

AZERBAIJAN'S NATION-BUILDING PROCESS: ROLE OF LANGUAGE POLICY

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Abstract

The article examines Azerbaijan's nation-building process by specifically focusing on language policy and how it shapes the nation-building during the post-Soviet era. It aims to clarify the role and the importance of the language policy in Azerbaijan's nation-building process. To this end, the nation-building process is scrutinized as a whole and there is a special focus on the extent of the influence of the language policies. This article reveals what does language policy stands for the Azerbaijani nation. In this context, after the Introduction, brief historical background information on the Soviet Union's language policies is given. In this part, the alterations experienced under the rule of different leaders as well as the reasons and impacts of these changes over the nation-building process, are explained. This is followed by Azerbaijan's nation-building process after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this chapter, first, language policies adopted by Azerbaijan's government and then the other aspects of the nation-building process are investigated comprehensively. The article concludes that the language policy is an indispensable part of Azerbaijan's nation-building process and it stands as a key factor while building the Azerbaijani nation.

Keywords: Azerbaijan, Language Policy, Nation-Building, Soviet Union.

Özet

Bu makale, Azerbaycan'ın ulus inşa sürecini, özellikle de dil politikası ve bu politikanın Sovyet sonrası dönemde ulus inşa sürecini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Makalenin amacı Azerbaycan'ın ulus inşa sürecinde dil politikasının rolünü ve önemini açıklığa kavuşturmasıdır. Bu sebeple, ulus inşa süreci ayrıntılı olarak

incelenmiştir. Bu çalışma bilhassa, dil politikasının Azerbaycan ulusu için anlamını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, giriş bölümünün ardından, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dil politikaları hakkında tarihî arka plan bilgisi verilmektedir. Bu bölümde, farklı liderlerin yönetimi altında dil politikaları çerçevesinde yaşanan değişimler ve bu değişimlerin nedenleriyle beraber ulus inşa süreci üzerindeki etkileri açıklanmaktadır. Ardından gelen bölümde ise, Sovyetler Birliği'nin çöküşüne müteakip Azerbaycan'ın ulus inşa süreci incelenmektedir. Bu kısımda ilk önce Azerbaycan hükümeti tarafından benimsenen dil politikaları, daha sonrasında da ulus inşa sürecinin diğer yönleri kapsamlı bir şekilde ele alınmıştır. Makale, dil politikasının Azerbaycan'ın ulus oluşturma sürecinin vazgeçilmez bir parçası ve Azerbaycan ulusunu inşa ederken önemli bir faktör olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Azerbaycan, dil politikası, ulus inşası, Sovyetler Birliği

Introduction

Nations cannot survive without a common language by which they can communicate, share values, build institutions, create deeper bounds and common history. Language is the preliminary stage or prerequisite for the nation-building process. According to a study, language is an irreplaceable and a dominant factor of nation's existence and identity.¹ This definition clearly puts forth the significance of language for a nation. Identity building and even existence cannot be sustainable without a language. In the same study, author has also drawn a picture of language which is a means of communication; medium of expression of culture; nationhood and national identity maker.

¹ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *Politics of national languages in the South Caucasus after 1991*, MA Thesis, Nationalism Studies Program of Central European University, Budapest 2012, pp. 5-6.

Apart from these definitions Bernard Spolsky, in his work *Language Policy*, equalizes language with nations, so much so that language provides unifying factor for the nations². Furthermore, Elena Shohamy discussed that language is being used as a device to differentiate people, to control their personal freedom and to perpetuate homogenous group memberships, loyalty and patriotism which in the end becomes a tool for defining and legitimizing people as members of nation.³ Moreover, William Safran claimed that, language is the dominant factor within indicators of nation identity.⁴

Sue Wright has used several approaches towards the language: Ethnolinguistic, Perennialistic, Modernistic, post-Modernistic, and Apologist.⁵ In the first approach, author sees language as a unifier by which people can actually participate into the nation. In the second one, language acknowledged as a critical element of community formation.⁶ The third approach deals with language as a product of industrialization and democratization process and the fourth one considers language as a tool to create nation. In the last approach, language has been accepted as an essential, dispensable aspect of nation-building process.⁷ The last apologist approach is similar to the way which this study adopted to analyze the situation.

After this brief information about the significance of language in the context of nation-building process, we are now able to understand the meaning and significance of language policies.

² Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

³ Elana G. Shohamy, *Language Policy: Hidden Agendas and New Approaches*, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2006, pp. 1-22.

⁴ William Safran, "Language and nation-building in Israel: Hebrew and its rivals", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2005, pp. 43-63.

⁵ Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation*, London: Palgrave, 2003.

⁶ Idid. See also: Nancy Bonvillain, *The Routledge Handbook of Linguistic Anthropology*, New York: Routledge, 2016.

⁷ Sue Wright, *ibid*.

