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**ON THE FORMATION OF SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY OF ETHNO-
LINGUAL PROCESSES IN KAZAKHSTAN**

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Abstract

The socio-cultural, political, demographic and economic changes that are taking place in Kazakhstan, and the established language situation, create a complex mechanism for the formation of a new Kazakhstani identity. The study of language preferences and attitudes to ongoing reforms and changes occurring in society is an important component of researches that contribute to the functioning of the country's language policy, in particular, and the formation of Kazakhstan's identity as a whole. The analysis of the active ethno-linguistic processes and the value-based language priorities of Kazakhstanis makes it possible to rethink the concept of language policy and language situation that have been formed in the period of independence. The aim of the study is to analyze the process of formation of language identity in the multicultural space of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The conducted sociolinguistic analysis, aimed at revealing the essence and role of languages in ethno-cultural interaction, provides essential information for the timely adjustment of language policy and language planning. In general, the results obtained during the research can be useful in solving managerial tasks in the field of language regulation.

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Keywords: Language situation, ethnolinguistic processes, sociocultural identity.



1. Introduction

The rapidly changing geopolitical and economic realities are putting forward new tasks for the Kazakhstani society. The reforms carried out in our country cover all spheres of society, among which the language sphere can be called one of the most relevant and significant for today. The introduction of multilingual education and the transition to the Latin alphabet are defined as priorities of the country's social development at the present stage and considered as factors of globalization and integration into the world space. But at the same time it becomes clear that such drastic changes, on the one hand, lead to our increased competitiveness at the world level, while, on the other hand, they can cause serious dissonance in the formation of state and ethno-linguistic identity, a decline in the prestige of a particular language and a change in its status, which in turn can cause stratification of society.

The socio-cultural, political, demographic and economic changes taking place in Kazakhstan and the established language situation create a complex mechanism for the formation of a new Kazakhstani identity.

The aim of this research work is to analyze the process of a language identity formation in the multicultural space of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In other words, this study is an attempt to measure a linguistic self-identity through its specific parameter — an attitude of respondents to the need to learn languages (Kazakh, Russian and English), to the ongoing policy of multilingualism and to the transition of the Kazakh writing system to the Latin alphabet.

To achieve this aim, the following research objectives were formulated:

- to show the role and place of language in the process of formation of Kazakhstan's identity;
- to monitor the process of introducing multilingual education in the Republic of Kazakhstan and to determine how successful and viable the tasks set by the state are;
- to reveal the attitude of respondents towards the policy of multilingualism in our country.

2. Problem Statement

The issues of formation of a new Kazakhstani identity on a general civil basis are intended to solve various problems. After the declaration of independence in the early 90s, the Kazakh government faced a political dilemma of identification. On the one hand, it was a new independent state trying to establish itself as a nation with the Kazakh language as a single national language. To create a new nation / state, a strong ideological policy was needed that could unite ethnic Kazakhs, which were divided into two groups: Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking. On the other hand, Kazakhstan, being historically a bilingual and multinational country, also continued to promote a bilingual ideology. Thus, Kazakhstan chose an identity that is not only different from the Soviet, Russia-oriented past, but also emphasizes its isolation from other Central Asian countries and is more focused on Russia and Europe (for example, on the idea of the Eurasian Union). Moreover, bilingual ideology (bilingualism) was to some extent motivated by the need to comply with the requirements of European linguistic rights, so that the country was perceived as a democratic state by international organizations and Western countries (Smagulova, 2006).

A new concept of national identity emphasizes not an ethnic origin, but civil feelings of belonging to the country. Its main goal was to form the Kazakh nation that would unite all citizens.

