

**SOME OBJECTIVE
REASONS WHY THE
STATE LANGUAGE
POLICY IS MODERATE IN
KAZAKHSTAN**

In any state the language policy is regarded as an integral part of national building. Learning and knowing the state language should be taken for granted.

But the language situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan has undergone both positive and negative effects of the Soviet language policy.

First of all, it should be noted that thanks to the Soviet regime the majority of the population of the USSR could cope with illiteracy. Many languages were standardized.

In the first years of the Soviet power much attention was paid to learning all the languages of Union Republics.

We should remember that many languages, including Central Asian, used the Arabic alphabet, later the Latin script. But from the mid of the 1930s the process of the language ‘rusification’ started. Many languages transferred to the Cyrillic alphabet. The Russian language started to be used in public places and state administrations. Parents sent their children to schools where classes were conducted in Russian, at home they spoke Russian.

Some people considered the process of dissemination of the Russian language as the positive achievement of the Soviet power, but at the same time there were the opponents of this process who considered it as the infringement of the language rights of the minorities.

Thus, by the disintegration of the USSR, despite the fact that in 1989 the Kazakh language was proclaimed the state language, approximately 85 per cent of the population read and wrote in the Russian language and only 35-40 per cent could read and write in the state language.

The language situation in Kazakhstan differs greatly from that of the Baltic republics or of Georgia and Armenia because of many historical and demographic factors. The demographic factor is definitely one of the significant factors in the formation of the language policy.

Let’s take as an example such post-Soviet republics as Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. After gaining their independence they could easily transfer from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin script. But Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan could not do it because the share of the Russian speaking people was very high.

Straight after the adoption of the «Law on Language» some people expected, some people feared and some people hoped that the Kazakh language would substitute Russian in all spheres of life. If such kind of withdrawal from Russian was possible in the Baltic states and in the Caucasus, it was absolutely impossible in Kazakhstan. The language policy in the RK was and remains moderate.

In this paper I would like to dwell upon some objective reasons of this phenomenon.

First of all, it should be noted that the language policy in Kazakhstan was and is moderate in order to keep the multinational state in tranquility, without clashes and confrontations among different ethnic groups.

Language policy is the most important component of state policy. But the adoption of the Law on Languages, Resolutions of the Cabinet of Ministers of Kazakhstan that the Kazakh language would become the state language triggered the outflow of Russians from Kazakhstan.

As a result of the worsening migration situation, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev declared in June 1994 «a new course in the field of interethnic relations, stating that false expectations in the state language policy should be eliminated by the passage of a new language law». The President subjected the previous language law to certain criticism. According to the Head of the State the strict requirement to master the state language by 1996 has put even many Kazakhs (shala Kazakhs) in a difficult position.

N.A. Nazarbayev offered assurances that the «adoption of a new program will mean the disappearance of discrimination of the basis of full equality of Kazakh and Russian; in questions of employment there should be two criteria for any position: competence and loyalty to the homeland».

A required knowledge of the state language was not mentioned. He didn't do it because Article 4 of the Law on Languages of July 1994 runs: «It is the duty of every citizen of the RK to master the state language. The Russian language is used on an equal basis with the state language in state organizations and organs of local self-administration».

Article 23 envisages a definite list of specialties and positions for which knowledge of Kazakh is required.

And what is wrong in this? Why should Russians feel the squeeze put on them? Let's take some other democratic states like France, Germany. Those who live or arrive in these countries from other states they know and speak French or German. If they

don't know, they attend courses, they are willing to learn the language of the state where they are. It goes without saying, if you want to live there, to find a job and to work for the benefit of yourself and of the country.

But the situation in Kazakhstan is quite different. There are a variety of reactions to these events relating to the language policy.

They ranged from internal frustration, despair, psychological discomfort, uncertainty about their near future and other forms of emotional upsets to forms of open protest in the Russian Community «Lad» and the Association of the Slavic and Cossack Civic Organizations. Even in those days before the Presidential elections, they appealed to the President and government to recognize the Russian people as a state-building nation and to guarantee a just personnel policy.

The President of Kazakhstan was wise enough to acknowledge the situation that the implementation of the state language policy in practice in the form of harsh administrative measures would not work, that the good designs in regard of the Kazakh language might be interpreted by a part of the Russian – speaking population, primarily by Russians, as an effort by Kazakhs to encourage them to leave the country or to call for conflicts between ethnic groups.

The President of our country was not misled by shortsighted approaches. Keeping in mind the fact that the Kazakh language is the state language while Russian is the language of interethnic communication, the President has never ignored the specific characters of interethnic accord in Kazakhstan. He could foresee that the language policy would enter the political dimension. That's why a careful approach is required for implementing the language policy.