Language and language policy are two different aspects that ought not be confused. In dictionary terms, language is a “system of communication consists of sounds, words, and grammar, or the system of communication used by people in a particular country or type of work”.⁸ Whereas, language policies are the practices and implementations of a government of any country in order to create one language that shall provide solidarity and integrity among the citizens. However, it is not an easy mission to achieve because of the heterogenous structure of the states.⁹

Language policies are mostly being done in order to eliminate the other alternative language that is being spoken in a certain country. States, specifically Soviet and ex-Soviet countries, utilize language to spread national values. Together with state institutions, political elites are in charge of these policies. While adopting a language plan or policy, states naturally chose sides to act with and to act against it.¹⁰ In this context, languages spoken by minorities could be eliminated and the one spoken by the majority of the population, would become the official language.¹¹ However, this is not a favorable way to build a state or a nation due to the possible cause of inter-ethnic conflicts that might occur eventually.¹² But one way or another, after a certain language policy, all of the citizens including minorities obliged to learn the language if they wish to take part in society.

Language polices are certainly differs state to state; government to government or even depends on the leader. As it has been mentioned above, political elites are among the critical authorities who decide which policy will be pursued or how is that policy will be implemented. According to James Tollefson, language policy is a

⁸ Cambridge Dictionary defines “language” as follows: “A system of communication consisting of sounds, words, and grammar, or the system of communication used by people in a particular country or type of work”.

⁹ Sue Wright, *idib.*, p. 80.

¹⁰ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² William Safran, *ibid.*

political process which usually cause social inequality between the different nations living within the same country.¹³ Language policies in nation-building process, are indeed regarded as critical determinants (Behera, 2008).¹⁴ However, being critical does not necessarily make them a key factor. Throughout the history, we have witnessed many examples of nation-building process. Some of them were completed under extreme conditions, others were succeeded much more easily. In each nation-building process, there is/are specific factor/s that determine/s the whole process. These aspect or aspects could be the key determinant or just could be a contributing factor. Distinguishing among them as a key factor or a contributing factor, is not an easy task to achieve.

Azerbaijan nation-building process has officially started in 1991 after the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. Subsequent to the dissolution of Union, Azerbaijan was left without proper state and nation. By that time, it has never truly experienced independency. Following to the declaration of independence, nation-building process was kicked off. Despite the independence and disintegration of the Soviet Union, there were some crucial developments, policy implementations, and decisions occurred during the Soviet reign that were affected the Azerbaijan's nation-building process even afterwards such as multiple language policies; sovietization policies; delimitation policies and Korenizatsiya.

In order to analyze the Azerbaijani nation-building in a consistent way, and to be able to decide whether language policies are the key factor or not, first we need to analyze Soviet language policies over Azerbaijan and point out the consequences over Azerbaijan's nation-building process. Later on, Azerbaijan's language policies and other

¹³ James W. Tollefson, "Critical Theory in Language Policy", in: Thomas Ricento, ed., *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, Malden: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 42-59.

¹⁴ Priyabrata Behera, "Nation-Building Process in the Transcaucasus: A Case Study of Azerbaijan", (Ph.D. Dissertation), The Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies is Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi 2008.

nation-building aspects will be analyzed comprehensively to decide the role of language policies.

Soviet Language Policies: Consequences over Azerbaijan Nation-Building process

Soviet Union along with United States was one of the polar in the international system and the largest country in the world. Being one of the pairs of scale and magnitude bring several responsibilities along with them. Maintaining territorial integrity and preventing country from internal conflicts and uprising, were a difficult task. In the Tsarist Russia period, there were like 180 groups that were speaking different languages.¹⁵ During the Soviet period, there were 130 different ethnic groups.¹⁶ This information obviously points out the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic structure of the Soviets. At that time, language policy was under the control of Communist Party and that policy assumed a significant role while forming the Union.

During the Vladimir Lenin's era, Soviet language policy was more tolerant than any other leader's administration. Lenin's ultimate purpose was, along with the desire to gather all the people around the communist state, to enhance literacy among the population in order to ensure the communist values stability.¹⁷ Throughout the Lenin's era, he underpinned notions of equality and self-determination among the nations under the Soviet rule.¹⁸ Besides, he

¹⁵ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Lenore Grenoble, *Language policy in the Soviet Union*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003, p. 23.

¹⁷ Cem Karakılıç and Oğuzhan Aydın, "Azerbaycan'daki Latin Alfabeti Tartışmalarına Türkiye'deki Azerbaycan Matbuatının Bakışı 1923-1930 (The View of Azerbaijani Press in Turkey Over The Dispute of Latin Alphabet in Azerbaijan 1923-1930)", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi*, Vol. 17, No. 43, 2010, pp. 181-203. See also: Lenore A Grenoble, *Language policy in the Soviet Union*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003.

¹⁸ Michael Kirkwood, "Glasnost', 'the National Question' and Soviet Language Policy", *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (1991), pp. 61-81.

strongly opposed the idea of making Russian as the state language. Furthermore, he supported the policy of providing education to the ethnic minorities in their mother language. In this context, it can be acknowledged that, Soviet language policy in Lenin's era was relatively moderate. Nevertheless, being moderate does not mean being accurate, concrete or reasonable. At that time, most of the local or minority spoken languages were not in written forms, they had just been existed in oral forms which makes harder to provide education in those language. Apart from that, there were also problems with the scripts of the languages.¹⁹ Thereby, illiteracy among the population was very high and it was considered as a threat for the survival communist values. Lenin believed literacy was very critical to achieve the survival of communism.²⁰ As a result, Soviet language planning was prepared around the problem of adopting a proper script, thereafter, it paved a way to the emergence of a new question: Which script should be adopted?

