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The language policy of Kazakhstan and the state language in government service

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Abstract

The Russian language holds a strong position in Kazakhstan. It has a status of an official language, the language of international communication, and it continues to perform important social and humanitarian functions. But the purposeful displacement of Russian with the Kazakh language is still in progress, though this process lasts for a long time being held back because of satisfying the needs of society. The aim of this work is to show how much the sphere of Kazakh language use became widened after gaining the independence. In Kazakhstan, the future of the Kazakh language is shaped by activities of masses and by dignity level of Kazakhs in power. Therefore, the Kazakh language acquisition becomes a compulsory for government officials. Free Kazakh language training courses are provided in all public institutions to this effect. So from now on career growth issues also directly depend on state language acquisition, and this gives a great stimulus to its learning.

Keywords: Kazakhization; Kazakh language proficiency; KAZTEST system.

1. Introduction

The Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) has been a recipient country for many immigrants for many years. Therefore, Kazakhstan is not considered to be an ethnically homogeneous country, and is similar to Russia in ethnocultural and linguistic terms: all 126 languages of Kazakhstan nations can be found in Russia as well.

The ethnic and demographic characteristics of Kazakhstan changed dramatically in the first years of the independence. Firstly, both the total population of Kazakhs and their share in the population of the republic increased. This process was driven by natural population growth due to the positive migration balance. Repatriate-Kazakhs number nearly one million today which significantly affected the ethnic and demographic structure and the cultural landscape of the country. In general, the growth of the population of Kazakhs is regarded as a demonstration of a tendency of Kazakhization or monoethnicitization which is not as obvious in other CIS countries.

2. Kazakh language training courses and KAZTEST system

The rapid demographic changes of the last twenty years led to significant shifts and turned it into a country with a predominantly Kazakh population and shrinking Russian one. This fact naturally affects the essential characteristics of language situation: exoglossic language situation seems to be defined by 126 languages, but in
fact ethnic groups speaking 124 languages (except the Kazakh and Russian) account for only 13.2% of the country population and the language situation is clearly centered around the two powerful communicative languages: the Kazakh and Russian.

The harmonious language policy is stated in the project “The functioning and development of languages of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020.” (art. 555) which provides the full-scale functioning of the state language as the most important factor for strengthening national unity and preserving the languages of all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. In the near future, the Kazakh language is expected to be the language of international communication.

This decisive rearrangement of languages is in process in Kazakhstan today especially in the change of their share of function and learning. Obvious changes were observed in the specifics of Russian language functions. Besides, in accordance with the modern requirements and globalization, more priority is given to the English language. That is why the President of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, put forward the cultural program “The Trinity of languages: Kazakh, Russian, English” the realization of which was underlined as a separate direction of the state internal policy and it is considered as a condition of the strengthening of social compliance and evidence of the country competitiveness. Two of the three languages are the world languages with all the attributes and effects associated with this status: Russian has a fairly stable position in Kazakhstan, and English is seem as the language of successful integration into the world economy and science. In addition to the two world languages – English and Russian, the prestige of the Chinese and Turkish language is growing in Kazakhstan.

It goes without saying, the Kazakh (state language) language is in the foreground. With joint efforts of government, business and bank structures, social associations a charitable fund has been established with the aim to support the Kazakh language. Consequently, the Kazakh language gets all-round support from both sides of the government and the Kazakh society. One of the main directions of the state language policy is to create conditions for all citizens of Kazakhstan to master the state language. With this aim centers for compulsory, free learning of the state language were set up in accordance with the ethnic, demographic and professional characteristics of population groups.

The status the Kazakh language is “the language of government administration, legislation, legal proceedings and paperwork operating in all spheres of public relations in all over the territory of the state”, and the mastering of the state language is an important factor for the consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan (Basic legislative acts on languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2007, p. 5).

