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GLOBALIZATION AND THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE COUNTRIES
OF SOUTH ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST
(THE CASES OF AFGHANISTAN, IRAN AND PAKISTAN)

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Abstract: *The article analyzes the role of English in the language policy of the Asian countries in the system of world globalization processes, seen from the viewpoint accepted in modern sociolinguistic literature on the connection between the language aspect of globalization and the spread of English as the global language, the universal second language. The authors note the historical component of the popularity of English in the modern world in general and in the countries under consideration, in particular. It includes the influence of the British Empire and the strengthening of the USA's position in the international arena. Estimated numbers of people speaking English both as the first and the second language in everyday life are also provided. The authors analyze large multiethnic states of South Asia and the Middle East such as Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The situation with the English language in these countries is presented against the background of the state and national languages' functioning. The authors made an attempt to show both general aspects of the use of English, including a view through the prism of the legislative acts imposed in these countries, particularly their constitutions, and the peculiarities of their functioning in each of these countries, including the influence of the language policy pursued by their leadership. The authors have also noted the growing interest of Iranian and Pakistani authorities in Russian and Chinese accordingly, as these languages may seriously compete with English in the future and break its monopoly.*

Keywords: globalization, the English language, national languages, language policy, Middle East, South Asia.

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The issues related to world globalization processes and their reflection at the level of individual countries have been the subject of discussion by the world community since the early 20th century. Thus, the definition of globalization as global integration in the spheres of economy, politics, culture and religion demonstrates the unification of inter-state systems and their functioning as an entity. The aspect of globalization in modern sociolinguistic academic works is associated with the spread of English as a world language, as a universal second language [Alpatov, 2004,

p. 23–27]. The English language with its numerous varieties and dialects plays an enormous role in the contemporary world. It is the official language of international organizations, particularly the UN; it largely covers such areas as business, science, world media, cinema, television, tourism, information technology.

English is ranked either second or third after Chinese and Spanish in terms of the number of people that consider it their native language, amounting up to 400–500 million people. At the same time, this figure increases significantly – up to 1.3–1.4 billion people when considering those for whom English is the second language actively used in everyday life. The wide spread of the English language was facilitated in the past by such circumstances as expansion of the British Empire's influence, and in the 20th century – by strengthening of the USA's position in the international arena.

The purpose of the article is to present the situation with the English language against the background of functioning of state and national languages in a number of countries of South Asia and the Middle East. Moreover, the article is aimed to show the peculiarities of its functioning in these countries, including the influence of the language policy pursued by their leaders, one of the priority areas for academic analysis and practical settlement of complicated national-linguistic relationship. The countries in the focus of the research are Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.

Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan are large multinational states of the Asian continent, with the population of about 40 million, 85 million and 208 million people, respectively. In addition to the religious similarity (these countries are Islamic republics), they have common traits in their historical development and cultural traditions. At the same time, there are several political, historical, geographical, ethnic and other factors that determine the specifics of their development paths. These features are also manifested in the existing language situations and language policies.

It is known that at least 24 languages are the means of communication for the population of Pakistan. At the same time, it is believed that four peoples – Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Baluchis, belonging to two language groups of the Indo-European family of languages – Indo-Aryan and Iranian, make up the absolute majority of the population of Pakistan – about 97%. A considerable part of Pakistanis know not only their native languages; many of them (mostly, literate urban population) also speak both English and Urdu, and in this regard, they are both bilingual and multilingual. At the same time, according to the constitution, it is Urdu that is the state language of Pakistan [*Foreign Orient*, 1986, p. 312].

Since the establishment of the state of Pakistan in 1947 and up to the present times, the country has adopted three constitutions – in 1956, 1962 and 1973. Each of them contained an article on the language, above all on the state language. As early as during the preparation and adoption of the first constitution, the ruling circles tried to make Urdu the state language. It should be noted that, despite the relatively small number of Urdu speakers – no more than 8% of the country's population, the native speakers of other languages did not organize any violent protests against its status of the state language. This can be explained by several reasons. Firstly, it is to a great extent socially and ethnically neutral for the majority of Pakistan's population in comparison with the languages of other ethnic groups living in the country. Secondly, Urdu has fairly high prestige in the country, since it is believed to embody Muslim culture, being close to the languages of other Muslim countries, particularly Arabic and Persian, as proved by a great number of Arabic and Persian words in Urdu. Moreover, the country's leadership and its religious leaders, guided by the two aforementioned factors in their choice of the state language, based their efforts on the fact that the internal state unity should be built on a single common language for the whole of Pakistan, and spread appropriate propaganda among its population [Nikolsky, 1986, p. 124, 127]. It should be noted that back in 1948, the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah, addressing the students of the University of Dhaka, emphasized that the Urdu language was the vehicle of

the Muslim culture, an important binding link of the new state. Therefore, in his opinion, this particular language should become the state language of Pakistan, and anyone who tries to mislead the people on this issue can be considered an enemy of the country [Quaid-i-Azam, 1962, p. 36].

