

## Conference Paper

# Russia and Post-Soviet Central Asia: Reciprocal Language Studies in University Curricula and Bilateral Cooperation in this Area

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## Abstract

Russia and the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia are close partners, having ties not only in the economy, politics and culture, but also in the field of security. The linguistic aspect of interaction is also of great importance. This article analyzes the presence of the Russian language in the curricula of Central Asian universities, the presence of Central Asian languages in the curricula of Russian universities, and the level of bilateral cooperation in this area. The study is conducted within the framework of the methodological structure of the theory of "soft power" by J. Nye and the concept of "competitive identity of the state" by S. Anholt. The findings of our study present arguments in support of, firstly, the development of an effective strategy to preserve the role of the Russian language as a unifying cultural factor and an instrument of international communication and cooperation, and, secondly, the possibility of preparation specialists in Central Asia in Russia with a good knowledge of regional languages in order to ensure strategic planning, evaluation of joint projects and the study of modern literature.

**Keywords:** Russia, Central Asia, cultural cooperation

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## 1. Introduction

Russia and the countries of Central Asian have historically been close partners, important to each other. They have many economic, political and security ties. An important area of relations between them, ensuring the continuity of centuries-old partnership, is cooperation in the field of culture and education. The linguistic aspect of interaction is of great importance. Despite reports of the general prevalence of the Russian language

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in Central Asia [1], a significant number of schools where instruction is in Russian [2], and the prestige of Russian education, researchers note a decrease in interest in learning Russian among young people in favor of English, Chinese and Turkish [3]. This can be explained by the growing influence of non-regional actors in Central Asia -- the USA, China, the European Union and Turkey, who use various instruments of soft and hard power. Given the fact that mutually beneficial cultural and historical ties between Russia and Central Asia can be at risk in this situation, for Russia it is important, firstly, to develop an effective strategy to preserve the role of the Russian language as a unifying cultural factor and an instrument of international communication and cooperation, and, secondly, to provide training specialists in Central Asian studies with good knowledge of regional languages in order to ensure strategic planning, evaluation of joint projects and the study of modern literature.

This article analyzes the presence of the Russian language in the curriculum of Central Asian universities, the presence of Central Asian languages in the curriculum of Russian universities and the level of bilateral cooperation in this area. These problems may be important in the context of developing a strategy for sustainable cultural cooperation between Russia and the post-Soviet space of Central Asia.

## 2. Methodology

The methodological framework of our study is set by the theories of "soft power" developed by J. Nye (2004) [4], and of "competitive identity of the state" developed by S. Anholt (2010) [5]. J. Nye's concept argues that nowadays the impact of states in international relations is defined by such factors as the attractiveness of their culture, values, effective patterns of social development and recognizable successful national brands, rather than military potential. We focus on the idea that language and culture play a major role, influencing international relations.

According to the theory of "competitive identity", a successful national brand consists of such indicators as innovative development of culture, tourism, education, economy, and government policy. In terms of this theory, we assume that Russia's cultural heritage is a resource of competitive identity, and the Russian language is an instrument, necessary for studying this heritage.

In our study, we analyzed the following parameters: 1) the status of the Russian language in each country of the post-Soviet Central Asia; 2) the presence of language learning aspects in interstate agreements; 3) the presence of the Russian language in the curriculum of Central Asian universities; 4) the presence of various forms of

cooperation in this area; 5) the presence of Central Asian languages in the curriculum of Russian universities. The results of the study can be further used for the development of instruments for evaluation and strategic planning of Russia – Central Asia cultural cooperation.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Kazakhstan

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK), "the Kazakh language is the state language in the RK," while "the Russian language is officially used at the same level as Kazakh in state organizations and local governments" [6]. In accordance with the bilateral Treaty on Good Neighborhood and Alliance [7], the states are obliged to support the activity of each other's information and cultural centers, including language learning. In addition, the State Program for Learning the Languages and their Functioning, adopted by the RK in 2013, defines the support of the Russian language as one of the key tasks and requires that 90 % of adult population demonstrate excellent command of it in 2020 [8].

