

How to maintain and develop the use of the Circassian language in Jordan?

The following steps can be taken (or are recommended by the International Centre for Circassian Studies in co-ordination and co-operation with the Circassian Charity Association in Jordan) to upgrade the status of Circassian in Jordan in the short- and medium-term and enhance its prestige, in addition to boosting and extending the gamut of Circassian language usage. Some of these measures are immediately implementable with minimal effort and cost. Others are more involved and medium-term, but still they can be done if the will to action is obtained and the requisite resources are made available. Systematic and sober implementation of these measures should give a considerable boost to the status and prestige of Circassian and promote its use amongst both the old and young.

The Circassian Charity Association (CCA) can play a leading role in effecting a linguistic and cultural revival since it runs the Prince Hamza School, which has a core centre of children who enjoy some knowledge of the Circassian language and where already there are mechanisms on the ground for teaching the Circassian language. Concerted efforts by concerned parties would upgrade the status of Circassian in the School and improve the levels of competence that could be attained by the students. Dr. Ülle Rannut's work on the Circassian language situation in the School and how to boost the status of the language, *Minority Language Policy in the Middle East: Circassian Language Maintenance in Jordan*, should be designated and assigned as the blueprint for effecting these transformations.¹

¹ Dr. Ülle Rannut is a well-known international language policy researcher and authority on the promotion of minority languages at the Institute of Estonian Language and Culture, Tallinn University, Tallinn, Estonia. She conducted research in Jordan on the status of Circassian and produced a report entitled *Minority Language Policy in the Middle East: Circassian Language Maintenance*

It is fortunate that there are no restriction whatsoever on the use of the Circassian language by the Circassians in the cultural and literary spheres in Jordan. therefore, the only challenges facing the Circassian community in this regard is the will to action and the technical know-how to effect the required measures and bring into action viable mechanisms for language maintenance and development.

1. Promote the use of the Circassian language:

- a. **Use (attractive) signs and plates** (for doors and gateways) **in Circassian** (besides other languages) at all Circassian institutions in Jordan. This ‘symbolic’ step could be supported and sponsored by the Circassian Charity Association (CCA) in co-ordination and co-operation of the other Circassian institutions (Prince Hamza School, Al-Ahli Club, Al-Jeel Club, Circassian kitchen, etc.). Symbolism is very essential and powerful in such an endeavour. The implementation of this measure could be construed as the inauguration of a new phase of concern and consideration for the mother tongue.
- b. **Establish a language centre** that both prepares materials in Circassian on the Circassian language and provides instruction in the language on a wide scale for both children and adults. Initially, instructors could be employed from the Circassian language staff at Prince Hamza School. Later, the graduates of universities in the Caucasus (sent on scholarships) could gradually take over these tasks.
- c. **Provide the students at Prince Hamza School with adequate, even handsomely produced text-books and**

in Jordan, and published an article ‘Circassian Language Maintenance in Jordan’ in an international journal.

language materials. This entails the selection, printing and distribution of these books. Support from the Ministry of Education in Jordan could be solicited in this regard.

- d. Perhaps thought should be given **to establish bilingual media outlets in Circassian** and other languages as a long-term goal. A bilingual newspaper and radio station are possible with enough resources. **Bilingual publication of the Nart Magazine is however possible as an immediate measure.**

- e. **Set up a traditional Circassian guest-house** (*hesch'sch*; хьэщIэщ) at the Circassian Charity Association (CCA), whereby 'traditional minstrels' (джэгуакIуэ; *jegwak'we*) can display their wares (proverbs and sayings, toasts, stories, songs, the tenets of Circassian customs and traditions, etc.). Each night a theme is broached and people are encouraged to attend and take part. Talented people could be persuaded to act as minstrels.

- f. **Spread awareness about the importance of learning and teaching Circassian** amongst parents and students using multiple methods (flyers, lectures, electronically, at school, etc.). The time to start to teach children Circassian is upon birth. A child could easily learn more than one language (three are possible) as a mother tongue. The limitation in this regard is purely on the part of parents, not the children.

