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ON THE FIRST RUSSIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE CAUCASUS AND THE TEACHING OF THE AZERBAIJANI LANGUAGE

SOBRE LAS PRIMERAS ESCUELAS PÚBLICAS RUSAS EN EL CÁUCASO Y LA ENSEÑANZA DEL IDIOMA AZERBAIYANO

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ABSTRACT

The 19th century was a very complicated and momentous period in the history of the Azerbaijani state; As a result of the signing of the Gulustan and Turkmenchay treaties, the national territory was divided in two, which caused certain difficulties for the people. The tsarist occupation tried by various means to add the population of the new colony to its interests and objectives, for which education played a fundamental role. However, despite attempts to undermine national unity, the growing access to education was forming a group of intellectuals who in the future would lead the national liberation movements, and in the same way helped to promote and preserve identity, and traditional values of the nation. For this, the dissemination of the Azerbaijani language in educational processes was very relevant, whose analysis constitutes the main objective of this research.

Keywords:

Azerbaijan, education, history, mother tongue.

RESUMEN

El siglo XIX fue un período muy complicado y trascendental en la historia del estado azerbaiyano; Como resultado de la firma de los tratados de Gulustan y Turkmenchay, el territorio nacional se dividió en dos, lo que provocó ciertas dificultades para el pueblo. La ocupación zarista intentó por diversos medios sumar a la población de la nueva colonia a sus intereses y objetivos, para lo cual la educación jugó un papel fundamental. Sin embargo, a pesar de los intentos de socavar la unidad nacional, el creciente acceso a la educación fue formando un grupo de intelectuales que en el futuro liderarían los movimientos de liberación nacional, y de la misma manera ayudaron a promover y preservar la identidad y los valores tradicionales de la nación. Para ello, fue muy relevante la difusión de la lengua azerbaiyana en los procesos educativos, cuyo análisis constituye el principal objetivo de esta investigación.

Palabras clave:

Azerbaiyán, educación, historia, lengua materna.

INTRODUCTION

A language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols used by people in a shared culture to communicate with each other. A language both reflects and affects a culture's way of thinking, and changes in a culture influence the development of its language (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2006). Interest in studying the relationship between language and culture can be traced back at least to the eighteenth century. Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767–1835), Franz Boas (1858–1942), Edward Sapir (1884–1939), and Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941) are prominent scholars who all emphasized the relationship between language, thought, and culture (Sharifian, 2014).

According to Luscombe & Kazdal (2014) Azerbaijan's Turkic–Azerbaijani language has its roots in ethnic dynasties and tribal khanates – medieval nomadic-political entities ruled by a sovereign or military ruler, or khan. Prior to the Russian conquest of the South Caucasus as a result of the Russo-Persian wars of 1804–1813 and 1826–1828, Azerbaijan was linguistically a Turkic–Persian society, heavily influenced by centuries of rule by Turkish and Iranian dynasties. Persian itself retained significant symbolic and cultural capital as a literary language, with some of Azerbaijan's classical writers having written in Persian and various Azerbaijani-Turkic dialects. The Turkic tribes *“provided for the development of a Turkic vernacular language that would eventually become the present-day Azerbaijani language... [with] strong Persian influence in its vocabulary”*. (Cornell, 2011, p. 6)

However, the Russian colonization of the Caucasus in the 19th century disrupted the traditional development of this region, forcing it to face the East-West dilemma (Baghirova, 2019). As the national leader Aliyev (2001), pointed out: *“The course of historical processes during this period led to the fact that the Gulustan and Turkmenchay agreements signed in 1813-1828 divided Azerbaijan, its historical lands, divided our people”*. (p. 11)

Due to these treaties one-third of Azerbaijani lands came under Russian rule while the rest remained within Iran (Bolukbasi, 2011). Then, as a result of the division of the country into two parts, Azerbaijani people faced great trials and difficulties. Thus, the occupation of the northern part of Azerbaijan by Russia created conditions for the establishment of a colonial system in the region.

