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**KAZAKH LANGUAGE
AND PROSPECTS FOR ITS ROLE
IN KAZAKH “GROUPNESS”***

Introduction

In the Soviet era, Communist Party ideologists who tried to explain the USSR’s nationality policy faced the difficult task of reconciling two very different processes that were said to be taking place simultaneously. On the one hand, they had to adhere to the dogma that maintained that, thanks to the Party’s beneficent and scientifically based policy, cultures of all the USSR’s ethnic groups were enjoying an unprecedented “flourishing” (*ras-tsvet*).¹ At the same time, however, they had to demonstrate that a “Soviet

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¹ In order to simplify analysis, for purposes of this article I accept commonly used Soviet ethnic categories. In doing so I am not implying that divisions within individual “ethnic groups” are not extremely important, or that the definition of ethnic groups is unchanging. Rather, I agree with the view expressed by Brubaker and Cooper that “grounded groupness” must be understood as “a contingent, emergent property, not an axiomatic given.” (Rogers Brubaker, Frederick Cooper. *Beyond “Identity” // Theory and Society*. 2000. Vol. 29. P. 31).

people” (*sovetskii narod*) had been created, that all ethnic groups in the USSR shared an increasingly common culture, and that eventually this would lead to a merging (*sliianie*) of cultures. Although the cultures of *all* ethnic groups were said to be benefiting from “mutual enrichment,” Party ideologists at least implied that the culture of the most numerous ethnic group comprising the Soviet people – the Russians – was the dominant element in the common culture, and that the mutual enrichment involved more “giving” by Russians and more “borrowing” by all others.

Using terms suggested by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, we can describe the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) as undertaking a project to monopolize the processes of “categorization” and “identification.” That is, the regime sought to monopolize authority to categorize by creating a Soviet people, as well as its constituent ethnic groups. Furthermore, with no significant open political opposition, the regime was able to conduct identification, using its “material and symbolic resources to impose the classificatory schemes, and modes of social counting and accounting with which bureaucrats, judges, teachers, and doctors [had to] work and to which non-state actors [had to] refer.”²

The USSR’s isolation, which enhanced the CPSU’s ability to carry out its identification program, was successful in creating what is frequently referred to in the literature as a common Soviet “sense of identity.” Brubaker and Cooper, who eschew the term “identity,” instead use “groupness” to describe individuals’ sense of “belonging to a single, distinctive solidarity group.” With regard to the entity called the Soviet people, the groupness created by the Party rested on shared common attributes (which Brubaker and Cooper refer to as “commonality”) and relational ties among individuals (which Brubaker and Cooper call “connectedness”). In the Soviet case, the commonality and the relational ties were rooted largely in Russian culture and language, and mediated by ethnic Russians.

Despite the level of success that the Communist Party achieved in creating groupness for the Soviet people, the USSR’s collapse destroyed the political underpinning of this experiment in nation building. However, because the demographic distribution of ethnic groups as defined by the Soviet regime did not correspond to the suddenly important political borders, the Soviet empire’s demise did not eliminate the issue of creating a sense of groupness for diverse groups. Instead, the problem shifted to the newly independent countries, which, like the Soviet regime before them, also faced

the challenge of effacing other senses of groupness that might compete with a common identity for all inhabitants of the state.

Events since the Soviet Union’s collapse have demonstrated the contentious nature of determining the classificatory schemes to serve as the basis for the identification projects of the post-Soviet states. This has been the case not only in areas marked by armed conflict, such as Chechnya, Georgia, and Moldova, but also in areas where peace has prevailed. Among the territories in the latter category is Kazakhstan, whose territory, with the exception of the Russian Federation, dwarfs all other former Soviet republics.

This study will examine a critical arena of identification in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, namely, language status and use. For reasons explained below, I will focus on the prospects of the Kazakh language as it relates to commonality, connectedness, and groupness among the ethnic Kazakh population of Kazakhstan. Although the potential role of the Kazakh language to link Kazakhstan’s titular ethnic majority with the more than 40 percent minority population is worthy of study, this broader subject will largely remain in the background of the present investigation.

The relation between *rastsvet* and *sliianie* once described by Soviet ideologists seems to echo in the pronouncements of Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev on the subject of ethnic and supraethnic identification. In an address delivered on 31 August 2004, Nazarbayev proclaimed that a supraethnic community – one he referred to as the “Kazakhstani nation” (*kazakhstanskaia natsiia /qazaq ulty*) – is in the process of emerging. The president described this as a “free association of ethnic groups [*etnosy*], [i.e.,] their cultural-political and social-economic unity.” In the very same sentence about unity, however, Nazarbayev also emphasized the ethnic diversity (*etnicheskoe mnogoobrazie*) of his country’s population. Whereas the president’s reference to “cultural-political and social-economic unity” was reminiscent of *sliianie*, his stress on diversity seemed to be a post-Soviet version of *rastsvet*.³

Nazarbayev’s reference to a Kazakhstani nation produced a very strong reaction among members of Kazakhstan’s intelligentsia. The response from

³ For a report on Nazarbayev’s address, see <http://www.zakon.kz/our/news/news.asp?id=27604>, accessed on 15 March 2005. In the Soviet era, CPSU ideologists refrained from using the term “Soviet nation” [Russian (*natsiia*), Kazakh (*ult*)], probably because it would require redefinition of the individual constituent ethnic groups that were also called “nations.” Against this background, Nazarbayev seems to be implying a greater unity for Kazakhstan than was ever claimed by Soviet ideologists, who used *narod* and *khalyq* when referring to the superethnic “Soviet people.”

² Brubaker, Cooper. Beyond “Identity”. Pp. 14-16.

non-Kazakhs – despite the president’s assurances about diversity – may be rooted in a perception that “Kazakhstani-ness” is a step toward eventual assimilation into a nation dominated by a Kazakh majority. The president’s introduction of the term “Kazakhstani nation,” however, also evoked a very negative reaction from some Kazakh nationalists, i.e., those who see Kazakhstan above all as the homeland of the Kazakhs, and who insist that Kazakhstan must make Kazakh culture the “first among equals.” In the nationalist view, ethnic minorities of Kazakhstan – including Russians – reside in the country as guests, and, therefore, should live according to the rules of their (Kazakh) hosts.⁴

A striking example of opposition to Nazarbayev’s idea of a Kazakhstani nation from a Kazakh nationalist appeared in an article published in the newspaper *Turkistan* just a few weeks after the president’s speech. This article consists of a full-page interview with writer Beybit Qoyshybayev.⁵ Perhaps above all the interview is remarkable because in it Qoyshybayev draws a direct parallel between the supraethnic consolidation policies of the USSR (where Russian culture formed the core) and Kazakhstan (where the author maintains Kazakhs should form the core). Qoyshybayev makes it clear that he is not opposed in principle to the assimilation of minorities within Kazakhstan. That is, he is not against the idea of a policy or a program of *identification* that would encourage greater commonality and connectedness among all citizens of the country. His objection to the concept of a Kazakhstani nation is based in his perception that the Kazakhs themselves are presently too weak to attempt to create a Kazakhstani nation with a Kazakh core.⁶ If they were not so weak, Qoyshybayev maintains, Kazakhs “would not fear” the president’s proposal. “However, unfortunately, the situation is different. It is hard to say that [today] Kazakhs are a nation [*ult*] with a firm foundation. The reason is that there has been a policy of Russifying us since tsarist times.”

⁴ Not all nationalists opposed the introduction of the term “Kazakhstani nation.” We will discuss a very different reaction to this term by another nationalist, Azimbay Ghali, below.

⁵ Beybit Qoyshybaev. Bizde “qazaqstandyq ult” emes, qazaq ulty qalyptasuy kerek // *Turkistan*. 23 September. 2004.

⁶ Curiously, Qoyshybayev maintains that in the Soviet era, ideologists began to use the term “Soviet nation” [*kenges ulty*]. In fact, however, in the Soviet era this term was *not* used, only “Soviet people” [*kenges khalqy*]. On this matter (though with reference only to Russian nomenclature), see Gerhard Simon. *Nationalism and Policy Toward the Nationalities of the Soviet Union*. Boulder, CO, 1991. Pp. 307-314.

Qoyshybayev places a special emphasis on language, which he identifies as a Soviet-era tool of assimilation that can serve to promote consolidation in a new form today. The author recalls that in Soviet times, the CPSU promoted Russian as a “second mother tongue” for minorities, and maintained that only one language would remain by the time world civilization reached communism. In terms of language and consolidation, Qoyshybayev expresses fear that if a Kazakhstani nation is promoted at present, then Russian, not Kazakh, will provide the linguistic bond. This is because in addition to the non-Kazakhs, who comprise 40 percent of Kazakhstan’s population today (almost all of whom know Russian but very few of whom know Kazakh), among the titular nationality, too, a large share are literate in Russian, but cannot read or write “their own” language.

