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The Mankurt Remembers:
The Politics of Language in Kazakhstan

By
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and
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Introduction

*The mankurt did not know who he had been, whence and from what tribe he had come, did not know his name, could not remember his childhood, father or mother—in short, he could not recognize himself as a human being. Deprived of any understanding of his own ego, the mankurt was, from his master's point of view, possessed of a whole range of advantages. He was the equivalent of a dumb animal and therefore absolutely obedient and safe.*¹

The *mankurt* is a powerful symbol in Central Asian literature, cinema, and oral tradition. It refers to someone of a certain ethnic background who, so blinded by the foreign power that dominates him, does not remember his ancestors or homeland. Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov wrote about the mankurt in his 1980 novel, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years*. The mankurt is often considered a metaphor for Central Asians under Russian occupation who, in order to successfully adjust to Russian and Soviet influence, have discarded their traditional ways of life. The “forgetting” of his ancestors and traditions not only makes the mankurt a slave to the foreign power; it compromises his humanity.

It is difficult, however, to completely divorce Central Asian culture from the powerful Russian hegemonic structure in the region. Even Aitmatov himself praised the impact Russia had on the Central Asian peoples. In a 1993 speech, he expressed his belief that advancement in Central Asia without Russia was not possible:

We cannot attain progress by isolating ourselves from Russia, just as Russia cannot develop by isolating itself from the world. Our development is part of one organic whole. The Russian language and culture are an integral part of the psyche of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, offering them an access to civilization.²

¹ Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts Longer than a Hundred Years* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1988), 126.

² Chingiz Aitmatov qtd. in Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power* (New York, Routledge, 2007), 51.

The cultural psyches of Central Asia, particularly Kazakhstan, are rich and complicated. Ethnic Kazakhs experience conflicting identities, hoping to preserve their ancestral and ethnic identity while accepting and adapting to the pervasive Russian influence. Nationalistic sentiments often conflict with the large and powerful presence of Russians and russophone groups that remain in the state and resist integration with ethnic Kazakhs. Of all components of social and political life, language is the most potent and tangible manifestation of these tensions. Particularly within the post-Soviet context, language is one of the most powerful symbols of nationalism, independence, and ethnic consciousness. Revision of the Soviet language policy has been a major component of every former republic's post-1991 political reforms, which usually promoted a more nationalistic agenda. My research will explore the role the Kazakh language has played in post-1991 Kazakhstan in relation to the Russian language. I will examine the language policy of the Nazarbayev administration and how it has affected the current linguistic environment.

My argument begins with an analysis of the pre-1991 linguistic environment in Kazakhstan from three theoretical lenses: Bloomfield's concept of language shift; Bourdieu's connection between language and power; and Ferguson's *diglossia*. I will discuss Kazakhstan's current language policy and apply it to Cooper's theory of language planning as a result of social change. This will lead to a discussion of symbolic importance of language and the power of its psychological, emotional, and ancestral associations according to Connor and Fishman's theories. Finally, I will explore how these factors have affected the relationship between the Kazakh and Russian languages post-1991 through the previous linguistic lenses. Through this exploration, I will offer a clearer understanding of

the development and significance of the relationship between the Kazakh and Russian languages in pre- and post-1991 Kazakhstan and how the language policy has affected this relationship.

Three Lenses: Language Shift, Language and Power, and Diglossia

Linguist Leonard Bloomfield defines *speech communities* as groups of people using the same system of speech signals. He claims that because language is the basis of all the distinctly human activities that form a society, speech communities are the most important groupings of people.³ In colonial settings, one speech community becomes politically and economically dependent upon another. *Language shifts* occur when speech communities adopt a new language in place of their native one, usually resulting in forgetting of the native language.⁴

In these circumstances, the speaker socially suffers when using his or her native language and benefits when using the language of the colonial power. Linguist Pierre Bourdieu extensively explored the connection between language and access to power, arguing that language is an expression of *cultural capital*, or non-economic wealth and authority that a dominant group wields over other groups.⁵ In this environment, a certain language provides access to power structures, such as education, the political system, and greater job opportunities. A less powerful language is associated with less powerful structures, such as domestic, rural, and uneducated life. The foreign colonial power

³ Leonard Bloomfield, *Language* (London, Montilal Banarsidass, 1935), 28.

⁴ *Ibid*, 42.

⁵ Although the concept of cultural capital refers specifically to *non-economic* wealth, economic wealth often provides greater access to cultural capital. In the case of most colonial contexts, economic capital leads to, or at least contributes to, cultural capital.

maintains control over the cultural capital, and its language becomes the more powerful language. The language of the native population is relegated to an inferior position. If natives hope to achieve power in society, they must adopt the new language.⁶

In some cases of language shift, the speaker does not lose his native language and maintains native-like control of two languages. Bloomfield defines this as *bilingualism*.⁷ Usually, these two languages play different roles in the bilingual's life, reflecting the power structures he associates with each language. He speaks one language with his family and friends and the other in school and in his occupation. The phenomenon of two languages operating side-by-side but in different spheres is called *diglossia*. This term, first used by linguist Charles Ferguson, refers to an environment in which one language is identified as the "high" ("H") variety and the other as the "low" ("L") variety. Accurate *language choice* is essential for operating adequately in diglossic environments. "H" is considered the more legitimate or "real" form, the correct form for literature and formal speech, and the appropriate language to use with foreigners. "L" is associated with regional, conversational, and informal speech. To use the "H" variety in informal conversation among friends or to use the "L" variety in a formal political speech would be inappropriate.⁸

Fishman expanded the concept of diglossia to include additional divisions: bilingualism *with* diglossia and bilingualism *without* diglossia. Bilingualism *with* diglossia refers to a situation in which individuals use different languages within different contexts. This situation remains stable, without much political or social tension, when individuals

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1977), 502-3.

⁷ *Ibid*, 55.

⁸ Charles A. Ferguson, *Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society, 1959-1994* (New York, Oxford UP, 1996), 25-30.

want to keep these roles separate and there is no need for the government to intervene for protection of one language. The languages do not necessarily exist in a hierarchical structure. Rather, the association of one language with informal contexts and the other with formal simply reflects the *mental* divisions individuals maintain between these two realms. The division between different uses of language does not have to reflect or perpetuate social, political, or cultural divisions.⁹ However, diglossia may not be stable if it arises from *external imposition* rather than organic evolution and is thus considered a burden on the bilinguals in society.¹⁰ If individuals associate a certain language (particularly the “L” variety) with autonomy or sovereignty and prefer a single, national language, diglossia will likely crumble.¹¹

Bilingualism *without* diglossia occurs when individuals employ both languages across all social roles. In this case, language competes for dominance, and it is likely social and political conflicts will arise.¹² When two groups in society do not have the same native language, it is likely that the language associated with the group that holds political power will become the more powerful language. That group subsequently has the power to decide *how to manage the burden of bilingualism*. The dominant group rarely assumes the burden of bilingualism, usually transferring that burden to the minority group. The political elites

⁹ Joshua Fishman, “Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism,” *Journal of Social Issues*, 23 no. 2 (1967): 31-2.

