# THE SOVIET LEGACY AND THE FUTURE

## OF LANGUAGE POLITICS IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN

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OLLOWING THE BREAK UP OF SOVIET UNION, THE world witnessed many post-Soviet republics going back to their cultural roots and native languages. During the Soviet era Moscow administration developed effective policies in order to promote and elevate Russian as the dominant language throughout the USSR. As a result, almost all citizens of the majority of republics spoke Russian fluently and in some countries to the extent that their own native languages were abandoned. Such was the case in Kazakhstan, which had the highest percentage of Russian-speaking native population out of all the former Soviet Central Asian republics, such as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. As the republic industrialized and developed, the Russian language become more prestigious, offering greater career opportunities and eventually turning into the 'lingua franca' of the Union. Such development indicators as literacy and economic growth therefore negatively impacted indigenous languages such as Kazakh, stripping it of its prior communicative function.

After gaining independence, all the Central Asian republics resolved to return to their former native languages and reinstate them as their respective official state languages. While most did not experience significant problems with this change, Kazakhstan faced major obstacles concerning the language issue. This can be explained by the fact that upon the collapse of the USSR, the country had one of the biggest Russian populations living outside of Russia, with over half of its population native Russian. Secondly,

since a majority of the native Kazakh population did not and still does not speak the Kazakh language, language revival stirred hot debates between 'nationalists' and those who did not speak Kazakh, i.e., ethnic Russians and the Russian speaking ethnic Kazakhs (later referred to as Russophone Kazakhs). The

country has a population of 16 million people and the most numerous ethnic groups are: Kazakh 63.1%; Russian 23.7%; Uzbek 2.8%; Ukrainian 2.1%; Uighur 1.4%; Tatar 1.3%; German 1.1%; other 4.5% (2009 census). Thus, its multi-ethnic community makes it challenging for the newly independent state with no previous history of statehood to create a coherent nation with its own national identity. In Europe, the birthplace and architect of the concept of nation-

state, most states were formed from relatively homogenous populations and before the age of globalization and easy access to international communication, whereas Kazakhstan became a nation in the early 1990's when technological communication and globalization were already widespread.

Even though at the time of independence the country's economy suffered greatly as a result of being separated from the Soviet command economy, Kazakhstan has experienced the highest economic growth rates out of all Central Asian republics. Its GDP growth rate for 2010, 2009 and 2008 are 7%, 1.2% and 3.2%. The country's GDP per capita has increased from USD 3,200 in 1999 to 12,700 in 2010, making it the most developed state in the region (CIA Factbook). It is therefore interesting to evaluate how the Kazakh indigenous language evolved amidst such extensive economic transformations.

### DEVELOPMENT AND TRADITION

The dichotomy that emerged in the 1950's and 1960's in modern sociology and that dominated studies of development and modernization between modern and traditional societies assumed that tradition could not go hand in hand with modernization. Whereas traditional society was defined as a static one with little differentiation and low literacy and urbanization rates, the modern society was viewed as the one having thorough differentiation, high literacy rates, urbanization and a presence of mass media. Traditional society was perceived as

being limited by the cultural horizons set by its tradition, and modern society as being culturally dynamic, oriented to change and innovation. An assumption that existed behind this idea was that the conditions for development in various institutional fields were contingent on continuous extension of specific socio-demographic or structural indices of modernization. In other words, society's modernity was correlated to its features of structural specialization and to the different indices of social mobilization. The greater the specialization, the less traditional, and therefore more capable it is to develop continuously and to deal with new problems and social forces (Eisenstadt 1973:2). From this it appears that development and tradition are two contradicting processes. It is therefore important to trace the impact of the policies directed at reviving the language and tradition on the development in Kazakhstan and the impact the latter had on the former.

The implicit assumption that the less traditional society is, the more capable of sustained growth it is, was proved inconclusive. The socio-demographic indices of modernization cannot reveal whether a viable new modern society, capable of continuous economic growth, will develop. By contrast, many countries that have successfully sustained growth have done so under the "aegis of traditional symbols and by traditional elites" (Eisenstadt 1973:3). Whenever anti-traditional elites promoted modernization, it would be followed by an attempt to revive some of the traditional symbols by the traditional elites. Therefore, recognition followed that though traditional societies typologically differ from modern ones, they vary in the extent to which their traditions hinder or contribute to the transition to modernity. In the cultural sphere all traditional societies can be generalized by a tendency to accept the givenness of some past event, order, or figure (whether real or symbolic) as the major focus of their collective identity. This givenness legitimates changes and delineates the limits of innovation. Access to power becomes restricted and incumbents become "legitimate interpreters of traditions and forgers of the legitimate content and symbols of the social and cultural orders" (Eisenstadt 1973:5). In this case, the Kazakh language, and predominantly its symbolism, becomes a givenness of the past, around which the government forged a collective national identity as part of its nation-building process. Also, as a means of mobilizing support for its policies central government permeates the periphery and the periphery impinges on the center, making the two sides dependent on each other. And since modern soc eties are characterized by a high level of commitment by central government and periphery to common 'ideals' or goals, leaders of modern 'nation-states' place heavy emphasis on the development of common symbols of cultural national identity (Eisenstadt 1973:9).

In Kazakhstan, a nationalist sentiment expressed by the periphery becomes a 'common ideal' that the central government uses to mobilize support for their policies in general and to legitimate political changes they undertake.

Furthermore, the process of modernization is not hindered by tradition. Upon gaining independence, some states have experienced the revival of indigenous tradition as a phase of nationalistic and independence movements. For instance, in India a revival of Indian national identity was "fostered by explicit adoption of customs and styles which were both traditional and closer to popular behavior" (Gusfield 1967:359). The same process is also taking place in Kazakhstan, where the government has established various institutions and organizations aimed at reviving indigenous Kazakh traditions and culture. Several national museums, Kazakh cultural and language centers were opened for public in the country. The new elites of the newly independent nations do not necessarily seek to overcome tradition but instead find ways of synthesizing and blending tradition and modernity. In Kazakhstan the authorities seek to recover from Soviet command economy by launching free-market system values while reminding people of their ancient traditions and languages as means to unify all classes and ethnicities.

