Between Resistance and Adaptation

The Place of the Uyghur Language in the Sinicised Zone of Ürümchi

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ABSTRACT: The urban areas of Xinjiang have recently experienced major changes in their demographic, urban, ethnic, and linguistic landscapes. Ürümchi, the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, is a typical example of this. In this city, which is undergoing rapid economic and urban expansion, the Han make up around 72% of the population and the Chinese language is ever more present in the language use of the Uyghurs. This study examines the place of the Uyghur language in the context of the sinicisation of the city of Ürümchi, its role in the daily life of the Uyghur community, and opportunities for its use and revitalisation.

KEYWORDS: Ürümchi, Uyghur community, Uyghur language, language use, language policies.

The context: Ürümchi, a city for studying the responses of the Uyghurs to the Chinese model of modernisation

The city of Ürümchi, capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, is a representative example of the Chinese system of development and modernisation. It is an active, developed urban centre from the point of view of infrastructure and economic investment. The majority of the city's inhabitants are Han and it has a Uyghur community that is, to varying degrees, integrated into the employment system and social life of the city.

Several academic research projects have taken Ürümchi as a subject of study in order to investigate various aspects relating to the life of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. These include relations with the Han, dietary habits, consumption, language practices, demographic organisation, and employment (Cabras 2016; Caprioni 2011; Cèsaro 2007; Erkin 2009; Howell and Fan 2013; Smith 2002; Thompson 2013; Wilson 2012). These publications describe Ürümchi as a modern, developed city where the Uyghur community has the role of a social player, actively adapting to economic development, Han immigration, and the spread of the standardised Chinese language (*Putonghua*), fundamental elements in the Chinese government's modernisation policy.

Up until the Qing dynasty, Ürümchi was a staging-post for nomad populations (Gaubatz 1996, p. 71). It was not until the 1760s, when the Qing government established its garrisons and military government there in order to secure the regions of the northwest (Millward 1998, pp. 131-135), that it gained strategic importance. Therefore, unlike other cities in Xinjiang such as Kashgar, and other centres on the Silk Road, Ürümchi was not an emblematic city in the ethnogenesis and history of the Uyghurs.

According to a study carried out by the office of statistics for the autonomous region of Xinjiang, in 2009, the city of Ürümchi had 2.41 million inhabitants (Xinjiang Weiwu'erzu Zizhiqu 2010, sheet 3.5). In terms of percentage, the Han population made up around 72% of the population (1.75 million inhabitants) and the Uyghurs (310,000 inhabitants) and twelve other minority ethnic groups present in Xinjiang (in particular the Kazakhs, the Kyrgyzs, and the Mongols) only 28% of the population. Ürümchi is a centre on which Han from other regions (in particular Henan, Sichuan, and Gansu) converge along with Uyghurs and Han of both wealthy and modest backgrounds from other cities and rural areas in Xinjiang (Howell and Fan 2013, pp. 119-139).

Ürümchi may also be considered a Chinese city from the point of view of its urban development. As Loubes (2011) states, the urban strategies implemented in Xinjiang consist of replacing the local cultures of the space by Chinese regularity. In Ürümchi, as in Beijing and Shanghai, we find central squares, rectilinear avenues, and recent architectural models (residential areas, skyscrapers, and shopping malls).

One exception is the heart of the circumscription of Tianshan, which is home to the majority of the city's Uyghur population. In particular, the area commonly known as Erdaoqiao (Dong köwrük in Uyghur) contains various mosques, night markets, and businesses run by Uyghurs.

As far as ethnic relationships are concerned, contacts between Han and Uyghur are extremely frequent in the public sphere, since the two communities come into contact at work, school, at university, and in business. However, as is underlined by the research work of Caprioni (2011) and Smith (2002), there are many barriers dividing the two communities that contribute to ethnic division, such as dietary habits, religious beliefs, and lifestyles.

In the context of social and urban development as well as of co-existence between ethnic groups, language is a representative element in the study of the reactions of the Uyghur community to the system established by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. The Uyghur language has entered a

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critical period on account of language policies that encourage the development of Standard Chinese, presented by the government as an instrument of social and economic development. The campaign for the spread of Standard Chinese developed first and foremost at the national level in the 2000s, with restrictions on the use of minority languages in education and the media. [2] This policy of the promotion of Standard Chinese was then developed in Xinjiang in particular in the field of education, with the adoption of a type of bilingual education based on Chinese as the language of instruction (Dwyer 2015; Schluessel 2007; Tsung 2014; Simayi 2014). This was a major change in comparison to the previous system of education, which included Chinese schools as well as minority schools in which the teaching language was Uyghur. [3]