One of the important places is given to the regulation of the language development issues. The study of a language as one of the main indicators of a population's adaptation to new socio-political and socio-cultural realities is now a relevant scientific and practical task. After getting independence in the 1990s, Kazakhstan faced the issue of

its identification. On the one hand, it was a new independent state trying to establish itself as a nation with the Kazakh language as a single national language. To create a new nation / state, a strong ideological policy was needed that could unite ethnic Kazakhs, which were divided into two groups: Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking. On the other hand, Kazakhstan, being historically a bilingual and multinational country, also continued to promote a bilingual ideology. Thus, Kazakhstan chose an identity that is not only different from the Soviet, Russia-oriented past, but also emphasizes its isolation from other Central Asian countries and is more focused on Russia and Europe (for example, on the idea of the Eurasian Union). Moreover, bilingual ideology (bilingualism) was to some extent motivated by the need to comply with the requirements of European linguistic rights, so that the country was perceived as a democratic state by international organizations and Western countries (Smagulova, 2006).

In Kazakhstan, a new aspect of the ongoing language policy was the introduction in 2007 of the cultural project "The Trinity of Languages". The most important were three vectors of this language policy aimed at ensuring a worthy compliance to the world standards of development: the Kazakh language as a state language, Russian as a language of inter-state communication, and English as a necessary condition for successful integration into the world educational space (Nazarbaev, 2007).

The project of trilingual education is a strategically important task, the solution of which, together with others, will have an impact on the future of Kazakhstan, ensuring its competitiveness and successful entry into a number of developed countries of the world.

In general, the idea of introducing the principles of trinity of Kazakh, Russian and English languages in the country was supported by the majority of our citizens. Nevertheless, the discussion of this issue in the media caused a number of disputes that exposed the existing problems.

"Of course, it is not enough to know only one language. The more languages a person knows, the more competitive he or she is. [...] There are few people who know three languages at a decent level. The bulk of our population is presented by people speaking one and a half languages. [...] Officially, trilingualism is declared, but it still has not received any support from our society, because firstly we need to solve the problem with the Kazakh language, as it exists, and then take steps towards bi- and trilingualism. Ouraim is beautiful, but it is very difficult to teach all pupils in schools to speak three languages."(KanatTasibekov, <http://weproject.kz/articles/detail/trehyazichie-v-kazahstane-nachalo-1/>).

Russian and English languages should be studied from the perspective of dominance of the Kazakh language; otherwise our language will remain in the background. The concept of three pillars (trilingualism) should be understood in a different way. There should be one main pillar. The Kazakh language should be a priority, and only on this principle two additional languages should be considered as auxiliary ones. The strategic task of trilingual development, proposed by our President to enter the ranks of 50 developed civilized countries, is undoubtedly very important for our country. Here, the only problem lies in the correct implementation of this strategy, ensuring positive results. Unfortunately, at present the reform is implemented inefficiently. Let me tell you that we have repeatedly warned the Ministry of Education of the country that teaching English or Russian (for Kazakhs) since kindergarten will become a serious obstacle to the nation's formation . Of course, the historically developed situation with the Kazakh language required some dramatic changes in relation to it. Today, the language policy in Kazakhstan is aimed at Kazakhization, but with the obligatory condition of preserving the linguistic diversity formed in the country — the support of the Russian language (and other ethnic languages) and the active promotion of English. In Kazakhstan, the

existence of a "conflict" between Kazakh and Russian languages is undeniable, but today the language problem in the republic is no longer as crucial as it was in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Smagulova, 2008).

At present, the functional capacity of the Russian language in Kazakhstan is high, which is facilitated by close political and economic relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, and it is due to a flexible language policy that Kazakhstan has not become an arena of ethnic confrontations. According to Z. Smagulova, the stabilizing factors of the language situation in Kazakhstan are the following: 1) the achievement of a compromise between linguistic ideology and ethnic politics; 2) weak linguistic identity links; 3) the improvement of an attitude to learning of the Kazakh language; 4) the selective policy in studying languages; 5) weak ethnic stratification of society; the vitality of the Russian language and its social significance, and other factors (Smagulova, 2008).

3. Research Questions

To get a more complete picture revealing the personal attitude of Kazakhstani people to the functioning and prospects of development of Kazakh, Russian and English languages, we asked respondents the following questions:

- What do you think about the introduction of multilingual education in our country?
- How do you think the promotion of English will impact on the development of Kazakh and Russian languages?
- What difficulties do you see in promoting multilingualism in Kazakhstan?

