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Introductory Comments
Let me start out by stating emphatically that I have not devoted a lifetime of study to Usbekistan. However, on the basis of a long career in which I have had to assess societal and cultural features in nations outside Europe within a limited time frame, I have approached the specific Usbek situation from a holistic point of view. I find that the transition Usbekistan is presently going through is so exceptional in the annals of the world in peacetime that it deserves the attention of the world community. In that context my viewpoint will be just one more contribution to an assessment of the forces at work in Usbekistan and the implications of what is happening.

Some Basic Facts
The Usbekistan under discussion here is the country of 447,400 square kms. carved out of the Soviet Union in 1991 and with a population of 23 million. Approximately 75 percent are Usbek and there are numerous ethnic minorities. Usbekistan is potentially a wealthy country with rich deposits of gold, silver, oil, coal and natural gas, although it was mostly a cotton producer in the Soviet period.
At a certain political price, it is also a stable country, and the end of the financial decline following independence is in sight.

The Corner-stones
The transition presently under way in Usbekistan with regard to language and culture comprises a complicated web involving three factors:
1. De-russification,
2. The creation of Usbek national identity, and
3. Westernization.

I have seen no tangible evidence of Easternization, for which reason I leave aside that dimension, although I have met with the claim that such a process does exist.
I shall approach the three key factors mentioned above first as a language professional, and then discuss them in more general terms. It should be noted, however, that relevant information is often incomplete and sometimes also inaccurate and contradictory. This is due to the fact that during the Soviet period all policy decisions were made in Moscow - possibly even on the basis of incorrect data - and, consequently, there was no local need for knowing facts in the Western sense.

The Role of Russian
There are many minorities in Usbekistan, including circa 5 to 10 percent ethnic Russians. The Russians are primarily concentrated in Tashkent, but they have recently begun leaving the country in droves, although I have at no stage seen any indication that they are not more than welcome to stay - that is, under the present-day Usbek realities. I have also noted that some Usbecks are
disturbed by this brain-drain.

I would suggest that the emigration is linked to the fact that since Russian had been the common language for education and inter-ethnic communication, Russians enjoyed a privileged situation in so far as they never met with linguistic barriers that they had to overcome. This meant that ethnic Russians automatically had the edge over other minorities. I have come across no resentment against Russians because of this or any feeling that this was wrong, for it is accepted that Russian provided - and to a large extent still provides - the different ethnic groups in Usbekistan with a common language. However, as Usbek is now the official national language, the tables have been turned, and the Russians’ in-built linguistic superiority over competitors has been weakened. This constitutes a major loss in status for individual Russians, and is, in my view, the most obvious reason why Russians want ‘to go home’. One should also add that the new privileged status of the Usbek language is officially promoted with regard to hiring and firing.

At all events, as the new state proceeds to establish its own identity, Russian is diminishing in importance, whereas Usbek language and culture are being promoted.

National Identity
The Usbeks are doing much to define their own nationality. The pride of the nation is ‘Independence Square’ in Tashkent which is lit up at night with orange and green neon lights, and statues of local celebrities, such as Timur Lenk, have replaced those of the leaders of the Russian Revolution. Street names have been changed to conform to Usbek and post-Soviet realities - rumour had it that this was the reason why it was impossible to get a city map for a considerable period of time. True, these are in many ways superficial changes and innovations, but they illustrate symbolically the enormous change in cultural attitude. It is of more tangible significance that at school there are now classes where Russian-speaking students are taught Usbek, and others where older students from the senior classes give lectures to younger pupils on Usbek history and culture.

The Language Situation
Usbek - and an implicit Western orientation - is promoted in a number of ways. The most momentous change began in the summer of 1995 with the start of the five-year transition period in
the course of which Usbek will adopt the Latin alphabet in place of the Russian one.

Acquiring a new alphabet is nothing unusual in the recent history of Usbek. At the time of the Russian revolution, the elitist Tajik language was in the process of being replaced by a form of standard Usbek. A simplified version of the Arabic alphabet for writing Usbek was introduced in 1923. This was then replaced by the Latin alphabet in a first wave of changes (1927-1934), until the Latin alphabet was replaced by the Russian alphabet in the early 1940s. Linguistically the present-day switch from the Cyrillic letters will make for a better approximation to pronunciation (since Usbek uses an approximation of Turkish diacritical letters). The first Latin alphabet coincided with the successful Soviet campaign to wipe out illiteracy, but this latest change - like the previous changes in the alphabet - will predictably lead to ‘secondary illiteracy’, i.e. some people will only be literate in one - the old and outdated - alphabet.

