

The Language Of National Legislation: Legal And Technical Challenges

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Abstract: This article examines the linguistic and legal-technical dimensions of drafting, adopting, and publishing normative legal acts in the Republic of Uzbekistan. It highlights the central role of the Uzbek language as the state language and analyses the implications of multilingual duplication, terminological inconsistency, and the formal nature of linguistic expertise in legislative practice. Drawing upon data from the National Database of Legislation (Lex.uz), the research reveals several challenges: the continued duplication of acts in Uzbek and Russian despite the availability of automated translation tools; the absence of standardised terminology and conceptual definitions across legal texts; and the limited application of linguistic expertise, which currently extends only to draft acts concerning the state language and its development. The study argues for the institutionalisation of linguistic expertise, the creation of a centralised terminological glossary (“bank of terms”) within Lex.uz, and the exclusive adoption of legislative acts in the state language. Such reforms are deemed essential for enhancing legal clarity, ensuring linguistic consistency, and strengthening the quality of national law-making in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Language of law; normative legal acts; legal drafting; linguistic expertise; state language; legal terminology; Uzbekistan; Lex.uz; legislative technique; multilingual legislation.

Introduction: Uzbekistan possesses its own national legislative framework, and the language of normative legal documents plays a crucial role in understanding and complying with its requirements.

In accordance with the Basic Law of the country, the state language of the Republic of Uzbekistan is Uzbek. Legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as other documents of state authorities and administrative bodies, are adopted and published in the state language.

Within the scope of the topic selected for this article, we have analysed information from the National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan – Lex.uz. Based on the results of this analysis, the following conclusions have been drawn.

Firstly, the texts of several normative legal acts are officially duplicated in the state and Russian languages.

It should be recalled that normative legal acts are divided into two types:

- legislative acts (the Constitution, laws, including codes and constitutional laws, resolutions of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan);

- by-laws (decrees and resolutions of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers, orders and resolutions of ministries and departments, decisions of local public authorities).

Such types of acts as the Constitution, codes, laws, constitutional laws, and decrees and resolutions of the President are adopted and published typically in both the state and Russian languages. However, at present, there is no longer a practical need to duplicate these texts in two languages, particularly Uzbek and Russian, since Lex.uz now integrates “Google Translator”. This automated translation tool allows readers to access the texts of normative legal acts in Lex.uz in more than 50 languages, including English, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and French – all official languages of the United Nations [4].

Thanks to the automated translator, potential investors

intending to work in Uzbekistan, as well as researchers, representatives of research institutions, analytical centres, and other stakeholders abroad, can access Lex.uz online and become familiar with the national legal framework of the country.

At the same time, official duplication, i.e. adopting and publishing normative legal acts in both the state and Russian languages, creates certain problems. As of 17 October 2025, Lex.uz published 1,167 laws in the state language, of which 1,166 were duplicated in Russian. It also contained 1,131 presidential decrees, of which 1,132 were available in Russian, meaning one decree is missing in the state language [5]. Moreover, 2,678 presidential resolutions are published in Uzbek and 2,670 in Russian, a difference of eight documents.

At first glance, this may seem insignificant, since legislation stipulates that in the event of discrepancies, the version in the state language prevails. However, it must be noted that 514 normative legal acts officially published in Lex.uz in the state language are marked as “Unofficial Translation” [6], which indicates that the original document was adopted in Russian rather than Uzbek. For instance, the Presidential Decree “On Approval of the Flag and Emblem of the Presidential Security Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan” dated 23 June 2018, No. PD–5463, carries the note “Unofficial Translation” in its Uzbek text.

In other cases, normative acts are not fully presented in the state language, as their annexes often bear the note “Unofficial Translation”, for example, the Presidential Decree “On Measures to Improve the Efficiency of the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan” dated 29 August 2019, No. PD–5795.

This document demonstrates that a number of normative legal acts, which are subsequently amended and supplemented, were initially adopted in the Russian language.

Secondly, the absence of well-defined terminology complicates the process of understanding the essence and content of a normative legal act.

For example, in the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Approval of the ‘Digital Uzbekistan–2030’ Strategy and Measures for Its Effective Implementation” dated 5 October 2020, No. PD–6079, the term “Заместитель руководителя по цифровизации” (“Deputy Head for Digitalisation”) is used in Russian, “Рақамлаштириш бўйича ўринбосар” in Uzbek, and is simultaneously duplicated in English as “Chief Digital Officer”.

In this instance, the text clearly reveals an inconsistency between the English version of the term and its

equivalents in the state and Russian languages.

This issue is particularly relevant given that, in accordance with the Unified methodology of Legal and Technical Design of Draft Normative Legal Acts, as well as Information and Analytical Materials Attached to Them, the use of foreign-language terms is not permitted where equivalent words and concepts exist in the state language. The aforementioned document explicitly notes the simultaneous use of a term in both the state and English languages [3].