As Ma Rong (2009), one of the most influential Chinese academic personalities in the field of the education of ethnic minorities, has stated, the aim of the reform was to lift Xinjiang out of its state of under-development, to make the ethnic minorities more competitive in the workplace, and to improve communication in economic and cultural exchanges. The language policies pursued by the government, together with everyday linguistic contact between Uyghurs and Han, have had various consequences on language use and on the linguistic attitudes of the Uyghur community. Several studies have examined the question of the Uyghur language from different angles: language policies, language ideology, language practices, and linguistic attitudes (Ablimit and Tang 2014; Baki 2016; Cabras 2016; Dwyer 2015; Schluessel 2007; Tsung 2014). Their research has highlighted several elements concerning the sociolinguistic situation of Xinjiang: the political value of the languages spoken in China for the construction of the Chinese state, the need for the Uyghur community to be socially and linguistically competitive in relation to the Han majority, the weight of Uyghur-Chinese bilingual communication, and mastery of the ethnic language as a sign of fidelity and attachment to one's ethnic group.

Theoretical framework and methodology

The ideas of diglossia and bilingualism introduced by Fishman (1970) and commonly used in sociolinguistic case studies constitute a useful instrument in the analysis of the relationships between the languages spoken within a community. Fishman explains the relationships existing between two or more languages that are not genetically related on the basis of the context in which they are used, their prestige, and the role that the languages play within a community. Basing his observations on Ferguson's idea (1971), he notices a high variety (or language) used in official situations and in written communications and learnt in the context of a formal education, and a low variety that is conversely used in informal situations and oral communication. The languages spoken within a community can therefore exist in a diglossic relationship in which they are functionally differentiated within the public sphere/private sphere dichotomy. [4] This categorisation is based on macro-sociolinguistic criteria concerning functions of the language that are socially imposed and that depend, in general, on the language policies applied by the government.

The models given by Ferguson and Fishman for diglossic relationships have been applied in various studies, though sometimes maintaining a critical distance.

Kremnitz (1987), for example, suggests observing the dimension of the individual together with the different levels of prestige that a language can cover for speakers in the case of institutionalised bilingualism. Calvet

(2002) and Le Page & Tabouret-Keller (2006) emphasise the need to take into consideration the conflicts existing in diglossic relationships that cause them to constantly evolve. Bourdieu (1977), Eckert (1980), and Gal (1987) have observed the link between diglossia and power: the high variety associated with social and economic superiority can support the supremacy of a group as well as create disparities between different communities. Rather than a bilateral relationship between high and low varieties, Dwyer (2005, pp. 14-15) puts forward a pyramidal vision in which the languages spoken in China are set on a continuum, with high and low varieties at each end and a series of other varieties in between, depending on the effects of linguistic policies, their use in communication, and their social prestige. Moreover, as in Barny's study (2016), the concepts of high variety and low variety have been applied whilst taking into consideration other factors: the prestige of a given language in time and space, individual linguistic competencies, and the weight of institutions (macro-linguistic level) and individuals (micro-linguistic level).

Taking into account this theoretical framework, this article examines the different functions of the Uyghur language in the public and private spheres, considering its presence and practices in the city of Ürümchi, and the possibilities for revitalisation within the community. Our analysis is based on data collected during two field studies carried out in Ürümchi in 2013 and 2014. This is mainly ethnographic data obtained through informal conversations with members of the community in Chinese and Uyghur, as well as through the observation of language use in everyday life. Most of the respondents were from university or intellectual backgrounds and aged between 25 and 50. They constitute a section of the community from a comfortably-off urban background, a category present in a regional capital such as Ürümchi.

The decision to investigate the place of the Uyghur language in the city of Ürümchi was taken on the basis of academic and practical criteria. On the one hand, Ürümchi is the regional capital of Xinjiang: the Han are the majority group, contacts between the Han and the Uyghurs are extremely frequent in the public sphere, and Chinese is a dominant language in inter-ethnic communication. The city is therefore a representative location to study the relationships between the Chinese and Uyghur languages. In addition to this, foreign researchers can easily live and conduct surveys in Ürümchi as Chinese and Uyghur language students, or as foreign language teachers.

Uyghur in the public sphere

This section concerns the presence of the Chinese and Uyghur languages in the public sphere in the light of two elements: the linguistic environment

2. For example, the Law on the common national language and written word of the People's Republic of China requires Standard Chinese as the language of education in schools (Art. 10), the main language of radio and television broadcasts (Art. 12), and the language of communication in the media (Art. 13). Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jiaoyu bu (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China), *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guojia tongyong wenzi fa* (Law on the common national spoken and written language of the People's Republic of China), 2000, http://www.gov.cn/ziliao/flfg/2005-08/31/content_27920.htm (accessed on 14 March 2017).

