the recent decision of the Kyrgyz parliament to give official status to the Russian language, describing Kyrgyzstan's ethnic policies as 'exemplary for all CIS member states'. The main issues discussed at the meeting included trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation, and Kyrgyzstan's application to join the Customs Union, which Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus established in 1995.

The issue of the 'Russian language' in Kyrgyzstan involves numerous debates regarding the delimitation of the functions of both state and official languages (Orusbaev, 2003). In 1998, there were discussions among Kyrgyzstan's political parties regarding the removal of the Lenin statue and the official status of the Russian language. The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan opposed these thoughts and actions. It has been stated that the authorities suppressed mass media broadcasting in Kyrgyz, but were reluctant to do the same for Russian newspapers due to the possible reaction of Russia (Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan).

In 2000, Akayev gave Russian the status of 'official language'. This decision was driven by three factors. 1) The harsh outburst of the Russian population from Kyrgyzstan, 2) The need to maintain good relations with Moscow, 3) The fact that there is a way to gain political support from the country's non-ethnic population (Russians, Uzbeks, etc.). In 2000, the Russian language had official status in the Republic only due to a Presidential decree. Regarding this, the leader of the Ar-Namys (Honour) party, Feliks Kulov (Russian mixed leader), announced that the issue that the candidates from his party will address in the parliamentary elections to be held in February will be the approval of the official status of the Russian language in the Constitution. Additionally, Kulov stated that his party wanted to see 'more representatives from non-indigenous nationalities' in the new Kyrgyz parliament. The majority of deputies in the current parliament were Kyrgyz nationals (Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan). After the Constitutional amendments of 2003, Kyrgyz retained the status of 'state language' and Russian received the status of 'official language' (OSCE, 2010).



Likewise, according to the 'State Language Law' dated 2004 and 2006, Kyrgyz was defined as the state language and Russian as the official language (Zakon o gosudarstvennom yaze ot 12 Fevralya 2004 g). At the same time, while aiming to develop the Kyrgyz language and strengthen its social role, a document was published on measures for the development of bilingualism at the level of government policy and the effective functioning of both languages (Orusbaev et al. 2008).

The 'state language' law required that documents written in state institutions be in Kyrgyz and translated into Russian when necessary. Russian was mainly used in central administrations. Kyrgyz was used in local governments (Oblast and Rayon) or especially in Kyrgyz or Kyrgyz-speaking rural areas. Additionally, the law stipulates that senior officials (including the President, Prime Minister, and Speaker of Parliament) must be able to freely read, write, and express themselves in Kyrgyz. From July 2010, embassies, consulates and other diplomatic representations of Kyrgyzstan in foreign countries were required to use Kyrgyz in their work and to use Russian only in cases of necessity (OSCE, 2010).

Social-Democrat Roza Otunbaeva, who came to power in 2010, proposed on June 18, 2011 that the language of interethnic communication should be Kyrgyz, that teaching in Russian should be abandoned in schools, and that all local nationalities should learn Kyrgyz from primary school (Otunbaeva, Roza. Vajno polojit);

I believe that there needs to be a radical reform in language education. Children of all nationalities need to know the Kyrgyz language after completing primary school. The language of inter-ethnic communication in Kyrgyzstan should be Kyrgyz, if this is a country and society of a single ethnic group and an exclusively Kyrgyz state, then we must clearly declare this, amend the Constitution, declare everyone else a minority and provide for their special rights in the Constitution and Laws. It guarantees both their ethnic development and respect for ethnic rights. These are the high standards of the European Charter for Ethnic Minorities. In this case, we must declare that we think some of the people are privileged and some are limited. The ethnic characteristics of the country are undoubtedly expressed and ensured by the fact that since it is the country of the Kyrgyz, the Kyrgyz language should be the state language, the language of inter-ethnic communication, and Kyrgyz history and culture is the most important language. It is an important component that state symbols have ethnic content and are related to the ethnic composition of the population represented in government institutions (Otunbaeva, Roza. 18 June, 2011).