In general, during this occupation, both the Russian and Persian-Iranian governments tried to erase the name of the country and the people from the world political map. They made special efforts to erode the national consciousness,

national identity and ethnic thinking among the local population. As a result of the occupation, they used official power structures and information and propaganda means to move away people from their traditions and cultural treasures that they had amassed for thousands of years.

However, regardless of the colonial goals of tsarism, along with political, legal, social and economic changes, the Russian conquest brought some innovations into the spiritual and cultural field. Firstly, the Muslim peoples included in the empire were able to familiarize themselves with the progressive culture and social and political doctrines of Europe. Regarding Azerbaijan, it should also be noted that the contact between the two civilizations, the European one represented by Russia and the traditional Muslim civilization, resulted in the appearance of a new social stratum – the Azerbaijani intelligentsia (Rahmanzade, 2019). Thus, the policy of Russification did not justify itself. On the contrary, it led to the formation of a generation of great intellectuals who developed the education and culture of Azerbaijan serving as a catalysis for progress and eventually led the growing liberation movement in Northern Azerbaijan in the early XX century, despite the control and punitive measures and bans of the administrative-police apparatus (Oglu, 2021).

In the words of national leader Aliyev (2001), *“the roots of our success in the twentieth century, including our determination to build an independent state, must be traced back to our distant and recent history, especially in the sources formed in the nineteenth century. These sources were reflected in the very successful creative activity of some prominent personalities, rare personalities such as Abbasgulu aga Bakikhanov and Mirza Kazim bey, and were directly related to the realization of national enlightenment ideas. It was during this period that a democratic press, a mother tongue school and a secular theater were established in Azerbaijan, which gave a strong impetus to the formation of national consciousness”*. (p. 11)

Thus, these provisions of our national leader Aliyev's “Address to the people of Azerbaijan on the occasion of the New Year 2001, the new century and the third millennium” are a logical proof and confirmation of the opinion that the XIX century was very important in the later achievements in the fields of culture, education and the national press in Azerbaijan. Most importantly, a modern bourgeoisie was formed in Azerbaijan and began to play an important role in the public life of the country. During this period, the activities of Azerbaijani intellectuals in various fields served the processes of national revival, national awakening, and inculcation of national spirit. Thus, the course of complex socio-political processes that began in

the 19th century led to fundamental changes in Azerbaijani society.

Indeed, since that time, the culture of the people in Northern Azerbaijan, which had been developing in contact with Islamic culture for more than a thousand years, gained opportunities to develop and form in parallel with a new culture, the science, culture and pedagogy of Russia and Western European. The awakening and movement of the national spirit, national spirituality and national culture began, which laid the foundation for the subsequent spiritual and cultural transformations to determine the direction of content, to be enriched with new development trends. Then the aim of this article is to discuss the importance of using the Azerbaijani language in this process.

DEVELOPMENT

According to Abizada & Seyidova (2021), the language of instruction plays a critical role in learning. The first language children learn is considered their mother tongue and instruction in the first language of the learner is defined as mother tongue-based education. Specialists believe that instruction of the content is best done in a language to which the learners are proficient and for this reason UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction for young learners in early childhood and primary education since 1953.

As pointed out by Milligan (2020), decades of research demonstrate that the use of a dominant language as the medium of instruction negatively affects learners' ability to both learn that language and access the wider curriculum. The results are strikingly similar: limited access to schooling; high repetition, failure, and dropout rates; poor quality of education; and low learner self-esteem – all of which are well documented. While acknowledging that the language factor does not stand alone, Walter (2008), found a distributional relationship between learners' access to education in their first language (L1) and level of national development, demonstrating that countries that do not provide access to L1 education experience the lowest levels of literacy and educational attainment worldwide.