At the same time, while the first two constitutions were in force, the issue of the status of the Bengali language was of significant value for the language policy in Pakistan. It lost its edge only in 1971 with the secession of East Bengal and the establishment of the independent state of Bangladesh. The constitution of 1973 declared Urdu the only state language of the country [Gankovsky, Moskalenko, 1975, p. 114]. Under this Constitution, Urdu became the language of inter-ethnic communication; the administration was required to use it both in the central apparatus and provincial institutions, as well as in legal proceedings, in the army and the police. It was used in the media, on radio and television. It was gradually acquiring strong positions in the cinema, as well as in the field of education – not only as a language of instruction, but also as a compulsory subject in secondary and higher educational institutions, especially in those specializing in humanities. Urdu remained the language of fiction and drama [Serenko, 2015, p. 303–309; *Foreign Orient*, 1986, p. 312–313].

However, until now, one of the main current issues regarding Urdu and of concern for the authorities and society has been the issue of granting it the status of the only official language in the country, which is associated with the high status of the English language and its role in the life of Pakistani society. It is associated with the high status of the English language and its role in the life of Pakistani society. Conflicts between Urdu and English arise constantly. Thus, according to media reports, in 2015 the president, prime minister, federal and provincial ministers and civil servants were required to speak exclusively Urdu in public, both at home and abroad [Haider, 2015]. In 2016, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif demanded that the paper work of all government ministries and departments should be in Urdu, and the country's Supreme Court appealed to the federal and provincial governments that the legal proceedings should also be converted to Urdu as soon as possible – within 30 days, in spite of the lack of practice in conducting trials in Urdu among both judges and lawyers and insufficiently developed judicial terminology [Pakistani Prime minister, 2016; Urdu implementations, 2016].

At the same time, a part of the Pakistani society has its own view on the problems of the country's language development, different from the official one. For instance, famous Pakistani writer, literary critic and publicist Monsour Ejaz, who lives in the United States, believes that nothing is more harmful for national unity than creating highly favorable conditions for only one language. In his opinion, the statement that linguistic diversity threatens national unity is absolutely groundless, and if the language policy remains unchanged and the dominance of Urdu and English is preserved, the cultural gap and economic poverty will remain in Pakistani society [*Urdu and English*, 2018]. Ali Raj, an author of the Herald magazine, notes skeptically that after almost 44 years (as of 2017) since the adoption of the latest constitution, the process of introducing the Urdu language into the life of the country is far from complete, and in many areas it hasn't even started yet [Raj, 2017].

The issue of granting Urdu the status of the only official language in the country is associated, as noted above, with the use of English in Pakistan, which, according to the country's constitutions, is granted a high legal status of the official language, which largely corresponds to its real role in Pakistani society and represents an example of a realistic approach in the legislative acts reflecting the socio-functional stratification of the languages used in the country. The law gives it the second most important place among the languages existing in Pakistan. It is quite obvious that such a decision is rooted in the historical past and is closely related to it. All three constitutions recognized the English language as an official one, differing only in the length of the time period for which such a language policy is intended. Thus, the 1956 constitution provided for its use over a twenty-year period; the 1962 constitution established no time limits; and the 1973

constitution again limited the period of English's functioning as an official language to fifteen years [*Constitutions of the Near and Middle East States*, 1956, p. 373; Gankovsky, Moskalenko, 1975, p. 63, 114]. It should be noted that even today, despite the expiration of the aforementioned time period, the English language still plays a significant role in many spheres of Pakistani public life. It is used in administrative management, in domestic and foreign policy activities, economy, social sphere, higher and partly secondary education, science, mass media; it is a means of everyday communication among the upper strata of Pakistani society that consider knowledge of the English language a prerequisite for their social mobility and successful career [*Foreign Orient*, 1986, p. 312–313]. There is an opinion that initially it was English rather than Urdu that was the language of the elites, which was rooted in the days of the British Empire. It remained the language of senior government officials, the upper strata of Pakistani society and the means of higher education [Lieven, 2012, p. 63; Vasilyeva, 2020, № 2, p. 352, 354–356]. The policy regarding the use of Urdu and English in educational institutions has often reached the point of absurdity. The issue of the language of instruction was resolved by their administration, and sometimes different subjects within the same educational institution were taught in different languages, usually Urdu and English.