For this reason, in Qoyshybayev’s view, the linguistic consolidation that should be promoted today is one primarily involving Kazakhs, and not the country’s ethnic minorities; for Qoyshybayev, linguistic consolidation of any sort of Kazakhstani nation around a Kazakh language core belongs to a distant future. In terms of Brubaker and Cooper’s analytic scheme, Qoyshybayev seems to be saying that Kazakhstani commonality and connectedness is currently so closely bound to the Russian language that a premature policy promoting Kazakhstani (as opposed to Kazakh) identification will advance the Russian language and thus promote groupness rooted in it.

The tension between the ethnic and supraethnic consolidation in Kazakhstan has been noted, among others, by Norwegian scholar Jørn Holm-Hansen. In Holm-Hansen’s view, “Kazakhstani nation-builders are attempting to achieve several incompatible goals at the same time. They are trying simultaneously to ethnify the state and to integrate the population on a supraethnic basis.” The unworkable nature of the exercise is all the greater, according to Holm-Hansen, because it “presuppose[s] clear ethnic identities in the population, whereas such clarity is far from evident in all cases.”⁷

Although Holm-Hansen does not use the terminology of Brubaker and Cooper, he seems to be referring both to contradictory classificatory schemes of identification as well as to ambiguous senses of groupness. The contradictions and ambiguity referred to by Holm-Hansen are true not only in the case of Kazakhstan’s minorities, but also (and perhaps especially) in the case of Kazakhs. In large part, this is due to the high degree of Russifica-

⁷ Jørn Holm-Hansen. *Political Integration in Kazakhstan* // Pål Kolstø. *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan*. Boulder, CO, 1999. Pp. 223-24.

tion of Kazakh culture during the tsarist and Soviet eras, which meant that upon Kazakhstan's independence, a large share of the ethnic Kazakh population, especially among the more educated urban members, felt more at home in a Russian than Kazakh cultural setting. As a result, many of them shared more bonds and felt a greater sense of groupness with non-Kazakhs (especially Russians) than with the majority of their co-ethnics. For this reason, a longstanding question in defining the content of Kazakh culture has revolved around the problem of determining the degree of similarity and difference between Kazakh and Russian, and, by implication, the extent to which certain borrowed elements of Russian culture have become integral parts of Kazakh culture that should be embraced, or, alternatively, classified as alien and therefore purged.

This problem applies especially in the field of language. Although at the end of the Soviet era, Kazakh was still the dominant language in rural areas of the republic, Russian had replaced it among a large share of urban ethnic Kazakhs. I will argue below that despite a number of factors that continue to work against the rapid recovery of the status of Kazakh today, Kazakh's domains of use are likely to expand over the coming decades. As this happens, the Kazakh language is likely to become a more important component of Kazakh commonality as well as groupness.

As noted above, this study will focus on ethnic Kazakhs, and therefore will deal only indirectly with the possibility of the Kazakh language becoming part of a Kazakhstani connectedness or groupness. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, reflecting statements by President Nazarbayev, Article 4 of the Kazakhstan language law states that mastering the Kazakh language is "the obligation" of *all* of Kazakhstan's citizens – not just ethnic Kazakhs.⁸ Indeed, in line with the idea of the Kazakh language as a bond that is to link all citizens of his country, the president recently referred to the language as "one of the main factors of the unity (*edinenie*) of all citizens of Kazakhstan" (*kazakhstantsy*).⁹

⁸ Osnovnye zakonodatel'nye akty o iazykakh v Respublike Kazakhstan. Almaty, 2000. P. 6.

⁹ Kazakhstan na puti uskorennoi ekonomicheskoi, sotsial'noi, i politicheskoi modernizatsii (Poslanie Prezidenta N. Nazarbaeva narodu Kazakhstana 18 fev. 2005) // <http://www.president.kz/main/mainframe.asp?lng=ru>, accessed on 30 March 2005. I have examined the approach of the Kazakhstan government and the major non-government organization involved in Kazakh language recovery in another article: William Fierman. Povorot iazykovogo sdviga v Kazakhstane // Etnograficheskoe obozrenie. Forthcoming.

In the next two sections of this article, I will provide background about several factors that help explain the relation of Kazakh language to commonality, connectedness, and groupness in Kazakhstan since independence. First, I will examine some of the most important legacies of the Soviet era, including the link between language, ethnic group, and territory in official Soviet ideology and in popular belief, as well as some major points that shaped language planning in Kazakhstan. These issues are important because the mindsets of both leaders and masses in Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states were profoundly affected by categories and relations defined by the CPSU, and by language planning efforts of the Soviet era. I will then provide background on Kazakhstan's demographic situation on the eve of independence. This warrants particular attention because so few non-Kazakhs knew (or even today know) Kazakh, and because Kazakhs' knowledge of Kazakh was closely correlated to place of residence. Following a discussion of these topics, I will present a very brief overview of changes in several aspects of Kazakh language status from the late Soviet period until the present.¹⁰ This analysis will provide a basis for considering the most important political, economic, and demographic factors in Kazakhstan affecting language status change today, especially among Kazakhs, and the likely direction of future change.

Soviet Legacy in Ideology and Language Planning

Despite the USSR's collapse, the CPSU's ideological canon about nations and their link to territory and language continues to shape both official government policy and popular beliefs in Kazakhstan. According to this canon – derived from Joseph Stalin's "Theses on the National Question" (originally published in 1913) – each nation is a historically developed community of people united by a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up as manifest in a community of culture.¹¹

In today's independent Kazakhstan, official accounts trace a centuries-old history of Kazakh *gosudarstvennost'* ("statehood" or "state system").

¹⁰ The juxtaposition of only Russian and Kazakh, which are the focus of this study, in fact oversimplifies the picture, since many citizens (perhaps 10 to 15 percent?) were native speakers of other languages.

¹¹ Frederick Barghorn. Russian Nationalism and Soviet Politics: Official and Unofficial Perspectives // Robert Conquest (Ed.). *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future*. Stanford, CA, 1986. P. 31. The tenacity of the ideas in Stalin's treatise is evident in Qoysybayev's explicit and positive reference to it in the article cited above.

Even if we accept this at face value, it remains true that Soviet identification policies played a critical role in linking a clearly defined piece of territory to a Kazakh nation said to have the unique attributes named by Stalin. The Soviet project of identification and nation building in Central Asia, along with dividing up territory, also parceled out much of what had been a common patrimony to distinct Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik, and Karakalpak nations, each with its own national history, national culture, and national language.

For the purposes of this article, one of the most important elements of the Soviet legacy is the widespread belief among Kazakhs that they and their culture, including their language, bear a natural link to *their* particular territory, which today extends as far as Kazakhstan's borders.¹² A corollary of this view is a belief that, in independent Kazakhstan, members of the titular nationality have a right or even obligation to promote their language as an element of groupness, especially among their co-ethnics.

Both in Soviet-era ideological writings and in today's official pronouncements in Kazakhstan, language is said to be a link among the population in the entire state as well as within individual ethnic groups. In the Soviet era, in accordance with Stalin's definition, every nationality had its own language. At the same time, however, Russian – termed the “second mother tongue” of the USSR's non-Russian nationalities – was said to fulfill special functions within the boundaries of the USSR. The president of today's independent Kazakhstan, despite his references to the Kazakh language as a key factor in the unity of all citizens of Kazakhstan, and his references to a single Kazakhstani *nation* (not just a “people”), nevertheless goes out of his way to underline major roles for other native languages spoken in the country.¹³ Such Kazakh nationalists as Qoyshybayev also recall Soviet precedents. Their emphasis is more one-sided than that of their president, and they call for Kazakh to be elevated to a position in independent Kazakhstan that is no less prestigious or important than Russian's in the USSR.

Before proceeding, it is worth a brief look at some issues concerning Kazakh language and Soviet language planning and policy for Kazakh.

¹² Very telling in this regard is independent Kazakhstan's official policy of supporting the repatriation of Kazakhs to Kazakhstan from other countries, including areas of today's Uzbekistan and Russia, where Kazakhs have lived for centuries.

¹³ Given Nazarbayev's references to the formation of a Kazakhstani *nation* and the Kazakh language as a major factor in the unity of all citizens of Kazakhstan, it is worth noting that Soviet ideologists stopped short of claiming that the Soviet people shared a common first language.