The promotion of Kazakh has been used as a means to unify its people under a new national identity, and to rid them of their former Sovietidentification. When the country became independent, Kazakhs, who never felt a strong Kazakh national attachment before, became a titular group in an independent Kazakhstan with its own flag, anthem, territory, and with most of them not even speaking a word of Kazakh. Whereas it is easy to create symbols such as flags, anthems and a Constitution, it is far more challenging to create an invisible bond that will bring people together, a bond critical at the time of economic crisis and uncertainty. In addition, ethnic heterogeneity may lead to "democratic instability, regional assertiveness, and civil war," which is applicable to Kazakhstan with most of its Russian population concentrated in the north (Laitin 2000:142). Recognizing this, instilling a sense of national identity became part of a political agenda for Kazakh elites. Language contributes to broader unity that serves as way of selfidentification and helps to recognize one's relationship and interdependence with other members of the society (Fishman 1972:45). This recognition of interdependence was especially crucial right after the independence for the country that was suffering from high inflation, underdevelopment, skyrocketing crime rates and a feeling of uncertainty among the population. Creating a sense of pride among the people for their country was one of the goals of the government. This was made especially difficult by the fact that Kazakhstan history had been eliminated from school curriculum during the Soviet era, resulting in the absence of the common

historical memories that are usually shared by, and serve to unite, the people in a state.

Moreover, used together with primordialist arguments, language has been one of the most important indicators of ethnicity and nationality during the period of territorial demarcation of Central Asian Soviet Socialist republics (SSR) by the Soviets. Primordialism "refers to the idea that certain cultural attributes and formations possess a prior, overriding and determining influence on people's lives, one that is largely immune to 'rational' interest and political calculation" (Smith 2000:5). Attachments deriving from such cultural attributes as kinship, descent, language, religion, and customs, as well as historical community are compelling and animate a sense of communal belonging that we call ethnic community and form a foundation for the subsequent development of nations and nationalism. Ethnic and national attachments take root from the 'cultural givens' of social existence like contiguity and kinship, language, religion, race and customs. These cultural givens or congruities of blood speech, customs etc. "are seen to have an ineffable, and at times, overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves" (Geertz 1973:259-60). These primordial attachments rely on perception, cognition and belief. Individuals assume that cultural differences are givens and therefore attribute a great importance to these ties. Primordialist arguments are also often used to stress that a real Kazakh is supposed to know Kazakh language, for it is the language of his ancestors.

Therefore, language can be used as one of the main instruments of nationalism and national identity formation, powerful in its authenticity and commonality, elements central to the construction of nationalism. In Kazakhstan, where Kazakh customs, skin color and religion resemble those of other Central Asian countries' cultural and ethnic elements, language is left as the only distinguishing and unique element that separates Kazakh culture and people from other Central Asians as well as from Russians. Nationalism is an "organizationally heightened and elaborated beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of societies acting on behalf of their avowed ethnocultural self-interest" (Fishman 1972:5). Since nationalism has to be organizationally heightened by a society in order for nationalism to emerge, members of one community must believe that there are some unique cultural traits and similarities that they share which are of great importance to them. If one of the prerequisites of nationalism is a feeling of sharing commonalities with other members of one's community then nationalism must seek to expand those commonalities even further. This process, called 'broader unity', serves as a basic component of nationalism because it helps one to "recognize his relationship and interdependence with a human population most of whose members he has never met and to believe that this relationship and interdependence are and have always been quite naturally rooted in ethnocultural similarities between him and far-flung "kin" (Fishman 1972:7). Recognizing one's relationship and interdependence with a human population is equal to locating oneself within the society consequently identifying oneself as well.

Authenticity is a second component of nationalism because authenticity, purity, and nobility of beliefs, values, and behaviors typify a particular community. No state, no nation, no people and no history of people are like any other and it is the past that holds a nation's authenticity and glory and appears to be a 'root' "from which nationalism derives its dynamism for changing the present and creating the future" (Fishman, 1972:8). Since authenticity serves as a source of dynamism and future change, nationalism and the Kazakh language it emphasizes become the givenness of the past that legitimates change and delineates the limits of innovation. Indeed, nationalism is "a complement to the modernizing processes which are involved in the aspiration toward a unified nation" (Gusfield 1967:359). A common culture that cuts across the segmental and primordial loyalties is a basis for national identity and consensus; without it, sustainable economic growth based on nationhood lacks a foundation for legitimating central authority. Thus, nationalism and traditions, despite the assumption that tradition and modernity are contradicting ideas, appears to be at the center of modernization for the newly independent state, such as Kazakhstan. Also, because language is a key driving force of nationalism, language planning becomes an instrument for authorities in fostering a sense of national identity among its population. Before the vernacular may start serving as a unifying, authenticating and driving force of nationalism and therefore modernity, the state becomes a vehicle for language policies and planning. In Kazakhstan, where the vernacular was used predominantly in rural communities during the Soviet era, the language could not keep pace with new technological and foreign vocabulary. In this light standardization of the language by the state becomes a necessity, and if not undertaken, signifies the defeat and inability of nationalist movement to become a mass movement. In pursuit of meeting the needs of an urban population and modernization, language planning first turns to pre-urban heritage for inspiration. In other words, before language planning can unify a modern society it must first turn to historical usage of the language.

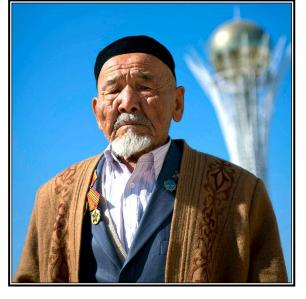
From the theories discussed above it is apparent that modernization is not hindered by the revival of nationalism in a form of language policies and indeed nationalism can create a framework for modernization and be a part of the process of economic growth in a nation-state. Nationalism is also conducive toward creating nationhood for a newly independent state. How the language revival evolves as a process and how successful it is in spreading Kazakh

language amidst significant economic growth is to be presented in the following sections.