The Russian language studies are widely presented in the degree programs of the Kazakh universities. The Eurasian National University named after L. N. Gumilyov (ENU) has the department of Russian philology which offers bachelor and master's degree programs "Russian Philology" and "Russian Language and Literature" [9]. The additional activities in ENU include: "The Week of the Russian Language", meetings with the Russian Language Ambassadors [10], the workshops "Modern Russian language and languages of the CIS countries: causes and consequences of lexical borrowings" [11] and "Creative use of new technologies in education" for teachers of the Russian language and literature [12], the international conference "Text in the system of teaching the Russian language and literature" [13], the academic contests in the Russian language [14], Pushkin day [15], lectures of visiting researchers and journalists from Russia [16]. Many events are held in cooperation with the Russian universities and organizations (for example, Rossotrudnichestvo). Also, the ENU students participate in the language contests at Russian universities [17]. Finally, ENU has joint degree programs on Russian philology with Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN) and St. Petersburg State University (SPSU) [18].

The Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (AFKNU) has the department of philology and world languages, which offers the degree programs for bachelors, masters and

PhD students: Russian Philology" and "Russian Language and Literature". The list of the courses is quite diverse: "Phonetics of the modern Russian language", "Russian folklore", "Lexicology of the modern Russian language", "History of Russian literature", etc. [19]. There is also the center "Russian Language and Culture" at the chair of general linguistics and foreign languages. It organizes special events in Russian, for example, creative workshops, movie presentations and open lectures, dedicated to the Russian history and culture. There are also specific classes in the Russian language; seminars (for example, "Good in the works of L. Tolstoy"); conferences related to the Russian language teaching; reading and essay contests in Russian [20]. The center also provides a variety of teacher-training programs. It works in contact with the Consulate General of Russia.

Informal events are also organized, for example, joint New Year celebrations [21].

The Kazakh National Pedagogical University (KNPU) offers the bachelor's degree programs "Russian language and literature" and "Russian language and literature at schools with non-Russian language of teaching", provided by the Institute of philology and multilingual education [22]. In addition, there are bachelor and master's programs "Russian language and literature" for foreign students [23], organized by the chair of the Russian language and literature. In 2019, 12 of KNPU second-year students took part in the international workshop at the Russian Pedagogical University [24].

The Russian language is also present in Kazakh technical and regional universities.

The Kazakh National Medical University (KNMU) has the department of the Russian language, offering a language course with a professional focus. Teachers regularly take part in conferences in Russia; song and reading contests are organized [25].

At the institute of Humanities at the East Kazakhstan State Technical University (EKSTU), there is the department of Kazakh and Russian languages. It proclaims among its main goals the implementation of the "Trilingualism" project -- the study of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages [26]. In 2019, EKSTU team took the second place at the international contest in Russian language, held in Russia [27].

The West Kazakhstan Zhangir Khan Agrarian Technical University (WKAU) organizes student groups, in which the Russian language communication is taught [28].

The Karaganda State Industrial University (KSIU) has the chair "Kazakh, Russian and foreign languages", providing the courses on the general and professional Russian language [29].

At the Aktobe Regional University, there is the chair of Philology and intercultural communication, which offers degree programs "Russian philology", "Russian language

and literature" for bachelors, and "Russian language and literature at schools with non-Russian teaching" for masters [30].

The Arkalyk State Pedagogical Institute has the chair of foreign languages, Russian language and literature, with bachelor's programs "Russian language and literature" and "Russian language and literature at schools with non-Russian teaching language" [31].

The Atyrau State University has a bachelor's program "Teacher of Russian language and literature" [32].

The program "Russian language and literature" is offered at the East Kazakhstan State University [33].

The Karaganda State University named after E. A. Buketov offers a bachelor's program "Russian Language and Literature" [34].

The Pavlodar State Pedagogical University (PSPU) has the chair of Russian language and literature. It regularly organizes international forums and other events dedicated to the study of the Russian language and culture [35], and also offers the bachelor's program "Russian language and literature at schools with non-Russian teaching language" [36].

In Russia, the Kazakh Language is taught at Moscow State Linguistic University (MGLU) [37].