Suleimenova E.D. (2011) indicates in her monograph, that status planning in Kazakhstan is the most powerful regulatory tool of the functioning of the Kazakh language in the most important communication spheres (p. 74). Moreover, it allows the state to exercise control over observance of legislation and compliance with language conditions. Under status and corpus planning, and the planning of acquisition and dissemination of the state language, as well a variety of measures of Kazakhization have been taken. Firstly, are the numerous regulations, orders and decrees for extension of the functioning of the Kazakh language in the so-called controlled spheres of communication: public administration, paperwork, including a single system of the electronic document management (which affected all enterprises and institutions, regardless of the form of ownership, the deadline of the introduction of Kazakh language into office work officially changed several times), broadcasting in Kazakh (according to the Ministry of Culture the air time on radio and television in the Kazakh and Russian language is equal at the moment, however, because the quality of programs of Kazakh air time in the Kazakh language doesn’t comprise a serious competition to the Russian and can not yet significantly expand its audience), and creating in all major institutions the special departments of state language with staff interpreters. Secondly, is the system modernization and expansion of educational infrastructure in the Kazakh language, regulation of hours devoted to the study of the Kazakh language in all types and levels of educational institution, improving the quality of teaching and methodological basis of Kazakh language teaching (unification of model programs and system of compulsory certification of the Kazakh language proficiency, lexicographical support, mass publication of educational materials for different categories of learners), the development of online resources and distance learning, the introduction of computer training programs into the educational
process, the opening of centers and organization of courses, festivals, contests and competitions (traditional contest “The state language in government service”) on the state language proficiency and many others.

Despite the abundance of “sound” and weighed offers and their reasonable realization there is still low level of Kazakh language proficiency and irregular functioning of the Kazakh language in regulated spheres of communication. Requirements of good level of Kazakh language proficiency are equal for all citizens of Kazakhstan: to the President (Art. 41), the chairmen of the two houses of Parliament – the Senate and the Majilis (Art. 58), ordinary employees, chiefs and managers of high level, a list which consists of 220 items (The law “On the list of occupations, specialties and positions that require state language proficiency in a certain volume in accordance with the qualification requirements”) etc. (The basic legislative acts on languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2007, p. 5). Kazakh language proficiency is certified by the KAZTEST system (by 2017 – at least 50% of government employees will be certified in accordance with the evaluation system of the level of Kazakh language proficiency of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan according to the program “KAZTEST” on state language proficiency. Moreover, by 2020 it will have risen to 100%).

The level of the Kazakh language proficiency of Kazakhstani citizens and foreigners can be determined with the help of KAZTEST system. The KAZTEST structure consists of four parts: Listening (evaluation of acquisition of the listened monologues), reading (determination of the level of the acquisition of the read text), writing (the determination of the level of the acquisition of writing skills), lexical and grammatical part (determination of the level of acquisition of linguistic structure).

In accordance with the protocol instructions of the Prime Minister from October 3, 2005 “The creation of the evaluation system of the level of the Kazakh language proficiency and on the basis of it to develop the methods of teaching”, the KAZTEST system has been developed by the National Testing Centre of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This system is designed to evaluate the Kazakh language proficiency of Kazakhstani citizens and foreigners who carry out any activity in the territory of the RK. Testing is considered to be a recognized method of evaluation of the level of language proficiency throughout the world experience. This system consists of test tasks of different levels. It can determine the level of Kazakh language proficiency by tasks such as listening, reading, writing and can give a mark. The KAZTEST system was drawn up in accordance with the “Concept of evaluation system of Kazakh language level in the Republic of Kazakhstan” based on international standardized tests regardless of the nationality and kind of activity.

Rigorous scientific research of international evaluation systems of the level of language acquisition was conducted before introducing the given system. This included TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Test System), DAALF/DELF (Diplome Approfondi de Francaise/Diplome d'Etudes en Langue Francaise), DSH (Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang) and TRKI (Test on Russian as a foreign language).

However, despite the demands, today even the highest positions in Kazakhstan can be held by a person who does not know the Kazakh language at the required level to fulfill his official duties. There are a lot of Russian speaking Kazakhs in the power with high performance of polilinguism and fluency both in Russian and English. On the other hand, the part of the population with Kazakh language proficiency requirements is disproportionate to the representation of Kazakhs and may explain the exclusion of Russians from the governing bodies.

Now the state language proficiency is demanded both from the government employees and workers in the sphere of science, culture, education, health and public service. Moreover, a system of financial incentives is provided for those workers in government institutions with a high level of state language proficiency.

