

Perceptions of national diasporas language policy in Kazakhstan

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Abstract. This article aims to present the situation of the Russian and Tatar diasporas in Kazakhstan under the influence of the language policy of the state. During Soviet period the Russian language prevailed over the Kazakh language in the Republic. The Kazakh language unlike Russian was elective course in schools, public administrations exclusively used the Russian language in most regions of the country. Since independence in 1991 Kazakhstan builds language policy in order to dominate the Kazakh language in all spheres of social life. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan only Kazakh is the state language. Since the end of the 1990s, all public sector jobs require knowledge of Kazakh. At the same time, more national minorities don't understand the state language. The current language policy contributes to the emergence of latent ethnic tensions and increases immigration sentiment among ethnic minorities. Some Russians and Tatar views this policy as ethnic discrimination.

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Introduction

Language issue is an important component of the national, interethnic and economic policy of the state. In addition to the explicit objectives aimed at the control the language situation, the selected language strategy of the state affects on change of social relations and social climate in the region [1]. In particular, the language can be used as a symbol of ethnic and cultural identity, a key element of "nation building" [2] that can lead to both the consolidation of the society and the ethno-cultural confrontation inside the community and be disruptive towards the state [3]. Obviously, language factor is of particular relevance in a multiethnic and transformable society.

Language engineering in the Republic of Kazakhstan is of particular interest since it was implemented in one of the most ethnically diverse states that established in the 1990s' in the territory of the former Soviet Union. New state faced the problem of choosing a nation-building strategy and the search for authenticity. As in many former Soviet republics, the national language became the most important symbol of national policy in Kazakhstan; it became a cultural element, which was strongly suppressed in the Soviet times. The success of the chosen course in multi-ethnic environment is determined partly by the attitude of non-title citizens to the current policy. At the time of declaration of independence, non-title citizens made up more than 60% [4] of the total population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, while to date this number has decreased down to 40% [5].

Methodology

To study the perception of language policy in Kazakhstan by non-title population we selected two national diasporas: Russian, the largest diaspora in the country, and Tatar, quite close to Kazakhs by language and religion.

During the period from 2010 to 2012 we have conducted a field ethno-sociological study of Tatar and Russian populations in the southern (Shymkent) and northern (Petropavlovsk) regions of Kazakhstan, as well as in Astana, the country's capital. Selection of the regions for the study was determined by the specificity of the ethnic landscape: Russian-speaking population is dominated in the north, while Kazakh-speaking population resides in the south.

The selection of respondents was conducted by the "snowball" method (500 Russians and 500 Tatars were surveyed). A standard questionnaire with 47 closed questions was used for the survey. Besides, active members of the Tatar and Russian cultural associations, as well as the representatives of "symbolic elite" were comprehensively interviewed in these regions.

Main part

Soviet period in the history of Kazakhstan was characterized by complete dominance of the Russian language in all spheres of public life. Path to the declaration of independence of the Republic was predetermined by growth of ethnic self-consciousness of non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union and, as a consequence, the actualization of the national traditional ethnic attributes, mainly language, in the national entities. After acquisition of the

independence, according to the Constitution of Kazakhstan of 1993 and 1995, the Kazakh language became the state language of the country, and according to the second edition of the Constitution, the Russian language granted the status of the second official language, having guaranteed equal use in public institutions and local authorities. The Constitution distinguished the "state language" and "official language" concepts. Validation the status of the sole state language to Kazakh language was regarded by many representatives of the Kazakh intelligentsia as "revival" and "salvation" of the dying national language [6].

However, the legal dominance of Kazakh language over the Russian language in the first half of the 90s' remained solely on paper, except for some changes in the school curriculum in favor of the Kazakh language. Research of Lebedeva M. N., conducted in Kazakhstan in the mid-1990s', shows that the language problem in those years was not much actualized and was not an ultimate cause of mass migration of the non-title population from Kazakhstan [7].

