



Multilingualism in Kazakhstan and Problems of Teaching the Kazakh Language

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Abstract

Historical development of multilingualism in Kazakhstan consists of several stages. It will be discussed in the report in more detail. Moreover, the implementation of teaching several languages into the education system of Kazakhstan, its current development, and the peculiarities of teaching Kazakh language in this system will be discussed.

In the current times of rapidly developing technological progresses, the development of quality education and educated youth is very important. For this reason, a number of state projects and programs were developed in the education system. On the basis of these programs professional development courses for teachers of secondary schools were organized. The language of instruction in secondary schools is carried out in several languages in collaboration with international partners (only Kazakh-Turkish Lyceums teach in Kazakh, English, Russian, Turkish languages). In addition, higher education institutions having English as the language of instruction in addition to Kazakh and Russian languages have launched their programs. This aim of this report is to answer to the following research question: The aims, peculiarities of multilingual education in Kazakhstan, and its influence on the development of Kazakh Language.

In contemporary Kazakhstan it is important to master the knowledge of the Kazakh, English and Russian languages. In this respect, what would the multilingual teaching system grant us? What models of teaching are implemented? What language is the dominant one? How English and Russian influence teaching Kazakh? This paper reviews the sociological side of these questions. We also search the ways of solving this problem. In our opinion, this research work would also burst the interest of scientists from other countries that practice the bilingual and multilingual system of teaching.

Multilingualism is a concept widely spread in the vast multi-ethnic geographical space. The situation in Kazakhstan reflects this concept. Today, more than 130 nationalities live in Kazakhstan. The majority of people of Slavic origin mainly speak only one language, whereas the majority of Kazakhs speak two languages. Multilingualism is prevailing among Uighur, Uzbek, Dungan, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Tajik, Tatar, and other ethnic groups. In German, Korean, and Chechen communities, multilingualism is also more frequent phenomenon. Due to the recent government attention to the knowledge of multiple languages, multilingualism is growing among the Kazakhs, too. According to the 1989 data, in the former Soviet Union, 73 mln people (23.4%) were bilingual; the Russian language was the second language of 61 mln people. A small group of them were multilingual (polyglot) [1].

Multilingualism is often a process of using a combination of more than three languages in a social relationship. "Multilingualism" sometimes refers to many languages. In this case, the issue is not about the process, but rather about language information. Today, countries of the world are, basically, multilingual. Multilingual environment necessitates a common language; that is why international languages are used extensively. Moreover, the language is experiencing globalization. At present, English is recognized worldwide as the language of globalization. In Kazakhstan, more than one hundred nations and ethnic groups use their ethnic languages in daily life. Officially, the Kazakh and Russian languages are used predominantly. Nowadays, more than 17 million people live in the country; 65.2% of them are Kazakhs, 21.8% are Russians and 13% are representatives of other ethnicities [2].

Continuing the above discussion, in today's world in general, and in megacities in particular, people are living in the multilingual environment. Such phenomena as bilingualism or even multilingualism are widespread. Our country is also experiencing this global process. One of the main directions of social-economic development of today's Kazakhstan is to develop an environment where the citizens would speak three languages.

Since the achievement of independence, our country has developed a wide range of social, economic and cultural ties with many countries. For these relationships to be effective, the necessity to speak multiple languages is growing every day. It is also important for maintaining the unity and cooperation among people. Multilingual teaching in the education process of young generation is a modern day



requirement that would help the students to learn the secrets of science and acknowledge their abilities.

Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev presented his idea of the use of three languages for the first time in 2006 in his speech at the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. In his 2007 annual address themed "New Kazakhstan in a New World", the President proposed gradual implementation of the "Trinity of languages" cultural project. In the 2008 address, he declared that "the Government should accelerate the implementation of the "Trinity of languages" project and should urgently improve the quality of teaching the Kazakh language, as the state language that unites our entire society" [3]. Thus, the Kazakh language was determined as the state language, the Russian language is now the language of interethnic communication, and the English language serves for integration of our country into the world economy and global society. Apart from this, in his address to the people of Kazakhstan "Building the future together" in 2011, the President stated, "I always say that knowing three languages is essential for the success of every Kazakhstani. Our task is to raise the number of citizens speaking the state language up to 80% by 2017. I think, by 2020, the number of Kazakhstanis speaking English should reach 20%" [4].

By decree №110 dated 29 June, 2011, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan approved the state program on the use and development of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2011-2020. This program aims at increasing the number of citizens knowing three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English) at the following ratio: up to 10% by 2014; 12% by 2017; and 15% by 2020. **The main objective of this program** is to maintain an effective language policy that will preserve the languages of all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan and ensure the extensive use of the state language as an important factor strengthening the national unity. The state organ responsible for the elaboration of this program is the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

After Kazakhstan gained the independence, the Constitution of the country declared the Kazakh language as the state language and the Russian language as the official language. The document's main purpose was to preserve the interethnic integrity and to avoid the dysfunction of the language environment of the society. That is why Russian was given the status of the language of friendship, peace and interethnic communication.