Evaluating the perspectives for the development of a full-fledged functioning of the Kazakh language in the future as quite optimistic and using studies of D. Fishman (1991) as a “convenient targets” for the study of language shift of the Kazakh language which once “gave ground to the Russian language” William Fierman (2005) uses the image of the half-full glass of water: “The glass,” where the status of the Kazakh language fluctuates, in the urbanized regions of Kazakhstan is still half empty rather than half full. In fact, it is more than half empty. But at the same time ... now it is much more liquid than in the second half of the 1980s (p. 62).

The status of Russian and Kazakh languages in the country was governed by the two basic laws: the Constitution (1995) and the “Law on Languages” (1997). The 7th article of the Constitution stipulates that “1)
The Kazakh language is the state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan. 2) In government institutions and local governments the Russian language is officially equally used with the Kazakh.” It means that the Russian language in Kazakhstan has an official status and can be used in all spheres of society. Preservation of the sphere of functioning of the Russian language is provided with the aspiration of integration in Kazakhstan and preservation of the common cultural and educational space with the CIS countries.

The use of the Russian language is described in the “Law on Languages” in detail and the authors of the bill suggest to change the main provisions of it. The acts of government institutions, accounting and statistical, financial and technical documentation can be developed in Russian. The Russian language can be used in court proceedings while concluding contracts and transactions, and the authority has the right to respond in Russian to citizens statements. The State guarantees secondary, specialized secondary and higher education in the Russian. The Russian language can be used in the sphere of culture, art and scientific activity.

The Russian language is restricted in its use in the sphere of mass media. According to the law “programmes on TV and radio broadcasters, regardless of their forms of ownership should be more in the state language than in other languages.”(Law on TV and radio broadcasting in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2012, p. 3). However, it was difficult for electronic mass media to meet the requirements due to the lack of Kazakh “content”. Programmes in the Kazakh language are broadcast more often in the evening and at night when the audience is minimal. On the contrary, programmes in the Russian language broadcast in “prime time”, when the number of viewers and listeners reaches the peak. Besides, the residents of the country have free access to satellite television and can watch Russian channels ignoring the Kazakh speaking TV channels. As for the printed mass media and online content, we can state that the Russian language still dominates.

In practice, the Russian language dominates in Kazakhstan, and it is stimulating motivation for Kazakh nationalists concerned with the disproportionately small role of the state language. According to the population census of 2009, 64.4% of Kazakhstani people possess the Kazakh language, and 94.4% – the Russian language (Results in brief, 2010). The Kazakhs constitute 63.1% of the population, and 11.7% know the Kazakh language at elementary level. It is obvious this language problems are felt, to a considerable extent, by the titular ethnolinguistic group itself. If the representatives of the Turkic people living in Kazakhstan – Uzbeks, Uighurs and others know the Kazakh language well enough, Slavs, on the contrary, rarely know it because in real life they do not need it. The Kazakh language is necessary in the bodies of government power, which is why there are no Russians, but in other spheres of life the Russian proficiency is quite enough. According to the data, 84.8% of people are fluent in Russian and it is understood by almost all the inhabitants of the country.

A forthcoming bill developed by the Ministry of Culture of Kazakhstan must radically transform the linguistic space of the country. The most radically changes it proposes to introduce, are to the “Law on Languages” (1997) which regulates language use in various spheres of government and public activities (On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2000).

The main innovation is the requirement to communicate with the authorities only in the Kazakh language and all the documents must be prepared in Kazakh including appeals, complaints and statements. Responses to the appeals of the citizens will also be given in the Kazakh language. Verbal communication of the people with officials is not regulated in the bill, but judging by the spirit and content of the document it must also be conducted in the Kazakh.

The accounting and statistical, financial, technical documentation of bodies of government power must be conducted in the Kazakh language. Commercial organizations can optionally carry paperwork in Russian. All answers of the government organizations to the statements of physical and legal people must be written in the Kazakh language. Non-governmental organizations can give replies in the Kazakh language or in statement language. Names of all legal properties should be given in the Kazakh. An exception is provided only for foreign and joint enterprises, the names of which should be transliterated in Kazakh, and in some cases in Russian. Requirements for advertising and commercial information are a milder. The bill requires forms, signs, announcements, advertisements, price lists to be presented in the Kazakh language, but in some cases it is allowed to be in Russian or other languages.
State language proficiency of government officials is determined by a special state standard. The bill provides, no requirement for Russian language proficiency, however article 7 of the Constitution of Kazakhstan directly says that the Russian language in Kazakhstan is official and can be used in the power alongside Kazakh. Kazakh language proficiency is becoming an essential for “special kinds of government service” (On state service: Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2001) as well. It means that officials of security, defense and law enforcement agencies which form the supporting framework of any state must know the Kazakh language.