Instead of responding positively to the changes of the status of the Kazakh language, which was almost on the verge of being given to oblivion, the Russian Slavic organizations started to express their dissatisfaction and discontent that Radio and TV broadcasts were reduced; that the number of hours of instruction in the Russian language and Literature were decreased. They sharply criticized the wide scale renaming of administrative units, settlements, streets and geographical designations, signs on many state institutions.

They expressed their strong discontent about state sponsored celebrations, primarily in honour of Kazakh heroes of the past.

In the first years of the country's independence the Russian community did not understand that the worthy status of the state language would determine

the status of Kazakhstan in the world community, that the Republic of Kazakhstan is an independent state with its all indispensable elements to be recognized as a subject of international law.

It should be perceived by the Russian community that the most important language determination issue around the world is the choice of national languages. The choice is determined by a set of functions that a national language is supposed and expected to fulfill. Many scholars who have dealt with this issue consider the following functions as the most significant:

- symbolic – defines a nation as a social entity, prevents a nation from falling apart by maintaining the common identity of all citizens of the nation. This function may also be called as a unifying function.

- communicative, which provides effective interaction between citizens of a nation, a condition essential for success of the nation as a whole.

- participatory, which allows a nation to remain an integral part of the world community.

An ideal state language should be able to fulfill all these three functions. The language should have a recognized status based upon its historical and present functionality as a means of intranational and international communication.

There is a general tendency for nations to fortify, to consolidate their identity by facilitating the development of their national languages in order to increase its functionality and, consequently, its status.

As I have already mentioned the state language policy in Kazakhstan is rather moderate mainly for the reason to keep social tranquility. But it does not mean that we appreciate the inaction or passive activity on the part of the government. I don't think the government has done its best for the advancement of the Kazakh language. I would like to express my point of view that the effective advancement and development of the Kazakh language as the state language would not infringe or squeeze the Russian or other languages. If the Russians start speaking Kazakh, it doesn't mean that they would forget the language they know.

One of the main problems, I think, is the fact that those who do not know the state language, are not interested in learning it. In order to make this process more attractive the Government must subsidize the publication of high quality books, they must be available, not so expensive.

Another serious problem is that many young parents do not know the Kazakh language themselves and they fear to send their children to the Kazakh schools.

The government must do its best in order to advance the Kazakh language as the language of contemporary Kazakhstan, the language that can be used in many spheres of our life. There must be more educational, high quality TV programs, radio broadcasting in order to attract children to watch and listen to them. I mean the quality but not quantity.

One more factor that may make an impeding effect on mastering the state language in Kazakhstan is, as I suppose, the demand to introduce and learn English as a required subject beginning in the second grade of the school program and continuing through high school and is chosen as one of the areas tested on University entrance examinations. Besides, many international corporations and organizations functioning in Kazakhstan are encouraging their employees to know the English and Russian languages but not Kazakh. Why? That's the rhetoric question.

The proponents of the introduction of the trinity of languages (Kazakh, Russian and English) consider that it will provide schoolchildren with a free access to huge flows of information, new technologies, mobility and qualitative communications. But this theme of 'the three – linguism' needs thorough and deep researches, because first of all, the role and place of the Kazakh language must be determined in this process. The multilingual education is a very expensive undertaking. If we are planning to introduce this method of teaching the school subjects in English, we must train highly qualified teachers who will know their subjects and the English language perfectly well. Schoolchildren must be provided with textbooks and all the educational materials of high quality. Are there any guarantees that all these processes will be carried out without any detriment to the state language? One of the strongest rejections is the inclusion of Western culture in teaching materials, which is not motivating or beneficial to students to advance the Kazakh language. That's why without certain researches it is hard to say what experience or whose practice is better to use in Kazakhstan. It means we should learn other's achievements, experience, but not simply copy someone's achievements.

In general I think, the state language policy must be tougher – if you finish school in Kazakhstan, no matter private or state – you must know the Kazakh language. Of course, at home, in your private life, if you don't bear any public responsibility, you may choose which language to speak.

I am sure that the advancement of the Kazakh language depends on the general language policy in the country.

I was very proud and delighted when N.A. Nazarbayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, made his speech in the Kazakh language from the rostrum of the General Assembly of the UN at the 70th anniversary session of the UN GA.

This fact speaks more than words convincing the world community that Kazakhstan is aptly considered a full – fledged member of the worldwide association of states with its own history, culture and language, that it is no longer the appendage of Russia.

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