In Parliament, simultaneous Usbek and Russian interpreting of the assembly proceedings was introduced after the general election in December 1994. As of 1997, every civil servant must have mastered Usbek, and by that date there will be a change-over to Usbek as the language of administration. On the other hand, it should be stressed that Russian is by no means on the point of suddenly disappearing.

The meteoric rise of Usbek means that it now has its own faculty at Tashkent State University. This faculty particularly concentrates on language teaching, not on literature: Usbek has undergone much Russian influence and is also socially and regionally stratified. In other words, present-day Usbek, no matter how one defines the language, has been subjected to far-reaching foreign influence for nearly 130 years, and, in addition, comprises numerous dialects and sociolects. Unlike some other languages that have been dominated by stronger nations, for instance Hungarian and Slovene in Europe, Usbek has not been nurtured by a strong and stable intelligentsia. It is thus more fluid and there is an obvious need to define and strengthen ‘genuine Usbek’. An arbitrating institution to decide on correct Usbek usage has been set up, but it is impossible at this point to assess its importance.

Similarly, Usbek literature is also being fostered - only more discretely - on the basis of works written in that language in modern times. Furthermore, no one who has visited Samarkand recently can be unaware that part of the restoration work going on there, in particular the restoration of the Timur Lenk Mausoleum, aims at promoting national pride in the history and culture of Usbekistan. In view of the fact that the process of restoring ‘national monuments’ had already started in the Soviet period, one can, perhaps, cautiously suggest that such regional national identity-building was a contributing factor to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

At the same time the disappearance of the Russian element in cultural life is eminently evident: the finest example of European cultural life, the State Academy Bolshoi Theatre, is nowadays half-empty since much of its former audience has emigrated to Russia. Hence its vital role in local cultural life has been greatly reduced.

**Education**

De-russification, the creation of a national identity and the process of Westernization, are indissolubly linked with the Usbek educational system.

All nations use their educational system for transmitting societal values and norms. But in my
view, this is not the most important aspect of the situation in the Usbek context, although as mentioned the school system deliberately used for promoting national identity. The significant point is that everything done in the educational system has an enormous ripple effect because of the demographic breakdown: nearly half the population is of school age, or younger.

Apart from the inhabitants of some remote, isolated places, there is no illiteracy in Usbekistan. Following (I believe) the Russian system, formal schooling starts at the age of six to seven. Primary school lasts four years. Secondary schooling is attended by nearly everyone (98 percent) until the 9th grade when school-leavers can enter vocational training and/or work. Upward of 30 percent go on to the tenth and eleventh grade where there is some specialization. After passing exams at this level, students either join the work-force, or go on to other educational institutions, such as university (1 to 1.5 percent).

**Teaching Methods**

There are admirable and enviable features to the Usbek teaching system. Once again, it is probably Russian influence that has kept the class size down to 10 to 16 students. It should also be acknowledged that teachers show inventiveness and perform remarkably well within the given framework. I personally witnessed a primary-school English teacher employing an enormous amount of home-made material, posters and boards which she used to teach English to her enthusiastic pupils.

On the other hand, - another Russian feature, I imagine - teaching at all levels is strongly teacher-directed, and students are not given any time to think over questions. The teacher is the unquestioned authority and - not least thanks to the use of unwieldy student desks - attention is focused on the teacher's performance. It may be a special Usbek feature that some classes last up to ninety minutes - a pedagogically unsound procedure if one wants to promote independence.

In this context, it is interesting to note that although the language of instruction is in principle Usbek, there are many classes, schools and institutions (primary, secondary, and tertiary) where the language of instruction is Russian (statistics are not available). In addition, a few schools use Kazakh, Tajik, and Korean as their languages of instruction.

English, French, and German are taught as foreign languages in a minority of primary schools. These languages are normally introduced in the fourth or fifth grade. In specialist schools they are taught from the first grade. In a few primary schools there is more instruction in English than in Russian or Usbek.