¹⁰ Joshua Fishman qtd. in J.A. Laponce, “Language and Politics,” in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, ed. Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (London, Routledge, 1992), 589.

¹¹ Ferguson, *Sociolinguistic Perspectives: Papers on Language in Society*, 36.

¹² Fishman, “Bilingualism with and without Diglossia; Diglossia with and without Bilingualism,” 34-5.

have the power to dictate how languages are used and which languages provide access to power.¹³

Linguistic Analysis of Pre-1991 Kazakhstan

Language Shift

Over the past two centuries, the Kazakh nation experienced a drastic language shift as a result of Russian and Soviet colonialism. Russian domination of the political, economic, educational, and social structures in Kazakhstan began in the mid-eighteenth century and lasted until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Several factors contributed to this shift; for my purposes, I will focus on structural upset and demographic shift.

Nomadic tribes, mainly Mongolian and Turkic, inhabited modern-day Kazakhstan before many decades of Russian colonization began.¹⁴ Hardly any political organization existed among them until the mid-fifteenth century, when these tribes united to form a political organization called the *khanate*.¹⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, a noted scholar on Kazakh culture and society, argues that that this societal formation was the first time the Kazakhs could be considered a united people, as they shared a common language, culture, social organization, and livestock breeding lifestyle.¹⁶ It was also around this time that these tribes

¹³ Fishman qtd. in J.A. Laponce, "Language and Politics," in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, 590.

¹⁴ Peter Mehisto, Assel Kambayyrova, and Khalida Nurseitova, "Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice," in *Education Reform and Internationalisation*, ed. David Bridges (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2014), 153.

¹⁵ Juldyz Smagulova, "Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use," in *Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries*, ed. Anita Pavlenko (Bristol, Multilingualism Matters, 2008), 167.

¹⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1987), 11.

began referring to themselves as “Kazakhs.”¹⁷ In 1731, the Kazakh khanate faced threats of invasion from the Zhungar tribes and requested protection from their powerful neighbor to the north, the Russian Empire.¹⁸

This request sparked over 250 years of Russian imperialism in Kazakh territory that drastically altered its societal structure. Russian governors were sent from Moscow to Kazakhstan to oversee political administration and naturally used their language in this administration. The Russian Empire replaced the traditional nomadic, livestock breeding economy with agriculture, significantly upsetting traditional Kazakh society and dividing it into urban and rural regions that had not existed previously. Native Kazakhs mainly lived in rural villages while Russians and foreigners dominated the cities. Almost no educational institutions existed in Kazakhstan before the Russians. Foreign governors established the first schools, which taught the history, culture, and language of Russia and neglected that of the Kazakh people. The Kazakh language, a Turkic language closely related to the other Central Asian languages, maintained a rich oral tradition but no written form before the Russian Empire imposed a writing system, using the Cyrillic alphabet.¹⁹ Because the Russian language dominated all these social systems, Kazakhs were forced to acquire the Russian language just to adapt to their changing environment.

Demographic changes also contributed to the drastic language shift. In the Soviet period, Kazakhstan experienced the largest demographic shift among all the titular republics and became the only republic in which the titular group was a minority.²⁰ From

¹⁷ Ibid, 4.

¹⁸ Smagulova, “Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use,” 167.

¹⁹ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 153.

²⁰ Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power*, 59.

1897 to 1917, the percentage of foreigners in Kazakhstan jumped from 14.7% to 30%. Approximately one million non-Kazakhs lived in Kazakhstan at the time of the Russian Revolution.²¹ From the 1930s to 1960s, Stalin forcibly removed massive numbers of Russians, Slavs, and other Soviet peoples to the Kazakh SSR. Like most of Central Asia, Stalin used Kazakhstan as a dumping ground for “undesirable” populations. He hoped large numbers of foreign, Russian-speaking immigrants would help assimilate the Kazakh SSR into the Soviet Union.²² Many people from different parts of the Soviet Union also move to Kazakhstan as part of Soviet agricultural programs.

Mass starvation, execution, and emigration of native Kazakhs, particularly during the Soviet period, also contributed to substantial decrease of the Kazakh population and language shift. The collectivization of agriculture and seizure of foodstuffs under Stalin resulted in the deaths of approximately 1.5 million Kazakhs, about 40% of the native population.²³ Many fled to neighboring Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Russia, and elsewhere. The last Soviet census taken in 1989 indicated that by the fall of the Soviet Union, 39.7% of Kazakhstan’s population was native Kazakh, 37.8% was Russian, and the remaining 22% was a conglomeration of various ethnicities (Germans, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Uyghurs, Koreans, and others).²⁴

²¹ Smagulova, “Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use,” 168; Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 153.

²² Alexandra George, *Journey into Kazakhstan: The True Face of the Nazarbayev Regime* (Lanham, UP of America, 2001), 132.

²³ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 153; David Bridges, introduction to *Education Reform and Internationalisation*, ed. David Bridges (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2014), xxiv.

²⁴ Smagulova, “Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use,” 172.

The 1989 census data also reflects the dramatic language shift that occurred in Kazakhstan. Of the small percentage of Kazakhs remaining, 75.3% claimed Russian fluency. This was higher than any other Central Asian titular nationality. The second highest percentage of Russian fluency among the titular nationality was in Kyrgyzstan, where only 37% of Kyrgyz spoke Russian.²⁵ Interestingly, 98.6% of Kazakhs claimed Kazakh as their mother tongue in the census, but Kolsto argues this is a misleading statistic. Though Kazakhs may have *associated* the Kazakh language with their ancestry, scholars estimate that only 60-72% could speak it proficiently.²⁶ 75% of urban Kazakhs did not speak it in their day-to-day interactions.²⁷ Comparatively, less than 1% of Russians claimed fluency in Kazakh. Of all the Soviet republics, Russians in Kazakhstan were the least fluent in the titular language.²⁸ As an Uzbek saying goes, if you want to become a Russian, learn to be a Kazakh first.”²⁹

Language and Power

Because of Russian imperialism and subsequent language shift, those Kazakhs who acquired proficiency in Russian had much greater access to political, economic, and social power structures. Russian-speaking foreigners arriving in Kazakhstan found a linguistically convenient environment. Rather than learning Kazakh, they were able to function using Russian, and almost no non-Kazakhs learned Kazakh. The large number of

²⁵ Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power*, 53.

²⁶ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1999), 30.

²⁷ Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power*, 53.

²⁸ Pal Kolsto and Andrei Edemsky, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1995), 245.

²⁹ Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power*, 53.

foreigners participated in and perpetuated the political, economic, and social structures that weakened the traditional Kazakh way of life. They held political offices, worked on farms, or held other jobs using the Russian language exclusively. They sent their children to Russian schools and continued to consider Russian language and culture superior to those of the native Kazakhs. This was true for almost all immigrants except those from neighboring Central Asian countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, whose languages and cultures more closely related to Kazakh and could usually speak it. Central Asians who lived in urban areas, however, usually also spoke Russian.