Given that language is so fundamental to community and self, it should be no surprise that learning a new language is a challenge. When we study a new language, we do much more than acquire knowledge. We must set aside our normal way of being ourselves. We must step out of our comfort zone, both individually and culturally. When we use a foreign language in unfamiliar settings, we are at a psychological and social disadvantage (Shaules, 2019).

For this reason language has been like a weapon use to dominate and convey power. As pointed out by Strathern

& Stewart (2019), language use is always closely related to the exercise of power, whether ideological power as expressed in semantic categories, such as the idea of the "institution" and its production of institutional "persons," or discursive power as in the work of Michel Foucault. This question of power further feeds into the numerous contexts in which language usages are brought into play in the service of politics, the construction of national imaginaries, ethnic and religious conflicts, among others.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the khanates of Northern Azerbaijan lost their independence as a result of the colonial policy of the Russian Empire. Azerbaijan was included in the Russian state as a colonial territory, fell into a new ampoule of socio-economic and cultural development, which, as in other areas, allowed the emergence of new forms of pedagogical thought, schools, public education institutions. Of course, although the tsarist colonial intentions took place in the lands of Northern Azerbaijan, however, a large part of the country was able to communicate with the progressive socio-economic and cultural life of Western Europe through Russia. In this time of Azerbaijani school and education history, the renewal, the tendency to keep pace with the times and secularism intensified, and enlightened meetings between certain segments of the population, even though they are trapped in the grip of colonialism, increase significantly.

In any case, in a peaceful environment, there could be a gradual revival in the cultural life of the country, the formation of certain development trends, and indeed this aspect did not take long. It was obvious that in the 30s and 40s of the century there was a significant revival in the cultural life of the country. Abbasgulu aga Bakikhanov, Ismayil bey Gutgashinli, Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Mirza Kazim bey and other intellectuals, who wore the pagodas and uniforms of the tsarist government, received the cross on their chests, the highest awards of the empire. Leading and progressive khans and beys in the regions considered science, knowledge and enlightenment as resort and a very powerful means of influence, and they support every step taken in this field, providing personal assistance and donations. For example, the efforts of the Kangarli khans Ehsan khan and his sons (Kalbali khan and Ismayil khan), representing the highest class in Nakhchivan, for the purpose of landscaping and spreading cultural events were also the demolition of the horizons of enlightenment.

The schools established by the Russian state had a special significance in the establishment and spread of the enlightenment movement in Azerbaijan. First of all, the content of education in these schools was to a certain extent in line with the requirements of the time. At the heart of education was secularism. As Professor Huseyn Amadov

wrote, *“the first schools opened by the state brought something new: new textbooks and teaching aids were written, a new group of intellectuals studying in Russian grew up”* (Ahmadov, 2006, p. 38)

But it is also true that tsarism tried to achieve colonial goals in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus in general to cultivate, to govern the local population, to bring them up as loyal subjects of the remedy. From the first years, they tried to use various ways and means to realize his intentions. As one of the means, the school considered it especially important to educate the local population within the framework of education in line with the goals of the empire.

Although the Russian government opened secular schools in the Caucasus, it did not allow them to expand. The government tried to ensure that the service of these schools did not go beyond training a group of officials who could work in the tsar's local offices. In these schools, teaching was conducted in Russian, and local languages - Azerbaijani - were taught as a subject. Therefore, graduates of these schools were able to hold junior positions in local government and work as translators. Taking into account all these aspects, the Russian government from the first days and years of the colonial occupation made serious efforts to realize its intention to open schools in the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan.

The first school opened by the tsarist government in the Caucasus was the Tbilisi Nujaba School. Founded on January 18th, 1801, the school was designed for the children of Georgian nobles and Russian government officials. The grand opening of the school actually took place on September 22nd, 1802. Talented pedagogue, one of the first and well-known researchers of Caucasian education Modzalevsky (1880), wrote about this event in his book “The course of educational work in the Caucasus 1802 by 1880” based on official sources of the time: in Tbilisi, Nujaba school worked intermittently in the first years. The content of teaching here was based on the content of the curriculum of gymnasiums. Due to the complexity of the content of education, the number of subjects taught and the high level of difficulty, the lack of teaching aids, etc. the school soon closed for various reasons.