Linguistic situation in the Republic began to change essentially in the second half of the 1990s'. The presidential decree "On the concept of language policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan", dated November 1996, states that *"the status of the state language has not yet reached its implementation due to lack of mechanisms for such implementation"*, while *"acquisition of the Kazakh language should become vital need of every citizen"* [8]. The law "On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" was adopted on July 15, 1997 to change the situation. According to its authors, this law had to overcome the troublous trends in the Kazakh language and create vital conditions for its rapid expansion. As a result of this law, the incidence of the official language was essentially reduced, and on the contrary, the status of the state language was strengthened. Thus, in particular, Article 18 of this law restricted broadcast on non-national languages, Article 23 contained a list of positions that strongly required knowledge of the state language, and Article 24 assumed responsibility for the *"refusal of the official against complaints of citizens, motivated by ignorance of the state language"* [9]. Article 4 of the Law "On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" for the first time most clearly prescribed functions of the state (Kazakh) language: *"The state language is the language of public administration, legislation, legal proceedings and records management, valid in all spheres of social relations throughout the state"* [9], as well as pointed out that acquiring the state language is an essential factor in the consolidation of

the Kazakhstan nation and the duty of every citizen [9].

In order to further implementation of the Law "On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan", dated February 7, 2001 the "State program on functioning and development of languages for 2001-2010" was approved [10]. The priority objective of this program consisted in *"ensuring functioning of the state language (Kazakh – noted by M.Z.) as the main language of business communications within the government system"* [10] that in fact contradicted with the Article 7 of the Constitution, guaranteeing equal use of Russian and Kazakh languages in government bodies [11]. This program has entrenched the ultimate change of all records management into the Kazakh language that caused a negative response among the non-title population. For example, some of the Russian community leaders raised the question of boycotting the "Year of Russia" in Kazakhstan and postponing it to another time, however, this initiative has not been heard by the Russian authorities.

After the passion, associated with the adoption of this provision, subsided, President of Kazakhstan amended on May 30, 2006 the "State program on functioning and development of languages for 2001-2010". The amendments defined a set of measures for the implementation of the Kazakh language into the public administration, the legislature, judiciary, armed forces, law enforcement agencies and educational institutions [10].

Despite the made efforts, so far the records management is not fully switched over the state language, though the transition of the paperwork into the Kazakh language still continues in the most active way.

From the interview:

"For a couple of years, all the regulatory documents from the Ministry, incoming to our school, are only in Kazakh language. In order to understand them, we use Russian version of these documents, which yet are directed to northern regions of Kazakhstan, for example, to Pavlodar. The directives are sent there yet in two languages". (Female, born in 1950, Russian, Shymkent).

"Today the Russian language is excluded from all state documents; even to me, the Chairman of the Russian community, they send documents in the Kazakh language. But since I am from Odessa, I write the request on the back of these papers asking them to provide Chinese translator. In response, some of them show furious reaction, though the next time they send me papers in Russian". (Male, born in 1952, Russian, Astana).

In many state institutions, as well as in large commercial enterprises there is a staff of translators

involved in the translations of the documentation. Inscriptions with the names of the streets in the cities, the room names in clinics and hospitals, plates on office buildings, etc. are written only in Kazakh language, especially in the southern and central regions of Kazakhstan.

School program has changed significantly; Russian lessons are shortened [12]; in some southern regions there are almost no Russian schools.

Such transformations take place against the background of the fact that currently only 21.4% of Ukrainians, about 25% of Russians and Germans understand Kazakh language [5]. Higher rates of knowledge of the Kazakh language are shown by Tatars due to genealogical proximity of the Tatar language to the national (Kazakh) language. Thus, about 73% of Tatars stated that they understand spoken Kazakh language [5].

Intensive teaching of Kazakh language in schools over the past 20 years only slightly changes the situation. According to our survey, only 20% of respondents from the Russian youth, who studied the Kazakh language at school, are able to speak this language. Slightly better situation with language knowledge is in the southern Kazakh-speaking regions of Kazakhstan; worse situation is in the northern regions.