One of the distinguishing points about Kazakh – especially in contrast to, say, the spoken varieties that were united to create a standard literary form of Uzbek or Tajik – is that in the early twentieth century only relatively minor differences separated dialects spoken over a vast territory.¹⁴ It should also be noted that although literacy was very low among Kazakhs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of writing systems had been used for Kazakh in recent memory, and at the time, prominent Kazakh periodicals in a modified version of the Arabic script were being published.¹⁵

In the late 1920s, Soviet policy dictated that Kazakh writing, along with that of other Turkic languages of the USSR, shift from Arabic to Latin letters. This was the first of two fundamental breaks that affected Kazakh; the second, a decade after Latinization, was the shift to modified versions of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet. These changes represented major Soviet policies concerning the categorization and identification of “Kazakh-ness.” Whether intended or not, the shift to Latin letters fostered a commonality between Turkic speakers in the USSR and populations literate in other languages, including Turkish, as well as French, German, and English. In sharp contrast, the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet reflected the CPSU's attempt to link Kazakhs above all to Russians.

While Russification was the dominant thrust of Soviet linguistic policy for roughly half a century, it is important to note that in the era that preceded Russification – i.e., during *korenizatsiia* (“rooting” or “indigenization”) of the 1920s and early 1930s – the Soviet regime followed a kind of affirmative action policy. During *korenizatsiia*, the CPSU actively promoted non-Russian cadres and encouraged the use of non-Russian languages in such critical areas as administration and education. This went hand in hand with efforts to raise literacy throughout the Soviet Union, and to encourage local Russian and other administrators working among non-Russians to learn minority languages.¹⁶

The decline of *korenizatsiia* after about 1933 greatly reduced the attention to non-Russian languages in administration, education, and other ar-

¹⁴ The Kazakh case stands in stark contrast, for example, to the dialects that were eventually included under the labels “Uzbek” and “Tajik.”

¹⁵ The low level of literacy, however, did not mean that Kazakhs lacked a literary tradition. Indeed, their rich oral literary tradition extended back many centuries.

¹⁶ See Terry Martin. *The Affirmative Action Empire*. Ithaca, NY, 2001. Chapter 4. For a description of the process in Uzbekistan, see William Fierman. *Language Planning and National Development*. Berlin, 1991. Chapter 8.

eas. The change in the relative status of Russian and other languages in the USSR during the 1930s is also evident in the 1938 CPSU decree making Russian an obligatory subject in all the USSR's non-Russian schools.¹⁷ Critical to the analysis here, though, is that, despite these trends, Kazakh and other non-Russian titular languages of the union republics continued to be widely used in primary and secondary education for the rest of the Soviet era.¹⁸ This was especially true in rural areas. In the case of Central Asia, this is where the majority of indigenous groups lived. I will discuss below the severity of Kazakh's decline in urban schools. For now, though, it must be emphasized that even in the mid-1980s, probably over 80 percent of Kazakh children in Kazakhstan's rural areas attended Kazakh-medium classes.¹⁹

In considering the relevance of Soviet policies for the prospects of Kazakh language in the post-Soviet era, it is also critical to note the considerable Kazakh language corpus development during the half-century following the demise of *korenizatsiia*. In addition to considerable scholarship devoted to various aspects of the Kazakh language,²⁰ important Soviet-era achievements in corpus development included the publication of major reference books in Kazakh (e.g., the twelve-volume Kazakh-language encyclopedia, published between 1972 and 1978, and a ten-volume dictionary of the Kazakh language, published between 1974 and 1986).²¹

¹⁷ Besides the alphabet shift referred to above, Russification in the corpus of non-Russian languages during the 1930s is manifest in their greatly increased "borrowing" of Russian words. In the case of Kazakh and other Turkic languages of Central Asia, this usually meant replacing words of Turkic, Persian, or Arabic origin with words taken from or through Russian.

¹⁸ The case of Belarusian is somewhat of an exception.

¹⁹ According to data received from the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education, as of 1988-1989, approximately 896,000 Kazakh pupils were enrolled in schools in rural areas of Kazakhstan, and approximately 746,000 were enrolled in Kazakh-medium classes. It can be presumed that this later cohort contains only a very small number of non-Kazakhs. Given that the Party began to pay greater attention to Kazakh language instruction in 1987, it is possible that the share of rural pupils in Kazakh-medium classes had slightly increased by the 1988-1989 school year.

²⁰ For more information on this, see, for example, *Razvitie kazakhskogo iazykoznaniiia*. Alma-Ata, 1980.

²¹ *Qazaq sovet entsiklopediiasy*. Almaty, 1972; and A. I. Iskov et al. *Qazaq tilining tusindirme sozdigi*. Almaty, 1989. Despite these achievements, it should be noted that both in the areas of terminology and orthography, Kazakh lagged behind such languages as Uzbek in terms of standardization.

Demographic Background

The demographic composition of the population living on the territory of today's Kazakhstan has changed radically since the end of the nineteenth century. According to the census of 1897 (by which time many Russians had migrated to the Kazakh steppe), Kazakhs still comprised 81.8 percent of the total population of 4.1 million. Russians accounted for 11 percent of the inhabitants, and other ethnic groups just 7.2 percent. Continued massive immigration of settlers raised the Russian share to 29.6 percent by 1917, by which time Kazakhs had fallen to 58.5 percent (and "others" had increased to about 12 percent).²² A key event that shaped Kazakhstan's demography in the twentieth century was the collectivization of agriculture, which in the case of Kazakhstan also meant massive forced sedentarization. In the period from 1929 to 1936 alone, famine and other causes reduced the number of Kazakh households from 1,233,000 to 565,000. The major cause of the famine was the precipitous drop (almost 80 percent) in the number of livestock in Kazakhstan. This was especially serious inasmuch as animal husbandry was the core of the Kazakhs' livelihood and source of food. Out-migration from Kazakhstan, some of it to China, also contributed to population loss.²³

Over the years of Soviet power, the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan's population also changed due to a number of other Communist Party policies, many of which brought large numbers of non-Kazakhs into the republic. Most important among these were the deportation of "punished peoples" to Kazakhstan in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the use of Kazakhstan as a site for prison labor camps, the Virgin Lands program of the late 1950s, and a longstanding policy of All-Union ministries' dispatching workers from other regions of the USSR to Kazakhstan.²⁴ By around 1960, the Kazakh share of the republic's population reached its nadir, about 30 percent. By this time the Russian share had grown to almost 43 percent, and the total Slavic share (including Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles) was

²² M. Kh. Asylbekov, A. B. Galiev. *Sotsial'no-demograficheskie protsessy v Kazakhstane (1917-1980)*. Alma-Ata, 1991. P. 42. Asylbekov and Galiev note that F. N. Bazanova claims the 1897 figures for Kazakhs and Russians were 74.4 percent and 8.8 percent respectively. (F. N. Bazanova. *Formirovanie i razvitie struktury naseleniia Kazakhskoi SSR*. Alma-Ata, 1987. No page number given).

²³ Martha Olcott. *The Kazakhs*. Stanford, CA., 1987. P. 185.

²⁴ For a discussion of the major factors affecting Kazakhstan's ethnic composition, see M. Tatimov and Zh. Aliyev. *Derbestigimiz – Demografiyada*. Almaty, 1999, especially pp. 33-37.

around 52 percent. In addition, the German population, mostly deported to the region during World War II, had grown to 7 percent.²⁵

Primarily due to their relatively high birthrate, by the time of the last Soviet census (1989) the percentage of Kazakhs had substantially recovered, to around 40 percent; by this time, the Russian share (over 37 percent) had fallen to less than the Kazakh, and other ethnic groups – including about 7 percent non-Russian Slavs (mostly Ukrainians) and almost 6 percent Germans – accounted for the remaining approximately 22 percent.²⁶ No other individual ethnic group accounted for more than about 2 percent of the total.

One of the most important facts about Kazakhstan's demography at the end of the Soviet era is that while Kazakhs accounted for over 57 percent of the republic's total rural inhabitants, in urban locales they barely exceeded 27 percent. Taking the republic's urban areas as a whole, Russians (almost 51 percent) outnumbered Kazakhs by a ratio of almost 2:1. On the other hand, in rural areas, the Kazakh share of about 57 percent meant that they outnumbered Russians (under 20 percent) by almost 3:1. The combined Ukrainian and German share of the urban population was about 11 percent, with the remaining approximately 11 percent split among many other ethnic groups.