In Turkic countries, in our case Azerbaijan, Arabic script had been utilizing. However, after the Azerbaijan's participation into the Soviet Union and with respect to Lenin's language policy during 1920s, they abandoned the Arabic and adopted Latin instead.²¹ Latin Alphabet was introduced with a law passed in 1922 and was accepted in 1926 in the Turkic Congress. Azerbaijan was the first Turkic State that had adopted the Latin alphabet.²² The adoption of a

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Monica Showalter, "Lenin Used Cultural Propaganda to Create A 'New Soviet Man'", *Investor's Business Daily*, 10 Februray 2013, Retrieved from: <https://www.investors.com/politics/commentary/lenins-failed-policies-led-to-economic-collapse/> (Retrieved on February 5, 2020). See also: Filip Bardziński, "The Concept of the 'New Soviet Man' As a Eugenic Project: Eugenics in Soviet Russia after World War II", *Ethics in Progress*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2013, pp. 57-81.

²¹ Erdal Karaman, "Dünden Bugüne Azerbaycan'da Alfabe (Alphabet in Azerbaijan from Past to Present)", *Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 130-143.

²² Michael Kirkwood, *ibid.*

new alphabet brought several disputes along with it. First of all, the abandonment of Arabic caused several unrest and opposition towards the central government policies, especially among the Turkic population. Because, adopting a different written script or alphabet, were seen as an eradication of the civilization that happen to be existed for centuries. Furthermore, bringing a totally new alphabet, would make the relatively literate people to illiterate and it would cause huge costs to create a new literature, text books and to write history once again.²³ Even though Lenin was a moderate leader, his policies were criticized highly at the time and continues to be criticized even today. Secondly, there were oppositions because of the religious beliefs. Azerbaijan was and still is a Muslim majority country, hence, changing alphabet from Arabic to Latin, affected people's thought on how to read Kur'an.²⁴ Arabic was seen as the language of Islam, therefore, leaving Arabic arose the question of 'are we leaving Islam too'. In this context, it was nothing more than a normal reaction. Thirdly, there were many scholars who did not believe that Latin was the most suitable script for Azerbaijan.²⁵ Although it caused several oppositions, Latin was the only choice that Soviets had at that time because of two main reasons: First, they could not continue with the Arabic because of the Islamic background it contains which was seen as a threat that could block the spread of communism and make harder to maintain communist values ergo obedience toward central government which was one of the main goals of the Communist Party under the leadership of Lenin.²⁶ Furthermore, leaving Arabic would also give rise to cultural

²³ Latif Kerimli, "Azerbaycan'da Dil Siyaseti: Alfabe ve İmlâ Meseleleri Tarihinden I (Language Politics in Azerbaijan: History of Alphabet and Spelling Issues I)", *Türk Dünyası Dil ve Edebiyat Dergisi*, Vol. 14, No. 14, 2002, pp. 273-288.

²⁴ Erdal Karaman, *ibid.*

²⁵ Cem Karakılıç and Oğuzhan Aydın, *ibid.*

²⁶ Filip Bardziński, "The Concept of the 'New Soviet Man' As a Eugenic Project: Eugenics in Soviet Russia after World War II", *Ethics in Progress*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2013, pp. 57-81.

distance between Turkey and Azerbaijan, since Turkey was using Arabic script at the time. It was also one of the goals of that Soviets tried to achieve with that script.²⁷ Secondly, Cyrillic could not be chosen because of both ideological problems and hatred against the Russian language which was being thought forcefully among the Turkic population.²⁸ In short, they had no choice but to adopt Latin.

The language policy that had been obtained during Lenin's era – the adoption of the Latin alphabet – is considered as the first step goes towards the Soviet nation with one language and culture.²⁹ Lenin went under such burden, not with pure bona fide instead he aimed to accomplish unification through assimilation forgetting about the diversity of different ethnic groups.³⁰ Even if it might look like his language policy was preserving the different languages and was providing them a change to acquire equal status with Russian, it was just remained in theory.³¹ In addition to that, the language policies implemented during his term was to construct different nations in certain territories that could never surpass the certain borders like Russian language e.g. national language can only be spoken where it was originally being spoken, Uzbek in Uzbekistan not in Kazakhstan which provided the path for applying the divide and rule method.³² In the light of these information, it can be claimed that, under the purpose of building a dominant Soviet nation and of facilitating the administration of the whole territory, Lenin was used language policy in political interests. Language Policies in 1920s were mainly based on Language building like adopting alphabet,

²⁷ Cem Karakılıç and Oğuzhan Aydın, *ibid.*

²⁸ Latif Kerimli, *ibid.* See also: Michael Kirkwood, "Glasnost', 'the National Question' and Soviet Language Policy".

²⁹ Cem Karakılıç and Oğuzhan Aydın, *ibid.*

³⁰ Lenore Grenoble, *ibid.*

³¹ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *ibid.*

³² Erol Kurubaş, "SSCB Sonrası Türk Cumhuriyetlerinde Yeni Uluslaşma Süreçleri Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme (An Evaluation on the New Nationalization Processes in the Turkish Republics After the USSR)", *Uluslararası Hukuk ve Politika*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 2006, pp.112-133.

designing new system of writing or words. Lenin's era is a good example to comprehend how language policies are a strong tool in creation of a nation. On the other side, it would not be wrong to remark that Lenin's endeavor to build a language and a Soviet nation, was caused a serious damage over the Azerbaijani nation. Besides, the so-called enhancement of the national languages status was not achieved. After the analyzes over his successors language policies, the reason of the failure of that enhancement will be crystallized. Comparing to his successors, he can be regarded as a moderate, yet he used language policies for the same purpose to create a Soviet nation regardless of the means and conditions.