# A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ABSENCE OF NATIONAL CONSSCIOUSNESS

Linking language with a glorious past is even more challenging when the majority of native Kazakhs do not speak Kazakh itself and prefer speaking Russian instead. For instance, more than 60% of Kazakhs still spoke Russian fluently in 2000 and this number might even be higher because when Kazakhs are asked about their level of Kazakh they tend to exaggerate and say what is more 'favored' by the society. In addition, in 2001 only 68% of ethnic Kazakhs

were satisfied with the current statute that granted Kazakh a level of the state language and Russian of the language of 'interethnic communication,' meaning that there are those who prefer Russian over Kazakh. Indeed during the Soviet era Kazakhstan was the most bilingual republic among all of the Central Asian republics (Peyrouse 2007:486). In addition, there is a group of Kazakhs who do not support extensive nationalizing policies of the government that are likely to expel



A Second World War veteran from rural area wisiting Almaty.

minorities from the country and institutionalize the values of "Kazakhness" at all levels of society. They do not believe in the political discourse, which aims to recreate an 'original' or an authentic Kazakh identity, free of its Russian and Soviet traits.

It is striking that a majority of people in Kazakhstan do not feel strongly about being 'Kazakh' and some even oppose the prevalence of Kazakh language, when it was the language of their ancestors. Current identity politics and consequently language politics of Kazakhstan first of all can be explained by the absence of Kazakh identity prior to becoming part of tsarist Russia and strongly reflect identity and language politics of the Soviets toward its union republics. Therefore, to fully understand the current language issue and its historical origins it is vital to know the historical background of the Kazakh people as nomads.

The continuing legacy of Soviet identity (sovetskii chelovek) that Moscow wished to develop among all of the Soviet ethnicities had a long lasting effect on the Kazakhs even after becoming its own nation-state.

This surprising absence of a sense of nationalism among the Kazakhs prior to separating from the USSR is due to several reasons. First, unlike other politically dependent countries in Africa and Asia, Kazakh SSR did not develop an independence movement. Second, out of all Central Asian states it was the most integrated state in terms of transformation into a settler colony and learning Russian language during Soviet rule. One of the main reasons for this is a lack of self-determination of the Kazakh people as a nation before becoming a 'colony' of the USSR.

The term *Kazakh* did come into existence until the time of the formation of the Kazakh khanate, i.e. an area governed by a khan, in the fifteenth century (Dave 2007:31). Importantly, the term was not an

ethnic category but simply meant a person, who was free as a nomad. Due to confusion caused by newly arrived ethnic groups of Cossaks on the Kazakh steppe territory, the tsarist administration began to name Kazakh nomads as Kirgiz. To differentiate Kazakh Kirgiz from the actual Kirgiz ethnic group, who lived south of the Kazakh steppes in the mountains, they called the former as kirgiz-kaisak and the latter as kara-kirgiz. However, the term did not bear any 'national'

or ethnic meaning until the early twentieth century, when the leaders of the first nationalist movement, Alash Orda, began to give it a meaning of *narod* (the people) or 'nation' (Dave 2007:31). Consequently, Kazakh nomads did not have a clearly defined national identity prior to tsarist subordination.

Only from the mid-fifteenth to the late sixteenth century were the Kazakh nomads united into one khanate, yet it was highly decentralized and thus could not withstand external security threats of the Chinese and Mongolians. Since its fall, the nomadic organization consisted of a tripartite system of clan conglomerations or hordes (zhuz) dispersed over three natural climatic zones. The titles Elder (ulu), Middle (orta) and Younger (kishi) zhuz convey the "seniority of their mythical progenitors, and not their size or strength" (Dave 2007:32). Within these zhuz there were several clans (ruy), which were the main axis of nomadic organization. Kazakhs had a segmentary lineage system, where a particular unit traces its descent from a single progenitor, while a larger unit is subdivided into smaller components

from parent lineages through a process of segmentation. The nomad was supposed to know his lineage at least to the 7th generation, which was also main determinant of his/her identity. When traveling in the steppes, the first question one was asked was to which 'ru' one belonged to.

Identities in pre-modern communities were fuzzy and fluid. First, due to the Kazakhs nomadic pastoralist way of living, they were not particularly tied to a territory, and their "notions of community or group solidarity among both nomadic and settled people were anchored in clan and genealogical ties and in local structures" (Dave 2007:39). A lack of a clear identity among the Kazakh nomads was due to an absence of central administration or classification schemes that would enumerate them. Also, several clan identities and clan classifications, which nomads identified themselves with, were never superseded by an overarching state framework that exists in many modern societies. Thus, an absence of such terms as 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' made it easy for the tsarist and Soviet Russia to create a new form of identity for the Kazakhs that could supersede their clan affiliation and thereby assimilate the Kazakhs into their own society.

One of the first ways in which tsarist Russia tried to integrate a Kazakh nomad into its system and begin forging a sense of identity among them is by spreading Russian language education and making a significant change in means of surviving in the tsarist system. If already prior to the tsarist Russia, the economic organization of nomadic pastoralism was displaying major drawbacks because of scarcity of land, lack of water resources and shrinkage of nomadic pastures; the growing immigration of Slavic groups, especially the Cossaks, decreased the grazing land and created a competition for land previously unknown. Between 1885 and 1895 around 35,000 European settlers immigrated into the Kazakh steppes increasing the population density and thus decreasing the grazing land per person (Dave 2007:40). Later, the tsarist policy of forced sedentarism further aggravated the situation. The Kazakhs, who did not have any prior experience with farming, in 1868 began to have taxes levied on the land they used for pasturage and yurts (round houses that nomads lived in). All these major changes implemented by the tsarist Russia caused a huge crisis in the pastoral nomadic economy. Tsarist Russia made nomadic pastoralism non-sustainable for the nomads with no other skills or education. These challenges forced the nomads to embrace literacy in order to obtain new skills to survive in the new order, making the Kazakhs more receptive to Russian language and culture.