Those Kazakhs who lacked Russian proficiency were relegated to the rural, static, and stereotypically “backward” realms of society. As a result, many Kazakhs lost the ability to speak their native language. Around 60 to 75% could not speak Kazakh by the collapse of the Soviet Union.³⁰ Because of the prevalence of Russian, many Kazakh families, especially those in the cities, had stopped speaking Kazakh altogether, teaching Russian to their children and sending them to Russian schools. Only about 25% of native Kazakhs, mostly in southern and eastern Kazakhstan, did not speak Russian. The rest were bilingual, maintaining proficiency in both Kazakh and Russian.

Bilingualism and Diglossia

The pre-independence linguistic environment in Kazakhstan can be considered bilingualism with diglossia. The Kazakh language was the “low” (“L”) variety and Russian the “high” (“H”) variety. The 75% of native Kazakhs who were bilingual used Kazakh in informal situations with family and other ethnic Kazakhs but used Russian for almost all

³⁰ Pal Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*, 30.

other activities. Particularly in urban areas, education, most occupations, political and social participation, and interethnic communication required the Russian language. The Russian language was also associated with what was considered a “higher” culture, even among the Kazakhs. Because of the Russian Empire’s long literary tradition, global presence, and history, both Russians and Kazakhs considered the Russian culture, and thus the Russian language, to be “more advanced” than that of the Kazakhs. As nineteenth-century Kazakh poet Abai Kunanbaev said, “To learn Russian is to open your eyes to world.”³¹

Almost all Russians and russophones remained monolingual. They could survive and prosper in society while using their native language in both “high” and “low” settings. Bilingualism with diglossia, therefore, did not exist among Russians. It did exist among many non-Russian russophones, such as Ukrainians, Germans, or other Europeans, who may have spoken their native language in “L” settings but used Russian in “H” settings. Non-Kazakhs, however, maintained extremely low proficiency in the language. Unless they traveled to the Kazakh-dominated rural villages, they hardly ever encountered it.

Smagulova refers to this system as *asymmetrical bilingualism*. She explains, “Asymmetrical bilingualism reflected the ethnic stratification of Soviet Kazakhstan, where Kazakh-speakers found themselves dominated politically, economically, and culturally, and threatened demographically.”³² In order to make the environment more convenient for Russians-speakers, *Kazakhs were forced to bear the burden of bilingualism*. This system was able to persist under Russian and Soviet domination because of the lack of power

³¹ Ibid, 50.

³² Smagulova, “Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use,” 171-2.

Kazakhs maintained over their own territory. However, when the Soviet Union fell in 1991, it was likely it would end. As Ferguson notes, diglossia becomes unstable when one language variety is associated with independence and autonomy and a single, national language is preferred.

Language Planning

Kazakhstan declared independence from the Soviet Union in December of 1991.³³ This was a time of great social and political upheaval for the Soviet republics. During this time, political power shifted from ethnically Russian elites to local ethnic elites. Many of these new elites were supported on the grounds that they would reverse Soviet-era policies, such as the suppression of ethnic languages.³⁴ Language planning thus became one of the first and most important changes that took place after 1991.

Linguist Robert L. Cooper explains, “To plan language is to plan society.”³⁵ *Language planning* refers to the “deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes.”³⁶ Cooper presents several key concepts on language planning that I will apply to the main points of Kazakhstan’s language policy as explained below:

³³ “Kazakhstan Profile” *BBC News*, 24 Feb. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15483497>.

³⁴ William Fierman, “Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools,” *Russian Review* 65, no. 1 (2006): 106.

³⁵ Robert L. Cooper, *Language Planning and Social Change* (New York, Cambridge UP, 1989), 182.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 183.

1. Language planning usually occurs during a time of social change and is a form of social and political change in and of itself. It cannot be divorced from its social context.
2. Elites (or counterelites) both influence and benefit from language planning. Language planning will probably not succeed if it is not embraced by elites (or counterelites), who will not embrace it unless it serves their interests. Therefore, language planning is a method by which established elites try to reclaim power or counterelites overthrow the status quo to consolidate power for themselves.
3. The people of society also benefit from language planning, as it strengthens their sense of social connectedness, dignity, self-worth, and having a place within society.
4. It is more likely that language planning will affect attitude than behavior. Changing language behavior is very difficult.³⁷

Overview of Kazakhstan's Language Policy

Kazakhstan's language policy is not limited to a single document. Over twenty government decrees, programs, and statements encompass Kazakhstan's complex language policy, all of which cannot be recounted and analyzed here. To provide a brief but comprehensive outline, I will focus on the 1989 Law on Languages, the 1995 Constitution, the 1997 Law on Languages, and the 2011 State Program for the Developing and Functioning of Languages. Within these documents, I identify the most important principles of Kazakhstan's language policy:

³⁷ Ibid, 183-5.

- Kazakh is the sole state, or official, language.
- Proficiency in Kazakh is required for the highest, largely symbolic government positions of President and Chairpersons of the two houses of Parliament.
- Kazakh and Russian may be used *equally* for governmental and administrative purposes. The government respects the rights of people to use the language of their choosing and generally acknowledges the use of Russian as the language of interethnic communication.
- The government promotes a “civic duty” among Kazakhstan’s citizens to learn Kazakh and will expand opportunities to do so.

The increased freedoms of the Gorbachev years (1985-1991) inspired several republics to pass laws honoring titular language rights. As early as 1987, the decree “On Improving the Study of the Kazakh Language in the Republic” was published to afford easier access to Kazakh language instruction in schools.³⁸ In 1989, two months after he was inaugurated as First Secretary of the Communist Party, Nazarbayev passed the 1989 Law on Languages. Arguably the most liberal of the language laws passed in the Soviet Union that year, the law contained requirements for increased Kazakh use in both the political and educational systems.³⁹

The 1989 law declared Kazakh the state language and Russian the language of interethnic communication. Russian was permitted use on par with the state language, and

³⁸ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 161; Fierman, “Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools,” 104.

