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**Sociolinguistic situation of Turkic ethnicities in Kazakhstan**

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**Abstract**

This paper is devoted to Kazakhstani Turkic linguistic landscape, which represents a special interest for linguistic, sociological and linguistic-cultural research. Kazakhstan is a multiethnic country. More than 130 different ethnic groups live on the territory of Kazakhstan. Some of them represent the indigenous population of this area; some came to Kazakhstan as a refugees because of various conflicts, were deported to Kazakhstan during the Stalin era, migrated there in search for work.

Kazakhstan is a unique region, where at the moment there is a process of mutual influence and interpenetration of (possibly partial mixing) of Turkic languages, belonging to different classification groups within the Turkic family (Kipchak, Karluk, Oguz, Sayan-Altai). According to the results of the Kazakh national census of 2009, representatives of 26 Turkic ethnic groups live there. The mentality of ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan, combined with a sound public policy, allowed to form a specific culture of non-conflictual behavior in a heterogeneous society. As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity in independent Kazakhstan has become a factor for no separation and disintegration of society, but on the contrary, promote its enrichment and successful sustainable development.

The data we are using were obtained thanks to a questionnaire we composed for this purpose and presented to representatives of various Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

Key words: Turkic languages, indigenous languages, Turkic ethnic groups.

*1. Introduction.*

Kazakhstan is a unique region of language interaction. In the Soviet period Kazakhstan was called the “laboratory of friendship”. More than 130 different ethnic groups live on the territory of Kazakhstan, whose languages belong to different language families and language groups (Axmetžanova Z.K. 2005); (Altyzbekova O.B. 2006a, b); (Sulejmenova Ė.D., Smagulova Ž.S. 2005); (Sulejmenova Ė.D., N.Ž. Šajmerdenova, Ž.S. Smagulova, D.X. Akanova. 2007); (Report of the independent expert on minority issues. Mission to Kazakhstan. 2009). (Agentstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike 2010).

Some of ethnic groups some came to Kazakhstan as a refugees because of various conflicts or were deported to Kazakhstan during the Stalin era, migrated there in search for work, some groups represent the endangered population of this area.

During the years of independence Kazakhstani model for interethnic and inter-religious tolerance has been successfully formed in the republic. The prestige of the Kazakh language as the state language is increasing in the society. This factor objectively stimulates activation of the interaction between the Kazakh language and other Turkic languages of Kazakhstan. Our research on the project “Interaction of Turkic Languages and Cultures in

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the Post Soviet Kazakhstan” supported by the “Volkswagen Foundation” deals with the sociolinguistic situation of Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

## 2. Turkic ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

The Turkic-speaking community is the largest in Kazakhstan. Representatives from 26 Turkic languages live in Kazakhstan (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). However, until recent time there had been 26 Turkic ethnic groups. Unfortunately, the Tofalar language has disappeared from linguistic map of Kazakhstan (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). That is why, the need for linguistic documentation of Kazakhstani Turkic language world is of great importance. We do not only need data from well-established Turkic languages, but also from less known varieties (Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz, etc.), endangered languages (Shor, . Karaim, Krimčak), languages strongly influenced by Kazakh and Russian contacts ( Karakalpak, Karačai, Balkar, Tatar, etc).

The speakers of Turkic languages and their varieties in Kazakhstan have separated from the main bulk of their speech community mainly had been deported from the Caucasus in 1944. Turkic ethnicities were isolated from their main historical area in 1935-1937 (Azerbaijanis, Kumyks,), in 1944 (Turkish population (Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz Turka), Karaims, Krimčaks, Karačais, Balkars or even more years ago (Tatars, Uzbeks). These Turkic languages and their varieties have kept some archaic features and developed innovative ones. Innovative features have emerged through contacts with other languages of Turkic origin as Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Tatar or languages of non-Turkic origin as Russian. Code shifting has taken place in a very broad scale. The Turkic speakers are very fluent of shifting the elements of the native linguistic code into Kazakh or Russian, they easily change the languages during conversation.