By introducing a central administration system, spreading literacy and bringing European settlers to the steppes, tsarist Russia took the first steps in forging a Kazakh identity. The main defining factors of nationality for tsarist administration were

language, race and territory. Furthermore, the first population census launched by the tsarist government in 1897 marked the initial realization of nomadic Kazakhs' self-consciousness that they were different from the other people living south of their steppes. The census served to separate the peoples of Central Asia and assign each one a separate 'nationality' linking the differences to language and territory, borders of which did not exist in pre-Russian era. It was also the first time imperial Russia differentiated the Kyrgyz (=Kirgiz) ethnic group from the Kazakh one. In addition, after demarcation of internal 'national' borders in 1924-1925, the Russians also introduced such terms as *natsional'nost* (nationality) and narodnost (peoplehood) to the vocabulary of Kazakhs, defining the first one as "formed character of an ethnos" and the second one as "lack of territorial, ethnic and linguistic consolidation" (Dave 2007:40). The census of 1926 deduced the nationality of the inhabitants solely relying on the language they spoke. While the process of determining nationality of bilingual groups was arbitrary, one's 'native tongue' would predetermine one's 'nationality' (Dave 2007:40). Census, being a practical tool of enumeration, became an ideological instrument of forging a particular identity prescribed by the authorities. After being told to define themselves along 'national' rather than clan or 'zhuz' lines, national identity for Kazakh nomads eventually began to supersede any previous identities they had before.

'Native language' became a meaningful category and since there existed many ethnicities, tribes, nations and nationalities, Soviets found it problematic to define each term and demarcate the borders according to the borders between all of ethnicities and tribes, language served as a marker of tribal composition. 'Native language' education became a basis of nationality policy and ethnographers depended on language as an indicator of ethnicity (Slezkine 1994:428). As part of the policy called 'korenizatsia' (indigenization) introduced by Lenin that lasted from 1920 to 1933-34, some 130 languages were spoken with minority languages being raised to a status of literary ones and some were even saved from extinction. By 1928 newspapers were published in 47 languages and books - in 66 languages (compared to 40 in 1913) (Slezkine 1994:431). The promotion of native languages also meant that the speakers of those native languages were also promoted. From 1924-1933 Kazakh membership in the republican Communist party grew from 8% to 53%, and every party in the region had a majority of native members (Suny 1993:104). The 'communal apartment' metaphor, introduced by Slezkine (1994:414), therefore refers to this process in the Soviet politics, where Russia was a kitchen, a common area and the main decision maker, and the rest of the rooms belonged to the republics, which had their own 'territory' and a certain amount of freedom.

Even though *korenizatsia*, contributed to the development of a sense of nationhood among the people

of USSR, the following policy of forced industrialization launched by Stalin limited and undermined nationhood concordantly. With the start of Stalin's industrialization and social transformation, the policy of 'korenizatsia' was invoked. This brought with it a transformation of previously agrarian societies into industrial urban ones, which in turn required assimilation to a generalized Soviet culture and learning the Russian language. Lenin's doctrine of rapprochement (sblizhenie) and merging (sliyanie) also played its role in limiting the national identities of republics and contributed to the development of one common Soviet identity, of sovetski chelovek. Therefore, a paradox of some sort took place: on the one hand korenizatsia gave birth to

more centralized, the language debate began to favor Russian as the 'lingua franca'. The Resolution On the Obligatory Study of the Russian Language in Schools of National Republics and Regions (1938) proclaimed that Russian would be a mandatory language in all Soviet schools (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:54). Latin script, adopted in 1929, was also changed to Cyrillic by 1940. This shift clearly demonstrated the Soviet leaders' intention to link Kazakhs (and other partitular ethnicities) to Russians, promoting the de jure equality of all languages while de facto favoring Russian. Publications in Russian began to exceed those printed in titular languages. Russian was also encouraged at school, while titular languages became elective courses.



Green bazaar in the capital city Almaty.

the idea of discrete nations and nationalities, and on the other hand, subsequent state policies promoted integration into a common Soviet culture and Russian language. This can be seen by such government actions towards Azerbaijan and Central Asian republics as codification and standardization of local languages, manipulation of vocabulary and removal of foreign accretions (mainly Persian and Arabic), and introduction of Russian as a language of inter-ethnic communication (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:53). Also, Russian was employed in government, industrial and commercial enterprises which led to a shift among the elites towards using Russian instead of their titular language. Gradually, the challenge of balancing identity through language, where native tongues carried emotional as well as possible nationalist sentiments, and Russian used as a common tool between various ethnicities, in an era of industrialization and common economic space, became of a central concern for the apparatus. With the Union becoming Previously, if the ethnic Russians, unlike the rest of ethnic groups, lacked a sense of Russianness and national cultural institutions, by the early 1930's that situation changed. The Party began endowing Russians with national past, national language and a growing national iconography. The Party placed emphasis on the 'friendship of peoples' and 'internationalism' dogmas, referring to close ties between all nationalities in the USSR, yet expressed them solely in Russian, underscoring the language's unifying function. Although Russian was not proclaimed a state language, it served as a main component in the consolidation of all ethnicities within the Soviet Union. Russification was also part of the "concentrated effort to obliterate the collective national memory of all peoples in the Union" (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:55). As Slezkine (1994:444) elaborates on his metaphor: "The Russians began to bully their neighbors and decorate their part of the communal apartment [...] but they did not claim the whole apartment was theirs nor that the other (large) families

were entitled to their own rooms. The tenants were increasingly unequal but reassuringly separate."