³⁹ Kolsto and Edemsky, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*, 246.

discrimination based on lack of knowledge of the state language was prohibited.⁴⁰ The law also required students to study both Kazakh and Russian and promised to increase the number of Kazakh-language schools.⁴¹ Fierman acknowledges that this law was extremely ambitious and argues that compared to the other republics, the difference between what the law mandated and what actually occurred was the most drastic in Kazakhstan compared to other republics.⁴²

The 1995 Constitution, still in effect today, affirms many of the previous assertions on language use. Additionally, it requires Kazakh proficiency among top-tier politicians. Article 7 establishes Kazakh as the state language, prohibits language-based discrimination, and allows Russian to be used on par with Kazakh “in state institutions and local self-administrative bodies.”⁴³ Article 51 asserts that the Chairpersons of the two Chambers of the Parliament, the Senate (upper house) and Majilis (lower house), must speak the state language perfectly. Like previous legislation, the Constitution promises that the government will provide greater access to language education. Article 93 requires that “the Government, local representative and executive bodies must create all necessary organizational, material and technical conditions for fluent and free-of-charge mastery of the state language by all citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid,

⁴¹ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 161; Fierman, “Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools,” 104.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ “Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” *Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, Aug. 30, 1995, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The 1997 Law on Languages provides a more complex outline of Nazarbayev's language policy. The law promotes the use of the Kazakh and Russian languages equally in government administration. However, Article 4 asserts, "the duty of every citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan is to learn the state language, being the most important factor for consolidation of people of Kazakhstan."⁴⁵ This statement demonstrates the importance the Nazarbayev administration places on Kazakh language promotion, to the extent that learning Kazakh is considered a *civic duty*.

The 1997 Language Law addresses language use in governmental authorities, education, mass media, and other areas of public life. The law promotes the equal use of Kazakh and Russian in most areas of government, including the workplace, document management, and legal proceedings. Article 16 provides for the creation of preschools in Kazakh and other languages. It also promises secondary and post-secondary education in Kazakh, Russian, and other languages if possible. Article 18 addresses the use of Kazakh in mass media, requiring that the number of Kazakh-language programs match the number of programs in other languages. Article 19 also requires that many of the Russian names of streets, squares, and other geographical or physical markers be replaced with Kazakh names according to transliteration.⁴⁶

The 2011 State Program for the Development and Functioning of Languages of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 was developed to provide explicit steps to promote the Kazakh language. These steps include increasing the prestige of and demand of the state language, improving teaching methods and expanding educational opportunities, using Russian in the

⁴⁵ "On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan," *Akimat of Pavlodar Region*, July 11, 1997, http://www.pavlodar.gov.kz/page.php?page_id=7&lang=3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

“communicative-language space”, and studying English and other foreign languages.⁴⁷ It also establishes several numerical goals for the program, including: increase of the share of school graduates that speaks the state language at B1 level to 70% by 2017 to 100% by 2020; increase the amount Kazakh-language content in state-owned mass media to 53% by 2014, to 60% by 2017, to 70% by 2020; and increase the percentage of Russian-speaking adults to 90% by 2020.⁴⁸

Cooper’s Theory of Language Planning

Cooper’s points on language planning are a useful tool for better understanding and assessing the effectiveness of Kazakhstan’s language policy. Below, I will explore the main concepts of Kazakhstan’s language policy through the lens of each of Cooper’s four points.

1. Language planning usually occurs during a time of social change and is a form of social change in and of itself. It cannot be divorced from its social context.

Political, economic, cultural, or demographic upheaval, or a combination of these factors, produce changes in society that language planning attempts to manage. Cooper explains, “In a stable world of complete equilibrium, where each day is much like the one before and the one to come, and where all members of society are satisfied with that condition language planning would be unlikely”⁴⁹. Perestroika and the subsequent collapse of Communism was a great time of social change, and language planning became one of the biggest factors in managing that change.

⁴⁷ “State Program on the Development and Functioning of Languages,” *Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, June 29, 2011, <http://ortcom.kz/en/program/program-lingual/text/show>.

⁴⁸ Ibid,

⁴⁹ Ibid, 164.

Language is particularly important in the post-Soviet context. Russian, Central Asian, and Eastern European expert Pal Kolsto explains that language was a significant element of most nationalist movements in the former Soviet Union:

In the former Soviet Union it was commonly assumed—almost axiomatically—that language, people and state belong together in some kind of holy trinity. As one Ukrainian nationalist once expressed it: “No language—no people. No people—no state.” Since these interlinkages were accepted as necessary and inevitable, it was extremely hard, almost impossible, to launch and sustain a nation-building project that was not linguistically founded.⁵⁰

All of the former Soviet republics, from Estonia to Ukraine to Georgia, used language as one of the rallying points of nationalist movements during perestroika and after the fall of the Soviet Union. The social change brought about by the Soviet Union’s demise made this language planning possible.

2. Elites (or counterelites) both influence and benefit from language planning. Language planning will probably not succeed if it is not embraced by elites (or counterelites), who will not embrace it unless it serves their interests. Therefore, language planning is a method by which established elites try to reclaim power or counterelites overthrow the status quo to consolidate power for themselves.

Kazakhstan is a unique example in the post-Soviet context because, unlike in other republics, the titular nationality was not a united group. A significant division existed between Russian-speaking, russophone Kazakhs and Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs. Furthermore, the political and economic relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia remained interdependent after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Baltic states, for example,

⁵⁰ Pal Kolsto, “Nation-Building and Language Standardisation in Kazakhstan,” in *Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia*, ed. Sally Cummings (London, Routledge, 2003), 121.

quickly joined the European Union and NATO after the fall of the Soviet Union, aligning with Europe rather than with Russia. Therefore, the more aggressive titular language policies that exist in Latvia and Estonia, which many Russian-speakers claim are discriminatory, do not pose a major economic or political risk. Kazakhstan would suffer far more from Russian alienation. Because of these reasons, it has been difficult for the government to present a unified language policy that whole-heartedly promotes either the Kazakh or the Russian language. Instead, the government symbolically encourages Kazakh in adherence with the post-Soviet model while making substantial provisions for the Russian language. This comprehensive language policy attempts to satisfy the interests of both Russian-language elites and Kazakh-language elites by making provisions for both languages.

When political power transferred from Russian to titular elites during the Soviet Union's collapse, the russified, Russian-speaking Kazakhs were the obvious choice of the next leaders of the nation. These elites had successfully adapted to the Russian-dominated environment and climbed the ranks through the Soviet power structures. They spoke Russian, attended schools, lived in urban areas, and understood the Soviet system. Nazarbayev himself served as First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and was close friends with Gorbachev.⁵¹ One of the only factors that differentiated them from former rulers was their ethnicity, which legitimized their rule in the post-Soviet context. Most, however, could hardly speak Kazakh at all.⁵²

⁵¹ "Kazakhstan Profile" *BBC News*, 24 Feb. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-15483497>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

The Kazakh *cultural* elites were Kazakh writers, historians, folklorists, and other cultural leaders who spoke Kazakh. Their power base resided mainly in rural areas, where Kazakh was spoken much more frequently and Kazakh traditions and culture were kept alive more than in urban areas. Unlike the russophones and russified Kazakhs, they had little power during the Soviet era, as they advocated for the language and culture that Russian domination had suppressed. These cultural elites formed a *counterelite* within the post-independence political climate. They often labeled the Russian-language elites as *mankurts*, ethnic traitors, to discount their legitimacy. The promotion of the Kazakh language was their main political tool.⁵³

The conflict between Russian-speaking Kazakhs and Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs and the importance of maintaining strong political and economic ties to Russia made it very difficult for the elites and counterelites of the post-independence period to present a unified language policy that thoroughly promoted one language over another. Kazakh provided the symbolic association with the post-Soviet model, recognizing the native Kazakhs whose culture had been suppressed for so long. Because the Russian-language elites could not function adequately in Kazakh, however, Russian was also maintained. In adherence with the post-Soviet model, the titular language has been declared the “state language” for symbolic purposes and is required for the most symbolic political positions. Other than these provisions, however, both Kazakh and Russian are permitted in the government and administrative spheres.