### 2.1. Language situation in Kazakhstan

- It’s important to note, that all the Turkic groups living in Kazakhstan possess their titular territory elsewhere (either as an independent statehood or an autonomous unit within a larger state).
- During the Soviet period the Russian language was the language of cross-cultural communication not only of Slavic group, but also for all the rest.
- The Kazakh language is now recognized as the state language according to the Constitution, the Russian language is the official language and English is coming to be used as the language of international communication (the State Program of Trilingualism, 2007).
- The usage of Kazakh has increased among both Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs.
- While this Kazakh revival is going slowly, there are serious changes in the status of the state language during the past 20 years of independence. Many middle aged and elderly Russians will never learn Kazakh, however young Russians and Turkic speaking people, especially elder generations, are fluent in Kazakh.

### 2.2 Reasons of migration Turkic ethnic groups to Kazakhstan

As far as we can judge now, the main reasons why Turkic speaking people came to Kazakhstan are as follows:

- Living side by side for centuries and mutual migrations (Uzbek, Uyghur and Kirgiz).
- Deportations of Kumyks and Azerbaijanians in 1935-1937 at the collectivization period.
- Deportations of Turkic ethnic groups in 1944 from the Caucasus and the Crimea (Karachay, Balkar, Karaim, Krymčak and Crimean Tatar as well as Turks.
- Industrialization during the Second World War, and the *Virgin Lands* Campaign during the 50s and 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that were connected with work migration of millions of people of various ethnicity.

- Mixed marriages.
- Work migration in the post-Soviet period.

### 2.3 Statistic Data concerning Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan

There are 26 Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan – see Table 1 with data presented by The Statistic Agency of the RK: <http://www.eng.stat.kz>. However, the number of people of this or that ethnicity has changed during the last decades.

Table 1

	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009
Total population in RK	13.026.274	14.709.508	16.222.324	14.981.281	16.009.597
Nationalities:					
1. Kazkhs	4.228.367	5.282.481	6.486.029	8.011.452	<b>10.096.763</b>
2. Azerbaijans	57.607	73.240	88.887	78.325	<b>85.292</b>
3. Altays	575	630	675	462	<b>221</b>
4. Balkars	2.714	2.258	2.926	2.079	<b>1.798</b>
5. Baškirs	21.500	32.577	41.060	23.247	<b>17.263</b>
6. Chakasses	401	475	575	355	<b>223</b>
7. Čuvašes	22.871	22.310	21.717	11.864	<b>7.301</b>
8. Dolgans	17	18	56	25	<b>3</b>
9. Gagauses	772	752	953	678	<b>493</b>
10. Jakuts	175	438	303	115	<b>119</b>
11. Karaims	50	33	33	28	<b>231</b>
12. Karakalpaks	463	620	1.357	1.497	<b>2.828</b>
13. Karačais	2.447	2.082	2.038	1.400	<b>995</b>
14. Kirgizes	9.612	9.352	13.718	10.925	<b>23.274</b>
15. Krimčaks	42	87	61	20	<b>35</b>
16. Kumyks	554	873	1.700	643	<b>481</b>
17. Nogais	155	236	539	350	<b>276</b>
18. Tatars	286.878	314.065	322.338	249.052	<b>204.229</b>
19. Krim-Tatars	2.023	834	3.125	1.007	<b>1.532</b>
20. Šors	215	381	382	212	<b>96</b>
21. Tofalars	6	14	0	29	<b>0</b>
22. Tuwinians	85	182	129	35	<b>37</b>
23. Türks	18.377	25.718	49.219	78.711	<b>97.015</b>
24. Turkmens	3.265	2.241	3.716	1.733	<b>2.234</b>
25. Uzbeks	216.258	262.960	330.417	370.765	<b>456.997</b>
26. Uighurs	120.622	147.676	181.155	210.377	<b>224.713</b>

According to the results of the Kazakh national census of 2009, representatives of 25 Turkic ethnic groups live in modern Kazakhstan.

### 2.4 The most numerous Turkic groups in Kazakhstan

The most numerous among the Turkic groups are the Uzbeks, Uigurs, Tatars, Turks, and Azeri. They mostly live in the south of Kazakhstan in Almaty, Jambyl and South Kazakhstan regions.

2.4.1 Uzbeks, have largely remained in the country. Their communities that have been in Kazakhstan for centuries. The population of Uzbek communities increase since 1991(<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). They are

preserving their culture, traditions and language. They have a native language education system (primary and middle schools), mostly in the Southern regions of the country, theater in Shymkent city, mass media: TV and radio broadcasting.