### 3.2. Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, the Russian language has no special status [38]. However, according to the Russian-Uzbek treaty on the foundations of interstate relations, the parties should encourage the reciprocal study of their languages [39]. A similar requirement is fixed in the Russian-Uzbek agreement on cooperation in culture, science, technology, education, health, information, sport and tourism [40].

The degree programs at Uzbek universities have the Russian language rather poorly represented, except for the major universities. The National University of Uzbekistan (NUU) named after Mirzo Ulugbek has the department of philology, which offers the bachelor's degree "Philology and language teaching: the Russian language" and "Native language and literature: the Russian language and literature in foreign language groups" [41]. The university master's program includes the trajectories "Russian language in foreign cultural environment" and "Theoretical problems of Russian linguistics" [42].

The Tashkent State Pedagogical University (TPU) offers the master's degree "Russian language and literature" [43].

At the Uzbek State University of World Languages (USUWL), the list of programs includes the bachelor's degree "Philology and language teaching" [44] and the "Linguistics" master's degree with the option of learning Russian (listed last after Japanese and Chinese) [45].

The Tashkent State Technical University (TSTU) has the chair "Languages (Uzbek and Russian)". This chair organizes language classes for first-year students of all departments [46].

At the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (UWED), Russian is taught to foreign groups as well [47].

An indicator of the presence of the Russian language at Uzbek universities is their participation in the exchange programs with Russia. Not all provide such information, but there is some accessible data: e. g., 233 students from the Tashkent Railway Engineering Institute (TREI) are currently studying in Russia. In 2018--2019, seven teachers also visited Russian universities for training [48]. Such exchanges are essential for communication, requiring general speaking skills and good command of technical vocabulary. Russian students also visit Uzbekistan, but the numbers are low. In the Tashkent Institute of Architecture and Construction (TIAC), two of the current thirteen foreign students are from Russia [49], and there are two interviews with Russian students at the website of NUU [50].

Little information is provided on joint academic events related to language studies. Some examples from 2019 include the news about a collection of books, presented to UWED by Rossotrudnichestvo, the open lecture of the Russian Embassy Counselor [51], and the open lesson at the TIAC [52].

In Russia, since 2000, the Uzbek language has been offered at Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO) [53] and at SPSU [54].

### 3.3. Kyrgyzstan

According to the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan, the state national language is Kyrgyz, while Russian is an official language [55]. According to the Russian-Kyrgyz Declaration on eternal friendship, alliance and partnership, signed in 2000, the state parties are obliged to assist the reciprocal studies of their languages, foster teacher training and provide comprehensive state support to cooperation in this area [56]. Finally, the

Kyrgyzstan Development Strategy contains a requirement for good command of the Kyrgyz, Russian, English and Chinese languages among Kyrgyz people [57].

The Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU) offers the program "Philology" (profile "Teaching philological disciplines (Russian language and literature)"), the program "Russian as a foreign language" and "Russian language and literature". There are also the Innovative Academic and Educational Center for the Russian language, the Resource Center for the Russian Literature, Russian language courses for foreigners, thematic conferences [58] and contests [59].

The Kyrgyz National University named after J. Balasagyn (KNU) has a department of Russian and Slavic philology with the chairs of theory and history of Russian and foreign literature, theory and practice of the Russian language, and the chair of the Russian language for all departments [60]. The university is running double-degree programs with MGIMO and RUDN, as well as student and researcher exchanges with Russia. In addition, KNU has experience in conducting international conferences on linguistics with the participation of the Russian Centre for Science and Culture (RCSC) and the Association of graduates of Russian and Soviet universities [61]. Other events include the language contests (organized with Rossotrudnichestvo) [62], short-term language courses for foreigners [63], and cooperation with the CIS Network University and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) University [64].

The Bishkek Humanitarian University (BHU) has the department of Slavic studies and the chair of the Russian language [65], which provides classes of Russian for all departments, shaped specifically for different professional areas [66]. Also, there are short-term courses [67] and preparation for the state exam in Russian [68]. A variety of special events was organized: the final stage of the international Russian language contest for schoolchildren of the CIS (in cooperation with the Chuvashia State University and the "Russkiy Mir" Foundation) [69]; the teacher training seminar "Innovative approaches to Russian language teaching" [70]; the all-Kyrgyz university contest in Russian [71]; the international forum "Dialogue of languages and cultures of CIS and SCO in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (in cooperation with MGLU and the CIS Interstate

Fund for cultural cooperation [72]); the international festival of languages and cultures [73]; the language and theatre festival [74] and the international conference "The modern concept of linguistic and cultural values" [75], etc. Since 2008, the "Russkiy Mir" centre has been operating at BHU [76].