**Foreign-Language Knowledge**

Foreign-language knowledge, then, is linked with the general school system, as well as de-russification and orientation towards the West.

Most Usbeks (by some estimates 95 percent) understand Russian, although Russian is in fact an Usbek minority language. It is difficult to give a long-range assessment of the future standing of Russian in Usbek society since it will depend on such factors as (a) the presence of Russian-speaking Usbeks; (b) the existence of Usbek families speaking Russian at home;' (c) the fact that Russian was previously hammered home from the beginning of school which means that there will be many elderly people who will still know Russian in thirty to forty years' time. And then there is
the question of (d) international relations, especially those with Russia as well as all CIS-neighbours who must also in the future rely on Russian for communication. Clearly Russia, by virtue of its sheer strength, is the number one power in the area, and Usbekistan lies within the Russian sphere of primary influence. To some extent continued knowledge of Russian will be a dictate for geopolitical reasons.

**English and the Mass Media**

In a modern society, and especially in a nation like Usbekistan with a high percentage of young people, we must include the mass media in an assessment of the overall knowledge of English and other modern European languages.

One cannot accurately assess the impact of the deafening and ubiquitous presence of loud Western music from video cassettes with the original soundtracks (English, American, Spanish, French, etc.). But I think this phenomenon merely contributes to the general world-wide background noise.

Radios are used extensively, but mostly for music programs, and it is a low status medium. It is therefore not surprising that they do not seem to exert any significant influence on foreign-language acquisition.

An estimated 60 to 80 percent of all households have a television set. Television broadcasts programs for 3 to 5 hours a day on two Usbek channels, an all-Russian channel (‘Ostankino’), and a Kazakh channel. There are few direct English-language programs on television: 45 minutes a week of CNN news. There are English lessons once a week in a thirty-item cycle of an educational series. Otherwise television is not the foreign-language medium one might expect: the fairly few English (or American) serials and films are dubbed or voiced-over (‘simultaneous interpreting’), although other serials (e.g. Indian ones) may be subtitled. I have even seen some American movies with Dutch subtitles and Russian voice-over. The main point is that television does not promote knowledge of foreign languages except Russian.

Videos are usually subtitled, more often than not into another foreign language (so that, for instance, English films with English soundtracks may have German subtitles)

**Foreign Language Standards**

The fact that Usbekistan had always been so dependent on Moscow in the Soviet period has left its trace on the mastery of English: oral proficiency and writing skills leave much to be desired, and the emphasis in most teaching is on acquisition of vocabulary items. Consequently, although in principle students have learnt English for many years in school, their level of command of the language is frequently not very high.

One Usbek foreign-language teacher, commenting on the educational background of his students, remarked to me: “There are exceptions, but for the most part: their English is faulty. Their knowledge of European geography, history, and literature is limited ... Likewise, they often have an imperfect knowledge of Usbek grammar, limited vocabulary, and are ignorant of specific functional styles. They know little of economics and law ... They are hesitant or unable to undertake independent work and unwilling to express their own views.”
Interest in Foreign Languages
In Usbekistan today there is great interest in learning foreign languages for education, tourism, trade, and entertainment, in particular for learning English which is the most sought-after foreign language at present, although there is interest in French, German, Arabic and other languages as well.

English and the other modern Western European languages are taught in the universities. However, the term ‘university’ is somewhat misleading compared to its counterpart in the West. In 1994/95 some fifty-odd institutions were converted into universities in Usbekistan. It is extremely difficult, therefore, to generalize about overall standards. Instead I shall focus on some institutions which I was actually able to visit and have a closer look at in 1995.

The English Department of Tashkent State University (200 students and 16 staff members) is in the process of expanding. Its graduates are employed as teachers in universities, seats of higher learning, or in industry (as interpreters and translators), publishing houses and the like. The curriculum consists of a five-year general program, the first two years being taught in ‘complexes’ comprising vocabulary, grammar, phonetics and home-reading, with the same teacher as supervisor of the whole ‘complex’. In the third year theory (e.g. phonetics) as well as practice (e.g. reading, speaking, etc.) is introduced; translation is also introduced at this stage and entails written translation, oral translation and translation of scientific texts.