TABLE 1. KAZAKHSTAN POPULATION 1989

| | % of Total Population | % of Rural Population | % of Urban Population |
|------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Kazakhs | 40.1 | 57.1 | 27.1 |
| Russians | 37.4 | 19.9 | 50.8 |
| Ukrainians | 5.4 | 4.4 | 6.2 |
| Germans | 5.8 | 6.9 | 5.0 |
| Others | 11.2 | 11.7 | 10.9 |

Source: Agenstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike. Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan. Tom. 1: Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan. Almaty, 2000. Pp. 6-14.

²⁵ Asylbekov, Galiev. *Sotsial'no-demograficheskie protsessy v Kazakhstane*. P. 187.

²⁶ Agenstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike. Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan. Tom. 1: Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan. Almaty, 2000. Pp. 6-14.

In terms of geographical distribution in various regions of Kazakhstan, at the end of the Soviet era Kazakhs already outnumbered other groups in the west and (especially) certain southern regions. However, according to the 1989 census, they comprised less than 20 percent of the population in two of Kazakhstan's seventeen oblasts (Qaraghandy and North Kazakhstan), and between 20 and 25 percent in five others (Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan, Kokshetau, Qostanay, and Alma-Ata city). In all of these cases, the large majority of the non-Kazakh population was Slavic; with the exception of Alma-Ata (then the capital city), all of these oblasts are located in Kazakhstan's north, east, and central regions.²⁷ Not surprisingly, given this fact, Kazakhs were a small minority in the larger cities of the "Slavic" oblasts. In the capitals of five of these oblasts (i.e., oblast centers), Kazakhs accounted for under 15 percent of the population.²⁸

Change in Kazakh Language's Urban Strength in Recent Decades

Although the Soviet 1989 census purports that well over 98 percent of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan (including 97 percent in urban areas) were "mother tongue" Kazakh speakers, these data give a very unrealistic picture of how many were actually fluent in the language.²⁹ The prominent Kazakh scholar S. Z. Zimanov, writing at about the time of the census, estimated that about 40 percent of Kazakhs "either [did] not know their mother tongue or [knew] it poorly."³⁰ Whatever the exact figure, by the middle of the 1980s, Kazakh had clearly lost a great deal of ground to Russian in urban areas. Although Russian's status in rural areas had also risen and a large share of rural Kazakhs knew Russian, they were also fluent – and usually educated – in

²⁷ Formally, Alma-Ata city was neither part of any oblast, nor an oblast itself; however, like oblasts, it reported directly to the republic level administration. At the time of the census, the city was called "Alma-Ata" both in Russian and in English. The Russian name of the city was officially changed from Alma-Ata to Almaty in January 1993. With the exception of Alma-Ata/Almaty and names for which there is an easy and standard English-language name (e.g., "East Kazakhstan Oblast"), I use English transliterations of Kazakh geographical names throughout this article.

²⁸ According to B. Khasanuly, the shares were 8.6 percent in Petropavlovsk, 8.9 percent in Qostanay, 10.6 in Oskemen, 12.6 in Qaraghandy, 14.7 in Pavlodar, and 18.8 in Kokshetau. In Almaty city, Kazakhs comprised 22.5 percent (Ana tili – ata mura. Almaty, 1992. Pp. 148-158). Slightly different figures are provided in: Ana tili, 11 Oct. 1990.

²⁹ GosKomStat SSSR. *Itogi Vsesoiuznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda*. Tom VII. Chast' VII. Moscow, 1991-1993. Pp. 296, 300.

³⁰ *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*. 23 May 1989.

Kazakh.³¹ Thus, the need for raising the level of Kazakh skills was, above all, an urban problem.

By the mid-1980s, many middle and younger generation Kazakhs in Kazakhstan's cities saw little reason to preserve Kazakh, even in the home.³² Since then, there has been a considerable change: many Kazakhs interviewed in the last five years during travel to Kazakhstan cities, including individuals born in the late 1970s or early 1980s to parents who grew up viewing Kazakh as something of minimal importance for their future, now see considerable benefits to knowing Kazakh. This is true both for instrumental reasons (e.g., calculating that Kazakh skills may improve employment prospects) as well as affective ones. The latter, which are closely related to groupness, appear to reflect a greater – though far from universal – desire today among Kazakhs to connect with their ancestors and co-ethnics through a shared linguistic bond.

In terms of the instrumental reasons, much of the change reflects language laws and programs that have been adopted in Kazakhstan since 1989. We will examine here some fragmentary evidence of change as related to three areas – education, electronic mass media, and the workplace.³³

Education. In the late Soviet period, a large share of Kazakh urban children were being educated in Russian-medium classes. Most cities had few if any Kazakh-medium schools. In the case of Alma-Ata, the then capital city with a population of hundreds of thousands of Kazakhs, only two schools provided Kazakh-medium instruction.³⁴

Although no precise data are available for the mid- to late-1980s on the proportion of Kazakh pupils in Russian-medium classes, almost certainly the share was substantially more than half: in the 1990-1991 school year (by which time there had been something of a boom in Kazakh-medium

education),³⁵ about 49 percent of Kazakh urban pupils were in Russian-medium classes. The picture today is very different: the share of Kazakh urban pupils in Russian-medium classes has declined to somewhere in the range of 25 to 30 percent.³⁶

The trend in higher education has been much the same. In the 1989-1990 academic year, only 17.9 percent of all students enrolled in Kazakhstan's higher educational institutions studied in Kazakh-language groups.³⁷ In the 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 academic years, the analogous share ranged between 32 percent and 40 percent.³⁸ Given that these figures represent students of all nationalities, for all years cited the share of ethnic Kazakh students studying in the Kazakh language is, of course, much higher. Thus, even in 1989-1990 (when the share for students of all nationalities was 17.9 percent), the share for ethnic Kazakhs was 32.7 percent.³⁹

Mass media. Unlike Kazakh-medium schools, Kazakh electronic mass media were widely available in urban areas. Still, at least in the case of radio, the situation of Kazakh relative to Russian deteriorated at the end of the Soviet era. Kazakh Radio (i.e., the main radio station for Kazakhstan, not just in the Kazakh language) generally transmitted its main program daily from 6:00 a.m. until midnight. Up until the early 1960s, the Kazakh-language share comprised half or even more of total transmissions; however,

³⁵ Without data for the number of pupils, it is impossible to identify the magnitude of the boom. However, data for the number of schools for 1988 and 1990 are available. In 1988, there were 181 schools in urban areas with only Kazakh-medium instruction; by 1990, the number had grown to 268. Likewise, in 1988 there were 242 schools with more than one language of instruction; by 1990 the number had grown to 411. (The number for mixed schools also includes a small number of schools where the mix of languages did not include Kazakh, and might have been, for example, Russian and Uzbek or Russian and Uyghur.)

³⁶ For information on how this was calculated, see William Fierman. *Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools* // *Russian Review*. 2006. Vol. 65. Forthcoming.

³⁷ Khasanuly. *Ana tili – ata mura*. P. 185.

³⁸ According to data from gathered from different sources, in 2002-2003 the share was 36 percent; in 2003-2004 it was 32 percent; and in 2004-2005 it was 40 percent. Data for 2002-2003 are from Nauan Sarin. 'Til turaly' zangnyng Bilim zhane ghylym ministriginde oryndau barysy // *Ana tili*. 10 June 2004; for 2003-2004 from Qabyl Duysenbi. *Ultymyzydyng bolashaghy – qazaq mektepterinde* // *Ana tili*. 12 Feb. 2004; and for 2004-2005 in an email from S. Ispusinova from the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education dated 12 March 2005. Much of the increase since 1989, of course, is related to the growth in the share of ethnic Kazakhs among students in institutions of higher education.

³⁹ Khasanuly. *Ana tili – ata mura*. P. 185.

³¹ Based on guesstimates of various informants in Kazakhstan, it appears that in the late 1980s somewhere in the range of 85 to 90 percent of rural Kazakhs could comfortably converse in Kazakh on everyday subjects. The proportion of rural Kazakhs who could not speak Kazakh was likely higher than 10 or 15 percent only in certain raions of oblasts bordering on Russia.