3. In the former, pupils attended Han schools and took their final examination in Standard Chinese (*minkaohan*), whilst in the latter, pupils (*minkaomin*) took their final examination in the minority language. Uyghur could also be the language of instruction for pupils from other ethnic minorities. In this type of school all subjects were taught in the minority language, with Chinese introduced as a second language in the third year. Sometimes the *minkaomin* began their school career in a minority school and continued their studies (secondary school) in a Han school.

4. Fishman's diglossia grid comprises four categories: diglossia with bilingualism, diglossia without bilingualism, bilingualism without diglossia, and absence of diglossia and bilingualism.

of the city (*linguistic landscapes*), and the social functions of the two languages, and therefore their diglossic relationship.

The linguistic landscape of the city: Uyghur as the "eyebrows" of the Chinese language

A description of the linguistic landscape in multilingual situations is supposed to revolve around two functions: informational and symbolic. The function of conveying information concerns the presence of a language in a given area, whilst the symbolic function, on the other hand, reveals its status and its sociolinguistic importance (Landry and Bourhis 1997).

In the city of Ürümchi, and in the Xinjiang region in general, these two elements are difficult to measure by examining the different signs present in the city, since this aspect of urban life is managed and controlled by governmental laws. The ruling on language planning in Xinjiang [5] requires, in fact, road and commercial signage to be written in Standard Chinese and in Uyghur, as a sign of support for bilingualism and the development of minority languages.

In Ürümchi, road signs, street names, the names of public transport stops, the information written inside the various means of public transport, commercial signage, and the information panels inside buildings are written in the two languages in simplified characters for Chinese and in Perso-Arabic (*kona yéziq*) for Uyghur. Advertising signage is an exception to this, and may be written in Uyghur, Chinese, or in both languages depending on the target audience.

However, this linguistic homogeneity in writing highlights an element indicating the existence of a diglossic relationship in the linguistic landscape, since in fact the Uyghur translation of the signs and traffic directions written above the Chinese version is always smaller and less legible. The Uyghurs often say that their writing represents the "eyebrows" (*qash* in Uyghur) of Chinese writing, an image that highlights its small size and consequently emphasises the minority status of the language. This shows us how, even in an environment that from a legislative point of view guarantees linguistic equality, a tiny detail such as the size of the letters can be an indication of diglossia.

The diglossic relationship between Uyghur and Chinese

As far as the presence of Uyghur and Chinese writing is concerned, we have noticed homogeneity in the description of the linguistic landscape of the city of Ürümchi, distorted only by the size of the Uyghur characters.

On the other hand, when we consider the languages spoken in the public sphere, the description becomes more complex.

As far as Chinese is concerned, it is important to specify that the Uyghur community is mainly in contact with two of its varieties: Standard Chinese, used in particular in the media, education, and the workplace, and the variety of Northwest Mandarin spoken in Xinjiang, present in informal discourse and with the status of a lower variety in relation to the former.

With regard to the Uyghur language, this is not only spoken by Uyghurs but has the status of a *lingua franca* within the city amongst the non-Han populations.

The following paragraphs describe the place given to Chinese and Uyghur in the public sphere, in particular in the education and media sectors.

As stated in the introduction, since the education reform initiated in the 2000s, schools have adopted bilingual education programs based mainly on teaching through the medium of Chinese. The implementation of these programmes reveals differences within the region. In rural areas, as in cities where the Uyghur population constitutes the majority group, teaching through the medium of Chinese is not easily achievable due to the lack of teachers who speak *Putonghua*, the refusal of teachers to move to rural areas, and the problems children experience in studying without the support of their mother tongue (Tsung 2014; Simayi 2014).

In Ürümchi, several schools now offer a type of bilingual education in which Chinese is the teaching medium and Uyghur is taught for four to five hours a week. The bilingual classes in secondary school hold classes in mathematics, physics, chemistry, political sciences, and history in Standard Chinese, with Uyghur language classes the only exception to this. Standard Chinese has therefore become the teaching medium for subjects considered in China to be the most competitive, the hard sciences.

A similar situation can be seen in university education, with classes taught in Chinese apart from Uyghur literature and language. The majority of scientific publications are also written in Chinese. [6] Consequently, not only teaching but also the transmission of knowledge becomes the prerogative of the national language, Chinese.