In Samarkand (a tourist centre) English proficiency among the regional university staff is by any standards remarkably high. One indication of the extent of the concerted drive to promote the teaching of English, is the fact that the English Department experienced an explosion in the number of teachers from twenty-eight in 1995 to fifty (in face of the need for ninety) in 1996.

The University of World Languages in Tashkent has 7,000 students and teaches about fifteen languages. About 60 percent of the students are majoring in English, and there are approximately sixty English staff members.

At the same time, most departments and faculties of economics and natural sciences at Tashkent State University have their own language sections which teach languages for specialized purposes. The obvious reason for this is that in the Soviet period English was not encouraged in school. Thus students entering university find themselves in a linguistic limbo when they have to use Western, i.e. English and American, textbooks. We particularly examined the Faculty of Economics (which comprises management, economics and international relations). This Faculty is given a high priority in Usbekistan. It is being supported in an effort to foster openness towards the Western world and market economies in order to achieve stabilization in Usbekistan’s economic development. Consequently, the Faculty has been rapidly expanding. Since nearly all teaching materials (in economics) are in foreign languages, 30 percent of the students’ time is devoted to learning two of the major European languages (English, German, or French) and students are encouraged to write their essays and theses in one of these foreign languages. Instruction is undertaken by a full-time language staff.

Translation is considered a desirable goal in the mastery of foreign languages, as well as in specialist training that focuses on technical terminology. The first translation of an economic textbook into Usbek was completed in 1995, but the need for textbooks in Usbek (and, consequently, further translations) is rapidly increasing.
There are also private schools for foreign-language learning. We visited one of these, namely the Usbek Association of Translators, Interpreters and Foreign-Language Teachers. The school has an enrolment of 350 in Tashkent and branches in a number of other cities in Usbekistan. The students are graduates/specialists in economics, technological fields and the natural sciences, who intend to become translators or revisers after following a two-year program tailored for work involving joint-ventures.

Modern Tools
Generally speaking, set textbooks are dominant in teaching. This is also true of teaching English language and translation. Some institutions, however, allow for variation.

The supply of textbooks seems to be adequate for teaching the core courses with set texts and no variation at the lower levels in the school system. At higher levels the shortage of adequate textbooks is more marked. This is also the case at the tertiary level, for although in principle teachers are free to choose textbooks and texts of their own, this is not possible for purely physical reasons: Western books are hard to come by, photocopying facilities are poor, and the books that are available are mostly old Russian editions in limited quantities (usually enough for one class). Similarly, there are only a few computers which are normally reserved for staff.

There is a shortage of elementary teaching aids such as blackboards, overhead projectors, tape-recorders, video-recorders, language laboratories, photocopying machines, and any sort of reading material. In sum: in Usbekistan there is an enormous potential for Westernization, but little in the way of resources for carrying it out.

Foreign Support
As the situation appeared in 1995, i.e. four years after independence, Usbekistan had received some help in the process of reorientation towards the West.

The American effort has been the most massive. According to my sources, 1,500 Usbeks in the 15 plus age group are being housed with American families for one year. In addition, about 100
scholarships have been given to Usbek students to study at American colleges. Likewise, there is a corresponding effort to send US staff to work at seats of higher learning, as well as a few peace corps people. The problem with efforts like these is that they are not properly targeted in terms of social impact: it may be fine for the Usbek student concerned and will doubtlessly leave him or her with improved English but gains of this kind remain essentially individual.

The most cost-effective effort is the German one - closely followed by the French - but both of these are relatively small.

The most popular and sought-after teaching program is that of the British, best exemplified by the British Council, which along with the new alphabet is introducing a set of English textbooks from primary through secondary and tertiary levels. The Council will clearly become an effective means of promoting English-language knowledge in the country.

**Changes, Targets and Implications**

Any attempt to assist the process of Westernization in terms of foreign-language teaching must deal with the sharp contrast that exists between the fine ideals set up as goals and everyday reality.