*2.4.2 Uyghurs*, a Turkic people who have historically inhabited Xinjiang province in present-day China but immigrated to Central Asia over the course of several centuries. The number of Uyghur people in modern Kazakhstan has increased up to 6.8 %. (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). They preserve their culture, traditions and language. Unlike the Uzbeks, the Uyghurs are largely integrated into the intellectual and art elites of Kazakhstan. There are Uyghur language primary and middle schools and the Uyghur Studies Institute within the Academy of Science. The Uyghurs are mostly located in the Almaty region.

*2.4.3 Tatar community* in Kazakhstan has declined. The number of Tatars has decreased by 18.0 % (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). They are the most urbanized among the Turkic groups in Kazakhstan, largely assimilated by either the Kazakhs, or the Russians. The Tatars live in all the big cities. The largest community is settled in Semey, in the eastern part of Kazakhstan. Unlike the Uzbeks and the Uyghurs, the Tatars do not have Tatar language education in Kazakhstan, and they do not claim for it. However, they have Sunday schools and cultural centers in bigger cities.

As for the majority of Kazakhstan's Turkic ethnic groups, their history of settlement is unclear. There are no special studies about how many of the Uzbeks, Kyrgyz and Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, whether they live in the places of their ancestors, and how many came through labor migration, or have not been registered. In particular, the number of Uyghurs living in Kazakhstan was increased because of refugees from China (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>).

## *2.5 Small Turkic Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan*

There are several small Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan as Tuwvans, Shor people, Karaims, Krimčaks, Meskhetin (Ahyska), Laz, Hemshilli Turks.

### *2.5.1 Tuvans in Kazakhstan*

According to Monica Pawlowski's information, which she obtained from Chinese Tuwiners during the field work in China, there are still many of Tuvans who live in Kazakhstan (M.Rind-Pawlowski). Before the Revolution their settlement area stretched along the Lake Balghaş. Since the revolution many Tuwvans have been deported from Kazakhstan and their current location is unknown. The statistics for 2009, according to which their number, which is placed at 37, should be thoroughly checked. According to information from Chinese relatives there are several hundred Tuwvans living in Kazakhstan. It's important to clarify their ethnic identity, language and cultural background (M.Rind-Pawlowski).

### *2.5.2 Meskhetian Turks*

The other ethnic group of research interest is the Meskhetian Turks, who were all deported to Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgiziya). According to statistic data, the number of Turks in Kazakhstan increasing (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). However, during interviewing Turkish population have a strong feeling of self identification, identifying themselves as Ahyska, Hemshilli, Laz Turks. At the same time all the interviewers stressed that they are Turks, but their language is "eski Osman Turk". They used to live in different regions of Georgia. In 1944 November they had been deported to Kazakhstan from Georgia. It is still

not clear scientifically whether the Meskhetians (Ahiska) were originally of Turkic stock or Turkicised Georgians. After their deportation, their new settlement areas were the south regions of Kazakhstan (Shimkent, Jambyl regions). Unlike other deported peoples, the Meskhetians returned in their old homes. Georgia had given their original area of settlement to Armenians. Thus, in 2000, to prevent a civil war between Armenians tens of thousands of Meskhetian were again expelled from Georgia. Today their language and culture is being subjected to the depletion of the speakers themselves because of their high assimilation willingness to protect them from further discrimination, that would threaten extinction (information from field research Taraz, 2014). They have been identified in this survey as Turks. At this point it is worth mentioning that in 1991 in Almaty the "Turkish Center " was founded, which proclaimed Turkey as the protector of the Meskhetian Turkish and Turkish as the "sole standard language" of Meskhetian Turkish speakers. However, there has been no research conducted concerning the peculiarities of the language and actual self-identification, as well as the socio-linguistic situation of the Meskhetians in Kazakhstan. They have Sunday school and cultural centers in bigger cities. International weekly newspaper "AHISKA" is published in Almaty (ahiska60mai.ru).

### 2.5.3. Shor population in Kazakhstan

After World War II there began the era of labor migration to Kazakhstan. Workers for the reclamation of new land and to work in metallurgical factories were recruited from all over the Soviet Union. In this way came to Kazakhstan the Yakuts, Dolgans, and Shors, Chuvashs and their descendants still live here.