What is even more significant is that, from January 1, 2013 test results for the Kazakh language are expected to be a necessary document for employment.

In the sphere of education these innovations are not yet noticeable, despite quite radical “Kazakhization” changes that have occurred in previous years. The bill requires that in all private schools the share of Kazakh groups will not be less than 50%. According to the developers of the law, the Kazakh language “must function” in the sphere of science as well, including in the writing and defending theses. However, in practice, the implementation of this requirement is not seen. It is permitted “if necessary” to use the Russian language. For the media, the previous quota is kept, stating that the amount of programmes in the Kazakh language should not be less in time than in other languages. The “promotion of the Kazakh language” is charged as the duty of the Kazakh media.

On the systematic basis the state language is taught to the staff of the Presidential Administration of the RK (PA RK) according to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan: the “Law on languages”, “On Government Service”, “On administrative procedures”, “On normative legal acts”, “On the First President”, “The state program of the functioning and development of languages for 2001-2010 years”, Presidential Decree of the RK from 7.02.2001. № 550 and Presidential Decree of the RK from 30.05.2006. № 127, “The concept of expansion the functioning of the state language sphere, increasing its competitiveness for 2007-2010 years” approved by the Decree of the Government of the RK from 21.11.2007, № 1122. So all levels of government bodies and their leaders are responsible for the realization of the state status of the Kazakh language. The possession of the state language is becoming a component part of Kazakhstan patriotism.

An impressive example of how personal and professional tri/multilingualism can serve a higher state official is, President Nursultan Nazarbayev (2007), who is “fluent in Kazakh, Russian and Ukrainian languages, and who understands perfectly the speech in most Turkic and Slavic languages. He often addresses citizens of the fraternal countries and representatives of other ethnic groups in their native languages. He is familiar with the theoretical foundations of the leading world languages, and he is able to converse confidently the conversation in English as well” (p.4). In the framework of the Constitution of the Republic and in the context of fundamental rights and freedom of a man the same ideal of polyglottism is present. The President calls upon all citizens and, first of all, his direct subordinates – the government officials. “The Kazakhs themselves must communicate in the Kazakh language otherwise we can’t demand it from others,” – said Nursultan Nazarbayev. Government officials themselves, as agents of political course of the President should go in the forefront of scientific-educational and social-linguistic progress.

The fundamental principle of the free teaching of the state language of administrative and political officials is that the staff of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, whose level of Kazakh language is low, has the right to learn the state language in order to develop documents, carry out the paperwork in the state language. A set of rules approved by the order of the head of Presidential Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan from 21.12.2006 № 43 – 653-K was developed to determine the level of state language proficiency of PA RK staff, and in particular, to regulate the organization order of staff training. According to the “Rules of determining the level of state language proficiency of the PA RK staff the state language is taught at the expense of the national budget during working time or other convenient time for the staff (Basic legislative acts on languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2007). Depending on the state language proficiency level according to the statements of workers the following groups are formed:

beginners (I) – for workers who do not know the state language at all;
elementary (II) – for workers who do not know the state language at all but for whom Kazakh is the mother tongue;
pre-intermediate group (III) – for workers with low level of the state language proficiency, who can not both read and write in the state language;

pre-intermediate group (IV) – for workers with average state language proficiency who can read and prepare a limited kind of documents;

advanced (V) – for workers with excellent ability to read and write in Kazakh, but find difficult to prepare the documents of high quality in the state language.

The number of learners in each group should not exceed of 15-18 people. The state language courses are held annually from 1 February to 30 November and last 90 minutes (2 academic hours). They are held twice a week for each group. Taking into account the location of learners working places, the courses are held in two major complexes: in the residence “Akorda” (Presidential Palace) and the building of “Ukimet uyi” (Government House) which are equipped with modern classrooms. The state language teaching program for each group is developed by teachers of Kazakh and approved by the Head of the Office of the President of the RK.