Russian newspaper 'Pravda' stated that if Russian-speaking minorities are deprived of the opportunity of education in their native language, they will either have to assimilate or try to leave the country and go to Russia, and a group of supporters of the Kyrgyz language wrote a letter addressed to Otunbaeva, saying 'the domination of everything Russian'. that they were angry, that many settlements bore the names of unknown people such as Vasilyevka, Konstantinovka, Lebedinovka, Malinovka, who had nothing to do with the Kyrgyz people; We believe that it is time to purify ourselves from '-evka' and '-ovka' (Yazıkovoy 'privet' dlya Russkih).

Russian newspaper Vedomosti stated that the pressure on the Russian language has increased in Kyrgyzstan, and that the new law on the state language was developed from the West in order to disrupt the country's relations with Russia. Mentioning the Kyrgyz statesmen who wanted the Kyrgyz language to be highlighted, President S. Caparov first spoke of Russian.



It was mentioned that promising to develop Russia and then making such decisions would disappoint Russia's expectations (Sokolov, 2023).

Russia actively supports the traditional position of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan, with the declining role of the language and the decreasing capacity of Russia as a tool of soft power in the region (Russian language status). For this purpose, it continues its attempts to instill in the country the perception that Russian is the language of today's globalization (Pavlenko, 2014). In this regard, it carries out its work on increasing the number of Russian schools and providing Russian educational resources. Alexey Zenko, head of the Kyrgyz department of the Russian-funded development agency Rossotrudnichestvo in 2014, stated that his organization produces Russian books for Kyrgyz schools, supervises training and distributes scholarships, and that Rossotrudnichestvo trained 800 teachers in 2014 (Kyrgyzstans' Russian). In addition, on March 29, 2011, Ministers of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov and R. Kazakbaev signed an agreement on the establishment and activities of the Russian Scientific and Cultural Center (RBKM) in Bishkek, and Kyrgyzstan became the 74th country where RBKM started to work.

Russian President V.I. Putin, on the other hand, talked about Russia's special mission regarding language, education and culture in his article titled 'Russia and the changing world', which he wrote in 2012; 'Russia inherited the great culture known both in the West and in the East. But it still invests poorly in cultural industries, advancements in the global market. The Russian-speaking area includes almost all former USSR countries and a significant part of Eastern Europe. We must strengthen it immediately. It is an order of magnitude to increase the educational and cultural presence in the world and in countries where a part of the population speaks and understands Russian.' (Путин, 2012).

#### **4. The Place of Kyrgyz and Russian Languages in Education Today and Before Independence**

One of the effective ways a government can promote higher literacy rates and language policy is through education. With Stalin's coming to power, education in indigenous languages was limited in schools and universities, and literary publications were reduced (Yazkovayapolitik SSSR). The colonial administration gave importance to the creation of educational institutions to raise the children of the indigenous peoples as 'citizens useful to the local society, children of the common values of the motherland Russia' (Proyekt Kirghizskiy Fotoarhiv). The Russian administration started to establish schools to educate the children of the local people in the Turkestan region. In 1887, Russian native primary schools (туземная школа) were opened in the south of Kyrgyzstan (Osh city) (Figure 1). The purpose of these schools was to introduce the values of Russian culture to the children of the local population in order to teach the Russian language and later train them to become lower-level officials of the regional government (Зима, 1987). At that time, Osh residents of Uzbek origin, one of the founders of the Komsomol union in Osh, contributed to public education and the development of the Soviet school network. The first kindergarten with a capacity of 95 people was opened in August 1918, and 13 schools were opened in 1918, where 939 children and young people were educated (Obrazovaniye v Kirgiziyi).