Speaking Chinese fluently is becoming increasingly important in order to obtain a good job, and consequently, a recognised place in society. The learning of Standard Chinese is supported not only by the government but now also by families, who prefer to send their children to schools offering a better education in Chinese or to crèches where they can learn Chinese before attending primary school. The teaching of the Uyghur language and its system of writing is often the responsibility of the family. Learning the minority language has become an activity that is developed in the private sphere.

The need to learn to speak fluent Chinese is also felt by adolescents and university teachers: learning and mastering Chinese has become a necessity for all those wishing to integrate into the socially and economically developed urban society of Xinjiang (see also Cabras 2016, p. 3; Dwyer 2005, pp. 36-38; Smith Finley 2013, pp. 38-39).

With regard to the media, the state is committed to the spread of Standard Chinese whilst guaranteeing the development of media in minority languages. In Ürümchi, Uyghur is in fact the language of certain television and radio broadcasts as well as certain newspapers (daily and weekly). Programmes in Uyghur are broadcast on Chinese National Radio (*Zhongyang renmin guangbo diantai*), as well as on local radio stations such as Xinjiang Radio (*Shinjang Xelq Radyo Istansisi*). As far as television programmes are concerned, stations such as Ürümchi TV and *Shinjang Téléviziye Istansisi* broadcast news, entertainment programmes, and documentaries in Uyghur.

National and regional daily newspapers such as *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao*) and *Xinjiang Weekly* (*Xinjiang ribao*) publish Uyghur editions, *Xelq géziti* and *Shinjang géziti* respectively. Moreover, periodicals includes papers intended solely for a Uyghur readership that are not translated into Chinese. These are available in bookshops and deal with various subjects such as modern society, literature, traditional lifestyles, and folklore.

The Uyghur community therefore has a varied choice of media in its mother tongue at its disposal. However, two elements that demonstrate the subordinate position of the Uyghur language in relation to the Chinese

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5. Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region). "Guanyu xiugai 'Xinjiang Weiwu'er Zizhiqu Yuyan Wenzi Gongzuo Tiaoli' de jueding" (Revision concerning 'The regulations governing the spoken and written language of the Uyghur Region of Xinjiang'), 2002, http://xjsgj.gov.cn/xjjgbzw/bmsdfa/2010/24636.htm (accessed on 14 March 2017), Art. 8 and 9.

6. One exception to Chinese publications is the Uyghur edition of the linguistics journal "Language and translation" (*Yuyan yu fanyi*, in Uyghur, *Til we terjime*).

language in this sector may be observed. Firstly, the Uyghur versions of the programmes and of the national press do not offer specific services, but tend to be translations of Chinese content (Dwyer 2005, p. 49). Secondly, it must be said that programmes in Chinese are not only greater in number but also more competitive in terms of content, offering a wide choice of films, TV serials, and entertainment programmes. Moreover, Chinese is, in general, the language through which it is possible to access television serials and foreign films (sometimes sub-titled versions in Uyghur do not exist or are only available after a considerable time). Consequently, watching films and TV serials in Chinese is a fairly common activity amongst Uyghur speakers living in Ürümchi. Since the Chinese language has a far greater number of speakers, it has more financial resources at its disposal with which to develop its media presence and to offer attractive content.

Particularities of the diglossic situation between Uyghur and Chinese

In studying the functions of Uyghur and Chinese in the public sphere, we find resemblances with various circumstances that characterise diglossic relationships.

If we take into consideration language practices within the Han and Uyghur communities in the public sphere, we can identify the Fishmanian situation of diglossia without bilingualism. The Chinese community does not speak Uyghur, in fact, and only knows a few words of it. On the other hand, the Uyghur community of Ürümchi masters the Chinese language in varying degrees. When we consider the existence of language policies that favour Chinese as the language of education, the absence of policies favouring the *de facto* knowledge of Uyghur, the competiveness of the Chinese media, and the development of Standard Chinese as a prime condition for obtaining employment, we are able to identify a diglossic situation in which Standard Chinese has the status of high variety by virtue of its importance and prestige in the public sphere.

However, as far as the specificities of our case study are concerned, several elements must be highlighted.

Firstly, according to Fishman, a situation of diglossia without bilingualism is one in which a section of the population does not have access to the high variety. However, in our case study, we have identified a shift towards a situation of diglossia with bilingualism: in Ürümchi, an urban environment in which relations with the Han in the public sphere and in the workplace are frequent, a large section of the community speaks Chinese (albeit with varying degrees of competence and with exceptions). Knowledge of Chinese is, admittedly, the prerogative of the wealthier classes, but at the same time it is becoming increasingly widespread, in particular amongst the younger generations.