³² For more detailed treatment, see Fierman. Forthcoming article in *Emograficheskoe obozrenie*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ One of the schools in Kazakhstan was a boarding school attended largely by children from other parts of the republic. The Kazakh population of Alma-Ata in 1979 was 147,000 (16.5 percent of the total); by 1989 it was 251,000 (22.5 percent of the total) (Mikhail Guboglo. *Demography and Language in the Capitals of the Union Republics* // *Journal of Nationalities*. Vol. 1. No. 4. Pp. 28-29).

it was subsequently reduced to only about one third. This was compensated somewhat by twelve hours of Kazakh-language broadcasts of Kazakh Radio's Shalqar editorial office. The subject mix treated in Kazakh Radio's Kazakh-language broadcasts probably contributed to a low level of interest among urban listeners: the editorial office of Kazakh Radio in charge of programming specifically for agricultural workers, for example, produced shows with three hours of material daily. This would account for half of all Kazakh broadcasts. The agricultural broadcasts in Russian, only two hours, seem to have constituted a much smaller share of all broadcasts in that language, perhaps only about 15 percent.⁴⁰ Naturally, in addition to radio broadcasts originating in Kazakhstan, listeners could tune in to a much richer variety of programming from Moscow.

The quality of Kazakh-language television was reportedly much lower than radio, and seems to have averaged about three hours out of the total eight hours of broadcasts per day. As in the case of radio, the share of Kazakh-language transmissions in republic TV also markedly declined during the 1970s. Likewise, programming from Moscow was much more varied than that produced locally.⁴¹

Today a law requires all electronic media channels and stations to broadcast at least half of their transmissions in Kazakh. Although this is not universally observed, and many broadcasters have ignored the spirit of the law by scheduling Kazakh-language programs at night, Kazakh television and radio audiences have a much wider choice today. Television programs include game shows, talk shows devoted to controversial topics, and music clips reminiscent of those on American MTV. The mere presence of these programs, of course, does not mean that a particular share of the potential audience is viewing or listening to them. Indeed, as in the Soviet era, many programs from Moscow continue to enjoy great popularity among audiences. In addition, many cable channels are also available. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that a substantial share of the Kazakh audience, including the urban audience, tunes in to Kazakh-language electronic media.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ramazan Sagymbekov. *Almatydan soylep turmyz*. Almaty, 1979. Pp. 149-153 and information in an email communication from Asiya Baigozhina (Almaty) dated 21 March 2005. According to another source that describes what appears to refer to broadcasts of just the main program of Kazakh Radio, as of either 1989 or 1990, only 4.5 out of 19.5 hours were in Kazakh (Qazaq adebiyeti. 23 March 1990).

⁴¹ Email communication from Baigozhina, 21 March 2005, based on information from Firuza Perzadaeva.

⁴² See Amirkhan Mendeke. *Bul qay arna? Bul – "Elarna" // Qazaq adebiyeti*. 15 March 2002; *Esengul Kopqyzy. Ala-qula arnalar // Turkistan*. 14 Febr. 2002; and *50x50 dengdi*

Workplace. Russian was the overwhelming language of communication in the urban workplace of the 1970s and 1980s. Above all, this was because in the ethnically integrated urban work environment, very few non-Kazakhs, who constituted the large majority, knew Kazakh, whereas most urban Kazakhs were fluent or had at least some skills in Russian.⁴³ Even today, in most cities Russian is still used more than Kazakh. However, provisions of the language legislation have helped Kazakh make substantial inroads. This is especially true in the case of government offices. In late 2001 or early 2002, Qyzylorda Oblast (where Kazakhs comprise about 95 percent of the population) became the first oblast officially to shift all office work (*deloproduktivno*) to Kazakh. Although some communications, in particular a large share of those with the government in the capital, apparently continue in Russian, the change to date still represents an important rise in status for Kazakh. Four other oblasts have since officially followed Qyzylorda's lead, and plans call for all government internal office work throughout the country to be shifted to Kazakh by 2008.⁴⁴ Despite the evidence of continued use of Russian even in oblasts where there has supposedly been a total shift to the state language, it is clear that Kazakh is used much more in government offices today than fifteen years ago, let alone in the Brezhnev era of the 1970s and early 1980s.⁴⁵

The status and domains of use of Kazakh and Russian in the mass media, education, and the workplace at the end of the Soviet era were contributing to a commonality between most urban Kazakhs and tens of millions of other Soviet citizens for whom Russian was the dominant language. These same phenomena were increasingly breaking the commonality between urban Kazakhs and their rural Kazakh-dominant cousins. This configuration of commonality was also affecting groupness, as urban Kazakhs increasingly realized that they had more in common with Russians through-

kim shygharghan // *Zhas Alash*. 4 April 2002. As Mendeke notes, a state-funded national TV channel was launched with programming entirely in Kazakh. However, today that station's programming is partially in Russian.

⁴³ In 1989, only about 1 percent of Kazakhstan's urban non-Kazakhs claimed fluency in Kazakh. At the same time, almost 78 percent of Kazakhs in urban areas claimed a mastery of Russian. *Itogi 1989. Tom VII. Chast' VII*. Pp. 296 and 300. Among the employed population the share was undoubtedly even higher.

⁴⁴ The other four oblasts are Atyrau, Manghystau, Zhambyl, and South Kazakhstan (Oralbay Abdikarimov. *Memleketik til zhyly bolmaydy, biraq... // Ana tili*. 27 Jan. 2005).

⁴⁵ For a report on problems of introducing Kazakh even in an oblast with a large Kazakh population (South Kazakhstan), see Shadiyar Moldabek. *Til uyrenudi balabaqshadan bastau kerek // Zaman Qazaqstan*. 30 July 2004.

out the USSR than with Kazakhs in the villages. Changes in the mass media, education, and workplace since independence have probably not fundamentally changed the cleavages that underlie groupness in Kazakhstan. However, thanks in part to the greater prevalence of the Kazakh language in various domains since independence, the language appears to have begun to serve as part of a commonality for an increasing share of Kazakhs.

Factors Shaping Language Policy and Status Development

We now turn to an examination of the key factors that have been shaping the recovery of Kazakh's status in the last decade and a half and that seem likely to continue to play important roles in this process. Based on this, at the end of the article, we will briefly consider the likely direction of future developments.

NAZARBAYEV'S IMPRINT ON POLICY AND POLITICAL CULTURE

The promotion of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan has been profoundly affected by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who first ascended to the leadership of Kazakhstan as the republic Communist Party first secretary in June 1989. Having become president of the Kazakh SSR in 1990, he was subsequently elected and re-elected independent Kazakhstan's president in 1991 and 1999.

Nazarbayev's appointment as Kazakhstan's Party leader in 1989 marked a turning point in the history of the republic. By removing his predecessor, Gennadii Kolbin, and appointing Nazarbayev, Moscow implicitly agreed to allow the republic party leadership to accept many of the platforms that were being advocated by relatively independent "informal" groups in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's informals, like those throughout the USSR, brought together activists interested in a variety of issues; they stood outside the Party and other official institutions. Many informals focused on language, historical monuments, and the environment, and therefore their members frequently either shared particular ethnic, religious, and/or linguistic bonds, or else inhabited the same territory. Upon his 1989 promotion, Nazarbayev quickly embraced the platform of a new informal organization devoted to language that would soon become known as the *Qazaq tili qoghamy* (Kazakh Language Society). Most importantly, Nazarbayev endorsed Kazakh (instead of both Kazakh and Russian) as the sole "state language" of Kazakhstan.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ For Nazarbayev's remarks see Natsional'naia politika partii v sovremennykh usloviakh (Platforma KPSS) // Kazakhstanskaia Pravda. 26 Sep. 1989.

Although Nazarbayev has consistently supported recovery of the Kazakh language, he has eschewed extreme positions. For example, even as a champion of Kazakh as the sole state language, he took issue with a reference in the 1989 draft language law that called for Russian to serve "along with" (*nariadu s*) Kazakh; upon Nazarbayev's insistence, "along with" in the law was replaced with "on a par with" (*naravne s*).⁴⁷

Since then, Nazarbayev has frequently emphasized that sudden and overly forceful measures to promote Kazakh may alienate Kazakhstan's citizens with weak or no Kazakh skills (including many Kazakhs) and may carry serious economic consequences. He has stressed that the teaching of Kazakh should focus on the *next* generation rather than today's mature adults, and that before Kazakhs demand members of other ethnic groups to learn the Kazakh language, Kazakhs themselves should learn it and use it.⁴⁸ Nazarbayev's restraining influence on language was manifest recently in a speech in which he criticized attempts to replace Russian with Kazakh too rapidly, noting, "it is the Russian language that unites our nation [*natsiia*], all citizens of our country. This is the way things developed historically, and this is no one's fault. We will need time in order for the Kazakh language to begin to fulfill this unifying role, and things should not be rushed."⁴⁹

Along with this moderation concerning language, Nazarbayev's "soft dictatorial" political style has been important to language status development in Kazakhstan because it has allowed ideas that are more nationalist than his own to be aired. This has remained the case even though since the mid-1990s, Nazarbayev has moved toward ruling Kazakhstan in a more authoritarian fashion.