Figure 1: Russian Tuzem primary school (Osh). Source: *Obşestvo segodnya v Kirgiziya*

On June 19, 1920, the Russian Council of People's Commissars established an Extraordinary Commission to teach reading and writing. A state education system was created for adults, represented by 'clearance centres' and literacy schools (*Obrazovaniye v SSSR*). In 1919, general education courses for adults were opened in Kyrgyzstan. The Decree introduced the compulsory teaching of reading and writing to citizens between the ages of 18-40. Evening courses for teaching reading and writing were organized in Bishkek, Tokmok and other cities and villages (*Proyekt Kyrgyzskiy Fotoarhiv*). This policy began to bear fruit at the end of the second decade of Soviet rule. The new main goal was to maintain and support the appropriate level of education for the younger generations, for this, a system of compulsory primary education was implemented starting from 1930 (*Арутюнова, 2012*).

The division of Central Asia into five national Republics between 1924 and 1936 was supported by the concept of 'making up nations'. Soviet nationality policy aimed to regroup and stabilize local identities into national categories based on homogeneous criteria (language, religion, cultural practices). This policy consisted of 'double assimilation'; 1) census assimilated peoples into official nation categories through maps and other classification; 2) assimilated into the Soviet state and society through administrative, economic, cultural and political institutions (*Hirsch, 2000*).

The place of the Russian language in the educational standard was determined on March 13, 1938, with the publication of the Central Committee's decree 'Compulsory teaching of the Russian language in schools of the National Republics and regions'. With this decision, Stalin's long-term approach on the role of a language in the development of Soviet society regarding the priority of Socialist construction was adopted. Asymmetric bilingualism in this situation has been evident; ethnic Kyrgyz need to learn Russian to be successful, especially in urban centers Russian has become increasingly necessary for success. However, ethnic Russians had no compelling reason to learn this language (*Fierman, 2013*). By the 1960s, Russian was used especially in academia and the government world, and Russian was seen as the way to be successful internationally, as in Kyrgyzstan. By the 1950s, Russian became a prestigious language that provided access to education, culture, and sometimes certain areas of employment. It has established itself as (*Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan*).

By the late 1960s, the benefits of education in Russian (more and better opportunities to study at Russian universities, opportunities to engage in cultural and economic exchange and to act at the all-Union level) became clear, Russification became widespread, necessitating the transition of many administrative areas to the Russian language. Although proficiency in spoken



Kyrgyz language was widespread, Kyrgyz elites preferred to educate their children in Russian schools, with the goal of becoming bilingual, predominantly literate in Russian (Orusbaev et al. 2008).

By the late 1980s, only three of 69 schools in Bishkek offered education in Kyrgyz, and only 17% of higher education was conducted in a language other than Russian. A study was conducted on the Kyrgyz literary language. However, 80% of the literary language used came either directly from Russian (i.e., of Russian origin) or indirectly from Russian, but from a different Western European language as a root word (Fierman, 2013). In 1989, 4 percent of the books in the National Library were in Kyrgyz, while 83 percent of students received higher education in Russian (Huskey, 1995).

Some of the schools providing education in Kyrgyz, which were opened hastily in 1990-1991, had to close in a short time due to lack of materials and teachers. However, publications in Kyrgyz increased significantly and the new Constitution adopted in 1993 allowed education in Kyrgyz. During the late Soviet and early Soviet years, the number of schools where the Kyrgyz language was the language of instruction increased by approximately 10%. In contrast, the number of schools with Russian as the language of instruction decreased by approximately 30% (Huskey, 1995). Despite this, Russia has been able to maintain its dominance in political and cultural life due to its deep-rooted position and material and organizational restrictions on the promotion of the Kyrgyz language. Perceptions that Russian is a 'serious' and 'sophisticated' language and that Kyrgyz belongs to the folklore and domestic sphere have been difficult to change. State business was conducted in Russian, and many well-educated Kyrgyz professed their love of their native language, while still considering Russian to be more practical, cosmopolitan, and intellectual (Everett-Heath, 2003).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian language continued its presence in higher education. In 1995, Russian began to be legally allowed in higher education (Chronology for Russians in Kyrgyzstan). When the Russian Slovakian university was established in 1993, there were those who interpreted this event as a continuation of the 70-year Russian 'bloodsucking' process (Huskey, 1995). However, according to the general perception, the Russian language was necessary for success. Kyrgyz in urban areas sent their children to Russian-medium or bilingual schools. Russian schools were seen as an easy way to ensure the child's future success (Fierman, 1991). Many Kyrgyz and representatives of other ethnic groups have chosen to educate their children predominantly in Russian, considering that Russian provides access to better education, employment, knowledge, and economic advancement (Orusbaev et al. 2008). Typical argument for this choice (Kosmarskaya, 2014);