Subsequent to the Lenin's death, Josef Stalin got the control of communist party. During his term, with a law passed in 1938, Russian became compulsory in schools.³³ As a consequence of that law, huge burden was loaded for the students who were living in Azerbaijan at that times. On the one side Cyrillic alphabet based compulsory Russian language was standing, on the other side Latin script based Azerbaijani language was standing, hence, students who wishes to learn his/her national language, had to learn two different alphabets. Afterward, the status of Russian has reached in a point where no other national languages in the Union could have reached in terms of effectiveness, functionality and communication.³⁴ Stalin implemented languages policies unlike the legacy of Lenin. Lenin scared of the Islamic movement or culture and approached it as a threat to communist values whereas, Stalin and other Communist Party members scared from the Turkic national movements which became more likely with the new Turkic literature after the adoption of Latin alphabet.³⁵ Therefore, he made Russian compulsory across the country which naturally caused another alteration in the

³³ Ayşe P. Dietrich, "Language policy and the status of Russian in the Soviet Union and the successor states outside the Russian Federation", *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, Vol. 19, Nos. 1-2, 2005, pp. 1-27.

³⁴ Michael Kirkwood, *ibid.*

³⁵ Ayşe Pamir Dietrich, *ibid.*

Azerbaijan's alphabet.³⁶ There were serious arguments and meetings about that problematic situation. In 1940, eventually, Azerbaijan adopted the Cyrillic alphabet to overcome problems and duality in the education system. However, that Cyrillic alphabet was kind of a mixture of Azerbaijani Turkish and Russian. As such, it adopted common letters from both alphabets and considered the consonance of the letters while picking them. Briefly, because of the Soviet Language Policy makers, Azerbaijan had to experience third script within 25-30 years. In each alteration, there occurs extremely costs for translating all the official and non-official documents, creating new textbooks, and rewriting the history, not to mention transforming literate to illiterate. At his first years, Stalin pursued the legacy derived from Lenin, however, he realized the danger of nationalism spreading throughout the country. Together with the growth of Soviet patriotism and there occurred the threat of nationalistic movements towards Russian culture. Thus, he changed the nation-building policy towards the Russification³⁷ way and he discarded the policy called as Korenizatsiya³⁸. It was like going back to pre-Soviet times. From that time on, national languages lost serious values against the status of Russian that came with the

³⁶ Jacob M. Landau, "Language and Ethnopolitics in the ex-Soviet Muslim Republics" in Yaser Suleiman, ed., *Language and Identity in the Middle East and North Africa*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996, pp. 132-152.

³⁷ Shireen Hunter, "Religion, Politics, and Security in Central Asia", *SAIS Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2001, pp. 65-90. See also: Simon Crisp, "Soviet Language Planning 1917-53", Michael Kirkwood, *Language Planning In The Soviet Union*, London: Palgrave, 1990, pp. 23-45.

³⁸ Korenizatsiya or Indigenisation policy stands for: within each and every political unit was established the policy of korenizatsiya, or indigenisation. It was the policy through which titular national cultures were promoted and members of titular nationalities were given preference for state-controlled benefits such as education, housing, and employment. This policy was seen as necessary in order to minimize the dominance of Russians in the state and to promote equality among all national identities. Retrieved from: Salvatore Freni, "The Soviet Nationality Policy in Central Asia", *Inquiries Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2013. pp. 1-3.

Stalin's harsh Russification process. These policies were paved a way towards the centralization of the government. Moscow was in charge of everything. Thereby, Russian language became a must for whom would like to take part in any governmental institution or in any higher job occupation. After all, none of families were eager to send their children to local schools, rather they prefer to send them to Russian language-based schools.³⁹ In this context, the status of local languages over Russian were nothing more than inconsiderable.

In the light of these facts, the abuse of language policies adopted by Stalin has become clearer. Stalin utilized language policy as a tool for nation-building or in other words Russification. Afterward, people in Azerbaijan were alienated from their own language and nation, like the Soviet people had experienced. Even the local people wanted to send their children to Russian based schools in order to provide them a better future. This perception caused a backwardness on the nationalistic senses. Azerbaijani identity became insignificant and perceived as the secondary, less valuable nationhood.

After the Stalin's legacy, his successors continued to pursue Russification policies. At those years, the number of the schools serving in Russian continued to be increased while the number of schools serving in any other languages, in our case Azerbaijani languages were sharply decreasing.⁴⁰ Russian became more influential even in the media and local administrations. During 1970s, even Azerbaijan's government itself, underlined the importance of learning Russian as it has become the language of science, trade relations and official interactions.⁴¹ The official status of Azerbaijani language became less considerable under such circumstances.

³⁹ Aneta Pavlenko, "Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory", *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Vol. 11, Nos 3-4, 2008, pp 275-314.