Despite the fact that the 15 year timeframe of the functioning of English as the official language in Pakistan under the latest constitution has already long expired, its position in Pakistani society remains stable. It seems that this objective trend will continue to prevail in the future; moreover, it is in the mainstream of world globalization processes. Nowadays there are still many supporters and advocates of the English language among Pakistanis. For instance, the article titled “Urdu Ignored. Pakistanis Forget their Native Language” was published in the leading Pakistani newspaper “The Nation”. According to it, “today English is present in practically everything: textbooks, exam materials or interviews. Even in everyday communication, English is used instead of Urdu. If a Pakistani is asked a question in Urdu, he will not be able to answer it correctly, and a question in English will be answered immediately”. The author of the article draws attention to the fact that the Urdu language is being forgotten, and this poses a problem that should be tackled. It is not for nothing that there is a catchphrase in Pakistani society that if you have one good suit and can speak English fluently, you definitely will not starve [Husain, 2017].

One of the notable language phenomena in contemporary Pakistan is the emergence and widespread use of Urdish, a hybrid use or mixing of English and Urdu; for example, all nouns in a sentence can be English and only functional words and verbs can be native. This linguistic phenomenon was first recorded in 1989, and, as noted by L.A. Vasilyeva, a prominent expert in Pakistan studies, currently it covers most population segments and all areas of life, causing concern in academic circles [Vasilyeva, 2020, p. 147–148]. At the same time, one should note the introduction of Urdish as a unique means of education within the framework of the Pakistani Knowledge Movement, launched in 2015 and supported by the government [Vasilyeva, 2020, p. 148]. On the one hand, the emergence and establishment of Urdish in Pakistani society proves the fact that with the support of the country's authorities, Urdu does not yield its position, on the other hand, English does not take a back seat and continues to be the most important factor of Pakistani society's existence.

The information appearing in the media that the Chinese language may gradually supplant English in Pakistan is also noteworthy. This was announced by Minister of Reform, Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal at the World Economic Forum back in 2017. In his opinion, Chinese is currently the second most popular language in the country after English. This is due to the implementation of inter-regional cooperation with China's participation in a number of projects, including the “Belt and Road initiative”. In addition, as the minister said, Pakistan is apparently ranked first in terms of the number of foreign students studying in China [*Chinese is gradually replacing*, 2017].

Regarding Iran, more than 40 large and small peoples, tribes and ethnic groups live there. They speak mainly Iranian (Persian, Kurdish, Baluch, Gilan, Mazendaran, etc.), Turkic (Azerbaijani and Turkmen, dialects of Turkic-speaking nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes) and Semitic (dialects of Arabic and Assyrian) languages. A special place is occupied by the languages of ethno-confessional minorities – Armenians and Jews that use the Eastern Armenian dialect of the Armenian language and Hebrew Persian, respectively, within their communities. In everyday life, the non-Persian population of Iran is forced to use Persian along with their native language. Many Iranians are bilingual, and in some parts of the country they speak three languages [Kameneva, 2017, p. 85–86].

In Iran, the issue of the state language was resolved differently from the policies adopted in Pakistan. To date, the country has adopted two constitutions. The first of them, adopted in 1906 and marking the transformation of Iran into a constitutional monarchy, did not legally record the status of any language functioning on its territory. However, for many decades up to the Islamic revolution of 1979, the language policy of the Iranian leadership was characterized by the forcible imposition of the Persian language among the non-Persian population of Iran, de facto making Persian the only official national language throughout the country [Kameneva, 2017, p. 88]. It was the new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, adopted in 1979, that declared the Persian language “the only official and state language for all peoples inhabiting the country” de jure and legalized its high social status [*The Constitution of the Islamic*, 1979].

In fact, unlike Pakistan, in Iran the Persian language had no alternative for the role of the state one. None of the national languages, even of such large ethnic groups as Azerbaijanis and Kurds, could compete with it. Several factors contributed to this. Unlike Urdu, Persian and its dialects are communication means for about half of Iran’s population. For a long time, the language policy has been aimed at its cultivation and propaganda. Moreover, Persian is a language with deep cultural and historical traditions. At the same time, none of the other languages in Iran had such a long literary tradition as Bengali in Pakistan. In addition, the number of speakers of each of these languages did not exceed the number of Persian speakers. A great role was also played by the policy of great-power Iranian nationalism, pursued in the Shah’s Iran. It was aimed at creating a united Iranian nation, one of the main features of which was the Persian language.