Researcher: So where will your son go?

Participant: Russian school. At university we study economics from Russian textbooks, there is no other option. I think it will be easier for him if he graduates from a school that teaches Russian. As for Kyrgyz, since we speak Kyrgyz in the family, he will speak it fluently (male, Kyrgyz, 32 years old, bank officer; Bishkek, May 2011).

The cultural-linguistic competence of urban Kyrgyz can be defined not by Russian bilingualism, but by the fact that a large number of them were raised and educated in Russian. Bishkek is notable not only for its ethnic composition (Russians and other Russian speakers), but also for its Soviet/Russified urban culture and lifestyle and the associated limited use of the Kyrgyz language. Even children who attend Kyrgyz schools in the country later go to Russian



schools and then to universities where the language of instruction is still predominantly Russian (Kosmarskaya, 2015). The number of Russian schools increased from 143 to 203 (9.14%) from 2002 to 2012, and the number of students studying in Russian increased by 14%. In the pre-school education system, 65% of institutions were Russian, 17.9% at secondary level, and 90% in higher education (Арефьев, 2012).

While the Kyrgyz language is not yet fully ready to become a tool capable of academic, administrative, interethnic and intercultural communication, Russian is widely studied by the young generation because they want to study at Kyrgyz universities and do business with Russia, where the basic scientific literature and textbooks are still in Russian (Orusbaev et al. 2008). Thus, Russian maintains its status in business, education and cultural life. It still serves as a tool for career development and entry into the globalizing world. However, the Kyrgyz language goes hand in hand with Russian in some areas. For example; International organizations require candidates applying for key positions to be fluent in Kyrgyz as well as Russian and English (Kosmarskaya, 2015).

Higher education is provided in Russian and Kyrgyz, but Kyrgyz universities have often lacked the resources to be effective learning institutions. Schools often lack simple tools such as textbooks, and almost all technological and scientific resources are in Russian. Additionally, qualified professors in almost every field other than the Kyrgyz language taught courses in Russian because they lacked the Kyrgyz fluency required to teach at a high level (Fierman, 1985).

There was increasing pressure for the use of Kyrgyz, but Russian remained the language of higher education (OSCE, 2010) and science and technology (Pavlenko, 2008). The lack of educational materials and the low quality of education in local languages have led to an increase in the demand for education in the Russian language (Russian language status). In schools operating in Russian, more scientific and academic literature is written in Russian than in Kyrgyz (Kyrgyzstans' Russian). Most active linguists had difficulty writing scientific articles in Kyrgyz, with only Kyrgyz experts using Kyrgyz in academic research and publications. Another factor in favor of Russian in academic life was a well-established scientific tradition (Orusbaev et al. 2008). Especially Russian as a source language has been preferred in the academy due to access to simple educational resources and qualified resources and the Russian literacy of the local people. A report prepared by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) stated that the Kyrgyz language is 'not developed enough to replace Russian' (Bekmurzaev, 2020).

