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SOME REMARKS ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF RUSSIAN LOANWORDS IN TAJIK

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Abstract

Tajik, as opposed to Fārsi and Dari, remained for a century strongly influenced by Russian. As a consequence, its lexicon abounds with borrowings from that language. The article deals with the problem of their pronunciation – are characteristic features of Russian phonology and phonetics preserved in these loanwords? Having analyzed a number of examples one notices that the pronunciation of such words is far from consistent and the idea of a fidelity level may be introduced to explain and classify the differences. This fidelity level depends on various factors, e.g. the education of a native-speaker.

1. Introduction

Tajik is classified either as a dialect of Persian or as an independent language closely related to it. It seems impossible to resolve this dilemma basing on linguistic factors only.¹ Nevertheless, even without answering this question, we are still able to consider certain specific features of Tajik. The most important one, as far as the problem to be discussed in the present article is concerned, is the strong influence of Russian, a fact that makes the idiom clearly distinct from the Persian spoken in Iran and the Dari language of Afghanistan.²

¹ For some important aspects of this see Perry (2005: 1ff.), Comrie (1981: 9), Kerimova (1995: 96ff), etc.

² Another language with great impact on Tajik is Uzbek. This is, however, not relevant to the topic covered by the present article.

The impact of Russian on Tajik is noticeable at various levels in the language system. What is important for this article is its influence on the Tajik lexicon. The vocabulary of the language abounds in Russian loanwords, even if some of them are falling into disuse for a variety of reasons (e.g. the disintegration of the Soviet environment in which they were needed).

What we are going to focus on in the present article is the problem of the pronunciation of the Tajik borrowings from Russian, especially the question of the extent to which they follow their original phonological form. In order to study the matter a number of recordings provided by a broadcaster, Радиои Озодӣ, were used. There are a number of arguments for using this large audio corpus: First, the speakers on Радиои Озодӣ are Tajiks and a significant part of the recordings analyzed are interviews with native speakers of various social, educational and dialectal backgrounds. These features make the recordings very good material for studying the problem in question. Additionally, all the recordings are available on the broadcaster's website (www.ozodi.tj), which makes them easy to access and analyze.

What is so interesting about the pronunciation of Russian loanwords in Tajik? The discovery of any systemic rules would make it easier to classify the most recent loanwords, which are chiefly internationalisms. The ability to trace Russian features in their articulation would allow one to decide whether Russian served as their intermediary or not. In other words, analyzing the problem will help us to find out important facts about the etymology of the given forms.

In fact, the history of Russian loanwords predates the tsarist rule over the former emirates of Samarkand and Bukhara. Their number, of course, multiplied as political domination became established and especially after the communist revolution. As a result, in the 1960s there were about 2,500 Russian loanwords in Tajik including those used to express ideas associated with military techniques, medicine, agriculture, etc. (Bashiri 1994: 118).

A number of important publications on the Tajik language provide some general information about the pronunciation of Russian loanwords. First of all, let us remember that at the beginning the borrowings in question were assimilated according to the phonological rules of the Tajik language (Perry 2005: 28), see examples such as [istansa] ← Russian **станция** (Perry 2009). However, in 1954 a law was passed which meant all the Russian words in Tajik (including internationalisms for which Russian served only as a vehicular language) had to be written in Russian orthography, even when it was in conflict with the writing rules of Tajik (Perry 2005: 28). And so [istansa] became **станция** [stantsiya] (Perry 2009). This law was imposed also on the speakers of other languages within the Soviet Union.³ As Perry observes this, of course, did not lead to an immediate and unconditional change in pronunciation (Perry 2005: 28). Nevertheless, pronunciation as close to Russian as possible was certainly promoted for the speakers of the

³ As Perry notes, such an attitude towards a foreign language and its script was by no means novelty to the inhabitants of Central Asia. This is how they had been perceiving Arabic and the loanwords taken from this language for centuries (Perry 1997: 11).

idiom in question (Comrie 1981: 34), and certainly contributed to inconsistencies and differences between the articulation of individual speakers. In summary we face a situation where the degree of assimilation of Russian loanwords in Tajik depends on various extra-linguistic factors, including educational and cultural causes (Perry 2005: 28).