4. Purpose of the Study

A sociolinguistic survey conducted among Kazakhstanis in 2012-2016 by a group of researchers-linguists of the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University identified the issues that are most actively discussed in the framework of ongoing educational reforms: ensuring the preservation of the native language in the multilingual space; strengthening the role of the state language (Kazakh) as the language of the titular nation. It is clear that in the situation of multilingualism and multiculturalism of Kazakhstan, with Kazakh functioning as the state language and Russian as the language of international communication, it is necessary to ensure the systemic nature of multilingual education in the state language, native language, Russian and foreign languages, and thereby modernize the language policy in the sphere of formation of the verbal and cognitive culture of our population.

As it was shown by the results of the conducted studies, the majority of respondents are sure that the introduction of a policy of multilingualism is the correct one. According to them, the Russian language is necessary for Kazakhstanis to integrate and maintain ties in the post-Soviet space, while English is important for joining the world economic space. It becomes obvious that the popularity of the English language is growing due to its relevance in different spheres of activity of our citizens, and it is related to its value from the point of view of its promotion in society and achievement of a more prestigious position by it. At the same time, the widespread use of English sharpened the contradictions of the modern language system and intensified its dynamics.

5. Research Methods

In this work, we have used a number of sociolinguistic methods that make it possible to achieve more detailed and comprehensive analysis:

- The observation method which was used by us in the process of selecting facts, establishing the specific features of the object under study, describing the various language situations and trends in the development of intercultural communication;

- The method of social experiment, where polls, conversations, study and generalization in a specific socio-situational context have a great potential to trace the language functioning processes;

- General and individual questioning;

- Statistical data processing (including electronic data) using the SPSS program.

As participants in the study, two focus groups were selected: Kazakhstani school pupils and students of colleges and universities. The choice of these categories of citizens was made due to the following reasons:

- Young people belong to the category of citizens characterized by the active formation of their own social, ethnic, political and ideological views. Kazakhstani youth experienced the influence of politics and ideology in the most intensive way; it underwent socialization and social adaptation in the context of the heightened growth of linguistic consciousness and self-awareness, when each person solved many issues related to the need for civil, ethnic and linguistic identification;

- the activation of the processes of forming consciousness (including linguistic consciousness) among young Kazakhstanis is the result of the effectiveness of measures implemented in the course of formation of a new kind of citizenship in accordance with the basic requirements and dynamics of language construction.

6. Findings

The answers to the questions posed had the form of reasoning and made it possible to reveal the subjective way of thinking, value orientations and social attitudes of informants.

"As I already said, knowing languages cannot be harmful for anyone. Yes, of course, the most important language for us is Kazakh, and only after it there should be English and Russian. I would like to emphasize that knowing Russian brings (and will bring) a lot of benefits to the CIS citizens. But we should speak Kazakh with each other, while the Russian language should be used only for communication with other countries. Also, with the spread of English on the planet, more and more people will be bilingual and even multilingual." (Male student, 18 y. o., Kazakh)

More than half of the informants (57%) spoke in favor of promoting English (in this, for the most part, they see the introduction of a policy of multilingualism in the country). For them English is the language that promotes the successful development of the state and personal growth. The respondents point out the importance of English as a world language and emphasize the role of developed countries and the importance of science and technology in promoting English. Most of them are sure that despite the rapid spread of English, the Kazakh language will occupy the corresponding position as the state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the sociolinguistic space of our country.

"I think that studying English does not make any harm to our language. Despite that we have been influenced by Russia for many years, we did not forget our own Kazakh language. Now, after getting independence, we are reviving it again." (Male student, 19 y. o., Kazakh)

Nevertheless, some of the Kazakh-speaking students expressed their concerns on this issue. The development of English and Russian languages along with Kazakh, in their opinion, can lead to weakening of the position of the

Kazakh language. They believe that at first it is necessary to study the Kazakh language purposefully, and only after that you may proceed to study foreign languages.