It is important to include content related to Kyrgyz history and culture in the preparation of educational books in the country. Much effort has been devoted to the complete rearrangement of books in the preparation of educational resources in the Kyrgyz language and their use in schools. For example, Abduldaev et al. In the book 'Эне тил' ('Mother tongue') for primary school children, written in Kyrgyz by and published in 1991, the Soviet anthem, our homeland of the SSSR, what kind of a woman gave birth to Lenin, Kyrgyz names that played a role in the establishment of Communism, and Russian fairy tales and stories are included. There were topics explaining in Kyrgyz (Ene til 1991). Thus, it was a difficult process to give this book content unique to Kyrgyz people.

Along with the language, the quality of higher education has also been left behind in the country. Post-Soviet Central Asian states largely inherited their education system from their communist past (Hirsch, 2000). All issues are tied to party principle and influenced by



communist ideology. In this sense, despite the great achievements in the field of education in the Soviet period, there were significant deficits. The achievements, practices and methods in the education systems of developed countries were not used. The education system was regulated, but the use of different teaching methods was not allowed. This situation dampened the enthusiasm of many talented teachers and leading figures of the education system and ignored their initiatives (Proyekt Kyrgyzskiy Fotoarhiv). Thus, by focusing on collective literacy, education was provided under the function of transferring theoretical knowledge, consolidating this knowledge and laying the foundations of socialism rather than practical education. In this sense, especially the higher education system inherited from the past has not developed in the country. In this sense, it is important to highlight and benefit from English and other different languages in the education system, in addition to Russian as the mother tongue.

It is accepted that the widespread use of the state language in important areas of public life has not been fully implemented by the state, and it is stated that the reason for these problems is that the state language cannot be included in the language of education. It is stated that this task is directly related to the imperfection of a unified methodology, concepts, methodology and technology, standards for teaching the state language, the absence of a system of incentives in the learning process and educational programs aimed at developing a professional language. In addition, since no fundamental research has been carried out on the theory of the Kyrgyz language for many years, it is expected that modern dictionaries (descriptive, bilingual, etc.), new normative grammar will be created and academic research will be conducted on the phonetics, lexicography, morphology and syntax of the Kyrgyz language (Programma razvitiya gosudarstvennogo).

According to the program, it is expected that the transition to education in the Kyrgyz language will be accelerated in all specializations and educational fields in educational institutions at all levels (preschool, school, university), the education system, the introduction of innovative communication technologies and interactive teaching methods, and the dissemination of information technologies. According to the activity plan for the implementation of the program, creating/translating educational books in the state language (providing electronic versions) in accordance with the educational standards of primary, secondary and higher education institutions, creating scientific and academic opportunities that will ensure the full use of the Kyrgyz language in all sectors, natural sciences, technology and other It is expected that scientific research in the Kyrgyz language will be carried out in the fields of humanities, and research in technical, humanitarian and medical fields will be translated from Russian and other foreign languages into the Kyrgyz language. It is also planned to create a stable education system in the Kyrgyz language in all specializations and fields of universities, to improve the activities, material and technical support of the Kyrgyz Encyclopedia and Terminology Center, and to organize information and educational events with the aim of developing the state language (Programma razvitiya gosudarstvennogo).

### **5. Revival of Kyrgyz: Today's Kyrgyz Language Law and Implementation Program**

The role of language in ethnic identity was quite deliberately manipulated by Soviet language planners, with maximum differentiation from each other. However, in Central Asia, the Russian language never went beyond bureaucratic structures and native languages experienced a revival (Pavlenko, 2008). The importance of the native language has increased since Kyrgyzstan gained independence (Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region). Especially as a result of the recent efforts of the state to highlight the native language, the use of



Kyrgyz in social life and media has become widespread. The positive trend towards the mother tongue has been positively reflected in the local community, national and international media (except Russia).

#### **6. State language law no. 140 dated July 17, 2023**

With the adoption of the law, the foundation was laid for strengthening the legal framework of the state language for three decades, and important steps were taken to improve the language and its scope of application. The National Program for the Development of the State Language and Improvement of Language Policy for 2014-2020, approved by the Kyrgyz President's Decree No. 119 dated June 2, 2014, outlines the goal of creating an effective state. A language policy has been developed that ensures the full and widespread use of the state language, which is an important factor in strengthening the unity of the Kyrgyz people. According to the law, Kyrgyz is the state language to be used in all public areas. The state language is the language of inter-ethnic communication in the Kyrgyz Republic, uniting all ethnic groups and helping to strengthen mutual understanding and ties. Russian is the official language.