Moreover, in the diglossia and bilingualism model, lack of access to the high variety contributes to the creation of social conflicts. In our case study, it is possible to note two trends. One of these trends is the acceptance of the *status quo* and recognition of the Chinese language as social capital. Chinese, associated with economic and social development, has become an imperative for all those who wish to integrate into the Chinese system. Moreover, the Uyghur language cannot compete as a useful code in the public sphere. What we are seeing here is a sort of Gramscian hegemony, [7] in that the need to learn Standard Chinese is a decision that not only has been taken by the central authorities but is also accepted and nurtured by those who have no control over language policies, that is to say, speakers of Uyghur.

Another trend is discontent over the spread of the high variety to the detriment of the minority language, which is also at the root of ethnic conflict. In this case, the learning and use of the minority language in the private sphere and linguistic purism, phenomena that we will study in the following sections, highlight opposition on the part of the community to the dominant position of the Chinese language.

In addition, if we take into consideration the evolution of diglossic relationships (Calvet 2002; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 2006), we can observe in the current situation traces of a past in which Uyghur itself was the high variety. For example, its literary tradition, presence in the education system of the past and, albeit to a lesser extent, its presence in the media, do not allow us to class this language unequivocally as a low variety as opposed to Chinese.

In the next section, we will observe how the diglossic relationship present in the public sphere is in fact less clear-cut in the private sphere. In particular, it is possible to note different language practices, as well as the existence of areas in which the diglossic situation has been overturned by the interests and initiatives of the community in its daily life.

Uyghur in the private sphere: "Uyghur spaces"

In Ürümchi, an urban environment where relations with the Han in the public sphere and in particular in the workplace are frequent, a large section of the community speaks Chinese (in varying degrees and with exceptions) and uses it not only in the public sphere but also in the private. There follows a schematic categorisation presenting different groups of speakers present in the Uyghur community of Ürümchi with their main language practices:

Migrants from the countryside with a low level of education, arriving in Ürümchi to do low-paid work. These speakers are mainly in contact with Uyghurs, and their social status gives them no opportunity to learn Standard Chinese apart from a few words (often in the variety of Mandarin spoken in the Northwest) used in very simple forms of communication.

Speakers whose education was in Uyghur (*minkaomin*) and who only use Chinese in the public sphere and avoid using it in private life.

Speakers whose education was in Chinese (*minkaohan*), who speak Chinese well and use it in their professional life. However, as far as private life is concerned, these speakers use Uyghur in their in-group conversations. For these speakers, bilingualism should be seen as a resource for the community and its future generations, whilst at the same time maintaining competence in Uyghur.

Minkaohan who use Chinese not only in the public sphere, but also at home and in in-group conversations. This often happens when within a family both parents or one parent and the children have attended Chinese schools. In this case, Chinese is a far more accessible and practical code.

The presence of Chinese varies according to the education received, the professional situation, individual experiences, and the perceptions of the speaker in relation to the languages spoken. It is also important to note that contact between the Uyghur and Chinese languages contributes to the development of linguistic phenomena such as code-switching in discourse and the borrowing of Chinese words. Chinese is therefore present in the linguistic practices and language use of the Uyghur in both the public and private spheres.

In a sinicised environment in which the Chinese language and the Han economic and social system are dominant, it is possible to find "Uyghur spaces," places or activities in which the community has common interests

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7. According to Gramsci, the hegemony of a dominant group is not imposed only through authority and repression. Given that the dominant group controls the political direction, the oppressed classes are led to accept the social and economic interests of the former.

and in which Uyghur can be used and revitalised by its speakers. These "spaces" include activities in the theatre, bookshops, celebrations and places where people gather, discussions on language in daily conversations, and the Uyghur Web. These spaces differ from one another but share a private or community dimension that sets them apart from activities linked to public life in which the Chinese language dominates.

Concerts of Uyghur music and theatrical performances

Uyghurs, like the other ethnic minorities in China, are represented in the collective imagination and in political discourse as a people cut off from modern development, and as symbols of folklore, in particular acclaimed for their dance and musical performances (Gladney 1994; Blum 2001). Consequently, the authorities pay particular attention to this type of performance. Often, the cultural activities promoted by the government have lost the link that tied them to their communities of origin and have been reduced to shows intended for Han Chinese and foreign tourists. [8]

On the other hand, the following examples concern activities that are especially appreciated by Uyghur audiences, as borne out by the number of spectators who attend them and their evident enjoyment.