“If we forget the language that we know from the cradle, start studying English and then go to a university where lectures are given in English, what will remain of the Kazakh nation? The proof is that nowadays we can see a lot of people who know a foreign language, but they do not understand Kazakh.

With lessons taught in English, will Kazakh become again the language of science, knowledge, profession and state? Who will accept the language that is not supported? Who will respect it, in which country, in what sphere?” (Female student, 20 y. o.)

54 percent of respondents are confident that the Russian language will retain its positions, since it is the language of international communication.

“I do not worry about the Russian language at all. Yes, it is possible that English can be a threat to the Kazakh language. But it is impossible for us not to learn English, because it is the language of communication. Just imagine, if you know English you can access interesting information, talk and correspond with interesting people from different parts of the world, get a better job, surprise everyone with your education.” (Female student, 20 y. o.)

15% of respondents believe that in future English can take place of the Russian language in the linguistic space of Kazakhstan.

Full support for the policy of trilingualism is observed on the part of Bolashakis (holders of the Presidential Scholarship "Bolashak" for studying abroad in the world's leading universities). This category of Kazakhstani youth has sufficient knowledge of several languages (at least three of them — Kazakh, Russian and English) and does not experience difficulties in verbal communication. In the situation of multilingualism within the framework of this category of language personality, native and mastered languages do not compete with each other. They successfully achieve their linguistic, social, cultural and other recognition, which is so natural with their active integration or socialization: they strive to bring the knowledge of new languages and cultures to a possible perfection, without losing the original linguistic and cultural competence.

The absolute majority of respondents (91%) are confident that in future the English language will strengthen its positions in the system of higher education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Despite the pessimistic forecasts of some respondents, most of them are confident of the development prospects of the Kazakh language, believing that the position of the state language will be further strengthened in the future.

Undoubtedly, the reforms implemented in the Republic of Kazakhstan determine the future of both the state and ethnic languages used in the country. The interaction of languages in a multilingual environment is a complex process that requires a carefully differentiated approach. It is difficult not only for a non-title language. This is a serious problem for Kazakhstan, since knowledge of the official language among both the titular nation and representatives of other nationalities leaves much to be desired. According to the famous scientist A. Aitaly: "From the very beginning, there were no special compensatory measures provided to restore language losses — such as the support of children's literature, the material support of writers and cultural figures, the dissemination of Kazakh books and press, all helping the development of the Kazakh language" (Ajtaly, 2013).

The results of the sociolinguistic survey also showed that there are a number of difficulties that have a serious impact on the successful implementation of the ongoing language reforms. Teachers of universities and schools, first of all, mark the problem with human resources. There is a lack of language training for teachers of non-linguistic disciplines. The different level of knowledge of a foreign language by students indicates a low level of preparation in

general schools (first of all, in rural schools). This, as a consequence, generates problems in the mastering of special disciplines taught in English, which leads to psychological and linguo-didactic difficulties. In general, this process is connected not only with the need for psychological preparation of school pupils and college students; it concerns the entire population of the republic.

University teachers note such problems as: the weak regulatory and legal system of multilingual centers organized within the framework of the country's universities and a poor material and technical base of higher educational institutions, which cannot provide full educational and methodological activity of such centers; a lack of a clear program, concept and rules for the development of the centers and a clear picture of the planned results of the students' activity and the criteria for their assessment; an arbitrary use of foreign educational programs and teaching materials by educational institutions without adaptation to Kazakhstan's reality. This may indicate that there is no single methodological platform for a continuous and continuum-variable foreign language education and unified regulatory support for it. An important problem is the preparation of Kazakhstani textbooks in English on profiling disciplines and their normative and program-methodological support.

The extensive factual material accumulated by Kazakhstani scientists over the past decades and the results of mass sociolinguistic surveys (Altynbekova, 2006; Sulejmenova, 2010; Sulejmenova, 2011; Zharkynbekova, 2012; Zharkynbekova, 2017) made it possible first of all to assess the trends that characterize today the process of linguistic changes in Kazakhstan and to obtain the objective information that allows determining the current state and prospects for the development and interaction of languages on the territory of our country.