Special attention was given to language policy in the 2018-2040 National Development Strategy, approved by the Kyrgyz President's Decree No. 221 dated October 31, 2018. This Strategy stated that in the future, conditions will be created for Kyrgyz citizens to master more than one language as one of the main factors of competitiveness, the scope of application of Kyrgyz will be expanded, and work will be started to develop Kyrgyz in accordance with the requirements of the age and the needs of the society. In this sense, the 'Kyrgyztest' state institution was established with the Decision No. 186 of the Kyrgyz Republic dated April 5, 2018. Since 2018, studies have been carried out to determine the proficiency level in the state language in accordance with international standards. In addition, mobile applications for teaching the Kyrgyz language to children, the Tiltest web platform, which is a preparation and education platform, multimedia products, and a software device that converts text to sound have been developed and made available for use.

#### **7. Program for the development of the state language and improvement of the language policy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2021-2025 (dated 7 February 2022, No. 67, dated 10 February 2023, No. 64) (Programma razvitiya gosudarstvennogo).**

In the program, the problem of disseminating the state language in the social and communicative fields was discussed. It is stated that the problem of language culture in society arises because the state language cannot be widely used in communication, in the public sphere, and cannot be transformed into the language of law, science and new technologies. It is stated that the Kyrgyz language needs to be codified, to improve and unify its literary norms, to develop uniform rules for speaking and writing culture, and that studies on unifying Kyrgyz terminology within the framework of Kyrgyz linguistics and translating borrowed words and concepts into the Kyrgyz language should be intensified. In addition, promotion and propaganda in socio-cultural areas and translation of cartoons into Kyrgyz are planned.

The program should not remain only on paper, but should have a real road map and a working mechanism for the development and improvement of the state language in order to be implemented. In order to solve the current problems, decisive steps should be taken to improve the language proficiency of the employees in the state language, who are responsible for





providing quality and competent services to the citizens. It is stated that it is necessary. It is stated that efforts should be made to increase the prestige of the Kyrgyz language, which is the main symbol of the state and the national treasure of the Kyrgyz people, and that the development, protection and wide and complete introduction of the Kyrgyz language into life does not depend only on linguists and philologists, but is the duty of every citizen, starting from the family to all institutions of the society.

In order for the Kyrgyz language to become the language of public administration, office work should be carried out in the state language, a mechanism for the formation of a professional language should be implemented, the proficiency of experts speaking the state language will be helped to improve, for this purpose, a scale will be developed to determine the proficiency level of civil servants and municipal employees in the state language according to their positions, and It is stated that mechanisms should be put in place to encourage speaking the state language. As a result of the state language policy for the development of methodology and technology for teaching the Kyrgyz language, the spread of the Kyrgyz language will be ensured in all areas, especially in the family, kindergarten, primary, secondary and higher vocational education institutions, a system for advanced training of Kyrgyz language teachers and the Kyrgyz test system appropriate to the linguistic levels will be established. The development of educational and methodological materials will be ensured, and the tasks set in this direction will contribute to the creation of a unified basis for the development (including the preparation of an electronic version) and publication of educational and methodological guides necessary for the study of the Kyrgyz language as a native language, a second language, as well as for teaching the Kyrgyz language as a foreign language in universities. It is stated that there will be.