A key aspect of Nazarbayev's impact on language policy is related to his insistence that Kazakhstan maintain a unitary political system. Despite Kazakhstan's great territory and conditions that vary from one part of the country to the next, Nazarbayev has refused to consider a federal system, which might open the door to regional autonomy and the eventual secession of regions. In terms of language, this has meant that despite the very dissimilar demographic and linguistic circumstances prevailing in different

⁴⁷ Kazakhstanskaia Pravda. 23 Sep. 1989.

⁴⁸ With regard to the latter (Kazakhs first learning to speak Kazakh with each other before demanding others do so), see the account of Nazarbayev's statement during a television question-answer session in Dukenbay Doszhan. Tilimizge quldyq uratyn uaqyt zhetti // Ana tili. 24 July 2003.

⁴⁹ Vystuplenie N. Nazarbayeva na III s'ezde rabotnikov obrazovaniia i nauki // Kazakhstanskaia Pravda. 13 Oct. 2004.

areas of the country, language policy throughout Kazakhstan has been fundamentally uniform.⁵⁰

Although a major reason for the insistence that Kazakhstan retain a unitary structure appears to be a perceived or real danger that parts of Kazakhstan might secede and join Russia, Nazarbayev has also consistently demonstrated that he places a high priority on maintaining good relations with his northern neighbor and seeking economic and political ties or integration with it. In the early years of independence, Nazarbayev supported a “Eurasian Union” that would have promoted greater integration among the CIS states. A more recent symbolic reflection of Nazarbayev’s policy was his declaring 2004 the “Year of Russia” in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev is keenly aware of sensitivity in Russia to alleged language discrimination in Kazakhstan – especially discrimination against Russians and other Slavs – and his recognition of the need to maintain good relations with Russia has likely reinforced his disinclination to support radical measures related to promoting Kazakh’s status.

As president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev has overseen and often orchestrated a system in which there have been almost constant changes in law, personnel, and even administrative borders. Kazakhstan adopted two separate constitutions in its first years of existence. Flux is also apparent in the transformation of many of Nazarbayev’s former allies into open political opponents who were exiled or arrested. The borders of Kazakhstan’s oblasts have been redrawn, with several being eliminated as independent units. Nazarbayev is famous for shuffling personnel in major government offices, sometimes setting in motion a version of “political musical chairs.”

This constant change has affected the implementation of language policy as well. The government organs responsible for language have not remained stable. At various times, local offices in charge of language have been created and liquidated, and the line of command has also shifted. The first government body with primary responsibility in this area was the “Committee on Languages” created under the Cabinet of Ministers in April 1993.⁵¹ In

⁵⁰ For an example of Nazarbayev’s insistence on the unitary system, see Speech of N. Nazarbayev on Opening of Second Session of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan of Second Convocation, Astana, September 1, 2000 // http://www.president.kz/articles/state/state_container.asp?lng=en&art=parl_sep, accessed on 22 Jan. 2005.

This phenomenon is considered in Jørn Holm-Hansen. *Political Integration in Kazakhstan* // Kolstø. *Nation-Building*. Pp. 153-226, especially the conclusion. With regard to language, minor concessions have been made to local conditions, such as a staggered timetable for introducing Kazakh as the language of office work in different oblasts.

⁵¹ Sultan Orzalinov. *Til taghdyry – el taghdyry*. Almaty, 1997. P. 21.

April 1995, language issues became part of the work of the newly created “National Committee on Nationality Policy.”⁵² In March 1997, coordination of language was largely handed over to a newly created Department for Coordinating Language Policy under the Ministry of Education and Culture.⁵³ Some months later, in late 1997, primary responsibility for language issues was transferred once again, this time to the Ministry of Information and Public Harmony.⁵⁴ Later “culture” was added to this ministry’s portfolio. However, in September 2003, this expanded ministry was split once more, and responsibility for language was given to a department in the newly established Ministry of Culture.⁵⁵ In February 2005, a new “Committee on Languages” was created to coordinate language matters within the recently reconstituted Ministry of Culture, Information, and Sport.⁵⁶

Frequent change of political personnel in key jobs has also negatively affected implementation of language policy. One of the most innovative individuals in terms of promoting Kazakh was Ghalymzhan Zhaqiyarov, who during his time as *akim* (governor) of Semei Oblast began to introduce salary bonuses for those with Kazakh skills. However, after transferring to other work, Zhaqiyarov was eventually arrested and removed from open political activity. The “crimes” for which Zhaqiyarov was sidelined had nothing to do with his positions or policies on language issues. Likewise, the reasons for a virtual revolving door in the leadership of the Kazakhstan Ministry of Education are probably not directly related to language issues, either.⁵⁷ However, the Ministry of Education is a key institution in implementing Kazakhstan’s language policies. The shifting jobs and political fortunes in national and regional posts is a hallmark of Nazarbayev’s Kazakhstan, and it is very likely that constant political reshuffling has negatively affected language policy formation and implementation.

⁵² http://www.atyrau-city.kz/Rus/index_r.php?volte-face.html, accessed on 22 Jan. 2005.

⁵³ Orzalinov. *Til taghdyry – el taghdyry*. P. 6.

⁵⁴ *Til sayasatyn uylestiru departamenti qazaq tilin ornynan kotere ala ma? // Ana tili*. 4 December 1997.

⁵⁵ See comments by Imanghali Tasmaghambetov in: *Ana tili*. 9 October 2003, and Aleksandr Peirak. *Vziat’ i podelit’ // Navigator*. 25 September 2003, <http://www.navi.kz/articles/4print.php?artid=4509>, accessed on 20 March 2005).

⁵⁶ Kazinform report at <http://www.inform.kz/showarticle.php?id=111029>, accessed on 20 March 2005. The ministry was reconstituted in September 2004 (<http://www.inform.kz/showarticle.php?id=93533>, accessed on 20 March 2005).

⁵⁷ Nine different ministers were appointed between 1989 and 2004! For a report on Birghanym Aytimova becoming the ninth minister of education, see Esengul Kapqyzy. *Kulekeev studentterding karinen qoryqty // Turkistan*. 16 December 2004.

Although it cannot be blamed entirely on Nazarbayev, pervasive corruption in Kazakhstan reaches the very top of the political pyramid. This has fostered widespread cynicism, and has interfered with implementation of virtually all laws. In the area of language, it has undoubtedly reduced the feasibility of introducing regulations that would require certain levels of skills as job qualifications. To extrapolate from the field of education, where bribes are paid in order to achieve scores high enough to enter educational institutions or to pass other exams, a test of language skills as a condition for employment would be vulnerable to exploitation for personal enrichment. Corruption in administration and in the legal system also means that regulations can often be ignored if a bribe is paid to an inspector or other person in charge of implementing them.

THE SOVIET SYSTEM'S COLLAPSE:
CONSISTENCY AND CHANGE IN THE ROLE OF RUSSIA

Perhaps the most important fact about efforts to raise the status of Kazakh is that although the USSR's political leadership allowed Kazakh language recovery to begin in the late 1980s, the Soviet system – under which the first language law was adopted – soon collapsed, and Kazakhstan became an independent country. Though Kazakhstan's political system has changed dramatically, its geographical position has not. As in the Soviet era, Kazakhstan and Russia still share a border of over 4000 miles with few natural physical barriers and, partly for this reason, it remains quite porous. From the perspective of Kazakhstan, the weaker neighbor, anxieties about the border's vulnerability have been aggravated by declarations of Russian nationalists who have suggested Russia reclaim territories now inside Kazakhstan.⁵⁸

As noted above, extensive parts of Kazakhstan are inhabited primarily by non-Kazakhs. Upon the USSR's collapse, Slavs in these areas, whose commonality as well as groupness is greater with co-ethnics across the Russian Federation-Kazakhstani *international* border than with Kazakhs in the south of Kazakhstan, began to push for increased regional autonomy in Kazakhstan or even redrawn state borders.⁵⁹ Although neither Boris Yeltsin nor Vladimir Putin has encouraged Russian nationalist ambitions to expand Russia's territory in this region, as noted above, Nazarbayev (as well

as other political leaders of Kazakhstan) are extremely sensitive to pressure from Russia. Besides the historical and demographic factors that lie behind this, Kazakhstan is also dependent on Russia (as a source and transit country) for most of its foreign trade, especially for its most precious commodity, oil. Although the situation has shifted somewhat since 1991, the transportation grids of areas of Kazakhstan adjacent to Russia are generally better tied to Russia than to Kazakhstan's densely populated south. A combination of all these factors has moderated more extreme measures of Kazakh linguistic nationalism.