The turning point in the process of Russification was the Decree on *Measures for Further Improving the Study and Teaching of the Russian Language in the Union Republics* (1978) that called for a new syllabus for the Russian language and better textbooks and teaching aid for all schools. Russian was also given a larger share as language of instruction and was prescribed for pre-school establishments (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:57). Although Russian was a language of inter-ethnic communication, it was the main language of instruction in institutions of higher education and professional technical schools. As a result, more and more people in Kazakhstan claimed to speak Russian. According to the Soviet population

in a form of protests in Almaty in 1986 carrying ethnic character. Thousands of young Kazakhs protested against the removal of Dinmukhamed Kunaevan ethnic Kazakh- and appointment of Gennadi Kolbin – an ethnic Russian – as a secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party. In light of these ethnic disturbances the Kazakhstan Council of Ministers and Kazakhstan Communist Party decided to adopt a resolution *On Improving the Study of the Kazakh Language* (1987) (Fierman 1998:175). Although this resolution did not confer great power upon Kazakh language, it was an important step since Kazakh language had not been given even nominal support in the previous decades.

Furthermore, with even more freedom given to Kazakh Communist Party with perestroika, *The* 



Green bazaar in the capital city Almaty.

census from 1970, 1979 and 1989, 41.8%, 52.3% and 60.4% respectively of the ethnic Kazakhs claimed to have a command of Russian. In 1989, despite showing loyalty to their native language (97%), 60.4% considered themselves bilingual. This data of 97% of Kazakhs speaking their native language is disputable since S.Z. Zimanov estimated that as much as about 40% of Kazakhs did not speak their native tongue or spoke it very poorly (cf. Fierman 2005:405). Russians predominantly occupied the urban areas of the country, relegating Kazakh to the rural social sphere. Kazakh became a language of minimal importance, as it was not intrinsic to upward mobility or navigating urbanized society. Similarly, Kazakhs from rural areas encountered many difficulties when moving to the cities and urban Kazakhs, who had a strong command of Russian looked down on newly arrived rural Kazakhs, who could barely speak Russian.

The first shift of attention to Kazakh language by the Soviets was triggered by the emergence of national consciousness among the ethnic Kazakhs Language Law (1989) was adopted by the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan declaring Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication (Dave 2007:101). It was a first time Kazakh language was elevated to a level higher than that of Russian despite the fact that Kazakhstan was the most likely state in Central Asia to adopt Russian as the state language. Barely one in one hundred Russians in 1989 spoke Kazakh and the census data of 98.5% of Kazakhs having a good command of the language was grossly exaggerated (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:56). Unlike in other republics where similar laws passed served to fortify the titular languages that already enjoyed a popular support, in Kazakhstan they simply carried a symbolic meaning as Kazakh did not enjoy the same prestigious status as did the titular languages in the Baltic republics, for example.

Even though the Kazakh language was elevated and the republics were granted more freedom over the

language policy, the Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party adopted a resolution on the The Nationality Policy of the Party in the Current Circumstance (1989). This resolution declared all languages in the Union equal and prohibited language discrimination. The Soviet language politics carried a double faced character reflecting the communal apartment approach to identity and language issue in the Union. On the one hand, the authorities used a non-titular (except for the ethnic Russians themselves) Russian language to forge a soviet identity and on the other hand, by drawing a strong connection between language and nationality, Moscow used titular language of each republic during 'korenizatsiya' and less so later on to forge titular identities of their own. The same strategy was to be employed by the government in Astana but this time utilizing Kazakh language, which is to be demonstrated in more detail below.

# LANGUAGE POLITICS AFTER THE

Although the Kazakh authorities gained more leverage closer to independence, they admitted the complexity of the language issue and abated their approach. They had to take into account the Russian minority and its prevalent presence in the North and poor knowledge of Kazakh language among ethnic Kazakhs. A rural versus urban dichotomy posed another obstacle for the authorities. While most of the urban Kazakhs spoke solely Russian, rural Kazakhs spoke Kazakh and were fluent in Russian as well. Kazakh had completely lost its importance for the urban Kazakh population, whereas Russian was necessary to secure future career opportunities. This language divide served as an obstacle to consolidation between the urban and rural Kazakhs. Therefore, the objective of the language policies consisted of consolidating the Kazakhs together without disagreeably affecting the Russian population so as to prevent their future outmigration. Consequently, the government tried to find a medium to satisfy both sides. Thus, a growing prevalence of the Kazakh language was not the main objective of the government shortly after independence; it was primarily to unite the ethnic Kazakhs using the language and its unifying and authenticating function, as stated by Fishman.

Thus in the *Declaration of Independence (O Gosu-dastvennoi Nezavisimosti*, 1991), the language issue did not receive much attention because it only stressed the importance of general cultural attributes, such as a "development of culture, traditions and language, and consolidation of the Kazakh national virtue (merit) and virtue of other nationalities, living in Kazakhstan." With the growing necessity for the first Constitution, the newly independent state issued the *Constitution of Sovereign Kazakhstan* (1993) where Kazakh was defined as the state language and

Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication, reflecting the 1989 Language Law. However, this division of roles between languages triggered debates among political activists and nationalists especially, who argued that by designating Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication would result in Kazakh remaining a language of lesser importance, and would discourage Russian speakers from learning Kazakh. One of the main arguments they used was that Kazakh could not compete with Russian, thus it required more legal support than Russian did. Later, a new constitution was adopted which stripped the Russian language of its role as language of inter-ethnic communication. The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Konstitutsiya Respubliki Kazakhstan 1995) reiterated Kazakh as the state language: "the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds with the Kazakh language in state institutions and local-self administrative bodies. A year later, the government issued the resolution Concept of Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan analyzing the language situation, concluded that the Kazakh language continued to be of diminished stature compared to Russian and laid out a language program for further expansion of functions of the former. In 1997 a Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Languages was passed reflecting the Constitution that Kazakh was the state language and Russian was to be used on equal grounds with Kazakh. It also added that "it is a duty of every citizen of Kazakhstan to master the state language, which is the main factor of consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan" (Zakon o Yazykah ot Iyulya 1997 N# 151). Although this law stressed that the state language should be employed by the governmental and nongovernmental business institutions and that its functions should be expanded, it also declared discrimination on the basis of language unlawful, gave freedom to citizens to speak their native language and promised to develop all of the languages of the people of Kazakhstan, an approach that strongly resembled the Soviet method of promoting Russian language and culture without appearing to completely disregard other languages.