⁴⁰ Aneta Pavlenko, "Russian As a Lingua Franca", *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 26, 2006, 78-99.

⁴¹ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *ibid*.

Furthermore, the promotion of education in Russian language, its improving role as a lingua franca among the nations lived under Soviet rule, carried its status to the highest point so far. even higher than it's ever been. Moreover, most of the secondary and higher education were thought in Russian.⁴² Thereby, other nationalities favored the education of Russian because of its acknowledged higher status. In the late 1970s, almost one out of two non-Russian people claimed fluency in Russian and almost 90 percent of the total population claimed knowledge of Russian.⁴³ On the other hand, Russian people did not claim any fluency or knowledge in any other national languages speaking in Soviet Union.

When we analyze the last years of the Soviet Union, we see the fact that, 30 percent of the total population in Azerbaijan claimed Russian as their native language or fluency even though the six percent of Russian population who were living in Azerbaijan at that times.⁴⁴ These numbers show how successful were the Soviet language policies as enhancing the status of Russian while decreasing the value of titular languages. However, it can be asserted that, as being a titular language, unlike other minority languages that were not regarded as titular, Azerbaijani language was more advantageous which enjoyed more or less some autonomy under the Soviet rule, even if it has never been treated equally with Russian.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it does not make Azerbaijani language as an influential or effective. Harsh Russification policies and promotion of Soviet patriotism that was started specifically during the Stalin's era, caused a significant loss of value in Azerbaijani language. Russian preserved its status as the language of inter-ethnic communication, thus, language policies where Russian

⁴² Isabelle T. Kreindler, "Soviet Language Planning since 1953", in Michael Kirkwood, *Language Planning In The Soviet Union*, London: Palgrave, 1990, pp. 46-63.

⁴³ Lenore Grenoble, *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Ayşe Pamir Dietrich, *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Aneta Pavlenko, "Russian As a Lingua Franca", *ibid.*

keeps its prominence, continued to be pursued.⁴⁶ Under the pressure of central government it was very hard for a titular nation to adopt its national language policy and even harder to maintain it due to the economic difficulties. Hence, these pressures were not just political but also economical. Even at the late 1980s, the position of Russian was not the subjected to any discussion. Parents continue to choose Russian over national languages. Although the end is on its way; language policy did not change. All the nations under Soviet rule were bounded somehow to centralized government which means in order to be able to survive, to maintain their economical existence and to pursue their trade relations with other states under the Soviet rule, they had to obey the commands of central government. In this context, under the influence of Russian language, Russification policies, and harsh pressure of communist party, Azerbaijani nation-building was precluded and the identity of Azerbaijani was ignored until the end of Soviet Era.

Nation-Building Process of the Post-Soviet Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan's Language Policies and The Other Nation-Building Aspects

Along with the dissolution of Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has declared its independency in 1991. As a result of that, Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic has become the Republic of Azerbaijan. From that time on, Azerbaijan has loaded a great amount of burden to deal with. As a matter of fact, it had to rebuild its nation and state all over. During the Soviet era, all the governmental institutions, administrative units were dependent to central government ergo communist party. Therefore, after the independency, they had to build them from the scratch. Furthermore, because of the policies during the Soviet Union, all the nations were created according to the Soviets' desires and interests. Soviets designed and invented all the nationalities.⁴⁷ As it has been mentioned above, culture and language of the Turkic states

⁴⁶ Isabelle T. Kreindler, *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Erol Kurubaş, *ibid*.

were destroyed and replaced with Russian one. Under these circumstances, Azerbaijan declared its independency. Because of the artificial nation that had been constructed by the Soviets, there was a lack of belonging and loyalty to the nationality that got independency with. In addition to that, due to the poor and incomplete nation-building policies implemented by Soviets, Azerbaijan like the other post-Soviet states, has faced with real the difficulties and complexities during their own nation-building. In this process, while trying to build their identity and nation-state, Baku maintained legacy derived from Soviet Union. During the process, it was realized that in order to achieve a successful nation-building process, they had to get rid of the Soviet impact. By doing so, they could be able to create their original shared values which makes them a nation "we-our own". On the other side of the process, whilst they were trying to advance in nation-building process, the war between Armenia and the pressure coming from Russia caused difficulties. Therefore, Azerbaijan got through this process painfully.

In brief, Azerbaijan's Nation-Building process contains several aspects: language policy, common culture, common history, ethnicity, religion, external enemy, territory, flag, and national prides.⁴⁸ After achieving sovereignty, they have taken great steps in these aspects. All these aspects carried a certain value for Azerbaijan nation-building process. At this point, there is a view that separates these aspects as formal (flag, national anthem and prides, common culture, common history and ethnicity) and essential elements (senses of solidarity, belonging, loyalty among the citizens).⁴⁹ According to that the formal elements ought to be utilized in a perfect harmony while constructing the essential aspects. This kind of nation-building method was not occurred in the example of Azerbaijan. Besides, it would not be consistent to divide or separate them as formal or essential aspects. All of them are at some point crucial without which

⁴⁸ Priyabrata Behera, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Erol Kurubaş, *ibid.*

the process would not be thoroughly accomplished. Though, the carried value and the role that they have taken over during the process, indeed, changes. Therefore, in order to understand the value and the role of these aspects, they are analyzed under two parts: language policies and the others.

