

Multilingualism is a trend in the development of modern Kazakhstan

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Abstract

The development years of sovereign Kazakhstan show that polylingualism in the society not only infringes on the rights and dignity of the Kazakh language but also creates necessary conditions for its development and progress. According to the state programme for language development, three languages' priority has been approved: Kazakh, Russian and English. In addition to Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication, English is an essential means of communication. The most important strategic task of education in Kazakhstan is, on the one hand, to preserve the best Kazakh educational traditions and, on the other hand, to provide school leavers with international qualifications and develop their linguistic consciousness, based on mastering the state, native and foreign languages. Meanwhile, as specified in the concept of language policy of RK, the main difficulty in further realisation of language policy in Kazakhstan is 'creation of optimum language space of the state'. On the other hand, we are talking about a professional gap in specialists' training, studying Russian and Kazakh language. Our study used the following methods: UNT 2015–2019, a survey of first-year students of ARGU named after Zhubanov. The results of the study can be used to develop a methodological complex for training foreign language teachers.

Keywords: SLA, Language policy, UNT, students.

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1. Introduction

Multilingualism is an important factor in the development of Kazakhstani society. The linguistic diversity of modern Kazakhstan is characterised by a high degree of ethnic and linguistic diversity. As for today, representatives of more than 130 nationalities live in our state. Among them are Kazakhs – 63.1% of the population, Russians – 23.7%, Ukrainians – 2.1%, Uzbeks – 2.9%, Tatars – 1.3%, Uigurs – 1.4%, Germans – 1.1% and representatives of other nationalities – 4.4% (more than 20% of Kazakh citizens speak three languages; The Astana Times, 2018).

There are significant differences in the degree of language proficiency among the different peoples inhabiting Kazakhstan. So, among Slavic groups, 25.3% of Russians, 21.5% of Ukrainians, 19% of Byelorussians and 20.9% of Polish understand oral Kazakh speech. A similar level of Kazakh language proficiency is demonstrated by the Germans – 24.7%. 6.3% of Russians, 5.2% of Ukrainians, 4.8% of Belarusians, 6.6% of Poles and 7.9% of Germans can read and write in Kazakh (Development and functioning of the state (Kazakh) language | Electronic government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

At the same time, it is worth noting the high percentage of those who understand oral Kazakh speech, for example, representatives of the title nation, i.e., Kazakhs themselves (98.4%) and representatives of Turkish peoples: Uzbeks 95.5%, Uighurs 93.7% and Kirghiz 92.7%. But if among Kazakhs 93.2% can read and write in Kazakh, among the other listed Turkish peoples, 61%–63% can do it and the other 8%–12% can only read in Kazakh.

The degree of Russian knowledge among the Slavic peoples and Germans is about 99% for reading and writing in Russian it is 97%. Of all ethnic groups on which the information was published, ethnic Tajiks were the least understood in Russian – 85.2%; they have the lowest share of those who can read and write in Russian – 56.6%. All other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan understand Russian from 92.1% (Kazakhs proper) to 92.1% (Kazakhs).

98.4% (Tatars) can read and write in Russian from 68.3% (Uzbeks) to 95.5% (Koreans). Among the Kazakhs, 79.1% can read and write in Russian.

The declaration of English proficiency varies quite noticeably among different ethnic groups. The Koreans declare the highest rates of English proficiency: 24.2% understand oral speech, 11.4% can read and write and 3.5% can only read; Kazakhs (17.5% understand, 9% read and write and 2.9% only read), Uighurs (15.7% understand, 7.2% read and write and 2.6% only read), Kirghiz (12.6% understand, 5.8% read and write and 2% only read). The Russians have the highest declared level of English among the Slavic people and Germans: 12.6% understand, 5.6% read and write and 2.1% only read. Belarusians and Poles declared the lowest level of English proficiency: 6.8% understand spoken English, only 3% can read and write and 1% can only read (Aldashev & Danzer, 2014).