Together with these policies, several other actions were taken to elevate the status of the state language. For instance, the percentage of books published in Kazakh substantially increased from 19% in 1990 to 45% in 1993 and the number of the books published in Russian declined (Landau and Kellner-Heinkele 2001:91). The Law on Education (1992) also promoted Kazakh language schools and emphasized the importance of studying it. This bore some results as in 1989-90 academic year only 17.9 % of students went to higher-education institutions with Kazakh language instruction but in the period between 2002 to 2005 this number ranged between 32% and 40% (Fierman 2005:407). To strengthen the feeling of an independent state with its own historical memories and myths, the government also undertook the program

of renaming physical geographical, toponymic, industrial and other objects with Kazakh names. For instance, a street named Lenin Street in Kostanay was renamed to Al-Farabi Street after the Muslim philosopher and thinker.

### REALITY FAR FROM FORMALITY

Despite of all these changes in the legal status of the Kazakh language the results appear to be rather superficial. One of the main objectives of the 1997 Law on Languages was the expansion of the functions of the state language. However, the functions of Kazakh only appeared to be expanding on the surface. For instance, even though more office work was carried out in Kazakh it was so only because of a high number of document translations from Russian into Kazakh. So, effectively, office work is still carried out in Russian and then translated into Kazakh. Radio stations and television channels also circumvent the law on media that requires the proportion of programs in Kazakh to be no smaller than of those in Russian and other languages by broadcasting the programs in Kazakh during off-peak hours.

Often, officials and official documents tend to overrate and exaggerate the facts in order to create a false sense of policy success. For instance, the government used census manipulation to exaggerate the numbers of Kazakhs speaking Kazakh. However, I found that this does not apply to the new Conception of Expanding the Functions of the State Language (2007) for it acknowledged the gap between policy and its implementation. It revealed that the documentation in central governmental bodies was still prepared in Russian, with only 20-30% of it being written in Kazakh. Even in the regions with predominantly Kazakh population, the office work was still handled in Russian due to a lack of translators. According to this document, only 458 of 2300 newspapers and magazines published in the country are in Kazakh. It also admitted the nighttime broadcasting of Kazakh programs and "poor quality of many [Kazakh] programs, the lack of relevance and attractiveness of programs that can foster a culture of language and speech, ultimately, its successful mastery" (Konceptsiya Rasshireniya Sphery Primeneniya Gossudarstvennogo Yazyka, 2007). From this it is possible to conclude that there is a growing concern in the government over the implementation of the policy and its results. The authorities are willing to go beyond simply assigning Kazakh a symbolic role by legally and officially elevating its legal status. By publishing a negative account of failure and policy disregard, the authorities appear ready to take serious measures to realistically promote the Kazakh language and its communicative function in the social sphere.

The Conception also proclaims that due to a low quality of Kazakh language instruction, there is a lack of professionals educated in the Kazakh language, indicating the significance of its use in educational

instruction. In spite of growth in the number of published textbooks, methods and literature in Kazakh, Conception argues that the organs of local administrative bodies do not supply local educational institutions with them. The document therefore admits the poor quality of language teaching methods, an admission often denied by 'nationalists' who blame the people's unwillingness to learn the language instead of the poor quality of teaching methods (Ramazanova 2011:44).

The failure of policy being implemented is also supported by the evidence gathered from the government officials. It is evident that although there was an official requirement to have an excellent command of the Kazakh language for government workers, most of the employees in city administration in the Northern region of the country did not speak Kazakh and were not required to learn it in the near future, despite the law that requires all government documents to be written in Kazakh. In general, this issue was of low importance to the authorities, who emphasize that professional competence is of higher priority than knowledge of the state language. It is also apparent that there is a lack of qualified professionals who also speak Kazakh fluently (Ramazanova 2011:44). All documentation is still handled in both languages by translators, who are responsible for translating the documents into Kazakh. The rule to hire candidates with knowledge of Kazakh is not abided and registering for Kazakh courses, which are completely subsidized, is not mandatory and is completely at will.

Additionally, the mayor (akim) of the Kostanai region does not speak Kazakh well but can use it on the conversational level (Ramazanova 2011:45). Nevertheless, during various conversations with the local citizens on this subject, most of the locals believed that he spoke Kazakh since they saw him speak it on the local news channel. It appears that the mayor chooses to project an image of speaking Kazakh while he does not speak proficiently. The mayor's appointment by a president who also speaks the state language poorly indicates that the central government is not highly concerned by the extent to which language policies are implemented. The mayor, like any other high official figure, is expected to be a role model for the country, setting an example by speaking or at least making an effort to learning Kazakh. Therefore, despite the passage of myriad rules and regulations on language, the enforcement of the policies appears to be negligent. Although the government is attempting to develop the communicative function of the language, its symbolic function is more prevalent in regions with a high percentage of Kazakh Russophones (those natives Kazakhs whose first language is Russian) and Russians.

Furthermore, the enforcement of the rules depends on who is in power at the time. Many of those working for the government in the northern city of Kostanay explain that the relaxation of the rules concerning the state language was partially due to the mayor being ethnic Russian. The rules are not strict but if someone from the South, historically a more nationalistic part of the country, comes to power then the rules might be more tightly enforced (Ramazanova 2011:45). Low knowledge of the state language is also blamed on the inefficient teaching methodology of Kazakh language at schools. Unlike the English language, Kazakh does not have well-developed teaching methodology dating back to the Soviet period, perhaps due to the omission of Kazakh language instruction from school curricula under the Soviets.