The Xinjiang Opera (*Xinjiang gejuyuan*) and the People's Theatre (*Xinjiang renmin juchang*) present music and plays performed by the best-known artists in Xinjiang (singers such as Abdulla Erkin and Abdulla Abdurehim, actors such as Abdukérim Abliz, and musicians such as Sanubar Tursun). A combination of dance, music, and theatre, these shows represent an entertainment opportunity for a wider section of the community and not only for enthusiasts.

Other shows, such as the comedies (*étot*) of Abdukérim Abliz, performed in theatres and available in DVD shops and on the Web, tackle subjects focusing on the evolution of Uyghur society, such as the emergence of new linguistic practices, the search for employment, and regional development (such as the jade trade, for example) (Cabras 2016, pp. 287-309). [9]

The ability of the organisers and actors to breathe life into an artistic production with which the public can identify, as well as the interest of the community in the Uyghur artistic and folk tradition, are probably the factors that have made this "Uyghur space" so dynamic.

During these events, organised with the approval of the civic authorities, the expression and reconstruction of the ethnic identity develops on two levels: that of content, with discussions of topics related to today's society, and that of interest in tradition and artistic representations as well as in the Uyghur language, the instrument through which these activities are developed.

In these contexts, the Uyghur language is not used exclusively for everyday informal conversations but has become a language used in a variety of contexts in the community life of the Uyghurs.

Bookshops

In a region where the national language is the subject of major diffusion policies, one might expect a crisis in translation and in the literature of the minority language. However, this is not the case in Xinjiang. In Ürümchi, state bookshops such as the *Xinhua shudian* on the one hand, and independent bookshops on the other, offer a wide range of books in Uyghur: translations of Chinese texts (for example of literature, history, and political

propaganda), foreign novels, and modern and contemporary Uyghur literature such as the works of Zordur Sabir and Memtimin Hoshur, as well as great classics such as *Divânu Lügati't-Türk* (Collection of Turkic Languages) and the *Kutadgu Bilig* (The Wisdom of Royal Glory). [10]

It is therefore not only a question of translations from the Chinese, but of genuine literary production.

Children's literature is also varied. It is possible to find books of traditional Uyghur, Central Asian (the stories of *Nasreddin ependi* is one example), Chinese, and foreign tales as well as various materials for learning Uyghur.

Other books concern specific areas such as Uyghur medicine and cooking and language learning for adults, with teaching manuals and dictionaries.

Thanks to these publications, the Uyghur language, which as we have observed is currently shifting towards a low variety status in the public sphere, can be spread as a high variety and used as a language of leisure, knowledge, literary production, teaching, and discussion. Moreover, the production of children's literature becomes an alternative to the teaching dispensed in public educational institutions that no longer value Uyghur as a language of knowledge. This allows families to take an active part in the linguistic education of their children.

Religious festivals, celebrations, and meeting places

In the "Uyghur spaces" described above, the Uyghur language is a fundamental element. However, as we have previously observed, in an urban environment such as the city of Ürümchi, the linguistic habits of the Uyghur community vary according to the individual, their experiences, and their degree of insertion into society. Moreover, they influence the perception of the Uyghur identity. As demonstrated by Smith-Finley (2013, XXVI) in her study on young Uyghurs brought up in the urban zones of Xinjiang, Uyghur identities extend over a continuum on which each sub-group forms a community with a certain degree of "purity" based on factors such as Uyghur language, religion, and culture, but which nonetheless feels part of a wider Uyghur community. A characteristic example would be the *minkaohan*: their linguistic and cultural ambivalence and ambiguity make possible a negotiation with the system that does not imply total assimilation (Grose 2010; Smith Finley 2013, pp. 380-393).

Consequently, language does not constitute a stable identity trait. The presence and absence of the Uyghur language is one of the characteristics of the "Uyghur spaces" presented in the following part of this section.

The celebrations of religious festivals such as the *roza heyt* 'celebration of the fast', the *qurban heyt* 'celebration of the sacrifice', and the *noruz* 'new year festival', weddings, funeral rites, gatherings for the circumcision of children, outings in the night markets, and discotheques intended for a Uyghur public all represent spaces in which language is not one of the main ele-

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8. For example, the *meshrep* are an emblematic case. *Meshrep* are traditionally described as gatherings during which poems are recited, dances performed, and conversations held on subjects concerning the behaviour to be respected within the community. Nowadays, with the government ban on private *meshrep* and the modernisation and urbanisation of society, the term is often used to refer to the Uyghur dance and music shows on television or in restaurants (the latter intended in particular for tourists). See Harris (2014) for further information on the subject.