Azerbaijan's Language Policies

After the dissolution of Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has passed through the de-Russification process. Briefly, it comprises the elimination of Russification's effects from all areas including language policies. In language policy sphere, it set forth the removal of Russian from all the official documents, communications and transactions.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the amount of the Azerbaijani speaking people was decreasing. Marriages with non-Azerbaijani people was one of the reasons of such decline. The other one was the insistence of Russian people not to learn Azerbaijani which in the end, forced non-Russian people to learn Russian in order to communicate and make trade relations.

With regard to the official document on the subject of Language published by the Azerbaijan's Presidential Library, after the law that was passed in December 1991, the process of turning back to Latin alphabet from Cyrillic was initiated.⁵¹ However, the transition of Azerbaijani language's alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin was highly slow. In 1992, Azerbaijan language with Latin alphabet has passed through several stages including the changing institutions names and media propaganda. In 1993, textbooks for secondary and higher education were published and language of instructions used in media was totally transformed into Azerbaijan language.⁵²

⁵⁰ Aneta Pavlenko, "Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory", *ibid*.

⁵¹ "Language", Administrative Department of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Presidential Library, http://files.preslib.az/projects/remz/pdf_en/atr_dil.pdf

⁵² *Ibid*.

Moreover, utilizing Latin in official documents and media; accepting English as *Lingua Franca* instead of Russian; Latin's common tie between the North and South Azerbaijani people, supported the spread of Latin and transition process from Cyrillic.

Along with the law passed at the end of the 1992, Turkic language was accepted as the state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan.⁵³ It was not only a provision which regulates its sphere (economic, cultural, political) but also the legally determination of the status of Turkic language. It was an important step to get rid of Russian effect over the state institutions and any other sphere. However, it caused another problem in the country. Because of the close relations with Turkey, government was criticized due to encouraging Turkic policies and promoting pan-Turkic ideas, instead of emphasizing a distinct, unique Azerbaijan identity. After the acceptance of Turkic language as a state language of the Republic of Azerbaijan, oppositions ascended.

Eventually, after the constitution adopted in 12 of November 1995 and came in to force 27 of November 1995, rather than Turkic language, Azerbaijan language was accepted as the state language (Section II, Article 21).⁵⁴ According to the same article, speaking of another language was not forbidden either. Moreover, with respect to provisions under Section III, Article number 45, right to use of native language and to get education in native language was guaranteed. Apart from that, any kind of discrimination or limitation of rights and freedoms because of the language origin was prohibited under the 25th Article. And lastly, with regard to Section VII, 127th Article, legal rights of the people who do not speak Azerbaijani were taken under protection. In this context, it would not be wrong to posit that while governments language policy was taking Azerbaijani under protection, it was not discriminating the other languages and rights of the other language speakers.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

As it has been mentioned above, the transition of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin was very slow as it was started in 1991 and ended with the decree given by President in 2001. Until that time, it had not been used widely in the higher in education. Furthermore, even newspapers and books continued to be pressed in Cyrillic alphabet. Even the edicts that have been declared by state officials were published in Cyrillic alphabet. After the decree in 2001, transition has been completed. In short, two alphabets had been used at the same time for 10 years.

One of the main goals that the governments tried to achieve in South Caucasus, was to closing Russian schools which were remained as the ruins from Soviet Union's Russification policies.⁵⁵ However, Azerbaijan was an exception that kept Russian schools.⁵⁶ The quantity of Russian schools have not been changed significantly since the independence. The number of the pupils attending in Russian schools between the years of 2000 and 2007 were almost the same.⁵⁷ On the other hand, pupils attending in Azerbaijani schools were higher than before, which means that the language policy that the government maintained, enhanced the status and usage rate of the Azerbaijani language whilst it was not affecting the prevalence of Russian.

Since the decree that ended alphabet transition, the official Latin based Azerbaijani has been using in fields such as the press, books, media, and official state documents.⁵⁸ Russian signs and names in the country start to have been replacing by the Azerbaijani ones *e.g.* town, city or street names. Since the constitution does not restrict or discriminate the use of any other, it is accepted that the state

⁵⁵ Jamala I. Mammadova, "Language Policy in Azerbaijan toward Sustainable Change", *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2013, pp. 68-74.

⁵⁶ Manushak Kevkhoyan, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ Ayşe Pamir Dietrich, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ Aneta Pavlenko, "Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries: Language Revival, Language Removal, and Sociolinguistic Theory", *ibid.*

language policy was not as harsh as Stalin's language policy towards other ethnic groups during the Soviet era or the Latvian's language policy against Russian after the collapse of the Soviets. The constitution allows the minority languages and Russian, however it does not ascribe Russian an official status like the Moldovans or Belorussians.⁵⁹ On the other side of medallion, while the state was promoting the use of Azerbaijani, it was also trying to prevent any possible uprising, conflict, or unrest among the minorities. It also tries not to take Russian Federation against them. Mainly because of two reasons: To get support in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh and Russian political impact over the Azerbaijan's domestic politics.