By contrast, the opinions of officials representing various state language institutions can be placed on the opposite side of the scale. The budget allocated by the central government to this institution has increased from 3 million tenge (appx. 15,000 euro) in 2003 to 45 million tenge (appx. 215,000 euro) per year, suggesting a growing importance of the language issue to the state authorities. In addition, the percentage of the population that can speak and write in Kazakh has reached 77%. By year 2020 a language plan included an increase of that number to 95%, which will be achieved through improving teaching methods at schools and offering free language courses to the general population. A special emphasis was placed on the improvement of Kazakh language instruction stressing an increase of the hours Kazakh language is taught per week (Ramazanova 2011:45). The number of hours of Kazakh language instruction has increased from three to five hours per week this year as part of the government program from the president's state-of-the-nation address, where a goal of having 80% of population speaking Kazakh fluently by 2020 was set.

The main priority of the Kazakhstani elite was the adoption of a law that would grant a symbolic supremacy to Kazakh language without undermining their own position or damaging societal equilibrium (Dave 2007:116). Often when talking to high officials or elderly Kazakhs (older people are traditionally highly respected by the younger) Kazakh people, even without knowing the language well, would still start off their conversation in Kazakh and then switch to Russian. In business relations, Kazakh language is not necessary to know but is crucial for building personal bonds and in informal negotiations. A need for Kazakh language proficiency is correlated with professional field and region. For instance, in northern regions of Kazakhstan with close proximity to Russia and with a significant Russian population, knowledge of Kazakh is not a determinant factor for an individual's career even if he/she is a government worker. Contrastingly, in southern regions with predominantly ethnic Kazakh populations, knowing Kazakh is key for government positions as well as for socializing. Interestingly, Kazakh still appears to yield to Russian language in business related fields. Therefore, even though the

evidence reveals an increased effort of the government to expand the communicative function of Kazakh language, its symbolic function still prevails.

### LANGUAGE CONFLICT

Due to the heavy influence of Soviet centralized government and the current president being a member of the communist apparatus in the USSR, politics in Kazakhstan can still be characterized as undemocratic and thus not representing the interests of all layers of society.

In addition, the fact that the president appoints regional governors himself and has altered Constitution in order to prolong his own term in the office tells that the system is not democratic enough. To be able to analyze which interests are being represented by the government on the topic of language, it is crucial to understand the arguments of the two parties involved in the language conflict among the intelligentsia of the Kazakh society.

There is a language divide between Kazakh-speakers and non-Kazakh speakers, both of them being fluent in Russian. Second, within the latter group there are ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakhs- i.e. Kazakh Russophones. Whereas the preferences of ethnic Kazakh speakers and of ethnic Russians are straightforward, the preferences and opinions of the Kazakh Russophones are not as transparent. With their Kazakh ethnicity and Russian language, they are caught up between the two groups. Kazakh Russophones occupy a difficult space: if they bow to Kazakh speakers' language preference they would have to disavow their first language and learn Kazakh; if they do not, they are often disparaged as 'mankurts', a term used to describe someone who lost his ethnic identity and native language, and has become synonymous with being Russified (Dave 2007:50). However, as they comprise 60% of the total population, their interests are represented by one of the sides in the debate (Peyrouse 2007:486).

In general, there are two sides of the debate between ethnic Kazakhs with a perfect command of Kazakh language, who tend to be called and call themselves 'nationalists' and Russian speaking population. The Russian speaking population divides into ethnic Russians, who promote official bilingualism, and ethnic Kazakh Russophones. It is often the case that the opinions of Kazakh Russophones are left unheard since the language conflict revolves primarily around Russians, who promote official bilingualism and ethnic Kazakh nationalists, who support full transformation into Kazakh. Kazakh Russophones, being left in the middle, should be considered as a separate group within the population since it also fits the typology formulated by two Kazakhstani academicians, who divided Kazakh society into three groups with regard to their viewpoint on the construction of 'ethnocratic' state. The first and the most numerous group consists of rural members

of the educated classes, who were born in Kazakh traditional-patriarchical towns. Having been educated in Kazakh language and schools, they perceive Russian culture as alien. Though they are fully integrated into urban life, they retain their traditional world view, "which sets them in natural opposition to a linguistically and otherwise urban culture" (Smith *et al* 1998: 140). The second and least numerous group are urban Kazakh people, who are linguistically Russian and are also estranged from Kazakh culture. The members of the third group are equally integrated into Kazakh and Russian cultures "and are therefore characterized by an 'ethnocultural and linguistic dualism" (Smith *et al* 1998: 140). This typology highlights the divide within the society and marks out Russophone

Kazakhs as a separate group, whose position in the current language divide is not as clear as the one of the other two groups.

The language laws granting a significant status to the Russian language are strongly opposed by the nationalists and the anti-Russian language laws are not favored by Kazakh Russophones. Despite the usage of the term 'debate' the two sides

do not communicate with each other in public and often are not even aware of each other's stance. Nationalists take their debate to the media and get published in the Kazakh Press (Ramazanova 2011:48). Kazakh nationalists usually vent their rancor in Kazakh-language newspapers that hardly any Russophones are able or care to read (Kolsto 1998:53). Most Russian-language media is non-political and it is so "because they are afraid to touch on this subject" (Ramazanova 2011:48). That Kazakh speakers are not 'afraid' to air their complaints in the open, but the Russian speakers are, may indicate a sense of entitlement and leverage felt by the Kazakh speaking activists. This may be so because they sense support from the Constitution and policy, whereas the Russian-speaking activists might feel they have no legal grounds to substantiate their case.

The less prestigious status of Kazakh is also often linked to post-colonialism by the nationalists. The reason ethnic Kazakhs are not willing to learn their native tongue, they feel, is explained by the post-colonial attitude that Kazakhstan was a second or third-rate country which did not justify the knowledge of its own language by all citizens. Nationalists argue that this post-colonial attitude will pass, claiming that all Kazakhs should know their language and that the country should become mono-linguistic state.