According to Ms. Pawlowski research data from her Master's thesis conducted in 2004 in the mountain Shoria, she presented voice recordings of Shors, who have recorded some of their own work experience in Kazakhstan. There are also some of their children recording about their parent's time of living in Kazakhstan. It is worth mentioning at this point that Schor, which is spoken fluently by approximately 700 people. The Shor language is under serious threat. In this context it is of particular interest to examine the language skills of 96 Shors living in Kazakhstan and possibly stimulate action to preserve their language and culture (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>).

### 2.5.4 Krimčaks and Karaims

Of particular research interest is languages of a number of small ethnic groups, which are included in the statistics data. Information of the reasons for their presence in Kazakhstan is lacking, especially with respect to Krimčaks and Karaims. These communities are Jewish by their religion. It's unclear whether they have come under the Stalinist deportations to Kazakhstan or if they fled voluntarily to become migrant workers even before anti-Jewish persecution. The Karim and the Krimčak languages are spoken only by a few hundred speakers and their existence are severely threatened. It would therefore be of particular interest to examine the language skills of the members of these groups and possibly to encourage measures to preserve their language and culture.

## 3 The Role of Turkic Small Ethnic Groups in the Kazakhstan Education System

In modern Kazakhstan as in Soviet times, there is native education only for Uzbeks and Uighurs. There are 60 schools that perform their entire teaching in Uzbek, as well as 15 purely Uighur schools. Other Turkic languages such as Tatar, Turkish can best be learned at voluntary Sunday schools as well as at classes of extracurricular activities.

There are no studies on how many small ethnic groups want mother tongue education for their children. Perhaps only Kazakh or Russian schools are preferred by education-oriented parents, as university education takes place exclusively in Kazakh or Russian, and the passing of a language test is an admission requirement. Also there is no evidence as to how high the knowledge level of the native languages remains. Particularly for the smaller

ethnic groups it is possible that their native language has been replaced partially or completely by a more dominant language.

At the university level, questions regarding the Turkic ethnicities in Kazakhstan are increasingly coming to the fore. It was three years ago at the Gumilev Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana as well as at the Kazakh National Al-Farabi University in Almaty organized Department of Turkic Studies. In the three years since its starting program, the focus of research and teaching has been initially on the Old Turkic and Kazakh. Now, this should also be extended to the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of Turkic languages, Turkic small ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The historical, anthropological and linguistic information, which are determined in the context of the proposed project, should be included in the curriculum of Turkic Studies courses.

### **Conclusion:**

The mentality of ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan, combined with a sound public policy, allowed to form a specific culture of non-conflictual behavior in a heterogeneous society. As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity in independent Kazakhstan has become a factor for no separation and disintegration of society, but on the contrary, promote its enrichment and successful sustainable development

Kazakhstan presents a very interesting area for study Turkic community , who came to this territory by various reasons. It is important to clear up the real sociolinguistic situation in Kazakhstan with respect to Turkic languages present in the country, which includes the following issues:

- social strategies of Turkic ethnic groups in the new conditions of independent Kazakhstani statehood (the opening of previously closed ethnic groups, the choice of the education language for their children, etc);
- assimilation processes vs. retaining the ethnic identities, as well as the main factors influencing these processes;
- ethnic vs. civic in the mass-consciousness of the Turkic ethnic groups in modern Kazakhstan; the role of the state policies and of spontaneously developing tendencies;
- reasons for increase and decrease in numbers of certain Turkic ethnic groups during the independence period (such as the growth of Karaims and decrease in number of Siberian Turks);

The International research project “Interaction of Turkic Languages and Cultures in the Post Soviet Kazakhstan” supported by the “Volkswagen Foundation” deals with the sociolinguistic situation of Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan and documentation of endangered languages. The scholars and students from Berlin Free University (Berlin, Germany) as well as L. Gumilev Eurasian National University (Astana, Kazakhstan) and Taraz State University (Taraz, Kazakhstan) are involved in the project. Students of the National Eurasian University have already started testing it in the framework of their professional practice. We have prepared a questionnaire including questions to the following main issues:

- Self-identification, ethnicity and nationality as noted in the passport,
- Nationality in mixed marriages,
- Family history (history of migrations),
- Language competence and language use in various situations,
- Support of the language by the state (schools, media, etc.),
- Educational status , etc.

The results will be put into a databank, evaluated and made accessible for broader public via the Internet.

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