The Azerbaijani language was regarded as the most influential and improved one in the course of post-Soviet era. Along with the numerous decrees, it has improved the status of Azerbaijani and blocked Russian to become more influential. Moreover, during the following years in the post-Soviet Azerbaijan, if not immediately, the number of Russian populations living in Azerbaijan started to decrease because of enhancing status of Azerbaijani and Russian minorities lack of Azerbaijani knowledge.⁶⁰

In the same vein, there are several significant days for the Azerbaijani language which are considered as the elements of the nation-building process as well (9 August 2001 the day of Azerbaijani language and alphabet; January 2004 the promoting of the publications in Azerbaijani language; 18 September 2008 financial aid for the Azerbaijani representatives in the world literature.⁶¹ All of them signifies the importance of the Azerbaijani language and

⁵⁹ Ayşe Pamir Dietrich, *ibid.* See also: Aneta Pavlenko, "Russian As a Lingua Franca", *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Ayşe Pamir Dietrich, *ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶¹ "Holidays: Excerpt From The Labor Code of The Republic of Azerbaijan", *Official web-site of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, <https://static.president.az/media/W1siZiIsIjIwMTgyMDcvMjUvMnpwaWl6ZW1qb19lbmdfdmVyc2lvbl91cGRhdGUucGRmIl1d?sha=7932db49c03cbac0>.

aims to promote its status, therefore, regarded as important steps taken by the government.

Considering all the initiatives, decrees, laws, implementations over the years, government has paid serious time and attention to the language policy issue. Getting out of a serious Russification period and to satisfy the citizens demands, forced leaders to adopt such policies. Azerbaijanian people was wearisome of living under the affect or pressure of other country mostly derived from Russia, therefore, they even strongly opposed to the Turkic or Turkish affect. They realized that, adopting Turkish language would place them under the Turkish influence which was the last thing they ever wanted. Later on, the emphasis increased over the Azerbaijani language as a pure, unique and original just like the pure, unique and original Azerbaijani nation.

Language policies were at the center while implementing nation building policies. It is the mediator for citizens, indispensable tool for all the other nation-building aspects from history to culture. If a nation does not have a language and forced to live under a different of language in terms of Lingua Franca, then that nation fails to bond together. Language helps to create the notions of we and other, to provide the senses of togetherness, solidarity and loyalty which have mainly created the nation-building process. Thinking from the opposite where all the citizens speak different languages, then there cannot be nation-building process since these people cannot communicate with each other rather they would tend to create separate minor groups within each other's depending on the common language. Hence, Azerbaijanian officials were aware of that fact. They knew that in order to create their own nation, then they need a language through which the process could be completed. However, it ought to be strong, high-valued and needs to be acknowledged as privileged like the Russian in Soviet times. They need materials, documents, resources in Azerbaijanian and people wishes to learn it willingly or compulsory.

Despite all, Russian Federation's influence over Azerbaijan and Russian soft power in terms of Russian language; Russian economy and Russian literature have continued to be effective even during the de-Russification policies.⁶² Therefore, through promoting Azerbaijani against Russian in terms of financing Azerbaijani scientists, scholars, and academics; celebrating and creating special days for Azerbaijani, they tried to limit the Russian soft power.

Language policy has taken over a number of serious tasks. In order to maintain solidarity, sense of belonging and loyalty and to create the terms or the notions of 'we' versus 'others', language policies have been used widely and effectively. Likewise, language policies implemented during post-Soviet times have played a significant role while identify and underlining who Azerbaijani is and is not. Besides, it is not only utilized to create the nations of we or others, more significantly it consolidates the place of solidarity and sense of belonging among the nations. These two aspects cannot be achieved without the proper language policy. This is one of the most crucial parts of the nation-building process. Even if it sounds easy to construct it, it is highly complicated task to achieve. It consists of two different stages, either building over the we or building against the others. The uniqueness of language policy, it functions in either way.

Furthermore, language policies effectively serve to eliminate the influence of Russian and Russification over the citizens life as they had no longer need to learn Russian to be a government official or to get a job in higher positions. Of course, it's accepted as a plus to know second language, but the same thing is prevailing in any other states in terms of English, Russian, Chinese or else. The point is there, they do not have to learn it like they used to in Soviet times.

Creating sentiments among the nation is harder than creating a nation. Think of a repressed nation for almost 80 years in which, they

⁶² James Nixey, "The Long Goodbye: Waning Russian Influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia", London: Chatham House Briefing Paper, 2012.

had exposed serious nation destroying, assimilating policies that in the end caused an emptiness about the issue of where they belong or even who are they. In this context, language policies implemented by the Azerbaijani government in the way explained above, not only provided a path and led the way, where they belong but also minimize the external influence over the nation-building or identity building process. One story short, persistence of Azerbaijani language makes the Azerbaijan a true independent nation.