7. Conclusion

Let's summarize the trends that have been identified during the research:

- The number of representatives of both the titular nation and other ethnic groups who are fluent in the state (Kazakh) language is increasing. This is due, first, to the migration and demographic processes that determine the current state of the country's ethnic composition. While in 1989, the population of the country was 16 199.2 thousand people, of which 6 534.6 thousand were Kazakhs (41%) and 6 227.5 thousand were Russians (38%), in 2017, the total number of residents of the country reached 18,274,514 people, of which 12,780.0 thousand were Kazakhs (this is already 71%), 3,710.0 thousand — Russians (which is 20.6%) and 613.0 thousand — Uzbeks (3.4%). The second reason is the measures implemented in the framework of the new language policy aimed at preserving the state language. Their results are increasingly evident in such areas of communication as education, media, business sphere of communication, etc. For example, in 2014, 65% of state educational grants were given to those students who enter higher education institutions in groups learning in Kazakh, and 35% — to students learning in Russian; in 2015 and 2016, this ratio was 75% and 25%.

It is very likely that the transition of the Kazakh writing system to the Latin alphabet will further exacerbate problems in the current state of Russian and other Slavic languages, as evidenced by the experience of other post-Soviet countries (Bahtikireeva & Dvorjashina, 2015; Dzhusupov, 2013).

For example, today the Russian language still retains strong positions in various spheres of Kazakhstani society, but geopolitical, socio-economic, demographic and migration processes have a significant impact on its position. For example, every ten years, since 1989 to 1999 and since 1999 to 2009, the number of Russians in the country declined by about 10%. The number of Ukrainians, Germans and Belarusians is also decreasing. At the same time, the number

of Kazakhs and other Turkic-speaking peoples is growing. All this can lead to a narrowing of the Russian communicative space.

- The number of bilingual Kazakhs who prefer to speak Kazakh and English is increasing (the trend of giving a priority to studying and knowing English becomes more and more clear, both among young people and the older generation). It is caused, first of all, by the globalization processes in the linguistic sphere, which are associated with the increasing global role of English as a "lingua franca" and, as a consequence, with the increasing motivation in learning it. It should be noted that in recent years, the density of Russian-language information flows, including news and scientific and artistic programs, is much lower than that in English. For example, in 2011, this difference was fivefold. The prestige of the English language stimulates its studying, which forms a special attitude to the language as a factor of the increasing personal competitiveness. According to our surveys (2013-2016), about 83% of Kazakhstanis believe that their children should be fluent in English. The majority of young respondents (91.8%) associate the further development of their professional activities with the knowledge of English; they consider English to be one of the main factors related to the possibility of career growth.

- A new type of language personality is being formed — a multilingual person who fluently speaks three (and more) languages (mainly Kazakh, Russian and English), which is facilitated by reforms related to the introduction of trilingualism into the educational system. The Kazakhstani model of multilingual education is designed to take into account both historically established factors and the strategic goals that the country sets for itself. It is defined as an innovative model of education that forms a competitive personality with a high level of linguistic competence in the context of globalization, informatization and integration, and is supposed to ensure the training of qualified personnel in demand in the professional sphere and in a society.

One thing is clear: the introduction of a multilingual model into the Kazakhstani education system will contribute to the formation of a new type of a language personality — a person who knows several languages, is capable of solving problems in a multicultural society, open to the culture of his or her own people and co-resident peoples and to the world culture; a person ready for self-development and self-education. The Kazakhstani model of multilingual education aimed at the equal use of three languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) contributes to the formation of a competitive generation having a language culture, in the context of globalization. This will allow it to gradually enter the mobile megaculture world. The search for the most effective models of multilingual education still goes on.

The need to introduce multilingualism was considered in the context of the strategic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. To develop the most appropriate model of a multilingual education, the scientific and methodological works of foreign and domestic scientists have been studied and systematized; a vast number of various programs has been analyzed. A complex analysis of the functioning and interaction of languages in the multilingual space of Kazakhstan is being carried out in different areas of communication, which makes it possible to correctly assess the trends of language development in the country.

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