In modern Iran, the Persian language, like Urdu in Pakistan, is used in various spheres of the country’s public life, such as administrative and legal proceedings, instruction in schools, higher education institutions and vocational training; numerous newspapers and magazines are published in Persian; radio and television programs are broadcast in Persian as well. There is a plethora of Persian fiction. The Iranian leadership pays great attention to the development and improvement of the Persian language. It considers it an important feature of the Iranian nation, a symbol of the ancient Iranian culture, an instrument for the consolidation and integration of the country’s ethnic groups. Persian is also used as a consolidating factor within the Iranian diaspora abroad. It is also viewed as an important component of the international aspect of cultural and linguistic policy pursued by the Iranian government.

With a certain similarity in the communicative functions of Urdu in Pakistan and Persian in Iran, there are significant differences in the breadth of coverage and the existing communication fields of these languages, which is associated with the official use of English in Pakistan that is granted a high legal status under the country’s constitutions.

In Iran, despite the fact that none of the Western European languages had their status fixed in the Constitution of 1906, from early 20th century until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, at first mainly French, and then English played an essential role in the life of Iranian society. The language reorientation from French to English began after the end of World War II and was actively conducted over the next several decades until the Islamic Revolution. Periodicals were published in English, radio and television programs were broadcast in English as well. Western

European languages, primarily English, were taught at schools and higher educational institutions; fiction, textbooks, bilingual dictionaries were published in them. English began to play a primary role in the expansion of the terminological system of the Persian language. At the same time, knowledge of English was not that widespread due to strong positions of the unique national Iranian culture and traditions, as well as the existence of constant opposition to Western influence in the Iranian public opinion. The increasing impact of the English language on Iranian society was linked to the growing political and economic influence of the United States, as well as the strengthening of economic, trade and other ties with English-speaking countries.

However, the Islamic revolution, which had a pronounced anti-Western character, failed to significantly damage the positions of English and other European languages in Iran. Over the first years after the revolution, their authority was deliberately underestimated as a result of the new government's language policy, which sought both to limit their use in the life of Iranian society and combat the infiltration of Anglicisms and borrowings from other European languages into the vocabulary of the Persian language. This trend could be further demonstrated by the prohibition of teaching Western European languages at primary schools, reducing the number of academic hours of these foreign languages in secondary schools from six to four per week, disbanding all foreign schools in the country, renaming streets and squares named in the Western style, closing most periodicals in European languages, ceasing radio and television broadcasts in English, prohibiting the use of European words in public institutions, as well as some other acts [Keyhan, 1979, 1980].

However, Iran's trade and economic relations, business contacts with Western partners and overseas education of Iranian students that continued even after the Islamic revolution forced the country's government to show certain tolerance for the Western influence on Iranian society. Thus, in the higher educational institutions of the country, the study of English and French was continued. There were special English and German courses for students going to study abroad and for applicants to higher educational institutions.

The late 1990s and the following decades were a period of enhanced role of the English language in the social life of the Islamic Republic of Iran, of its growing prestige and level of proficiency, especially among young people that constitute significant part of the country's population.

Gradually, the position of English and other Western European languages has been largely restored in most areas compared to the pre-revolution period; they occupied a certain niche in the language functioning system in Iran. They are still studied at schools and higher educational institutions, as well as at special language courses; fiction and scientific literature are published in English; the news channel Press TV is in English; three newspapers – “Tehran Times”, “Iran Daily” and “Financial Tribune” are published in English; the Internet is in English as well. Large news agencies such as IRNA and ISNA have English versions along with Persian. There are radio broadcasts in the main Western European languages for foreign audiences. At the same time, in the last decade, the issues of English's dissemination and functioning in Iran have acquired some political overtones. Discussions on this issue reached the public level exacerbating the relationship between the spiritual leader, an ardent anti-Westerner, and then-President Rouhani, who advocated the need to study English in particular and Western European languages in general. Continuing this discussion, one can remember Iran's decision not to support the Document 2030 on Education (developed and adopted by UNESCO in 2015) when its phased implementation started in May 2017. Moreover, one should mention the ban on learning English in public and private primary schools of the country imposed as a result of late December 2017 – early January 2018 protests that were supposedly masterminded by the West, according to certain groups [Discussion, 2016; Iran won't submit, 2017; English at school, 2018].

The rise of new President Ebrahim Raisi and the new Cabinet of Ministers to power may possibly make significant changes in the life of the Iranian society. These bodies, along with the

previously elected parliament – the Majlis of the Islamic Council, represent a conservative trend in modern Iranian political discourse capable of exerting certain influence on various spheres of the country's life, including the field of culture and cultural policy. The English language may become the object of discrimination in the cultural and language fields.