The Jalal-Abad State University (JASU) has the chair of the Russian language and the department of Philology of CIS. It offers the degree program "Russian language

and literature" [77]. The university held some thematic events on Russian studies and cooperates with RUDN and other Russian universities [78].

In specialized universities, the Russian language is taught as official, with courses provided by special departments. The examples include the Kyrgyz State Technical University (KSTU) [79]; the Kyrgyz State University of Construction, Transport and Architecture (KSUCTA) [80]; the Kyrgyz State Academy of Physical Education and Sport (KSAPES) [81]. At Bishkek Academy of Finance and Economics (BAFE), the amount of Russian in the curricula is equal to Kyrgyz (240 hours). In 2014, the student conference "Russian language and culture of speech" took place [82]. At the Kyrgyz State University of Culture and Arts (KSUCA), there is the chair of language and literature, offering Kyrgyz, Russian and foreign languages [83]. At the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy (KSMA), all degree programs are presented in Russian, and the requirements claim that the students' competencies must include "the ability to communicate verbally and in written form in the state language and the official language" [84]. The Kyrgyz Diplomatic Academy cooperates with MGIMO and the Diplomatic Academy of Russia, offering a program in linguistics with the trajectory "Training of interpreters for international negotiations" and also some specialized courses, for example, Translation from English into Russian [85].

In some cases, problems are obvious, mainly in regional institutes. For example, at the Naryn State University (NSU), there was lack of textbooks and personnel for Russian language teaching. This problem is now being solved by NSU in cooperation with "Russkiy Mir", which provided a grant for advanced teacher training [86]. There are also reports on shortage of specialists in Russian Philology in the regional institutes, on decrease in the number of hours for the Russian language [87], and on lack of library collections [88].

In Russia, the Kyrgyz language is taught at MGLU [89].

### 3.4. Tajikistan

In the Constitution of Tajikistan, the Russian language is marked as a "language of international communication" [90]. According to the Russian-Tajik Treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, the two states encourage the reciprocal study of their languages [91]. In addition, the aim of the development of language degree programs, including Russian, is incorporated in Tajik National Development Strategy up to 2030 [92].



As stated in the RCSC review, "in non-linguistic higher education programs, Russian is studied for 4--5 semesters. Furthermore, it is an instrument of academic and scholarly communication and the official language of many cultural events [93].

The Russian-Tajik Slavonic University (RTSU) has a philological department, which offers a bachelor's degree in Russian language and literature and a variety of specialized courses [94]. All RTSU educational programs are presented in Russian. In addition, the cooperation results in a number of special events, such as "Pushkin Readings", theatrical performances, conferences [95], contests, concerts, and visits of the Russian Language Ambassadors [96].

The Tajik National University (TNU) associates its work with the "State program of Russian and English language teaching enhancement for 2014--2020" [97]. It offers a program "Russian philology" [98], and the thematic events include the teacher training courses [99], the student competition "Reading Pushkin in Tajikistan" [100], special lessons, seminars and conferences with the participation of Russian experts [101]. In 2010, thanks to "Russkiy Mir", Russian Center was founded in TNU. It regularly organizes exhibitions, workshops, movie presentations, contests, festivals, lectures, and is well provided with all kinds of literature in Russian. Teachers can use its resources, as well as acquire consultations online [102].

The Tajik State Pedagogical University (TSPU) has a department of Russian language and literature [103], which offers bachelor's degrees "Philology and language teaching: Russian language" and "Russian language and literature in foreign student groups" [104]. A chair of Russian language provides classes for all departments. In addition, there is a student club, where students of different departments study topics such as "The role of the Russian language in our life" and "Russian--Tajik friendship", etc. [105].