In the present article we are going to analyze these and certain other general principles based on real examples from the audio corpus mentioned above. We will focus on a number of specific features of Russian phonetics and phonotactics and search for their traces in the Tajik pronunciation of some Russian loanwords. The author of the article believes such an analysis may be valuable, even if some of the discussed phenomena have already been described. After all, nearly quarter of a century has passed since the fall of the Soviet Union and it is a good moment to make a summary, which ones are persistent and which are not.⁴

2. Features of Russian pronunciation in Tajik

2.1. Akanye

A characteristic feature of literary Russian and numerous dialects of the language is the so-called *аканье* (akanye), which is a type of vowel reduction. It may be described as a merging of both an unstressed [a] and [o] to a single reduced vowel, such as [ɐ], [ʌ] or even [ə]. Whatever the level of reduction is, the resulting vowel is perceived as closer to [a] than to [o], hence the traditional name for the process. Taking this into consideration, we will simply transcribe the result of akanye in Russian loanwords as [a] in Tajik.

We are without doubt able to observe examples of akanye in some Russian loanwords in Tajik, e.g. **объект** [abyékt] 'object' (Radyo-i ozodi 2012-02-08) ← Russian **объект** [abyékt]; **коммунист** [kamunísti] 'communist (adj.)' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-14) ← Russian **коммунист**⁵ + the Tajik adjective suffix **-й** [-i]; **контракт** [kantrákt] 'contract' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-25a) ← Russian **контракт**.

What is important, however, is the fact that when a suitable situation for akanye to develop appears only in Tajik (e.g. an [o] inside the word loses its stress because a Tajik word formational suffix or a plural ending is added), the process does not take place. Thus we have **паспорт** [pasport-hó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-21) (and not *[paspart-hó]) ← Russian **паспорт** + the Tajik plural ending **-ҳо** [-hó]. The above-mentioned phenomenon shows that the process is not productive in Tajik.

⁴ There are examples proving that certain changes in a language system may be reversed once the factor inducing them is no longer in power. For instance, the approximant [ɨ] was introduced into literary Polish under the influence of eastern dialect of the language. However, as the territories where they are spoken are no longer within the borders of the Polish state, most speakers use [w] instead of [ɨ] today.

⁵ An acute accent is used to mark the stress in forms written in the Latin alphabet. In the Cyrillic script underlining is used instead, especially where stress is the only feature of pronunciation not obvious from the Cyrillic form itself.

2.2. Palatalization of consonants

Russian, as with other Slavonic languages, differentiates between palatalized and not-palatalized consonants. On the other hand, Tajik does not show any trace of palatalization even where Fārsi uses it regularly (/k/ and /g/ in certain environments or positions).

Thus, the question is whether the palatalization present in Russian words in their original forms may be preserved when they are borrowed into Tajik. The answer is that in numerous cases palatalization is audible, e.g. **геологҳо** [g'eolog-hó] 'geologists' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-08) ← Russian **геолог** + the Tajik plural suffix **-ҳо** [-hó]; **кредит** [k'r'édít] 'credit, loan' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-14) ← Russian **кредит**; see also **сензура** [ts'enzúra] below.

However, one has to admit that there are also a considerable number of examples where the original Russian palatalization is clearly lost, e.g. **энергетика** [energétika] 'energetics' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-07a) ← Russian **энергетика** (the stress follows the original pattern, but there is no trace of the palatalization of [g]); **Сентябр** [sentyábr] 'September' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-01-29) ← Russian **Сентябрь**; **техника** [texniká] 'technics' (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-21) ← Russian **техника** (the speaker neither palatalizes the initial [t] nor follows the original stress pattern).⁶

Generally speaking, retaining the original palatalization in Russian loanwords seems to be an optional feature of their pronunciation in Tajik, with possible variations even in the articulation of the same person.

2.3. Initial consonant clusters

Both in Fārsi and Tajik initial consonant clusters were not tolerated. In fact, in the first of the two idioms they are still not acceptable today. Early Russian loanwords in Tajik containing such clusters employed prothetic (or epenthetic – TG) vowels, see the example of [istakon] above. However, probably owing both to the large numbers of borrowings from Russian and the legal regulations described above, at some point consonant clusters attested in Russian started to be accepted also in Tajik.

Today such consonant clusters are clearly audible in the pronunciation of many native speakers, including the cases where pronunciation without a prothetic or epenthetic vowel is impossible in Fārsi, e.g.