According to Georgian researchers, students' failure to succeed in teaching in a foreign language (Russian) led to insults and swearing, which was a major factor in increasing children's truancy. In such a way they did not want to recognize the centuries-old culture and enlightenment of the Georgian people, considering them to be uncivilized, and pretending to be “the first to bring the light of enlightenment to Georgia”. Something similar happened in Azerbaijan.

Tbilisi Nujaba School was not only the first Russian state school in the whole Caucasus, but as well the first secular educational institution in the history of the region in terms of educational content. Although the school was originally intended for the children of Georgian nobles and tsarist officials, but at the same time children of other Caucasian peoples - Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Imereti and others - could study at this educational institution. Research shows that Azerbaijani children educated there, since the first years of the establishment of the Tbilisi Nujaba School, achieved good results in training. We are acquainted with a fact confirming our opinion in the official letter of the Chief Judge of the Caucasus, General Field Marshal Count Ivan Vasilyevich Gudovich, sent to the Russian Minister of Public Education on July 27th, 1807, regarding the results of the school's 1807 academic year. In the letter, General Field Marshal Count IV Gudovich spoke specifically about the issues of education in the Tbilisi Nujaba school and noted such an interesting aspect: “I personally inspected and analyzed the Tbilisi Nujaba school. I was completely satisfied with the good discipline and tidiness there.

This aspect allows us to say that the Tbilisi Nujaba School (since 1830, the Tbilisi 1st Gymnasium) has left a certain mark on the history of education of the Caucasian peoples, including the Azerbaijani people. First of all, the place of this educational institution in our educational history is that, as a Russian state school, the Azerbaijani language was taught here for the first time.

We know this because as early as 1810, the then chief judge of the Caucasus, Alexander Petrovich Tormasov, while preparing the “Preliminary Rules” of the Tbilisi Nujaba Military School, which he wanted to open in Tbilissi (Georgia), stated in paragraph 9 of the document: Tbilisi Nujaba Military School is divided into two departments, different sciences are taught to the students in each department for 4 years. In the first section 1) Georgian literature; Russian, French and German languages and their grammatical rules, as well as Tatar (Azerbaijani - VR), this language is used not only in all of Asia, but also in a significant part of Europe. Knowledge of this language is especially important for every officer in this country”. (Glavnago Directorate of Intentions of the Caucasus, 1870)

In 1819, on the basis of the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasus, General Yermalov, fundamental changes and renovations were carried out at the Tbilisi Nujaba School. The material base of the school was significantly expanded. The school was transformed into a 5th grade educational institution. Certain changes were made in the content of the training. Military and applied sciences - geodesy, situation (a set of symbols on the map and in the plan), civil architecture, desert fortification sciences

and dance took a special place in the curriculum. Latin and German, taught since 1807, were removed from the curriculum and replaced by Azerbaijani as an independent subject.

Many sources confirm that all the peoples of the Caucasus knew this language. In the Caucasus, including the Stavropol Gymnasium, the Azerbaijani language was taught as a subject. In the emergency schools of the Transcaucasian provinces, the Azerbaijani language was considered a compulsory subject for all students, regardless of nationality (Glavnago Directorate of Intentions of the Caucasus, 1881). There are many facts that even high-ranking Russian officials sent to the Caucasus to work learned the Azerbaijani language.

The tsarist policy of governing the indigenous peoples also considered it important for the children of Russian officials studying in public schools in the Caucasus to learn the local languages, especially the Azerbaijani language. Of particular interest in the "Project on Improving the Education of the Transcaucasian Country", which was sent to the Russian Ministry of Public Education in 1834, is the fact that children who succeeded in learning the Azerbaijani language won gold or silver medals.