9. See also Darren Byler, "Uyghur Comedy, Abdukerim Abliz and Cultural Citizenship," *The Art of Life in Chinese Central Asia* (Blog), 24 October 2013, http://livingotherwise.com/2013/10/24/uyghur-comedy-abdukerim-abliz-and-cultural-citizenship/ (accessed on 14 March 2017).

10. These classics date from the eleventh century. The *Divânu Lügati't-Türk*, written by Mahmud al-Kashgari is a collection of the Turkic dialects of the time; the *Kutadgu Bilig,* written by Yusuf Khass Hajib, is a work on the virtues of sovereigns and how to govern an empire wisely, inspired by the Persian tradition of the *Shāh-nāmeh.* The object of the book was to legitimise Turkic civilisation and the teaching of moral and ethical values.

ments. They are events shared by the majority of Uyghurs whatever their linguistic preferences may be.

These different and varied activities have one element in common in that although the Han sometimes attend them as guests, they are only shared by the Uyghurs and consequently contribute to creating a sense of community.

Unlike the other "spaces" such as theatrical performances and bookshops, the link with the revitalisation of the Uyghur language here is not direct. However, such spaces are far removed from the context of the public sphere where Chinese is imposed as the language of communication.

As far as religious festivals are concerned, the way in which they are celebrated in the city includes practices such as prayer and charity to the poor, as well as more secular elements such as the wearing of new clothes, the giving of gifts to children, and the sharing of meals with the family. The private and secular aspects that may be present in these celebrations enable the construction of a space over which the government does not exercise strict control, unlike occasions when religious practices extend to the workplace (an example of this would be the ban on fasting during Ramadan).

Everyday conversations

As previously stated, the relationship between language and identity is not a stable characteristic within the Uyghur community. However, several elements show that the theme of language constitutes an element of construction and identity resistance.

Modern Uyghur possesses a lexicon extremely rich in borrowings that bears witness to the contacts that Uyghur speakers have had with different languages and populations both now and in the past. [11] Borrowings from Arabic, Persian, and Russian are seen by its speakers as an integral part of the vocabulary of the Uyghur language. On the other hand, Chinese phonetic borrowings have become the target of linguistic purism.

The forgetting of Standard Uyghur terms, often replaced by Chinese words, together with the alternation of Uyghur and Chinese in informal speech, both of which are widespread urban language practices, can be observed in everyday conversations heard in the city, as the extract below shows (a teacher is talking to one of his students and is asking her to be more diligent):

Siz yanjiusheng*, aspirant, maqale yézishing kérek.*
You are *yanjiusheng,* a Master's student, you must write a dissertation.

The teacher, who is reprimanding his student, first uses the Chinese term *yanjiusheng,* 'Master's student'. After using this term, he corrects himself by using the Uyghur term *aspirant* (of Russian origin). Despite the informal nature of the conversation, the speaker does not consider the use of a Chinese term to be appropriate in this context. This demonstrates a weakness in the Uyghur language but also the realisation that because of the presence and frequent use of the Chinese language, knowledge of Uyghur vocabulary is weakening. Consequently, the use of Standard Uyghur terms that are no longer common in informal speech has become the everyday response of the community to the changes that its ethnic language is currently experiencing. This has led to the revival of words that are now often replaced by Chinese words, such as *pemidur,* 'tomato', instead of *xihongshi; Pédagogika uniwérsitéti,* 'teacher training college', instead of *Shida;* and *pedigen,* 'aubergine', instead of *qiezi.* We note that the purism present in everyday conversations accepts borrowings from the other languages previously mentioned. The common dominant

language, Chinese, is therefore the only language that represents a danger for the survival and development of the ethnic language.

The Uyghur Web

The Internet in China is not just a means of controlling ideas but also a forum in which it is possible to express thoughts concerning political, social, and cultural life (Light 2015). Although monitored and with very many inaccessible sites, it is heavily used in China, not least in the city of Ürümchi, where it is accessed through private connections, in cybercafés, and on both computers and mobile phones.

In this context, Uyghur occupies an important position both as a language of communication and topic of discussion.

One element linked to discussions about the language on the Web is the Uyghur writing system. We have already mentioned the *kona yéziq,* the official form of the written language in the Perso-Arabic alphabet. The latter was established for computers in 1995 and is now the writing system most used on Uyghur Internet sites according to a study carried out by Reyhan (2012, p. 12), with a percentage of 82%. It is currently still missing from the parameters of mobile phones, but an application, *qelem,* widely used in Xinjiang, enables users to download a Uyghur font.