3. The people of society also benefit from language planning, as it strengthens their sense of social connectedness, dignity, self-worth, and having a place within society.

⁵³ Ibid, 4.

Much like the elite composition, Kazakhstani society is divided mainly into two powerful groups: Russian-speakers and Kazakh-speakers. Because of this, it is very difficult for language planning to establish a single language to be used for the entire population. The government must address and legitimize both groups, and establishing a *single* standard language would not create a sense of connectedness among the people but would alienate one of the two groups. The language policy must promote the languages of both groups on a relatively equal basis.

Kolsto calls Kazakhstan a *bipolar society*. Though the government often boasts of the *multiethnic* composition of Kazakhstan, citing the 130 ethnicities living within its borders, this does not tell the whole story. Most ethnic groups are too small to be statistically significant, and most have been linguistically assimilated into either Russian-speakers or Kazakh-speakers.⁵⁴ Rather, society is divided into two major ethno-linguistic groups about equal in population size and power, preventing one group from dominating the other group. Because it is not clear “who will be integrated into whom,” each group maintains its own language and culture.⁵⁵ In 1989, a few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakh and Russian ethnic groups were about the same population size, with 39.7% and 37.8% of the population respectively. Most of the remaining 22.5% of the population were Russian-speakers. Those numbers have changed in the past 25 years; Kazakhs now encompass about 63.1% of the population, Russians 23.7%, and other groups 13.2%.⁵⁶ However, the main division between Russian-speakers and Kazakh-speakers has

⁵⁴ Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*, 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 6-7.

⁵⁶ “The World Factbook: Kazakhstan,” *CIA The World Factbook*, June 20, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>.

not significantly changed, and the two groups have hardly integrated. Both expect their language will be respected by the government's language policy.

President Nazarbayev addresses the bipolar nature of Kazakhstani society but frequently presenting conflicting messages in his public speeches. He promotes Kazakhstan as both a homeland for native Kazakhs and a multinational state that welcomes and protects several ethnicities. In a speech to the Kazakh Tili Society, he explained:

We should not forget that the sovereignty of Kazakhstan is in many ways special. First and foremost it is a particular synthesis of the national sovereignty of the Kazakhs and the sovereign of the people of Kazakhstan in general as an ethnopolitical community.⁵⁷

The government no doubt attempts to use language policy to create a sense of social connectedness within society. The question becomes, however, which language will best connect society? The post-Soviet model points to the titular language, but that is difficult when such a large number of people within the state cannot speak it. Practically speaking, it should be Russian, but that echoes Russia's 250-year hegemonic project that favored Russians and russophones while marginalizing ethnic Kazakhs. The government attempts to promote both, but is it possible to foster social connectedness under *two* languages?

Rather than contributing to social unification the bilingual language policy contributes to and furthers the chasm that already exists between Kazakh-speakers and Russian-speakers in Kazakhstan. The promotion of the Kazakh language to position of state language, the increased funding allocated to Kazakh-language education, and the attempts to increase its prevalence in government, mass media, and geographical and physical markers certainly increases the dignity and social connectedness of the *Kazakh*

⁵⁷ Kolsto and Edemsky, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics*, 248-9.

people. However, these policies alienate many Russian-speakers, especially since they are still unwilling to learn Kazakh. Language policy is a point of contention particularly in the primarily Russian-speaking northern and eastern oblasts. The “Organization for the Autonomy of Eastern Kazakhstan” cited the discrimination they felt under the 1997 Law on Languages as one of their justifications for autonomy.⁵⁸ Chinn and Kaiser argue that “friendship of the people” image that Nazarbayev promotes is a myth. Rather, the policies of the last 25 years have alienated Russians and Russian-speakers to the point that an interethnic conflict may likely be on the horizon.⁵⁹

4. It is more likely that language planning will affect attitude than behavior. Changing language behavior is very difficult.

The first 1989 Language Law sparked a trend in Kazakhstan’s language policy of the government promising more than it could deliver. Many of the government’s intended changes have not occurred or have fallen desperately short of its intended goals. The Kazakh language is not being spoken on the widespread scale the government had hoped. Some changes in language attitude have occurred, mainly in regards to the Kazakh language rather than the Russian language. The promotion of the Kazakh language helped to unite the Kazakh people and legitimize their ethnicity, but it has also created a moral association with the Kazakh language that did not exist prior to independence. Now, those Kazakhs who cannot speak Kazakh are made to feel guilty for it. The “civic duty” of all citizens to learn Kazakh in reality only extends to ethnic Kazakhs.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1996), 194-5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 185.

⁶⁰ Fierman, “Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools,” 111.

According to Dave, hardly any attitudinal shift has occurred among Russians and russophones in Kazakhstan. They still consider Russian culture superior and are unwilling to adopt Kazakh language or traditions.⁶¹ Far more Kazakhs know Russian than Russians know Kazakh, and Kazakh language ability is only necessary in rural villages and certain regions in the South and West. Russians claim their language is more practical internationally, whereas Kazakh is only useful within Kazakhstan.⁶²

Interestingly, most Kazakhs do not expect non-Kazakhs to learn Kazakh, either. Many Kazakhs have a relatively high regard for Russian culture, seeing it as a language of development, education, and knowledge. Nazarbayev has promoted this respect for Russian culture in several speeches, such as the “Strategy 2050” speech delivered in December 2014:

We should treat Russian language and Cyrillic writing in the same caring way as we do for Kazakh. It is clear to us all that knowing the Russian language provided a historic advantage to our nation. No one can ignore the fact that through Russian language in centuries [*sic*] the Kazakhstan citizens gain additional knowledge, increase their perspective and communications both domestically and abroad.⁶³

Hoping not to alienate Russian-speakers, the language policy repeatedly acknowledges that citizens have the right to use the language of their choosing. The government has implemented no sanctions for those who do not adhere to the language policy. Therefore, the primary responsibility of learning Kazakh rests on native Kazakhs alone, and only those who are willing to do so. This does little to resolve the system of asymmetrical

⁶¹ Dave, *Kazakhstan: Language, Ethnicity, and Power*, 25.

⁶² Chinn and Kaiser, *Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States*, 194.