The other Nation-Building aspects

The other elements that have played a role in Azerbaijan's nation-building process are: Common culture, history, ethnicity, religion, external enemy, territory, flag, and national prides. In the context of Nation-building process, flag and national holidays or festivals carry quite important value. As being a sovereign, independent and unique nation; adoption of national days and festivals are an unavoidable process. After the declaration of independence, they started to celebrate 28th of May as the Republic day.⁶³ Moreover, despite the independence gained in October 1991, Russian influence and pressure continued. In addition to the aggression came from Armenia and civil war happened in 1993, President was changed and Haydar Alive took the office. Since then, 15th of June has been celebrating as the National Salvation day in Azerbaijan.⁶⁴ Furthermore, they adopted the 18th of October as the National Independence Day in the year of 1991.⁶⁵ In the sequel, anthem of Azerbaijan has been written. All these days are indicating the independence from the Soviet Union and the difference of Azerbaijani identity. The value of Azerbaijani nation and her uniqueness are being illustrated. The same point has been intended to be shown with the flag too. The current flag of Azerbaijan goes back to 1918 and after gaining the

⁶³ "Holidays: Excerpt From The Labor Code of The Republic of Azerbaijan", *Official web-site of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan*, *ibid*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*.

independence in 1991, it was modified. The flag of Azerbaijan contains 3 different color stripes:⁶⁶ Blue; red and green. The blue one symbolizes the Turkic origin; red puts forth the feature of being modern and democratic country and the green one indicates the Islamic origin, Islamic civilization that Azerbaijan belongs. Furthermore, there is crescent and eight-pointed star in flag. Former, symbolizes again the Turkic people and the latter indicates the word of Azerbaijan in old alphabet and the principles of the founder of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918). After all, only by examining the flag of the Azerbaijan, lots of information can be inferred. Its flag emphasis ethnicity, Turkic origin, Islamic civilization, national prides, history and so forth. All these have an important role in the nation-building process.

Ethnic nation-building briefly puts the ethnic origins into the center of nation-building process and approaches to the nations as natural consequence of ethnic structures.⁶⁷ If the ethnic communities live in the same place for centuries, they most likely share the same culture, history, cultural values and religion. Therefore, ethnicity is a best way to put forth similarities and differences between them. In this context, while nation builders are constructing a nation, they choose the ethnic identity that they belong. However, it does not necessarily mean that all the nation-building process have to be ethnic. In the case of Azerbaijan, there is an ethnic nation-building process but not based on the claims that we share the same ancestors, though they used the Turkic origin as an aspect, it did not shape the whole process according. It was mainly based on language and culture. The notions of we and others, are the necessary part of that kind of nation-building process which have been created by these two aspects. Even though their flag emphasize over Islam and Turkic origins, it was not the main case at first because, if they build

⁶⁶ "98-year old national flag: a source of national pride", *Azernews*, 9 November 2016.

⁶⁷ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 1988, pp. 249-264.

their nation over the Turkic aspects, then they cannot separate themselves from the other Turkic origin countries.⁶⁸ Islamic and Turkic identity are still regarded as supra-identity and preserves its importance but rather than Turkic, Islamic identity was preferred during the nation-building as we can inferred from the oppositions that were occurred against the adoption of Turkic language mentioned above.

While constructing the notions of we and others as enemies, Armenians and the Russians are accepted as the others. In case of ethnic nation-building process, the identity of others as significant as the identity of us. As a matter of fact, nations are constructing against them, hence identifying the external enemy is very crucial. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia is the perfect example to illustrate external enemy. Because of Karabakh, unrests began even the Soviet times before it had been abolished. When Azerbaijan declared her independence, Karabakh was the main conflict that they were dealing with. It was located in its territory and territorial integrity is crucial for nations and states, therefore, it is nothing more than a natural consequence. While identifying other in nation-building process, basically Karabakh conflict was guided them. Eventually, all these factors played a certain role in the Azerbaijan's nation-building and contributed to the process without a doubt.

Conclusion

Starting from the language policies implemented in Soviet Union as a part of their different political and economic interests, they had crucial effects over the Azerbaijani identity and Azerbaijan's nation-building process. The purpose of creating Soviet man, constructing different nations under the aim of divide and rule, were ruined the nations living under the Soviet rule. Along with the Lenin's language policies, and Stalin's harsh language planning under the Russification policies, the national identities were destroyed,

⁶⁸ Erol Kurubaş, *ibid.*

common culture was seriously damaged and replaced with Russian ones. During the 80 years, Azerbaijan's alphabets changed three times. People struggled with the learning new scripts. Families had to choose Russian over Azerbaijan's national language. Students who wanted to learn his/her national language, had to learn two different scripts. When the time came and the Soviet Union collapsed, Azerbaijan was left with a country without a nation. Nation consciousness were backwards. They were living a state that they had never felt fully bonded and connected. Loyalty was backward as well.

In this context, Azerbaijan was faced with obligation of proper nation-building which could eliminate all the aspects brought by Russification, bring stability and peace, provide solidarity and togetherness and eventually maintain the development of the Azerbaijani nation. In this nation-building process, there were several factors that been utilized serving for the mentioned purposes. They all had contributions over the process without a doubt in one way or another. But there was one other factor namely, language policy which have been the key factor in Azerbaijan nation-building process. The other factors namely common culture, history, ethnicity, religion, external enemy, territory, flag and national prides were maintaining and consolidating the role of language policies and nation-building process. In the meantime, language policies were at center while implementing the ethnic nationalism (not literally, not based on common ancestors or Turkic blood), creating the notions of we and other, providing the senses of togetherness, solidarity and loyalty which have mainly created the process. On the other hand, these policies were eliminating Russian effects and were promoting the nations development. As a conclusion, language policies were the key factor in Azerbaijan's nation-building process and were in a great harmony with of all the other factors of the process.

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