Taking this data into account and based on the integration processes taking place in the Republic, the President of the country came up with a trinity of languages. For the first time, we heard about it in 2004. In October 2006, at the XII session of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, the Head of State addressed it again, emphasising that knowledge of at least three languages is essential for our children's future. In 2007, in his message to the people of Kazakhstan 'New Kazakhstan in the new world', the Head of State set a task to introduce the cultural project 'The unity of languages gradually'. This priority development has become a starting point for a new language policy of independent Kazakhstan. The degree of implementation of this direction is an example for many countries globally in terms of popularity in society and its level of efficiency ['Message from the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the people of Kazakhstan (Part I) 'New Kazakhstan in the new world' (Astana, February 28, 2007),' n.d.].

On the one hand, this language policy is an indicator of the spiritual development of the people, and on the other – a component of a large-scale policy of social modernisation of Kazakh society. Thus, according to the sociological survey 'Ethno-linguistic processes and the sociolinguistic situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan,' the interviewees noted that 45.6% spoke the state language at work

and 47.4% spoke Russian. With regard to that, 81.6% of the representatives of other nationalities communicate with their colleagues only in Russian. Thus, members of one family communicate in Russian – 43% when in 2002 – 54.7%; in Russian and Kazakh languages – 16%; and Only in Kazakh – 32% (in 2002 – 40.9%), in other languages – 6 % (in 2002 – 4.4%) (Beisenova, 2013).

In Kazakhstan’s higher school’s current conditions, motivation to learn Russian is one pressing problem. ‘Kazakhstan should be a highly educated country whose population uses three languages: Kazakh is the state language, Russian is the language of international communication and English is the language of successful integration into the global economy’ – noted the Former President of the country, N. A. Nazarbayev, in his speech ‘New Kazakhstan in the new world’. In the state programme for the development and functioning of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020 from February 1, 2010, № 922 ‘On the Strategic Development Plan of the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2020’ noted: increasing the share of the adult population of the Republic of Kazakhstan that speaks Russian to 90% by 2020; increasing the percentage of the Republic’s population that speaks English to 10% by 2014, to 15% by 2017 and to 20% by 2020; increasing the share of the people that speak three languages (state, Russian and English) to 10% by 2014, to 12% by 2017 and to 15% by 2020 (The Strategy for development of the Republic of Kazakhstan – Official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). It means that today the Russian language is an integral part of Kazakhstan’s state policy in polylingualism. The cultural project ‘Trinity of languages’ is currently being implemented. The Russian language is not only one of the subjects studied in higher school, but also the language of international communication (Blackburn, 2019).

The percentage of using Russian during the working 8-hour day was divided, so 50% of respondents communicate in Russian. In two languages – Russian and Kazakh – 33% and only in Kazakh – 16%.

By the State Programme of Development and Functioning of Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011–2020, polylingual education will positively contribute (*The state programme of education development for 2011–2020*) to the follows:

- increase the competitiveness of the Kazakh language as a state language, its productivity in the field of obtaining special-professional, socio-political and cultural information;
- strengthening the status of the Russian language as the most convenient means of communication and implementation of interstate relations with post-Soviet countries;
- promotion of English as the dominant foreign language to the level of Kazakh–Russian bilingualism (Development and functioning of the state (Kazakh) language | Electronic government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

2. Research methods

However, special geopolitical, historical, cultural and social conditions of the state greatly influence the Russian language development and all other languages in this multiethnic society. Russian is the language of instruction in all Kazakh universities. Russian is a compulsory subject in public education schools in Kazakhstan. Moreover, over 40% of all students in Kazakhstan study at schools with only Russian as their language instruction language. As noted by Kazakhstan researchers Baktybayeva A. T. and Bayburina K. A., the number of schoolchildren studying in Russian has been decreasing since 2010–2011. The tendency to reduce the number of students today can be explained by the fact that Russian-speaking students’ central outflow is Russian (Syzdykbayeva, 2016).

We would like to pay attention to a number of students who passed, failed and complained about their UNT results during 2012–2018. The total number of complaints went down from 1,170 (2012) to 639 (2018) (Yergaliyeva, 2020).

We requested Zhubanov ARSU students to answer a questionnaire, ‘What is the most popular language for you?’