⁶³ Nulstatan Nazarbayev, “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050: New Political Course of the Established State,” *Official Site of the President of Kazakhstan*, Dec. 14, 2012, http://www.akorda.kz/en/page/page_poslanie-prezidenta-respubliki-kazakhstan-lidera-natsii-nursultana-nazarbaeva-narodu-kazakhstana-.

bilingualism. Instead, it creates an environment in which Kazakhs face pressure to learn the Kazakh language for symbolic purposes without full development of the functional uses of the language. Despite the attempts of the language policy to resolve past injustices against the Kazakh language, *the burden of bilingualism still rests on the Kazakh people.*

The Symbolic Power of Language

Even during Soviet times, the moral pressure to know the native language was deeply imbedded in the Kazakh psyche. Kolsto explores the discrepancy in the 1989 census in which 98.6% of Kazakhs claimed Kazakh as their “mother tongue” while only 60 to 72% could actually speak it. He argues that these numbers reflect the guilt ethnic Kazakhs felt for lack of proficiency in their ancestral language, causing them to inflate their language ability in the census.⁶⁴ A large percentage of Kazakhs may have forgotten their language, but they did not forget the metaphor of the *mankurt*. Even if Russian was the language they spoke at home, in school, at work, and in social interactions, Russian could not be their “mother tongue” because it was not the language symbolically associated with their ethnic group.

Political theorist Walker Connor explores the power of ethnicity and of language as a nationalistic symbol. He argues loyalty to the ethnic group tends to be more potent than loyalty to the state because of its psychological, emotional, and familial associations. The ethnic group is considered one’s “extended family,” united by a common genetic relation or “shared blood.”⁶⁵ The ethnic bond cannot be explained with rationality. Connor

⁶⁴ Kolsto, *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*, 30.

⁶⁵ Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1994), 42.

explains, “Logic operates in the realm of the conscious and the rational. Convictions concerning origin and evolution of one’s nation belong to the realm of the subconscious and the nonrational.”⁶⁶ This is why it has been such a powerful propaganda tool in nationalist movements. Hitler told the German people, “Think with your blood!”⁶⁷ Though ethnicity cannot necessarily be explained with rationality, it can be analyzed by examining the symbols to what it responds. Connor emphasizes the importance of symbols, with which people have a more emotional association.⁶⁸

Tangible aspects of ethnicity, such as language, territory, and religion, do not *define* an ethnicity, but they often serve as effective rallying points for ethnic-based movements. Linguist Joshua Fishman echoes the powerful role language plays as a symbol and its importance in nation building.

In the absence of a common, nationwide, ethnic, and cultural identity, new nations proceed to plan and create such an identity through national symbols that can lead to common mobilization and involvement above, beyond, and at the expense of pre-existing ethnic-cultural particularities. It is at this point that a national language is frequently invoked...as a unifying symbol⁶⁹.

In the process of social integration, a local language, or a language that was previously restricted to small populations, is elevated to a higher plane. It becomes a symbol for the unified state, just as important as national heroes, values, history, and so on. The language takes on a *moral* association. Fishman refers to this as the *ideologization* of language. It

⁶⁶ Ibid, 202-3.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 198.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 204.

⁶⁹ Joshua Fishman, *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (New York, Wiley, 1968), 6.

serves to unify and mobilize the state as a unified entity, and thus, the language becomes institutionalized in government, technology, and “High Culture.”⁷⁰

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan’s government used the ideologization of language as a tool for social unification and political legitimization. Because of the psychological and ancestral pull of the Kazakh language as a symbol for the common Kazakh family, this process was effective among Kazakhs. However, the Russians and russophones in Kazakhstan did not psychologically and emotionally associate the Kazakh language with their ethnicity. The ideologization of language, therefore, was lost on them.

Linguistic Analysis of Post-1991 Kazakhstan

The ideologization of language promoted by the Kazakhstani government through language policy manifests in the post-independence linguistic environment. I will examine the development of language attitude and behavior in Kazakhstan after 1991 through the three lenses used previously: Bloomfield’s concept of language shift; Bourdieu’s connection between language and power; and Ferguson’s “diglossia.”

Language Shift

In the 25 years since Kazakhstan’s independence, a noticeable language shift in favor of the Kazakh language has occurred. In 1989, less than a third of Kazakhstan’s population could speak Kazakh; as of 2009, about two-thirds can speak the language.⁷¹ Both demographic and structural changes contributed to this language shift. However, the

⁷⁰ Ibid, 7.

⁷¹ Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana Faces Unsettling Language Debate,” *EurasiaNet*, September 14, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64170>.

unwillingness to learn Kazakh among non-Kazakhs (and many Kazakhs) prevents widespread, multiethnic language shift from occurring.

One of the main reasons the Kazakh language has expanded is simply that the number of ethnic Kazakhs has substantially increased since 1991. As of 2009, Kazakhs make up 63.1% of a population.⁷² This is quite a jump from 39.7% in 1989. Conversely, the percentage of Russians in Kazakhstan has decreased from 37.8% in 1989 to 23.7% in 2009. (The post-Soviet Russian flight out of Kazakhstan was not nearly as large as it was in other republics.)⁷³ Non-Kazakh, non-Russians now encompass 13.2% of the population.

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Kazakh birthrates have been very high in the past 25 years. The *Oralman* repatriation policy, established as part of the Migration Act of 1997, encourages ethnic Kazakhs who migrated out of Kazakhstan in the past to return to their homeland. The government gives immigrants automatic citizenship, assists financially with the process, and provides educational and health privileges.⁷⁵ By 2011, 860,400 Kazakhs had been repatriated in Kazakhstan from Russia and various countries in Central Asia and the Middle East, many of whom speak Kazakh.⁷⁶

The prevalence of Kazakh in the public sphere has also increased, spreading to a greater number of occupations, political positions, and schools. Government spending on

⁷² “The World Factbook: Kazakhstan,” *CIA The World Factbook*, June 20, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kz.html>.

⁷³ Farangis Najibullah, “Kazakh Schools Getting ‘Kazakhified,’” *Radio Free Europe*, July 9, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kazakh_schools_leave_russian_for_kazakh/.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*,

⁷⁵ Smagulova, “Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitude and Use,” 173.

⁷⁶ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 162.

the development of the Kazakh language had increased to almost USD 700,000 by 2007.⁷⁷ Mehisto argues, “Kazakhstan is steadily shifting toward becoming linguistically-speaking a Kazakh-dominated society whilst seeking also to foster the learning and use of Russian, English, and minority languages.”⁷⁸

However, the language shift has not been as drastic as the government and many Kazakh citizens have hoped. As of 2009, only 6% of Russians can read or write in Kazakh, though about 25% can understand it orally. Asymmetrical bilingualism is still prevalent: 94% of Kazakhs can understand Russian and 85% can read or write in the language.⁷⁹ Unfortunately, only 14% of Kazakhstanis are actively trying to learn Kazakh.⁸⁰ Kazakhstan still has a long way to go to make up for the drastic loss of language during Russian and Soviet occupation.