ECONOMIC CHANGE

Paralleling developments in the political realm, Kazakhstan has permitted much broader and faster dismantling of key aspects of the Soviet economic system than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This included a quicker privatization of state property and decrease or cessation of state subsidies to enterprises that had operated at a loss. As a result, many factories and mines temporarily halted production or closed entirely, and/or sought ways to shed excess labor. Much of the social safety net in the USSR had been supported through these institutions. The upheaval that affected them meant massive closure of clinics and nursery schools, as well as recreation and other services. Local governments, which received facilities and responsibilities from the enterprises that no longer wanted them, did not collect sufficient revenues to support them, partly because there were no taxes to collect on non-existent production, but also because the country lacked an enforceable tax system.

The era in which the economy and especially the safety net collapsed nevertheless offered opportunities for enormous personal gain to many individuals with access to public resources and good connections. Some, for example, took advantage of their positions in order to purchase state property at low prices and then sell it (often to foreign concerns) at enormous profit. Others benefited by behaving according to entrenched Soviet traditions of exchanging favors and bribes, and more generally blurring the lines between private and public property and perquisites.

Nazarbayev's choice of economic course has profoundly affected language processes in Kazakhstan. Recognition of the high economic costs of more rapid or radical linguistic Kazakhization in the public sphere has undoubtedly reduced the likelihood of proposals involving radical change. Beyond this, however, the financial straits of government and non-government institutions have greatly slowed the implementation of laws and other

⁵⁸ Perhaps the most celebrated is that by A. I. Solzhenitsyn. *Kak nam obustroit' Rossiuu?* // *Literaturnaia Gazeta*. 18 September 1990.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Martha Olcott. *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Washington, DC, 2002. Pp. 75-78.

measures that have been formally adopted. Institutions have lacked the wherewithal to train and hire enough high quality Kazakh-speaking personnel to work in such key positions as schoolteachers, or translators and clerks for offices where work is supposed to shift to Kazakh. Though the situation has eased in recent years, funds have also been scarce for the creation and distribution of related key materials, such as textbooks or innovative and attractive local television programs.

Implicit costs of another sort have likely also restrained abrupt shifts intended to promote the Kazakh language. For example, changing an institution's language of operation from Russian to Kazakh has the potential to alter power relations radically inside it and disrupt operations. Furthermore, if, as is often the case, the person with the best professional qualifications cannot communicate in Kazakh, his or her replacement by a less qualified Kazakh speaker entails a loss in the institution's performance. True, in many cases language is simply a convenient excuse (or weapon) that is used in the battle for employment. Nevertheless, recognition of this dynamic has probably also tempered the political leadership's willingness to support measures promoting Kazakh language.

The impact of the collapsed economy on family budgets has also seriously affected the course of Kazakh language recovery. Because the state does not provide for the popular welfare as it had in the Soviet era – including through a guaranteed job – many citizens of Kazakhstan have been preoccupied with assuring very basic needs, such as finding ways to pay for food, heat, and medical care. For those with the appropriate qualifications, the desire or need for more income has often encouraged or required taking a second job. Few people have the luxury of spare time to engage in language courses for which there is no immediate economic payoff.

Likewise, for most urban Kazakh parents seeking a high quality primary and secondary education for their children with promise for higher education and/or income, it still makes sense to select Russian-medium instruction. In the last few years, knowledge of Kazakh has also become appreciated in some cases as a qualification that might positively affect future employment; however, it is not an important enough consideration for most parents to select a Kazakh-medium education for their offspring. Some Kazakhs with the means to do so send their children to elite private Kazakh-medium schools that charge tuition (or for which other payments or levels of achievement may be required in order to enroll). Others attempt to assure a good education plus Kazakh language skills by enrolling children in

Russian-medium classes and hiring Kazakh language tutors, or by enrolling in a Kazakh-medium class and hiring tutors to help in various disciplines where the Kazakh-medium instruction may be poor. However, economic reality puts this beyond the reach of most parents, and/or it does not make such a course appear rational for most families. Family economic difficulties may also affect such considerations as discouraging enrollment at a “good” Kazakh school that is located across town and so requires a bus ride to get there. The ride itself is more expensive than it was in the Soviet era, crime that is related to economic change may make that ride more dangerous, and grandparents, who in Soviet times might have been available to accompany the children to a distant school, may well be involved in activity that is intended to generate income.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

Closely related to economic changes, demographic developments in Kazakhstan since the late 1980s have also had a major impact on the language picture. The most important change has been the growing share of Kazakhs in the population. One of the major reasons for this is the large emigration of Slavs and Germans. Over the period 1993-1997 alone, the number of Slavs and Germans leaving Kazakhstan exceeded those arriving in the country by about 1.5 million. In the same period, there was a slight positive balance of Kazakh immigration into Kazakhstan: arriving Kazakhs exceeded those who left by 46,700.⁶⁰ An important factor behind the positive balance of Kazakh migration was the official state policy providing benefits to an annual quota of Kazakhs from outside Kazakhstan who wanted to resettle in the “historic homeland.” The return of many Kazakhs to Kazakhstan was also encouraged by discrimination and/or deteriorating economic conditions in their respective countries of residence.⁶¹

The increasing share of Kazakhs was also a result of a substantially higher birth rate among Kazakhs than among Russians. In 1991, when Kazakhs comprised something over 40 percent of Kazakhstan's total population, they accounted for 72.4 percent of the total natural population increase of 219,429. In 1993, they accounted for 88.2 percent of the 145,371 natural increase. By contrast, Russians, whose total number was not yet

⁶⁰ Azimbay Ghali. Orysym – Qara ormanym // Zhas Alash. 11 March 2000.

⁶¹ For our purposes in this chapter, we should note that by and large these returnees are Kazakh speakers.

much less than Kazakhs', accounted for only 12 percent of the increase in 1991, and experienced negative natural growth in 1993.⁶²

Despite the *relatively* high Kazakh birth rate in comparison to Russians, the rate of natural growth for Kazakhs and all other groups dropped in the early years of independence: whereas in 1987 there had been 417,000 births in Kazakhstan, a decade later there were only 232,000.⁶³

Migration *within* Kazakhstan, especially Kazakhs' movement from rural to urban areas, has had a major impact on language in urban areas. Although some cities from which Slavs and Germans departed simply withered because they lacked employment opportunities, others attracted Kazakh-speaking migrants who, arriving from rural areas or other smaller towns, replaced the former inhabitants. The shift of the capital from Almaty to Astana created many new opportunities for employment, including patronage positions for which ethnic Kazakhs often enjoyed the inside track. Almaty, though it lost its status as capital, has consistently offered a much better life than smaller towns or villages, and so it has remained a strong magnet for Kazakh migrants.⁶⁴

Although most new Kazakh arrivals in cities have enough Russian skills to get along, and many also may still see knowledge of Russian as a skill that increases their chances of upward mobility, their presence in the city has increased the use of Kazakh in urban areas. This may make it easier to encourage compliance with language regulations, for example in the case of merchants who see that it makes economic sense to advertise to Kazakh-speaking clientele in Kazakh. In most cities of Kazakhstan, Russian signs will still reach a larger number of potential customers than Kazakh. Nevertheless, the addition of Kazakh to what were previously Russian-only announcements may be more than merely a form of compliance with the law; it may also be a relatively inexpensive way to project a favorable image. The increased share of Kazakh speakers has also raised the likelihood of

non-Kazakh speakers or those with very limited skills encountering Kazakh language in their place of employment or at public or private gatherings. Whereas in the 1970s or 1980s, bilingual Kazakh and Russian speakers who lived in the city would generally have refrained from using Kazakh at work meetings, where not everyone knew the language, today it is common to speak Kazakh in this kind of setting. In such an environment, it may be prudent for non-Kazakh-speakers to learn at least enough Kazakh to understand what others are saying. This is especially true in the case of ethnic Kazakhs, who may be humiliated for not having proper respect for "their own" people and ancestors if they demonstrate that they do not know what is going on. The expanding share of Kazakhs who can at least understand and on occasion do speak at least some Kazakh is probably not a sign that the Kazakh language is a major component in a groupness uniting the newly arrived rural Kazakh with a neighbor who is a third generation urban dweller. However, the Kazakh language may be at the beginning of a long process of becoming part of Kazakh commonality.