It is worth noting that both the sentiments in Pakistan regarding the possibility of replacing English with Chinese and the ideas in Iranian and Russian official circles to replace English with Russian seem to be unrealistic. This, for example, was discussed in 2018 during the visit of Iranian Minister of Education Seyed Mohammad Bathaee to Russia at the negotiations with representatives of Russian Ministry of Education and Science. The goal of cooperation between the ministries of the two countries in the language field, as it was stated, was to break the monopoly of the English language. This is obviously impossible, not only due to the difficulty of mastering the Russian language, but also due to the fact that English is an important component of world globalization processes that include both Iran and Russia [*Iran intends*, 2018].

Regarding Afghanistan, its population speaks more than 30 languages and dialects belonging to various language families: Indo-European (Iranian and Indian groups), Turkic-Mongolian, Semitic-Hamitic and Dardic. Two languages have always had national importance: Pashto, the native language of the majority in this country, and Dari, the language with a long-standing literary tradition that has dominated the formal aspects of the region's life since the Middle Ages. These particular languages have always competed with each other for the dominant position in Afghan society. This process actively continues at the present time. This fact is reflected in most constitutions of Afghanistan, the number has reached seven since 1919 when the country gained independence.

Considering Western European languages, primarily English, and to a lesser extent German and French, their role in the life of Afghan society has received little coverage in academic literature and were not recorded in any way in legislative acts. Certainly, they were not removed from use, since the country had contacts with the outside world, sent young people to study abroad, primarily to English-speaking countries; foreign specialists worked in Afghanistan. However, for example, in comparison with Iran during the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, the situation with the spread of Western European languages in Afghanistan was a pale image of the situation in Iran.

In terms of teaching European languages in Afghan schools, one can assume that these cases were isolated, since in Afghanistan as a whole, the education system of various historical periods has been to a greater or lesser extent under strong pressure of the religious factor: madrasahs, where the religious curriculum excludes the teaching of any Western language, have largely prevailed over secular schools. According to eyewitnesses, during the reign of Zahir Shah, there also were separate foreign schools, where the most common European languages were used in the education process. Considering the periodicals published in the country, only one daily newspaper, "The Kabul Times", later renamed "The Kabul New Times" has been published in English since 1978. Since the mid-1950s, Bakhtar information agency has sent out English newsletters to foreign missions. Later the agency became the basis for the English-language newspaper "The Kabul Times". As for radio broadcasting, the first radio broadcasts for foreign audiences in English and German, along with Pashto and Dari, were launched in 1941 [*Afghanistan*, 2000, p. 224–227].

In this context, the data of the sample statistical surveys of people who speak English as first and second language are of interest. For example, in 2006, the first group amounted to 0%, and the second – to 8%; in 2013 the total percentage of those who claimed to belong to both groups was 5%, and in 2018 – 6%. At the same time, the number of participants in the experiment was gradually increasing year by year; by 2018 it has increased considerably. All these data are certainly an estimate; nevertheless, they seem to reflect reality [The Asian Foundation. Afghanistan, 2006].

Unlike Iran, for example, the English language in Afghanistan is not a subject of political conflicts and bargaining within the high-level political elites. Nevertheless, information that the

Taliban prohibited its use in the territory of Afghanistan under their control has already appeared in the media [*The Taliban banned*, 2001].

Currently in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, English is used as a means of communication exclusively in the informal sphere. The official aspects of life are dominated by Dari and Pashto. It is widely known that the country's parliament gave the Minister of Trade the no-confidence vote because he spoke neither Dari nor Pashto. In contemporary Afghanistan, it is considered prestigious to be fluent in English. In the public schools of large cities, English as a subject starts in fourth grade, but the level of both the educational process organization and the knowledge gained by students is low. Moreover, there are lots of English language courses. Private schools and higher education institutions which are numerous in the country achieve significantly better results. The capital of the country is home to the Kabul American University, where English is the language of instruction and its diplomas are recognized abroad. One can state that despite the peculiar character of the language situation in the country, with two state languages, Dari and Pashto, and the language policy aimed at strengthening their position in the country, due to gradual integration into the world globalization processes the government of Afghanistan pays attention to the English language as one of their important components.

One has to admit that most of the aforementioned points on the position of the English language in Afghanistan has apparently become part of the country's history. It is clear that the Taliban movement's coming to power will radically change the situation in the Islamic republic and bring significant changes to the modern Afghan society, making it much more archaic, which will also be reflected in the cultural and language aspects.

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