Although the *kona yéziq* is the most common writing system on websites, a different situation can be seen with regard to instant messaging services and blogs. Here, Uyghur Internet users use the *kona yéziq* as just one of several options: the Chinese language written in characters as well as the *yéngi yéziq,* a latinised version of Uyghur writing based on *pinyin.* The latter, although considered practical, also constitutes a sign of assimilation on account of its affinity with pinyin (for example, the letter x represents the sound [ʃ], the letter q the sound [tʃ]). On the other hand, the *kona yéziq* is a symbol of religious and cultural identity: the Perso-Arabic characters constitute a link with the Muslim religion and with the Uyghur literary tradition.

As for content, the Uyghur Web includes many sites dedicated to education, entertainment, literature, commerce, and information technology as well as other diverse content. Sites such as ulinix.com represent a space in which it is possible to read national and international news in Uyghur and watch films (for example Chinese, Turkish, and American productions) subtitled in Uyghur.

Changes to the language are also a topic of discussion on the Web. WeChat (an instant messaging and content-sharing application very commonly used in China) is a forum for the exchange and dissemination of opinions concerning the protection of the language, with the publication of posts that mention the former names of the neighbourhoods in the city of Ürümchi and the bad habit of using Chinese terms instead of Uyghur terms. In 2014, linguists even created a group called *Tilshunash* 'Linguiste', the ob-

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11. Borrowings from Arabic, in particular the vocabulary linked to Islam, probably date back to the Islamisation of the western part of what is now Xinjiang during the Karakhanid dynasty (999-1211), whilst most of the borrowings from Persian, certain of which are themselves of Arabic origin, may be attributed to the period of Chagatai literature. A more recent influence, on the other hand, is the Russian language. This dates back to the twentieth century, a period during which the Soviet Union played a considerable political and cultural role in the Xinjiang region. Terms used in the exact and human sciences, government, industry, and to describe objects and fashions from the West often constitute borrowings from the Russian, such as *zawut* ('factory' from the Russian *zawod*). Others are terms from European languages such as English and French, for example *kompyutér* (from the English *computer*) and *wélisipit* (from the French *vélocipède*), which came into the Uyghur language through Russian. As for Chinese, its influence began to represent a major contribution after the annexing of Xinjiang by the PRC (1949). Chinese borrowings concern the domain of government, industry, and new products and trends from China or abroad such as the term *zongtong* ('president', from the Chinese *zongtong*), *sulyaw* ('plastic' from the Chinese *suliao*), and *cheyze* ('aubergine' from the Chinese *qiezi*).

ject of which was the creation of neologisms in order to avoid the use of Chinese words. [12]

Like other "Uyghur spaces," the Web is set up as a tool in which the community creates interactions on topics of common interest. With regard to language, the Web therefore offers Uyghur users a range of possibilities, enabling them to decide how to use the Uyghur language on the basis of their preferences and ideological choices. Its presence with the *kona yéziq* writing as a topic of discussion and also as a means of discussing different subjects demonstrates the importance of the Uyghur language in a space that is visited very frequently in daily life.

Conclusion

This article examines various aspects of daily life in the Uyghur community of Ürümchi, taking into account the sinicised environment of the city as well as the major demographic, urban, and social changes that have taken place in the urban areas of Xinjiang in recent times.

The description of the environment of Ürümchi has highlighted a process of sinicisation that concerns aspects of the daily life of the Uyghurs, amongst these the linguistic dimension. As far as the public sphere is concerned, language policies and the social and economic prestige of the Chinese language have contributed to the development of a diglossic situation. On the other hand, as far as the private sphere is concerned, opportunities exist for Uyghur to be developed and revitalised within the context of the private life and interests of the Uyghur community. In the "Uyghur spaces," the language is involved in varying degrees in the life of the community, in both its oral and written versions, in physical places such as bookshops and theatres, and in intangible places such as in conversations on the state of the Uyghur language and on the Web. It is noticeable that efforts on the part of the state to marginalise the Uyghur language have been matched by increased efforts on the part of the community to develop the ethnic language in private life.

Moreover, "Uyghur spaces" such as theatres, bookshops, and the Web are under the control of the government and local authorities; they are integrated into the formal rights that the government's language policies grant to the development of the characteristic traits of ethnic minorities such as language, folklore, literature, etc. The ability to know how to take advantage of these spaces and breathe life into an artistic or literary production that attracts the community is a form of peaceful resistance to the hegemony of the Chinese language promoted by the government.

This study shows the insertion of the Uyghur community within the context of Chinese modernisation as a community integrated into professional and educational life and that speaks Chinese well, albeit with varying degrees of bilingualism, and which is at the same time capable of negotiating and revitalising its identity traits, in this specific case, its language.

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12. Personal conversation with Zohra Ablimit, Ürümchi, May 2014.

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