Prospects

Progress toward a higher status for Kazakh both as a language used by Kazakhs and as language known and used by all Kazakhstanis has been far slower than what Kazakh nationalists like Qoyshtybayev have advocated. Indeed, even moderates such as President Nazarbayev have criticized the poor and uneven implementation of laws and programs adopted to date. Naturally, progress has been easiest in those areas of Kazakhstan, including certain cities, where the Kazakh population is largest.

If we stand back and look at the larger picture for a moment, despite the problems of raising Kazakh's status, its prospects look rather bright. One key reason relates to the independent state and its proclaimed ideology, which is granted at least grudging support by a large majority of Kazakhstan's population, and enthusiastic support by a large and probably growing segment of it. This factor alone, of course, is insufficient to guarantee a higher status for Kazakh, but it is nevertheless a crucial component supporting it. In addition, however, the widespread popular mindset that identifies language, territory, and ethnicity is still basically intact. To the increasing majority Kazakh population, this lends a greater plausibility to the Kazakh linguistic nationalists' argument that the government's identification project should increase the prominence of what they (the nationalists) define as Kazakh. The platforms and aspirations of the nationalists, of course,

⁶² Azimbay Ghali. Qazaq qaytse kobeydi. Nemese optimistik demografiia // Egemen Qazaqstan. 1 January 2000.

⁶³ Zautbek Turisbekov. O problemakh migratsii i demograficheskoi situatsii // Kazakhstanskaia Pravda. 26 January 1999. The low birthrate, combined with the migration trends, contributed to the drop in Kazakhstan's total population from about 16.5 million to just under 15 million between 1989 and 1999 (Khalyq sanaghy: Ol qalay otti? // Zang. 19 May 1999).

⁶⁴ For an analysis of the migration to Astana and Almaty, see A. Zabirowa. Sel'sko-gorodskaiia i mezhsorodskaiia migratsiia v sovremennom Kazakhstane: motivy i rezul'taty // Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kavkaz. 2004. No. 3. Pp. 84-92.

do not automatically translate into reality. However, in terms of language, even among Kazakhstan's ethnic minority population, a considerable share appears to concede, that, whether they like it or not, time is on the side of the nationalists. One sign of this was an open letter signed by the presidents of the Almaty chapters of twelve *non-Kazakh* "national" cultural centers. This letter announced support for an initiative to remove parallel Russian translations of certain types of public signage, leaving only Kazakh writing.⁶⁵

This open letter was almost certainly encouraged by prominent political leaders, perhaps in this case Imanghali Tasmaghambetov, Almaty's new mayor and influential politician. This, however, does not lessen its importance. Indeed, it is another sign that, for all the moderation in executing language policy, Kazakhstan's leadership continues to stay the course of promoting Kazakh. Moreover, it suggests that if Nazarbayev should unexpectedly disappear from the scene, it might be difficult for a successor, whose legitimacy among a large segment of the population rests on support for a certain level of Kazakhization, to make a radical change of course on the issue of language.

Demographic trends supporting an increased status for Kazakh also seem likely to continue. Slavic emigration from Kazakhstan has slowed, but natural growth is producing a larger Kazakh share of urban population. The likely trend for the coming decades is unambiguous: as of 1999, among the cohort of Kazakhstan's population born between 1990 and 1993, Kazakhs outnumbered Russians more than three to one, and even in urban areas almost two to one. By contrast, among the cohort born from 1940 to 1949, Russians outnumbered Kazakhs more than two to one.⁶⁶ The trend of migration by Kazakhs from (especially rural) areas into urban areas, especially larger cities where Kazakh has been weakest in the late Soviet era, will also probably continue. This, too, is apt to make urban areas more linguistically Kazakh.

Given the financial costs of language development and change, Kazakh is very "fortunate" to be spoken on a territory with substantial natural wealth, especially energy reserves that attract foreign investment. Even though today's trends are no guarantee of future development, Kazakhstan's wealth

⁶⁵ See "Pravil'no li my ponimaem printsip dvuiazychiia?" 2 March 2005 // <http://www.navi.kz/articles/?artid=8244>, accessed on 20 March 2005.

⁶⁶ Agenstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike. Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan. Tom IV, Chast' 2. Naselenie Respubliki Kazakhstan po natsional'nostiam i urovniu obrazovaniia. Almaty, 2000, Pp. 24-28.

and economic growth may also contribute to efforts to expand the use of the Kazakh language by easing financial constraints that might otherwise complicate efforts to promote Kazakh.

It is worth noting, too, that although Kazakh's linguistic weakness inclines Beybit Qoyshybayev to oppose the idea of declaring a "Kazakhstani nation" today, other nationalists take a different view. Historian Azimbay Ghali, for example, welcomes the idea, citing linguistic changes as evidence that the process of producing a Kazakhstani nation is indeed already beginning. According to Ghali, the process is evident today in the linguistic assimilation of speakers of other Turkic languages; furthermore, in his view it is possible to predict that Kazakhstan will change from a country in which even many Kazakhs do not know the Kazakh language to one in which large numbers of non-Kazakhs will join most or all Kazakhs in speaking it.⁶⁷ Ghali, unlike Qoyshybayev, seems to feel that Kazakh is already becoming a component of a Kazakhstani groupness.

In today's increasingly globalized world, it is unlikely that Kazakh will replace other languages in Kazakhstan, even among Kazakhs, in ways that would fully satisfy either Qoyshybayev or Ghali. Nevertheless, it seems that Kazakh will proceed with the reconsolidation of its position in rural areas of Kazakhstan, and continue to make gains in urban settings as well. However, as in the case of other ethnic groups throughout the world, languages of wider communication (LWCs) will remain important for many forms or domains of communication. In areas ranging from advanced science to popular entertainment, Russian seems likely to continue to hold a substantial niche, though in these and other domains the functions once served exclusively or very heavily by Russian are already being shared with other LWCs, most importantly English. In any case, Kazakh currently seems to be on a path – even if not a very direct path – to becoming an integral part of Kazakh connectedness and even groupness in a way that it was not during the late Soviet period. The prospects for Kazakh language also to become part of a connectedness linking some of the minority population of Kazakhstan to members of the titular nationality may also appear good over the next few decades. Whether, however, in the more distant future it becomes a part of a Kazakhstani groupness is much more difficult to predict.

⁶⁷ See the interview given to Abay Mauqaraulы and Gulnar Mamanova. Ultym – qazaq, tegim – orys deytin kez keledi // Zaman Qazaqstan. 25 July 2003.

SUMMARY

В своей статье Уильям Фирман делает попытку применить новый категориальный аппарат, предложенный Р. Брубейкером и Ф. Купером, для более нюансированного анализа процесса формирования идентичности. В частности, анализируя формирование нового политического и культурного порядка после распада СССР и роль языка в этом процессе, автор использует такие понятия, как групповая солидарность, чувство общности и чувство причастности происходящему.

Исследование исходит из двойственности советской национальной политики, которая с одной стороны поощряла сохранение национальной самобытности на территории СССР, а с другой – ставила задачу воспитания чувства солидарности в советском народе. Фирман считает, что с распадом СССР и созданием новых независимых государств ситуация продолжает оставаться двойственной. С одной стороны, во вновь образованных государствах проходит процесс этнизации государственности, а с другой – руководство этих государств находится в поиске модели мирного развития многонационального и мультиязычного населения этих государств. Примером такой двойственности может служить Казахстан, на языковой ситуации в котором подробно останавливается автор.

Исследование анализирует статус русского языка в Казахстане, а также языковую ситуацию и политику в этом государстве. Двойственная политика Нурсултана Назарбаева, поощряющего развитие титульной нации и казахского языка и одновременно настаивающего на создании казахстанской идентичности для представителей всех национальностей, подвергается нападкам как со стороны казахских националистов, так и нетитульных национальностей. Особый интерес представляют возражения казахских националистов, которые считают опасной ориентацию Назарбаева на казахстанскую идентичность, неизбежно, по их мнению, консервирующую доминирование русского языка.

Анализируя перспективы развития казахского языка, Фирман утверждает, что в ближайшем будущем произойдет его укрепление, поскольку он функционирует как символ государственности. Укреплению языка будут способствовать и демографические изменения, ставшие следствием эмиграции русскоязычного населения и миграции

сельского населения в города. Однако автор также настаивает на том, что русский язык сохранит свое распространение в Казахстане в силу требований экономического развития и эффекта глобализации.