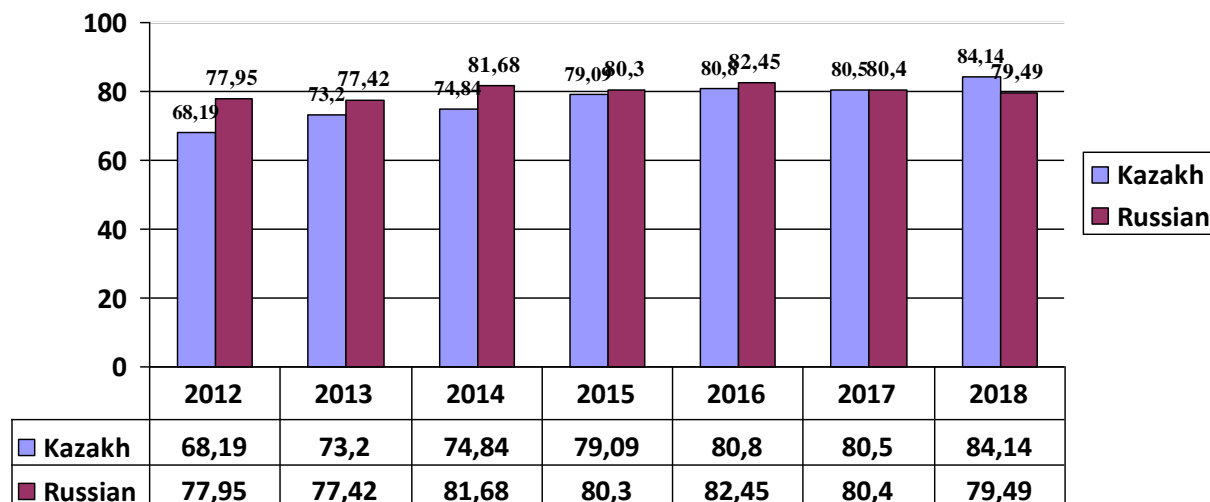


Figure 1. UNT results by teaching language of learning, 2012–2018 (Me)

According to our study results on the application of Kazakh, Russian, English and other languages in various spheres of life, we can conclude that the most popular languages are Kazakh and Russian. The percentage of demand for the Kazakh language varies from 29% to 57%, depending on the application sphere. The rate of need for the Russian language ranges from 29% to 59% also depending on the globe of application.

There is no sufficient reason to consider Russian in Kazakhstan to be any other language than Russian in Russia. The Republic of Kazakhstan's aspiration confirms preserving the sphere of influence of the Russian language to globalisation processes, preserving the shared space in the sphere of culture, economy and education with the Commonwealth countries.

Multilingual education is still in a transition stage. The current economic and political situation in the world requires the educated part of the population to master several languages at an equally high level to integrate into the world system of information, socio-political, economic and other relationships. Hence, the interest in learning and interaction of Kazakh, Russian and English languages will be constant.

3. Conclusion

The Eurasian nature of Kazakhstan's development means that Kazakhstan absorbs the achievements, the best moments of Western civilisation, namely: the level of its technology, technology, socio-political and democratic development. At the same time, the peculiarities associated with the eastern type of thinking, eastern wisdom and the eastern way of treating the world are preserved.

Some researchers, considering the nature of the modern linguistic personality in the conditions of poly-linguistics, speak about the formation of 'communicative linguistic personality' 'bilingual cultural personality' (Utemissova et al., 2018).

In light of this, the problem of language education in the Republic of Kazakhstan acquires a new sound when professional knowledge of Kazakh, Russian and English languages allows a linguistic personality to obtain a more prestigious social and professional status in society. However, at the moment, there is a question about each language's specific weight in the overall structure of education, the functional and cultural significance of each of them, the creation of new integrative disciplines that develop the intercultural competence of future specialists (Development and

functioning of the state (Kazakh) language | Electronic government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

The high level of English knowledge in modern Kazakh society's changed conditions does not seem to be a perfect criterion of human education because international interaction goes beyond the boundaries of English-speaking countries (Aksholakova & Ismailova, 2013). In light of the above, the experience of multinational states, such as Canada, Switzerland, etc., should be studied.

Thus, the new basic model of development of the linguistic personality in the conditions of Kazakhstan's polylingual educational environment in the near future should be built based on three languages: Kazakh, Russian and English.

It will create and implement new integrative disciplines, the specifics of studying the language material in connection with language and culture; elective courses representing the national features of languages and cultures. This approach will undoubtedly open new opportunities for further formation of polylingual and multicultural space in Kazakhstan, interaction and mutual influence of languages, and preservation of peace and stability.

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