In the Khujand State University named after B. Gafurov (KSU), a basic language course for all departments is provided by the chair of the Russian language [106]. In-depth learning is organized at the department of Russian philology [107]. The university cooperates with Russian universities, providing students and teachers with the opportunity to visit Russia [108]. In 2018 more than 25 teachers were trained in Russia and in Europe [109].

In another regional education center -- the Kulob State University -- there is also a department of Russian philology and the chair of the Russian language for all departments [110].

At specialized universities, the data is rather similar, although not all of them provide a detailed view of structure. The Russian language is present in the curricula of the Tajik State Medical University (TSMU) [111]; at the Tajik Technical University (TTU) [112] and the Tajik Agrarian University (TAU) teaching is provided both in Tajik and Russian [113].

The majority of educational programs are carried out in Russian equally with Tajik at the Tajik State University of Law, Business and Politics [114]. At the Tajik State Institute of Languages (TSIL) named after S. Ulughzoda, there is a department of Russian philology. Its degree programs include "The Russian language and literature" and "The Russian language and literature in national school". Since 2008, TSIL has been cooperating with "Russkiy Mir" [115].

Despite the wide presence of the Russian language in Tajik higher education, according to the RCSC, there are problems, such as "lack of resources and the technical and academic base of most centers of secondary and higher education, often the poor quality of language teaching and teacher training, lack of academic and educational literature, lack of new technologies and interactive learning" [93].

In Russia, the Tajik language is studied at MGIMO [116], at MSU [117], at SPSU [118] and at MGLU [119].

### 3.5. Turkmenistan

According to the Constitution of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen language is the state language. The status of the Russian language is not defined [120]. However, the Russian-Turkmen treaty on friendship and cooperation, signed in 2002, contains the obligation to "encourage" the reciprocal "study and dissemination" of the national languages [121].

According to T. V. Kudoyarova (2010) [122], Russian is taught at the Turkmen State Pedagogical Institute at a small department with 5-6 graduates per year, and at the Turkmen National Institute of World Languages. The latter has a faculty of Russian language and literature [123]. The Magtymguly Turkmen State University provides a specialty "Russian language and literature" [124]. Finally, there is a department of foreign languages at the Turkmen State Medical University, but there is no data on which languages are studied [125]. Also, there is not enough information about thematic events related to the study of the Russian language.

In Russia, the Turkmen language has been taught at MSU [126] and at MGIMO, in cooperation with the Embassy of Turkmenistan and cultural center of Turkmenistan in Moscow [127].

## 4. Conclusion

The situation with the study of the Russian language is different and depends on the legal status of the language, the efforts of the parties to develop interaction and the

activities of Russian organizations that promote cooperation: embassies, consulates, Rossotrudnichestvo, "Russkiy Mir". We can observe the wider presence of the Russian language and more successful examples of cooperation in Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik higher education in comparison with Uzbek and Turkmen universities. The latter does not pay much attention to the promotion of the Russian language, since it is considered only as one of the foreign languages. Turkmenistan is also known for the closure of its education space.

However, Uzbekistan's connection with Russian universities reflects its readiness to expand cooperation with Russia.

Lack of resources, teacher training, library funds, internships and joint research activities are obvious obstacles to bilateral cooperation. In addition, in Russia there are few programs to study the languages of Central Asia. Understanding these problems can be promising in terms of the possibility of bilateral cooperation to work in this direction with a view to solving them. With regard to exchanges and internships, a detailed review of inter-university cooperation requires further research.

The Russian language remains the most important instrument of international communication in Central Eurasia. It is still in demand. The promotion of its research, as well as the financing of educational and research projects in Central Asia (in particular, joint projects, student exchange programs, etc.) will likely remain promising and decisive areas of effective cultural cooperation between Russia and this regions and maintaining sustainable historical connections. This requires the constant development of a specific state strategy in this area. At the same time, expanding the study of Central Asian languages in Russia is also important for preparing new generations of diplomats and experts in the field of political, sociological and migration studies. They will work in all areas of interstate cooperation, showing spoken language skills, the ability to analyze latest scientific publications, media, official documents, standards and technical papers, developing understanding in different ways.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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