As our research shows, the ignorance of the Kazakh language causes pronounced discomfort among the non-title population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. About 86% of reviewed Russians and 55% of Tatars experienced discomfort in different situations. This discomfort is caused by both psychological and pragmatic reasons. Psychological reasons include cases in which the respondent experienced a situation of isolation, stay in a foreign language environment, and "falling out of the conversation".

From the interview:

"Recently I was in Astana to visit my friend. The announcements at the bus stops were made only in the Kazakh language, so I missed my stop. Can this happen in your native country?" (Female, born in 1983, Tatar, Petropavlovsk).

"I am the only non-Kazakh in the top management of our construction company, and so I do not know Kazakh language. Usually everybody speaks to me in Russian, but when they begin to communicate with each other, they immediately switch to their native language. I do not even know how to express it better, but at this point I feel some kind of isolation, when you do not know what your colleagues are talking about, and this is very unpleasant ". (Female, born in 1951, Russian, Astana).

Pragmatic reasons may include cases where the ignorance of the state language was the basis for denial of employment and career development, or indirect cause of dismissal.

From the interview:

"My wife's sister is a teacher, she has a university degree; the knowledge of Kazakh language was laid it down to her as a condition for further employment. She was told that if she will not pass test on Kazakh language, she will not be attested and will be dismissed ". (Male, born in 1953, Russian, Astana).

"I work in the temporal Russian working team in Astana on providing assistance for resettlement of compatriots living abroad. People sometimes talk about the causes, which impel them to obtain the status of temporary migrant and move to Russia. For example, yesterday there was a girl, she worked at the Ministry of Environment and has left her job because the Ministry received recommendations to submit reports written in the state language that for her was no realistic, so she had to leave her job". (Female, born in 1974, Russian, Astana).

Often, such discomfort, caused by lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language, is perceived by respondents as ethnic discrimination. But according to the Thomas theorem, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" [13].

Russians and Tatars, having command in the Kazakh language to the varying degree, feel much more comfortable than those who do not speak the Kazakh language.

From the interview:

"When I communicate with the Kazakhs, I try to speak Kazakh. This makes them a delight, and they immediately treat me with great respect and even reverently. When I spoke a toast in Kazakh language at the Kazakh wedding, the whole hall applauded me". (Male, born in 1985, Tatar, Petropavlovsk).

At the same time it should be noted that the modern behavior strategy of non-titular population of Kazakhstan cannot be called an adaptation, since, according to our survey, only 38% of Russians and 46% of Tatars of the Republic of Kazakhstan would like their children to acquire the Kazakh language. For comparison, 80% of respondents of both nationalities wish their children to be proficient in English.

Many people perceive the way out of this language situation in emigration. It is the state language policy that is root cause of migration of our respondents. According to our data, currently about 50% of Russians and 42% of Tatars would like to

leave the Republic. About 23% of Russians and 15% of Tatars are going to do this in the near future.

Conclusions

Language has become an important element of nation-building in Kazakhstan. Constitutions of 1993 and 1995 consolidated Kazakh language as the only state language of the Republic, while the Russian language received the status of a second official language. Since the second half of the 1990s' the government began to pursue language policy aimed at expanding the functioning scope of the Kazakh language: in 1997, the Law "On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" was approved, the "State program of functioning and development of languages for 2001-2010 years" was launched in 2001. A gradual process of changing the entire paperwork into Kazakh language is still underway.

In an environment, where the majority of Russians and Tatars do not speak Kazakh language, implemented linguistic strategy is perceived by part of the respondents as ethnic discrimination that creates latent ethnic tensions in the region.

Despite number of advantages, which give the knowledge of the state language, neither Tatars nor Russians seek to learn the Kazakh language. This indicates the segregation strategy in behavior of minorities. In current situation, the language policy in Kazakhstan is the most important reason for the emigration of non-title population.

Thus, the state language policy is not a means for integration of national diasporas of Kazakhstan into Kazakh society.

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