Every year at the end of the courses, an examination is taken in order to determine the level of language proficiency of those who have completed the course. The examination is taken in the form of tests, the tasks of which are approved by the Commission. The Commission evaluates the level of the state language proficiency of the PA RK staff as “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory”. In accordance with the decision of the Commission an official who has passed the examination moves up to the next group. An official who has failed has to restudy the programme. Learners who have made good progress in the state language are guaranteed to be rewarded. According to the results of examinations, the protocol of Commission sitting is drawn up, the examination list is filled which after signed by the members of the Commission. After the exam results are reviewed by the staff and heads of departments these documents are transferred to the Department of Personnel Policy of AP RK.

A range of training programs and teacher training is carried out on a competitive basis in accordance with the “Law on Government Purchases” and in coordination with the Committee on Languages of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the RK.

According to Kazakh language teacher Maulenov B.M. the communicative method composes the methodical basis of training courses. The communicative method is based on the extensive practice of “live” communication and it is focused on oral speech training. This method is aimed at teaching somebody to speak first, then to think in the language. The main priority of the method is to remove the language barrier. The language is learned in the process of natural communication where the teacher is at the same time is an organizer and a participant, and the student plays the role of the subject of communication and has to actively participate. Such qualities as sociability (the characteristic to serve as a tool of communication), systemacy (as language means are mutually organized and should be studied in unity), functionality (intention, purpose and content of communication determine the order of selection, design and actualization the language means) are considered as the main characteristics of the target language.

According to the result of a short interview with the course participants, the vast majority experience tremendous interest in the state language acquisition and regret that such language courses were not organized in previous years. But the respondents are not satisfied with the “liberal” and “unobtrusive” methods of teachers and they express the need for an element of “force,” “everything should be as at school: homework and keeping the record book, checking the notebooks, to ask strictly and evaluate the progress, diligence and hard work of students by school 5-grade scale.”

Training system of the state language aims to achieve the transition from quantity to quality, when the students move up from the “elementary” group to “intermediate”, and then to the “advanced” group.

Nowadays it is apparent that all the external conditions and domestic factors and all the necessary and sufficient constitutional and legal, political and ideological, organizational, financial, intellectual and human resources, theoretical and methodological, didactical and methodological foundation are provided for.

As evidence for the linguistic shift Fierman W. cites: the strengthening of the symbolic role of the Kazakh language, duplication of public signs in the Kazakh and Russian languages, more Kazakh speakers at public events, the expansion of the education sphere in the Kazakh language, and expansion of the sphere of the use of Kazakh language in the mass media.
3. Conclusion

Despite the measures taken full of the state status of the Kazakh language has not been realized. The main reason is that this status is only declared but not supported adequately by a mechanism which would ensure its overall learning and the use. The official state language still remains secondary in office work and service communication.

Other factors have also contributed to the switch of language shift of the Kazakhs:
- consistent and purposeful government support to the spread of the Kazakh language in various fields;
- the use of financial and economic tools in education (writing, publication and distribution of textbooks, dictionaries, electronic and visual aids in Kazakh, opening of new Kazakh schools and programs at universities in the Kazakh language, financial and material incentives in the form of awards for textbooks and etc.);
- qualification and attestation activities, for example, tests on Kazakh language qualification for state officials before hiring employees;
- the mobilization of national consciousness and self-consciousness expressed firstly in the strengthening of the direct correlation between ethnic and Kazakh linguistic identity, and in the broad approval of civil identity;
- strengthening of the conscious motivation to learn the Kazakh language: the Kazakhs who knew Russian had more advantages and opportunities for social and career promotion before, but today, on the contrary, the social mobility and communicative adaptability benefits those who know the Kazakh language;
- inflow to banks, government institutions, commercial area the youth with better command of Kazakh language than the older generation;
- ethnic and demographic change of communicative linguistic areas of the city: internal migration (village → city) and a noticeable presence of repatriates who do not speak Russian, the transfer of office work to the Kazakh language, as well as the pressure from Kazakh public awareness of the use of Russian in regulated and unregulated spheres of communication ensuring the extension of functioning of the Kazakh language.

References