In the context of globalization, the demand for the knowledge of English is undeniable. Currently, the English language is taught in pre-schools centres; knowledge of English is also important in continuing education. The young generation will lead the country to the future. The system of education is the main social institution that influences the formation of a young person as a competitive professional. Therefore, the education institutions are the main organs responsible for the implementation of the "Trinity of languages" policy in quantitative and qualitative terms.

For the implementation of multilingual teaching, we should first solve a variety of issues, such as the study of international experience in multilingual education; the personnel training and their availability; availability of material resources, and etc. Until proper solutions to these issues are found, the implementation of the planned program will create a number of difficulties. We tried to answer the question of how these issues are being solved now.

Own experience is seen as not enough. We need the foreign experience exchange. The state program (for 2011-2020) states, "in the process of elaboration of this program, the experience of more than 30 countries in legal regulation of state language policies was examined" [5]. Unfortunately, we were not able to identify these 30 countries in the course of this study.

The program of development of education system in the Republic of Kazakhstan for the years 2011-2020 was approved for the purpose of implementation of decree №922 of the President of Kazakhstan dated February 1, 2010 "On the strategic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan till 2020". According to this program, starting from 2011, the multilingual teaching staff training is carried out. For this training, the state compulsory education standard foresees the increase in number of credits for foreign languages in the cycle of basic classes; and changes are introduced to the education programs. It is expected to increase the number of teachers of natural sciences and mathematics speaking three languages up to 15% by 2020.

The network of specialized secondary schools for gifted children has been also formed. There are 33 schools teaching in three languages in the country today [6]. In these schools, mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology are taught in English. Educational and cultural activities to increase students' interest in the discipline and to improve the level of education and self-discipline, as well as creative work weeks, creative work ten days, and other cultural events are carried out in three languages [7].

The issues of the multilingual teaching process are difficult and comprehensive. The most pressing, spiritually and historically significant problem is promoting the use of the Kazakh language on the whole territory of the state and in all social relations. It is also important for upbringing the young generation.



The Government provides the material and technical conditions for free for the expansion of use and learning of the Kazakh language by the citizens. Every year, the funds for the state language policy are also increasing. In every city of Kazakhstan, there are centres of “Developing the languages”. In these centres, the teaching Kazakh for adults is provided on free basis, and the students are supplied with all required textbooks and technical resources.

The state program on the development and use of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 consists of 3 stages:

- 1) 2011 – 2013;
- 2) 2014 – 2016;
- 3) 2017 – 2020.

During these stages, increasing the level of learning Kazakh is planned as follows: share of adults knowing the state language should reach 20% by 2014, 80% by 2017, and 95% by 2020; number of school graduates knowing the state language on B1 level should amount to 70% in 2017, and 100% in 2020.

The development of teaching the Russian and English languages is planned as follows in this program: the share of citizens knowing Russian should reach 90% of total population by 2020; the share of citizens speaking English should be 20% by 2020.

Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev has said: "We must put all our effort on development of the Kazakh language as a main factor of unity of all Kazakhstani people. Besides, we need to provide every opportunity to different nationalities living in our country to speak, learn and develop their own mother tongues".

The tasks of the state program on the development and use of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 are the following:

- 1) Improvement and standardization of the teaching methodology of the state language;
- 2) Development of infrastructure for teaching the state language;
- 3) Stimulation of the process of learning the state language;
- 4) Strengthening the status of the state language;
- 5) Increasing the demand for the state language;
- 6) Improvement and systematization of lexical resources of the Kazakh language;
- 7) Enhancement of the language culture;
- 8) Functioning of the Russian language in the communicative language space;
- 9) Preservation of the linguistic diversity;
- 10) Learning English and other foreign languages.

The Kazakh scientists' opinions on the trilingual policy can be divided into two parts:

1. Children should learn three languages. But they should study only Kazakh till the age of 13. Then, they can learn other languages.
2. Children learn languages quickly while they are small, so they should be taught three languages from kindergarten.

There are reasons for the existence of these views. The use of Kazakh was damaged by the Soviet language policy. In many families of city dwellers, the Russian language is used solely, or the Kazakh-Russian bilingualism has been established. In order to avoid such practice in the future, the Kazakh intellectuals raise the issue of the role of the Kazakh language in the trilingual state policy.

According to the survey of sociolinguist E.D. Suleimenova conducted in 2006, the proportion of respondents who asserted Kazakh was their primary language was 92.4%; 4% had difficulties to answer; and 1.2% of them were bilingual, they considered both Kazakh and Russian languages as mother tongues [2].

In conclusion, we claim that multilingualism is the need of the globalizing world. We appreciate the trinity of languages as the phenomenon strategically significant for our independent country. To meet the needs of the society, we find important the knowledge of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages. It should also be emphasized that in the language policy, the role of the state language – the Kazakh language – is especially significant.

References

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