Moreover, according to the Unified methodology of Legal and Technical Design of Draft Normative Legal Acts, as well as Information and Analytical Materials Attached to Them, the definition of a concept or term must fully disclose its meaning. It is prohibited to define a concept or term through the same concept or term, as well as through other concepts and terms that themselves require definition [3].

In this regard, the texts of normative legal acts generally include a so-called glossary – an explanatory section clarifying the main terms used in the text.

At the same time, this approach is not standardised. For instance, among the 124 laws adopted in 2024, several – such as the Law “On the Authorised Person of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Human Rights (Ombudsman)”, the Law “On the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan”, the Law “On the Authorised Person of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan for the Rights of the Child (Children’s Ombudsman)”, and the Law “On the Status of Teachers” – do not contain an article explaining the terms used in their texts.

At the same time, other laws – including the Law “On the Privatisation of State Property”, “On the Protection and Improvement of Soil Fertility”, “On Road Traffic”, “On Conflict of Interest”, “On Energy Saving, Its Rational Use and Increasing Energy Efficiency”, “On the Electric Power Industry”, “On Probation”, “On the Recognition of Rights to Illegally Occupied Land Plots and Buildings and Structures Erected Thereon”, “On the Creative Economy”, “On Agricultural Cooperatives”, “On the Provision of Psychological Assistance to the Population”, “On Subsoil”, “On State Secrets”, “On Telecommunications”, and “On Railway Transport” – include an article devoted to the main concepts.

As a rule, Article 3 of the above-mentioned laws provides explanations of the basic concepts applied within the text. Nevertheless, even among the laws adopted solely in 2024, inconsistencies can be observed. For example, Article 3 of the Law “On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence” (Violence against Children) defines such concepts as “Violence against Children,” “Physical Violence,”

“Sexual Violence,” and “Psychological Violence.” However, despite the title of Article 3 being “Violence against Children,” it also defines terms that are not directly related to violence, in particular “Neglect,” “Child Exploitation,” and “Basic Needs of the Child”.

Thirdly, linguistic expertise remains a formal type of review with a declarative character.

According to the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Normative Legal Acts”, a draft normative legal act is subject to mandatory legal and anti-corruption examinations. At the discretion of the drafter or the body authorised to adopt a normative legal act, the draft may also be subjected to economic, financial, scientific, linguistic, environmental, and other types of examinations [3].

By the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Approval of the Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Linguistic Expertise of Draft Normative Legal Acts” dated 28 October 2021, No. 662, the Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Linguistic Expertise of Draft Normative Legal Acts was approved [7].

According to this Regulation, linguistic expertise applies only to draft normative legal acts concerning the state language and its development. This requirement significantly narrows the scope of linguistic expertise and, in practice, almost nullifies it. For instance, as of today, the national legal framework contains only 13 normative legal acts relating to the state language and its development.

Clause 1 of this Resolution also devalues the significance of linguistic expertise, stating that a draft normative legal document may be subjected to linguistic review only upon the decision of the drafter or the body authorised to adopt the normative legal document. In practice, however, developers of draft normative legal acts are not inclined to initiate linguistic expertise, as it requires additional time, expert resources, and other inputs in the absence of designated funding. The Resolution explicitly provides that expenses related to linguistic expertise shall be covered by extrabudgetary funds and other sources not prohibited by law. Moreover, in each organisation, only one person – the adviser to the head of the organisation that drafted the normative legal act – may carry out linguistic expertise, meaning that human resources are likewise limited. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that a draft must undergo linguistic expertise within three working days from the date of its receipt by the adviser to the head [7].

It is also worth noting the formal and declarative nature of the Regulation on the Procedure for Conducting Linguistic Expertise of Draft Normative Legal Acts itself,

which consists of 21 paragraphs divided into six chapters. The first chapter sets out general provisions; the second defines the goals and main tasks of linguistic expertise; the third outlines the requirements for linguistic review; the fourth addresses the procedure for conducting linguistic expertise; the fifth defines the rights and duties of the adviser or specialist performing the review; and the sixth contains final provisions. Notably, the fourth chapter deals primarily with organisational matters – such as who may initiate linguistic expertise, the time frame for its completion, and the formalisation of results. Consequently, there is no unified, detailed, and comprehensible methodology for conducting linguistic expertise.

The lack of sufficient attention to linguistic expertise is further confirmed by data from the public discussion portal for draft normative legal acts, which includes sections for gender, anti-corruption, and scientific reviews but contains no information concerning linguistic expertise.

Overall, in light of the foregoing, it appears expedient to adopt measures aimed at ensuring the uniform application of linguistic rules in legal drafting. In particular, all types of legislative and subordinate acts should be adopted exclusively in the state language, while other languages may be represented through automated translation tools. All entities engaged in law-making should follow the practice of including in the general part of normative legal acts provisions clarifying the meanings of key terms used throughout the document – that is, defining essential terminology at the outset. Additionally, a centralised terminological glossary – a so-called “bank of terms” – could be created on the basis of Lex.uz, consolidating definitions contained in existing normative legal acts that form the national legal framework. These measures are intended to revitalise linguistic expertise and enhance its quality and significance within law-making activities.

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