The nationalist side also insists that the majority of young Kazakhs are nationalistic and would push for more nationalistic policies causing the authorities to succumb (Ramazanova 2011: 48). They hold that while previously the government could give different accounts in Russian and Kazakh language, it cannot now do that without damaging its reputation. Nationalists were also able to convince the president to insert the formula into the Constitution that "it is a duty of every citizen to learn and know Kazakh language" (Konstitutsia Respubliki Kazakhstan 1995). The nationalists believe that the majority of the country is supportive of the language revival and it is their interests that are being represented in the policy (Ramazanova 2011: 48).



A Kazakh nomadic boy with a traditional hunting eagle.

This is also in line with the results (Graham Smith et al 1998: 140) that primarily the members of rural Kazakh intelligentsia, educated in Kazakh schools and brought up in traditional Kazakh town and villages, guide the nationalizing policies. Though being fully integrated into urban life, they nonetheless retained their traditional worldviews. This implies that those members of

intelligentsia employing nationalist and primordial arguments have gained the upper hand in promoting nationalizing policies.

Many of them also consider Russian language as an "outgoing reality" due to the growing Russian outmigration claiming that in some decades it would completely yield to Kazakh language.

However, on the side of the spectrum, offering an instrumentalist explanation, are those who believe that the elites in Kazakhstan are predominantly Russophone and as long as they are in power, the Russian language will dominate. The urban population in Kazakhstan has a higher social status and is economically a more powerful group creating stark class stratification with a rich Russophone class (comprised of ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakhs) and poor Kazakh-speaking class. For Russophone elites, economic self-interest and a desire for social mobility prevail over ethnic loyalty.

Often when interacting with government officials on the issue of language they intentionally choose to give an interview in Kazakh though they speak perfect Russian. Kazakh becomes a political instrument and is intentionally promoted due to its weak communicative function compared to that of Russian. The legal elevation of the Kazakh language is seen as mere political maneuvering.

Stressing the shortcomings of language planning and in particular a poor Kazakh terminology development, Kazakh language cannot become the language of communication due to the dominance of Russian language in all spheres of the social structure. The social structure where an individual grows up, socializes and becomes a part of society is filled with Russian language. Even those Russian-speaking parents, who take their children to schools with Kazakh as a language of instruction, still do not succeed at having their children speak fluent Kazakh. In such cases, Kazakh remains as a 'school language' and their Kazakh vocabulary is limited to the one used at school. Reflecting the data that the government does not enforce the requirement of government

ment employees' having a good command of Kazakh, evidence suggests that all government institutions still operate in Russian and therefore it is enough to know Russian when communicating with the authorities.

It appears that the policy making process is heavily influenced by the nationalists. Their primordialist-like arguments that all

self-respecting Kazakhs must know their 'mother tongue' have been gaining popularity among citizens. However, it is evident that despite the fact that the government has been promoting the Kazakh language in terms of policy making and implementation, the latter process is still lagging behind. The nationalists often overlook these flaws and deny the lack of conditions provided by the state to learn the language. They also insist on introducing a language test for everyone with certain levels of Kazakh being required for certain types of job, at the same time stressing that for government jobs knowledge of Kazakh should be mandatory.

The idea of having a regulation in a form of a state language test, the "KazTestfor" government job positions was already considered but never passed so as not to incur the displeasure of Russian-speaking Kazakhs in the government (Dave 2007:107). The test, might be adopted in 2020 but this information was not confirmed by official sources. Together with the increased budget allocation toward language planning this indicates a doubled effort of the government plan to revive the 'native tongue' of the Kazakhs (Ramazanova 2011:50). However, it is also evident that policy implementation still has not achieved the point of Kazakh language being spoken more than Russian, i.e. compared to Russian language its communicative

function still remains underutilized. While economic growth is conducive to the language revival and increases the chances of Kazakh language gaining upper hand, it still does not have sufficient impact due to a large role played by the way the budget is utilized, i.e. how well is the policy implemented.

It is hard to predict whether the nationalists will succeed in exerting their pressure to make the regulations stricter. Although the nationalist argue that the government sides with the majority, it is applicable in democratic states, which Kazakhstan is not. Freedom House rated Kazakhstan as 'not free', with Civil Liberties score being 5 and Political Rights 6 (1 being the highest and 7 the lowest) (Freedom

House). In this light, it may be more accurate to predict that even though policy execution has improved, Russian language will dominate as long as the Kazakh elite is Russian speaking.



A Kazakh dombra player.

#### CONCLUSION

Tradition does not hinder modernization and nationalism is a complement to the modernizing processes that are aimed at creating a unified

nation. The Kazakh government has embarked upon a journey of nation-building and instilling national identity among its multi-ethnic society while developing its economy after the collapse of Soviet Union. From a poor country in the early 1990's Kazakhstan has emerged as a leader in economic development in the region. The country introduced the free market system and privatization while extensively emphasizing symbols of nationhood such as the native language, tradition and culture. This proves that tradition and nationalism does not hinder the process of sustainable economic growth, and indeed contributes towards aspirations of a more unified nation. However, despite the extensive language policies promoting Kazakh language amongst its titular group, Kazakh, unlike Russian, still does not fulfill its communicative function. This is due firstly to a lack of national identity prior to independence and secondly to the shortcomings of the policy implementation caused by the still large majority of the Russian-speaking elites. Importantly, the improved situation of the Kazakh language planning shown demonstrates that the interests of the nationalists are reflected in the policy making process.

Considering a decreasing share of Russian population due to outmigration and the continuation of the Kazakh language revival, it seems likely that Kazakh language will prosper in decades to come. Although currently it cannot compete with Russian, provided the government continues its nationalizing politics, the Kazakh language has strong prospects for positioning as the main language of communication in Kazakhstan.

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