A system will be created to support the publication of scientific research in the field of science in the state language, the implementation of scientific projects in the fields of theoretical research of the Kyrgyz language and the publication of their results, the conduct of scientific research on the history of development and formation of the Kyrgyz language, the creation of a unified national database on Kyrgyz terminology, the unification of terms and the development of industry terminology. is intended to be developed. It is also expected that sector dictionaries (economic, financial, medical, legal, technical, transportation, military, agriculture, industry, construction, etc.) will be developed and published. It is expected that studies will be carried out to develop and expand the areas of functioning of the state language and the formation of language culture through literary and cultural resources. The issues of learning the Kyrgyz language from different segments of the society and including it in communication, and the development and dissemination of its usage principles are brought to the agenda. It is aimed to develop the Kyrgyz language as a cultural language and a language of inter-ethnic communication. The program is expected to lead to the following socio-economic outcomes. Kyrgyz language;

- Strengthening the unifying role
- Fully functioning in all areas of public life
- Strengthening communicative, cognitive, educational and learning functions



## 8. Conclusion

The Russian language policy implemented during the USSR period served as a political interest, cultural tool, ideological understanding and, as a result, colonialist and assimilationist understanding. The Republics that emerged after independence still cross paths with Russia in political, commercial and social terms through linguistic obstacles (Russian language). In a sense, the Central Asian region has turned into a Russian language and Russian cultural area, and this has minimized external interventions.

Benefits such as being bilingual, knowing different cultures, mastering Russian literature, and gaining an advantage in the profession have caused Kyrgyz people to see the Kyrgyz language as unimportant, perceiving the Russian language as a symbol of development and professional prosperity for years. While local Russians in Kyrgyzstan did not feel the need to learn the Kyrgyz language, Kyrgyz would have learned Russian to get even the simplest job. In addition, those who do not speak Russian are left with a derogatory feeling of being undeveloped, which has consequently led to the emergence of Kyrgyz who do not speak their native language. It was possible to hear the word 'baran' ('sheep'), which is widely used especially in the Russian society, by both Russians and local Kyrgyz to non-Russian Central Asians and those who cannot speak Russian. Moreover, nowadays, especially from foreigners, it is possible to hear sentences such as "You have become Russianized".

The status of Kyrgyz and Russian languages in Kyrgyzstan has always been a matter of debate since the country gained independence. During the USSR period, nations were not provided with an education aimed at advanced development, but rather political, ideological and theoretical content. As a result, after the USSR period, the education system could not be renewed or developed due to political, economic and social factors. In particular, the influence and use of the Russian language, which is perceived as a symbol of development and a means of accessing education and science, still maintains its dominance. Today, while the status of the Russian language in the country maintains its position depending on political, economic, social and educational factors, the Kyrgyz language maintains itself as a spoken language mostly in rural areas or among the population coming from rural areas and at home.

Kyrgyz language could not be developed in socio-cultural life, education, science and technology or had to be postponed due to different factors. In parallel, there are institutions in the country that provide education in Chinese, English, Arabic and Turkish, as well as Russian, in order to maintain its political position and influence through language and education. At the same time, Russia's efforts to maintain and expand its position continue as the Russian language and influence in Kyrgyzstan decreases. For this purpose, Russian schools are opened and educational materials are provided to increase their number. As for Turkey's position in the country, it can be stated that it is carried out mostly towards brother and relative communities, as a continuation of Atatürk's policy.

The revival of the mother tongue in the country as a symbol of existence, prestige, representation and belonging of a nation, identity, national security, diplomacy, culture, etc. has always been important. In this direction, the state's efforts to develop the Kyrgyz language and raise its status are continuing. Especially the latest language law and its implementation program aim at the use and development of the Kyrgyz language in all areas. However, the problem of the use and dissemination of the Kyrgyz language in social, basic and higher education, science and technology, which are the most problematic parts, continues to be the



most important factors that need to be solved in the short and long term. Its development and adoption as the language of education and science, expansion of its use in social life, increase of its prestige and status, development of the Kyrgyz language and the continuity of a nation as a nation are important in terms of raising a respectable and proud generation. However, it is important to popularize the use of English as a source language in addition to the Kyrgyz language in education and science.

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