Let me point to two examples: by simply arguing that Westernization offers numerous benefits will not suddenly do away with the importance of Russian. Russian is still the main language of communication for the different ethnic groups in Usbekistan and will remain so for at least twenty years (for demographic reasons). For more or less the same period of time, Russian will remain the primary language in Usbek relations with Russia and the CIS-nations. Secondly, the decree for all decision-makers to know an additional foreign language by the year 2000 is doomed to failure: the majority of Usbek decision-makers are most in need of speaking Russian. Moreover, they do not have the time, nor are they at the optimal age, to acquire a complete command of English, for example.

This is not tantamount to saying that the process of becoming independent is doomed to failure. On the contrary, there is no doubt that Usbekistan has indeed cut the umbilical cord and distanced itself from the planners in Moscow. But independence on a greater scale will take time, and so will orientation towards the West, which is part and parcel of derussification.

The policy of Usbek foreign-language reorientation is ambitious. Plans have certainly been drawn up in this regard. In my view, however, they not only lack insight into foreign-language acquisition, but they ignore the necessary societal ‘ambience’. Up to a certain point, it is possible to manage on a shoestring, especially if one’s goal is well-defined, as is the case with the well-targeted program to develop the tourist industry (best exemplified by the promotion of Samarkand which is a natural tourist spot), and, possibly, in the area of trade with the surrounding world. But what I feel is missing is the required coordination in this daunting transformation.

There are problems with the means, the human resources and the physical possibilities. These I shall discuss in terms of short-term and long-term implications, fixing the dividing line in this regard somewhere between ten and thirty years.

One of the most obvious means - whether based on a coincidence or not - is the introduction of a Turkic version of the Latin alphabet. The short-term implications are that all Russian teaching materials will be phased out over the next five-year period. In five years time the new generation reaching secondary and tertiary school, or graduating, will be largely unfamiliar with Russian
lettering and accustomed to reading books in the Latin alphabet. All other materials based on the Russian alphabet, such as typewriters and word-processors will be obsolete. Learning Russian will become a specialist activity, like studying English, or economics, etc.

Unless special salvage operations are planned, Usbekistan will, in this process, also cast away a great part of its cultural and intellectual past beginning from the time of General Kaufmann's invasion of the area in the 1860s up to Independence in 1991 - in so far as that past is preserved in Russian. And I see no serious concerns being voiced at this prospective loss.

One might then believe that what is left will be Usbek culture, for which there are, according to Birgit Schlyter, special provisions. But this I find doubtful: As far as I can see, Usbekistan, because of its extended family and tribal pattern, is no doubt a country with a strong oral tradition and a rich folklore with its own national characteristics. From a social perspective, the Usbek custom of exchanging grand speeches, Usbek hospitality and the Usbek pattern of life within the extended family will come more to the fore. But so far as the societal infrastructure is concerned in other areas, in hospitals, schools, universities, etc., the Russian imprint will remain although it may take on a free market garb. So although doctors will now write up their case histories in the Latin letters of the capitalist West, the hospital they work in was established by the socialist state and for the foreseeable future will perpetuate that socialist cultural heritage.

The Potential Increase of Foreign Language Standards

A crucial factor in this regard is television whose use of voice-over, however, be it in Russian or Usbek, does not promote foreign-language awareness. On the other hand, subtitling does. The situation is not much different than that of the smaller European societies in the 1990s when television made its first large-scale appearance: the first subtitlers will have to be autodidacts. Subtitling, it is true, costs more than voice-over. One possible solution would be for Western institutions to donate interesting copyright-cleared material to Usbek television, on the explicit
condition that the donations be subtitled. This might also, at least partially, solve the problem of piracy. As far as foreign languages are concerned, it would make Usbeks more aware of the surrounding world. Of course, television also has a visual dimension. But in a language context this is not really important: unless one is concerned about an outside cultural power imposing foreign norms. But in this respect I fail to see the difference between Soviet and American films: they both seem to be equally different from the emerging reality in present-day Usbekistan.

It is inevitable that the question of privileges and tribal family structures will loom large. People in key positions either exert influence or are subjected to pressure by others who can order them around. Soviet or Usbek? Or a combination of the two? I have no idea. But it is evident to me that this is a problem Usbeks have to live with. On the other hand, outsiders do not have to accept it, and foreign-language teaching programs can make the selection of material and teachers the responsibility of the outsiders. This would not automatically neutralize differences due to superior schooling, nor will it eliminate the possibility of excluding competent candidates, but it would make things more fair. In terms of Usbek societal norms, such an approach is novel. It is alien to Soviet nomenklatura attitudes and it is alien to Usbek clan or family loyalty. In other words, in this regard we wish to implement a marked transition in norms which will have an impact in the long-term. Norms of this kind cannot be imposed by language institutions, but will simply result from the competitive spirit of free market mechanisms and the competitiveness of international life where merit, despite all protestations to the contrary, is rewarded.