Language and Power

It is unlikely that over 250 years of an established power dynamic can be reversed in only a tenth of that time frame. One may expect that the Russian language will maintain its cultural capital for some time in Kazakhstan. Reversing this situation, or at least establishing an environment in which the Kazakh and Russian languages both carry an equal amount of cultural capital, requires attitudinal changes among both Kazakhs and Russians. Culture Minister Mukhtar Kul-Mukhammed, who oversees language policy,

⁷⁷ Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Officials Adopt Low-Key Approach on Language Policy,” *EurasiaNet*, July 23, 2007,

<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav072407.shtml>.

⁷⁸ Mehisto et al. “Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice,” 172-3.

⁷⁹ Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana Wants Kazakhstanis to Speak Kazakh,” *EurasiaNet*, November 22, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62424>.

⁸⁰ Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana Faces Unsettling Language Debate.”

expressed the need for a significant attitude shift concerning the cultural capital of the Kazakh language:

In Soviet times, and even sometimes now, communicating in Kazakh was considered to be a sign of backwardness, of ignorance of Russian. Now we should neutralize these negative stereotypes and shape the idea that knowing Kazakh is a sign of success, freedom, sophistication and professional advantage...It is time to ask Kazakhstan's citizens if they know the state language, if they respect the state language—the language of the people who gave this state its name.⁸¹

The presence of the Kazakh language is slowly but steadily increasing in various aspects of public life. Higher education is becoming more linguistically diverse; as of 2009, 50.7% of university students received instruction in Russian, 47.6% in Kazakh, and 1.6% in English.⁸² Most jobs in urban areas still require Russian, though more and more employers have formal or informal Kazakh-language requirements. This is a subtle process, and job availability for Russian-speaking non-Kazakhs may be decreasing over time.⁸³ Kazakh-language media has also increased. In 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that 100 movies, 13 TV channels, 10 radio stations, 40 newspapers and magazines were produced in Kazakh.⁸⁴

Arguably, the greatest indicator of which language people consider the language of power is the one in which they choose to instruct their children. From 1988 to 2004, the proportion of Kazakh-language schools increased from 11.0% to 27.6%. The proportion of Russian-language schools decreased from 73.0% to 36.0%. The proportion of mixed

⁸¹ Lillis, "Kazakhstan: Astana Wants Kazakhstanis to Speak Kazakh,."

⁸² Mehisto et al. "Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice," 160.

⁸³ Fierman, "Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools," 112-3.

⁸⁴ Mehisto et al. "Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice," 164.

schools that provide instruction in both languages has increased from 15.0% to 35.4%.⁸⁵ This shows that the proportion of people who believe Russian holds the greatest cultural capital (36.0%) is still higher than those who consider Kazakh to hold the greatest cultural capital (27.6%). The number of people who consider both languages to provide cultural capital, though, has increased to a little more than a third of the population (35.4%).

One factor that may explain these numbers is that Kazakh schools are still considered of relatively poor quality compared to Russian schools. In 2002, only 37 of the 186 (19%) of the winners of Academic Olympiads were students of Kazakh-language schools.⁸⁶ The scores from the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment showed that only 40% of Kazakh-language students were reading at or above level 2, while 72% of Russian-language students were reading at or above the same level.⁸⁷ This is a result of a combination of factors, including limited, poorly-written teaching materials, poorly-trained teachers, and underdeveloped vocabulary. Many ethnic Kazakhs enroll their children in Russian schools because of their higher quality. About 20% of ethnically Kazakh children attend Russian-language schools; in urban areas, the percentage is 30%.⁸⁸ Kazakh-language schools tend to include a nationalized curriculum that emphasizes Kazakh culture and history, which does not appeal to urban russified Kazakhs who have been speaking Russian for two or three generations. It appeals even less to non-Kazakhs.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Fierman, "Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools," 102.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 114.

⁸⁷ Mehisto et al. "Three in One? Trilingualism in Policy and Educational Practice," 156.

⁸⁸ Fierman, "Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools," 112.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 104.

Almost no Russian-speakers send their children to Kazakh schools, and many are frustrated by the decrease of Russian-language schools. These tensions manifested in the central Kazakhstani town of Temirtau in 2011 when the government decided to convert two of the Russian-language schools to Kazakh-language schools. Education officials say that many of the Russian-language schools are half-empty while the Kazakh-language schools are overflowing to the point where teachers must conduct some classes in the hallways. The city has only three Kazakh-language schools compared to sixteen Russian-language schools. The government's decision to convert two Russian-language schools caused massive upset among Russian-speakers in Temirtau, resulting in over 300 lawsuits. As one Russian woman explains, "My son goes to the tenth grade, and I am worried about the psychological impact this situation could have on him." Another mother asserts, "We will not give up. We are not going anywhere just yet. We will go stage hunger strikes, protests, whatever it takes. I will not take [my daughter's] documents from the school until the end."⁹⁰

In March 2013, *EurasiaNet* journalists Joanna Lillis and Dean Cox interviewed Dr. Zhar Zardykhan, associate professor at the Department of International Relations and Regional Studies at KIMEP University in Almaty. He explained some of the reasons Russians are responding so poorly to the language policy:

If you are Russian or could be called a Russian speaker... You grew up in a country in the Soviet Union, where your language was the first language. Your culture dominated and finding yourself in a secondary position when your language is not as impressive, and you have difficulty sometimes in understanding what's going on around in administrative and legal issues, you have to come across people speaking another language it's always, obviously, a disadvantage. Among certain people that

⁹⁰ Farangis Najibullah, "Kazakh Schools Getting 'Kazakhified,'" *Radio Free Europe*, July 9, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/kazakh_schools_leave_russian_for_kazakh/.

creates also kind of a rejection, probably because “we were in a favorable position, and now we’re not.”⁹¹

Feelings of cultural and linguistic superiority are difficult for Russians to overcome in post-independent Kazakhstan. Most are unwilling to accept or acknowledge the changing linguistic power structures or to give up Soviet-era linguistic freedoms. This subversion slows both the language shift and the shift in cultural capital. Societal advancement and stability, however, require that both Kazakhs and Russians acknowledge the ethno-linguistic legitimacy of the other group.

Bilingualism and Diglossia

Before independence, the linguistic environment in Kazakhstan could be considered bilingualism *with* diglossia. The Russian and Kazakh languages existed in a hierarchy in which proficiency in Russian provided access to more powerful social and political structures, while the Kazakh language was relegated to informal, domestic, rural, and less powerful realms. The burden of bilingualism was forced onto the Kazakh people, and the Kazakh language significantly receded as a result.

Bilingualism with diglossia became unstable during a time of social change, when political power was transferred to ethnic elites and people associated the Kazakh language with national sovereignty. Kazakhstan’s language policy seems to promote a system of bilingualism *without* diglossia. Both languages may be used in almost all domains depending on the speaker’s choosing, with the exception of highly symbolic domains (“state language,” requirement for top political positions). Kazakhs are encouraged and

⁹¹ Joanna Lillis and Dean Cox, “Interview 180: Juggling the Roles of Kazakh and Russian Languages,” *EurasiaNet*, March 21, 2013, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66712>.

expected to speak Kazakh, but non-Kazakhs are not, and Russians and russophones will still speak Russian across the board. This results in an environment in which both social groups use their respective languages across all social roles, but Kazakhs still speak Russian on a large scale.