- Russian **профессор** [praf'ésar] 'professor' → Tajik **профессор** [praf'ésor] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-07a), cf. Persian **پروفسور** [p(o)rofesór] (Rubinčik 1970: vol. I, 293);
- Russian **трактор** [tráktar] 'tractor' → Tajik pl. **тракторҳо** [traktor-hó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-08), cf. Persian **تراكتور** [t(e)ráktór] (Rubinčik 1970: vol. I, 363);
- Russian **стандарт** 'standard' → Tajik pl. **стандартҳо** [standart-hó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-01-08), while Persian does not accept the initial [st-] and usually places a prothetic vowel before it, cf. **استودیو** [estud(i)yo] (Rubinčik 1970: vol. I, 81);

⁶ A variant with the original Russian stress on the first syllable but with no palatalization is also attested in the same recording.

- Russian **справка** ‘help (file, etc.)’ → Tajik **справка** [správka] (Milod 2011-11-22), while in Persian syllables of the CCCVC structure are impossible;
- Russian **стратегия** ‘strategy’ → Tajik adj. **стратегӣ** [strategí] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-02) ‘strategic’, cf. Persian **استراتژیک** [estrātežik] (Rubinčik 1970: vol. I, 76) (clearly transmitted via a different vehicular language, i.e. French).

To conclude, it seems that the massive influx of Russian loanwords and the pressure on their pronunciation to be in accordance with the original changed at least this aspect of Tajik phonology, as it clearly accepts at least a few types of consonant clusters, some of them even consisting of three elements.

2.4. [h] – [g] correspondence

One of the specific features of Russian is the substitution of the original [h] of foreign loanwords with [g]. This is observable in many internationalisms that entered the Tajik language via Russian. The latter, serving as a vehicular language, left its clearly visible mark in the form of the [h] → [g] change, e.g. **гектар** [g’ektár] ‘hectare’ ← Russian **гектар**. This is particularly striking in the case of proper names assimilated into Tajik via Russian and their derivatives, e.g. [gegel-či-gi] ‘hegelianism’ ← [gegel] < Russian **Гегельянство** (Perry 1997: 11).

Some words exist in Tajik in two forms – one with a Russianized [g] and the other with [h], for instance, **гормон** (Saymiddinov et al. 2006: 152; Nazarzoda et al. 2008: vol. 1, 330) versus **хурмун** (BBC Persian 2009-05-14). There are also words that seem to have been borrowed directly from languages other than Russian and thus show no trace of the change in question, e.g. **хуликуптар** or **хеликуптар** (Nazarzoda et al. 2008: vol. 2, 539; BBC Persian 2009-02-05). In the latter case, modern Russian mainly uses a native word **вертолёт** (well attested in Tajik as well), but the internationalism in question is not unknown, however, it undergoes the change of [h] into [g], thus **геликоптер**.

2.5. The approximant [ɮ]

In Russian the difference between the velarized alveolar lateral approximant [ɮ] (the so-called dark [l]) and the palatalized dental approximant [lʲ] forms a part of the non-palatalized : palatalized opposition. In Tajik, [ɮ] does not exist. Theoretically speaking, religious and/or classically educated Tajik speakers may know it from the Arabic pronunciation of **أَلْهَ [aɮɮāh]** and certain derived words.

It seems that at least some speakers pronounce the original non-palatalized [l] in Russian loanwords as the so called dark l ([ɮ]). Examples include **полк** [poɮk] ‘regiment’ (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-21), **полковник** [paɮkóvnik] ‘colonel’ (ibid.), and possibly (the recording is not clear enough for the author of the present work) **кило** [kiɮó]? ‘kilo[-gram]’ (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-25a).

On the other hand, many speakers seem to pronounce standard Tajik [l] (i.e. the alveolar non-palatalized approximant), e.g. **мелодрама** [meladráma] (Radyo-i

Ozodi 2012-02-25b] ‘melodrama’, **геологҳо** [g’eolog-hó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-08) ‘geologists’, **медал** [medal] ‘medal’ (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-01-29), etc. This may be noticed even in Russian proper names pronounced by Tajiks, e.g. **Ломоносов** [lomonosov] not *[lomonosov] (Qayumzod 2011-11-22).

2.6. The affricate [ts]

The affricate [ts] is a phoneme (/ts/) in Russian, while it is absent from the consonantal system of Tajik (cf. Perry 2005: 23), as well as that of Fārsi. However, the relatively high frequency of this sound in Russian surely exerted some pressure on Tajik, especially that the letter **ц** (its orthographic equivalent in the Cyrillic script) was compulsory in the borrowings from Russian used in Tajik until 1998, when it was abandoned together with **щ**, **ы** and **ь** (Perry 2005: 36).