So, thanks to outside help or because of the general economic progress of Usbekistan, or a combination of both, future Usbek students at all levels and in all fields will gradually have access to more varied teaching materials. They will become familiar with new tools of learning. They will learn to type; they will learn to touch-type. As I see it, through a combination of new materials, new information and new contacts with the outside world, more and more students will learn to work independently of their teachers. This process should be promoted in the educational system by training teachers to accept this trend. One way to influence teachers is to give them instruction, another is simply to demonstrate that it can be done. But other factors, as well, are of paramount importance, though they are consistently overlooked by bureaucrats who ladle out money. Teaching which is not teacher-oriented needs desks that can be moved. Operating computers, photocopiers, overhead projectors and tape-recorders should not be the privilege of one person. Nor should such equipment be donated one piece at a time. That will only confer new privileges on those who are already privileged. Equipment of this kind should be given in such large quantities that it cannot be controlled by single individuals. That way the initiative will necessarily be left to others. This is also part of the transition. It will eventually come of its own accord, but Westerners can give the process a boost. They can show the usefulness of delegating power and thus demonstrate the inefficiency of a hierarchical command structure which is clearly another unfortunate legacy from the Soviet period. But this approach presupposes two other physical changes: one is improved communication. Ideally, this would best be brought about by installing working telephones in all households and offices all throughout the country. The second physical change concerns abolishing the rule of janitors who have the power to keep rooms locked at will. The latter reform touches on a broader issue, the assumption inherent in the previous socialist system that everybody should be allotted a job (although the practice appears to accord with traditional Usbek ‘tribal’ loyalty as
Concluding Remarks
Generally speaking, the transition in Usbekistan, in my opinion, can be viewed at an even higher level. We are here dealing with a specific linguistic culture, Usbek, which for the most part has had an oral development. Over a longish span in history, it has been subjected to domination by a language which embodies a literate culture - Russian. In the transition we are witnessing, Usbekistan is cutting itself loose from the imposed literate culture and rejecting it. In place of Russian, the country is presently turning towards a new literate culture based on concepts from its own oral tradition and from the Western capitalist and literate culture. It will be no easy matter to strike a sensible balance. Yet, to date, the changes involved in the efforts to implement the new language policy have not been overhasty. This is reassuring.

My own views regarding this difficult period of transformation in Usbekistan are perfectly clear, namely that we should actively assist in the transition towards Western values. I have not reached this conclusion because I think Western values are above criticism, but because the present process of change is doubtlessly an inevitable one, that is to say, neither we nor the Usbeks themselves can stop it. For the inhabitants of Usbekistan, the process in question actually began, at the very latest, when General Kaufmann entered the area, whereas for us it began, at the latest, with the phenomenon of internationalization from the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars onwards. Furthermore, by consciously taking stock of what we ourselves are doing, we may also be able to help the Usbeks become aware of the full implications of the transformation. Ultimately, however, it is for the Usbeks to decide what foreign values they will reject, what foreign norms they will embrace and what foreign ideas they will adapt. Westerners can merely assist them in an effort at raising awareness.

I hope that this article, in some small measure, may contribute towards that goal.

Notes
1. The author was the contractor for a Pre-Tempus-project ‘Improving foreign language instruction and translation studies at Tashkent State University, Usbekistan’. The present article reports on findings based upon two inspection tours involving attendance of classes at primary, secondary, and tertiary level, as well as interviews with lay people and experts on the Usbek language (1995).
2. There are many people who have contributed information to this article. My warmest thanks go to Jim Riordan of the University of Surrey, to Abdurakhim Vakhabov, Dean of the Faculty of Economics at Tashkent State University, and to the Association of Translators, Interpreters and Foreign-Language Teachers of Usbekistan.
4. Ibid. p. 43.