The great prestige of the Azerbaijani language as a means of communication throughout the Caucasus, in a short time, caused the attention and interest in the development of the scientific basis of this language, especially the perfect grammar. Together with Azerbaijani teachers, they joined the work on preparing textbooks and other teaching aids on the methodology of teaching the language to teachers of other nationalities. On the other hand, the development of a group of teachers teaching this language in existing public schools was in the public interest. It should be noted that during our research on the problem it was possible to obtain at least some information about the identity of the first Azerbaijani language teacher at the Tbilisi Nujaba school.

We learn from the Memoirs by Kipiani (1886), who studied at the Nujaba School in Tbilissi (Georgia), that Mirza Jafar Tushmalov, a teacher of the Azerbaijani language at the school (for some reason, the author of the memoir spells Mirza Jafar's surname as Tushmanov), was the first on duty. Due to a dispute which turned into a conflict, the head of the school, Shipulin, addressed the higher distances with a report, taking into account the seriousness of the conflict. The conflict was discussed with the Governor of Tbilisi for Civil Affairs, General Hoven, in his personal presence. Regardless of which side was right in the conflict, this event in "Memories" allows us to conclude that the subject of the Azerbaijani language, taught

at school since 1819, was taught by teacher Mirza Jafar Tushmalov. It should be noted that Tbilisi Nujaba school operated until 1829. On the basis of the school, the famous Tbilisi First Gymnasium was established in 1830. Mirza Jafar Tushmalov worked as a teacher of Azerbaijani language at Tbilisi Nujaba school and for a year at Tbilisi gymnasium.

Another information about teacher Mirza Jafar Tushmalov was found in a document kept in the Central State Historical Archive of Georgia. This archival document is related to the activities of an educational institution established in 1828-1830 during the Russian-Turkish, Russian-Iranian wars for children taken hostage from noble families in the Shamshadil district of Azerbaijan. It is clear from the archive document that Mirza Jafar Tushmalov was first intended as a teacher of the Azerbaijani language for the "School of Savings". However, he was not appointed to the post due to his extensive work as a teacher at the Tbilisi Nujaba school.

The "Savings School" can be considered the first educational institution opened by the Russians for Azerbaijani children due to the composition of the students was composed only of Azerbaijanis. The Azerbaijani language was essential (the teacher of this subject was Mirza Mammad Agalarov, although we could not determine the position of this official in the Russian government). Sharia lessons were given and Russian language was also taught (teacher PI Shipulin, former director of the Tbilisi Nujaba school, taught Russian), as well as the secular nature of education within the opportunities (subjects) provided by primary education was maintained.

Thus, Azerbaijani intellectuals studied, and wrote the history of their people, codified native language and aspired to reform education and social mores that were perceived as contributing to the backwardness of their society, including such practices as religious education and arranged marriages (Bolukbasi, 2011). These intellectuals did not limit their creativity not only to national traditions, but also sought ways to rise to the level of modern world culture. Therefore, their worldviews are formed in the context of the values of Eastern culture and the achievements of universal civilization. Adopting the world experience, they tried to synthesize national and moral values and it opened wide opportunities to raise the Azerbaijan society to the level of the requirements of the new era (Suleymanli, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

From the first years of the century until the Treaty of Turkmenchay, the tsarist government pursued a policy of

educating a part of the population in the region, creating the cornerstones of future education policy by establishing Tbilisi Nujaba School, Tbilisi Nujaba Military School, among others. The secular content of education in these educational institutions, the teaching of local languages as a subject was a very useful experience for later periods. Despite a number of difficulties and artificial obstacles, these schools led to a tendency to innovate and change in the social “atmosphere” and cultural life of the region. These schools were also part of the beginning of the path to school education, science and culture, which was formed and developed around the middle of the century. In this process, it is undeniable that education in the Azerbaijani language played a fundamental role, since despite the difficulties due to the occupation, the language was a bulwark to preserve the culture, traditions and national idiosyncrasies.

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