Therefore, the question is whether affricative articulation may be found among Tajik-speakers. Based on the analyzed material one feels entitled to say that most speakers pronounce a fricative [s] in Russian loanwords in place of the original [ts], e.g. **конвенсия** [konvéns(i)ya] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-16) ‘convention’ ← Russian **конвенция**; **аксиз** [aksíz] ‘excise’ ← Russian **акциз**, etc. Nevertheless, there are some speakers who clearly produce an affricate in forms such as [ts’enzúra] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-05).⁷

Taking this into consideration, we could put forward a hypothesis that [ts] is at present a free-variant allophone of the /s/ phoneme, the distribution of which is restricted to Russian loanwords with affricative pronunciation in the original.

2.7. Stress

Both in Tajik and Russian stress is based on dynamics. However, the rules regarding its position are totally different. Stress in Russian is unpredictable and plays a distinctive role. On the other hand, in Tajik stress is more or less stable, usually on the last syllable of a word, with the exception of some verbal forms and loanwords.

So the question is, of course, whether Tajik words borrowed from Russian retain their original stress or are pronounced with the accent placed on the last syllable.

As in the case of palatalization, no simple answer is possible. There is a general rule that when a loanword is modified by adding an affix (e.g. a plural suffix [-ho] or a word-formational suffix), the stress is placed according to the standard Tajik rule, c.f. **гражданӣ** [graždaní] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-07b) ‘civil’, **паспортҳо** [pasporthó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-21), **медалҳо** [medalhó] ‘medals’ (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-01-29), **кредит** [k’r’edít] : **кредитҳо** [k’r’edithó] (Radyo-i Ozodi 2012-02-14), etc.

However, this principle is violated quite often and in the case of simple words there seems to be no rules as far as stress is concerned. A number of forms articulated

⁷ It is a particularly interesting example, as it not only contains the affricate in question, but the latter is also palatalized. Also the stress clearly follows the Russian pattern.

with the stress on the ultimate syllable have been found, but at the same time, many words retaining the original Russian accent have been noted, too, c.f. **справка** [správka] above, also **справкаҳо** [správkaho]⁸ (Milod 2011-11-22). Some variation is possible in accentuation, even when considering one and the same speaker, e.g. [texniká] vs. [ténika] (see above).

3. Conclusion

It is clear that the pronunciation of Russian loanwords in Tajik certainly does not follow any constant rules. There are differences in the preservation (or disappearance) of the same phonetical features in the articulation of various speakers, or, as a matter of fact, even in the pronunciation of the same speaker. We could say that a *fidelity level* can be established for the pronunciation of borrowings from Russian used in Tajik that depends on both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors (e.g. education, competence in Russian, etc.). This is by no means a phenomenon specific to Tajik. It may be found in many languages strongly influenced by another language. See e.g. the ‘educated’ and ‘uneducated’ pronunciation of English loanwords in Thai, e.g. [plá:st-tìk] vs. [pát-tìk] ‘plastic’ (Nacaskul 1979: 153).

The immense influence exerted by Russian on Tajik seems to have changed the phonological system of the latter to some extent, e.g. initial consonant clusters are now accepted in Tajik. It is a well known phenomenon and may be noticed in other languages that are influenced by some other language. A similar example may be found in Japanese. Strict rules decide which C + V sequences are acceptable and which are not in Japanese. However, in new borrowings from English, new clusters (previously avoided) appear, e.g. [fa] in [fakkusu] (← EN **fax**) or [di] in [disuku] (← EN **disk**) (Kay 1995: 70). One should remember at this point that such unacceptable clusters were changed in earlier borrowings, e.g. [di] → [ji] in [rajio] (← EN **radio**), [fo] → [ho] in [heddohon] (← EN **headphone**) (Kay 1995: 69).

As we can see from the analyzed material, Tajik is clearly another example of a language showing considerable variation in the fidelity level of the pronunciation of borrowings.

The important question is whether some of the original features of Russian loanwords in Tajik can be traced in the native lexicon of the latter idiom. It is, however, a subject beyond the scope of the present article.

It was also observed that the number of native Russian forms among the loanwords in Tajik is relatively low. In most cases Russian served only as a vehicular language by which certain forms reached Tajik. Thus, in these cases, analyzing their pronunciation and tracing features specific to Russian pronunciation helps to reconstruct their history.

⁸ In spite of the presence of the plural marker [-ho].

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