

Multi-lingualism and Lost Opportunities

Teach your genius what he deserves!

Amjad Jaimoukha

Since Circassian language and culture in the Caucasus and diaspora are under great pressure due to assimilation, every effort must be made to check the decline of the heritage. This short essay attempts to underscore the effectiveness of teaching Circassian children their mother tongue as a method of language revival.

Children before the age of three have an uncanny ability to learn many languages and adopt them as native ones. In theory, there is no limit to the number of languages that a toddler can master, but in practice two or even three languages are quite manageable. The effort on the parents' part is minimal. All the father and mother have to do is to speak the languages with one another and with the child. The baby has only to listen. A child has no predisposed preference for any language. He/she will absorb anything and everything you expose him/her to. Small children are such marvellous creatures!

However, apathy and ignorance are stubborn foes. Some people think that teaching children more than one language is detrimental to its future mastery of a single one. This is utterly incorrect, and research even suggests that poly-glot children tend to be more culturally advanced than their mono-lingual counterparts. Language hues the way we perceive the world, so the more mother languages that we have, the wider are the horizons of our perceptions. This is food for thought.

If parents are properly informed about the advantages of multi-lingualism, then many of them will undoubtedly choose to teach their children more than one language. The dissemination of this information must be done through the mass media and by issuing

booklets targeted at the nuclear family, which is the back-bone of any meaningful revival of the Circassian language and culture.

Apathy results when parents are presented with the facts and they choose to ignore them. This is fine because nobody can be coerced in this respect. However, some parents lack the option of teaching their children their mother tongue because they are ignorant of it. This is the case with the majority of them. Nevertheless, if the will is there, it is possible to devise other ways of exposing the children to Circassian, like involving the grandparents if they are alive or other relatives who are conversant with the language.

In short, if a child is taught his/her mother tongue, he/she will benefit greatly in more than one respect: he/she will learn an extra language; he/she will expand his cultural horizon; he/she will not lose his linguistic identity, and last but not least he/she will become an interactive member of his linguistic community and shall be able to learn and appreciate his/her culture and national ethos.