2. Make it pay to know Circassian:

- a. Make it a policy to **hire people** in Circassian institutions **that speak and write Circassian**. For example, the CCA could employ a person proficient in Circassian to make Circassian copies of CCA correspondences, make a Circassian version of the CCA website, translate some articles in Nart Magazine into Circassian so that the magazine could eventually turn into a bilingual publication, etc. In addition, the menu of the Circassian kitchen –Samovar – could also be provided in Circassian, etc.
- b. **Establish 2-3 scholarships** a year for students (competent graduates of Prince Hamza School) **to study Circassian language and literature** at universities in the Caucasus (Nalchik and Maikop). The graduates would be guaranteed good work at the CCA or School. They could be provided posts as school lecturers and cultural workers. This group of specialists in the Circassian language and literature could potentially effect a transformation in the fortune of the Circassian language in Jordan.
- c. **Make Circassian a principal and compulsory subject in Prince Hamza School**. This might need co-ordination with the Ministry of Education in Jordan. Also, **provide instruction in selected subjects in Circassian**, i.e. teach the topics in Circassian. **Don't leave Circassian as just another subject to be learnt**.

3. The Caucasian connection:

- a. **Strong and productive Connections should be fostered with educational and cultural institutions in the Caucasus** (ministries of education, ministries of culture, universities and colleges, cultural institutions, etc.). Books published in the Caucasus could be marketed in Jordan to upgrade the status of Circassian and boost literacy in Circassian. Working visits by linguists and culturalists from the Caucasus should be encouraged to provide consultations on how to develop and disseminate the language and to give lectures on the Circassian language. This would send out a strong signal to the Circassian community in Jordan of the importance of Circassian.
- b. **The Circassian republics have considerable linguistic and cultural resources** (books, text-books, media materials, etc.) that could be utilized. If the people in the Caucasus feel the diaspora's interest in the Circassian language and culture, this would feed positively into increased general interest in them in the homeland. Ultimately, the corrosion of language and culture in the homeland, should it happen, would be much more serious than their loss in the diaspora, this being said without detracting from the gravity of the situation in the diaspora.

4. The political dimension:

Although some people might want to keep away from any issue that might have political connotations, language survival is ultimately a political matter. There is only so much that the Circassian community can do on its own to stem the tide of assimilation and loss of language and culture. Official institutional support is most crucial in this regard, and it has to be solicited without causing undue consternation. Shying away from this task is not an option.

- a. Although the Circassians are not considered a minority in Jordan, but are full members of society with equal rights and responsibilities as other citizens of Jordan, special consideration should be given by the government to Circassian issues that are connected with language and culture. A case could be developed to **petition the Jordanian government to provide support and sponsorship for the Circassian language and culture**. The Circassian language should be viewed as one of the important cultural manifestations in Jordan that warrant conservation. The cultural heritage of the Circassians should be promoted as an integral part of Jordanian culture. Diversity and variety enrich the cultural texture in Jordan.
- b. **The figureheads of the Circassian community** (current and ex-ministers, members of parliament, senators, high-ranking officials, ambassadors, industrialists, etc.) **should be made aware of this effort and kept up-to-date of its developments**. Their suggestions and support are indispensable to the success of this endeavour. The championing of Circassian causes associated with language and culture at the official level should not be viewed with trepidation. This should send out a signal that the Circassians respect and appreciate their heritage, and are not ashamed of it.

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- 'Circassian Language Maintenance in Jordan', in *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 30, 18 March 2009. [Abstract: The central goal of this research is to explore the

language policy aspects in Jordan by focusing on the Circassian language maintenance issues and to provide measures for language revitalisation in the current demographic, linguistic and political situation. Research is based on multiple sources of information, but primarily on the empirical data collected through 14 videotaped interviews conducted with prominent researchers and professors and teachers of Circassian, through observations and a survey covering 485 respondents, including 323 pupils from the age of 10 up to 16, and 162 parents. The Circassian language status and maintenance are analysed as a continuum of language functions and domains in a society. Classification is based on the traditional distribution of language policy dimensions, where language status, corpus and acquisition aspects, as well as UNESCO's nine language vitality factors and linguistic rights are considered. Different factors influencing language maintenance are useful for characterising a language's overall sociolinguistic situation. So far there has been neither expert evaluation of the Circassian language situation based on international legal documents, nor has there been research which would provide basis for requesting governmental support and plan further steps for language revitalisation.]

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