Post-independent Kazakhstan is an unusual case of bilingualism without diglossia, though, because the group that holds political power did not transfer the burden of bilingualism to the minority group. When the Kazakhs assumed power, they did not establish an entirely monolingual language policy, forcing the Russian-speaking population to acquire Kazakh. Rather, they instituted Kazakh in primarily symbolic ways while allowing the use of Russian in almost all other fields.

Nazarbayev believes that the way to maintain interethnic peace within Kazakhstan is to acknowledge both Russian and Kazakh language rights. However, it is important to remember that bilingualism without diglossia is *not* a stable environment. Each social group uses its respective language in all social interactions, resulting in competition between the two languages. This leads to social and political conflict. By fostering a bilingual without diglossia environment, Kazakhstan's language policy counterintuitively fosters an environment of interethnic conflict and instability.

Conclusions

Kazakhs are, for the most part, the only group within Kazakhstan who are using their language on a large scale. This is a big step, considering the state of the language before independence. However, it does not go far enough. In order for interethnic peace and prosperity to exist, non-Kazakhs must acknowledge and make provisions for the past injustices committed against the Kazakh people within their own territory. Learning the

Kazakh language would be the most tangible and meaningful way for the russophone populations to fully integrate into Kazakhstani society. The burden of bilingualism should not rest solely on the shoulders of ethnic Kazakhs. The most stable environment would be one in which the burden is divided equally between the two social groups. The Kazakh government cannot just give lip service to both languages. There must be an attitudinal change among Kazakhs and Russians that holds Russians accountable for learning and using the Kazakh language.

This argument rests on the assumption that native Kazakhs have a greater claim over Kazakhstan because Kazakhstan is their only homeland. If non-Kazakhs do not feel at home in their society, they could return to their traditional homelands, and the government there would be expected to heed their rights and needs. If a Russian or Ukrainian feels the government discriminates against him, he could return to Russia or Ukraine. Kazakhs do not have this choice, as there is no state other than Kazakhstan that should or would give precedence to the needs of the Kazakh ethnicity. This argument becomes murky, however, when one considers how long the Russian Empire held power in Kazakhstan. Russians have been in Kazakhstan longer than the United States has been a nation. A Russian-speaking Kazakhstani whose family has lived in Kazakhstan for generations will likely consider Kazakhstan his homeland more than Russia. As Kazakhstan scholar Alexandra George explains: “According to the government the Russians, even those whose ancestors came here over a hundred years ago, are not indigenous people, yet how can Kazakhstan not be their homeland when their forefathers

are buried here, many Russians ask?”⁹² This challenges the assumption that ethnic Kazakhs have greater claim over Kazakhstan than non-Kazakh Kazakhstanis.

Recently, these ethnolinguistic tensions have manifested in public protests. In August of 2011, 138 public figures signed an open letter to Nazarbayev and other government officials demanding a stricter language policy in favor of the Kazakh language. They called for the removal of the Constitutional clause that allows Russian to be used equally with Kazakh in official state bodies. Deputy leader of the opposition OSDP Azat party, Amirzhan Kosanov, argues that this letter represents the frustration that the de facto position of Kazakh in society does not match the government’s promotion of the language.⁹³ This political movement reflects the desire among ethnic Kazakhs for greater recognition, legitimacy, and respect for the Kazakh language. The symbol of the *mankurt* is still prevalent in the Kazakh psyche; rather than submitting to cultural slavery, Kazakhs hope to keep their ancestral and traditional memory alive. Language is the most tangible and potent way Kazakhs honor and respect their ethnicity.

However, it is important to understand that more pro-Kazakh language policy may negatively affect Kazakhstan’s international relations, particularly with one of its most important allies, Russia. By maintaining a relatively non-aggressive language policy, Nazarbayev acknowledges the important strategic relationship between the two countries. Russia is one of Kazakhstan’s top trading partners, and both participate in unifying organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the newly formed

⁹² George, *Journey into Kazakhstan: The True Face of the Nazarbayev Regime*, 132.

⁹³ Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana Faces Unsettling Language Debate.”

Eurasian Economic Union.⁹⁴ Though some point out that Kazakhstan is pulling away from Russian influence toward powers like China and Europe, amicable relations between the two states remain crucial.⁹⁵ According to the Observatory of Economic Complexity, Kazakhstan receives the most imports from Russia at 36%. Russia is its number two export destination, receiving 9% of Kazakhstan's exports.⁹⁶ Alienating Russians and Russian-speakers within Kazakhstan with a more aggressive language policy could endanger these vital relations.

President Nazarbayev understands that any policy that could be considered discriminatory toward ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers may also threaten Kazakhstan's state sovereignty. The protection of ethnic Russians has become an important part of President Putin's foreign policy agenda and was one of the motivating reasons Putin cited for the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014. Academics, journalists, and analysts are speculating if Northern Kazakhstan, consisting of 50% ethnic Russians, will be the next Crimea.⁹⁷ By promoting a multiethnic and non-discriminatory vision of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev avoids giving Putin any reason to violate Kazakhstan's sovereignty in order to protect the rights of ethnic Russians. Maintaining positive relations with one of its top political economic partners and avoiding threatening ethnic Russians

⁹⁴ Leon Neyfakh, "Putin's Long Game? Meet the Eurasian Union," *The Boston Globe*, March 9, 2014, <http://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/03/09/putin-long-game-meet-eurasian-union/1eKLXEC3TJfzqK54eIX5fL/story.html>.

⁹⁵ Joshua Kucera, "North Kazakhstan Isn't the Next Crimea—Yet," *Aljazeera America*, June 19, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/19/north-kazakhstanisntthenextcrimeaayet.html>.

⁹⁶ "Country Profile: Kazakhstan," *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/kaz/>.

⁹⁷ Kucera, "North Kazakhstan Isn't the Next Crimea—Yet."

and Russian-speakers to ensure state sovereignty may be more important than promoting the Kazakh language at the expense of Russian.

Under the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, the Kazakh people experienced a drastic language shift, either losing Kazakh proficiency altogether or becoming bilingual. Cultural capital was associated with the Russian language, and thus Russian proficiency was necessary for political and social survival. This created a system of bilingualism with diglossia in which the Kazakh people were forced to assume the burden of bilingualism. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought about a time of social change in which Kazakh political elites and counterelites established a new language policy that many hoped would reverse past linguistic injustice. Instead, the government's language policy elevated the Kazakh language only to a symbolic position while allowing equal use of both languages in all other fields.

The government places a psychological, ancestral, and moral pressure on ethnic Kazakhs to learn their language without placing the same pressure on ethnic Russians and russophones. This has created a linguistic environment characterized by bilingualism without diglossia, in which Kazakhs *still maintain the burden of bilingualism*. Whether social and political stability can maintain under these circumstances remains to be seen.

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