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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 processes of mutual influence and interpenetration (or, possibly, even of partial mixing) of Turkic languages belonging to different classification groups within the Turkic family (Kipchak, Karluk, Oguz, Sayan-Altai) are under go. 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 well-balanced national politics, allowed to form a specific culture of non-conflicted behavior in this heterogeneous society. As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity in independent Kazakhstan has not become a factor for separation and disintegration of society, but on the contrary, it promotes 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, endangered 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. 2006 a, 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).

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Some of these ethnic groups came to Kazakhstan as refugees because of various conflicts, or were exiled to Kazakhstan during the Stalin era in the course of the so-called deportation, some migrated there in search for work, while some groups represent the endangered population of this area.

During the years of independence Kazakhstani model for interethnic and interreligious tolerance has been successfully established in the republic. The prestige of the Kazakh language as the state language is increasing in the society. This factor objectively stimulates activation of interaction between the Kazakh language and other Turkic languages of Kazakhstan. Our research on the international cooperation 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.

2. Turkic ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.

The Turkic-speaking community is the largest in Kazakhstan. Representatives of 25 Turkic languages live in Kazakhstan (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). However, there had been 26 Turkic ethnic groups until recently. Unfortunately, the Tofalar language has disappeared from the linguistic map of Kazakhstan (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). Therefore 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 Turkic varieties (see such understudied Turkish idioms as Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz, etc.), endangered languages (Shor, Karaim, Krimčak), languages strongly influenced by contacts with Kazakh and Russian (Karakalpak, Karačay, Balkar, Tatar, etc).

Speakers of many Turkic languages and their varieties in Kazakhstan were separated from the main bulk of their speech communities mainly in the course of deportation from the Caucasus in 1944. Some Turkic ethnic groups were isolated from their main historical area already in 1935-1937 during the time of creating collective forms and nationalization of private property of wealthy peasants in the Soviet Union (e.g. Azerbaijanis, Kumyks). Some came to Kazakhstan in 1944, e.g. Turkish ethnic groups (Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz, etc.), Karaims, Krimčaks, Karačays, Balkars; some migrated to Kazakhstan even earlier (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, such as Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Tatar, or languages of non-Turkic origin as Russian. Code shifting is taking place very easily. Turkic speakers are using elements of their native linguistic codes while speaking Kazakh or Russian, they easily change the languages during conversation.

2.1. Language situation in Kazakhstan

- It’s important to note, that practically 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 supposed 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 probably never learn Kazakh, however, young Russians as well as Turkic speaking people, especially their 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 Azeri 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 20th 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	10.096.763
2. Azerbaijans	57.607	73.240	88.887	78.325	85.292
3. Altays	575	630	675	462	221
4. Balkars	2.714	2.258	2.926	2.079	1.798
5. Baškirs	21.500	32.577	41.060	23.247	17.263
6. Chakasses	401	475	575	355	223
7. Čuvašes	22.871	22.310	21.717	11.864	7.301
8. Dolgans	17	18	56	25	3
9. Gagauses	772	752	953	678	493
10. Jakuts	175	438	303	115	119
11. Karaims	50	33	33	28	231
12. Karakalpaks	463	620	1.357	1.497	2.828
13. Karačais	2.447	2.082	2.038	1.400	995
14. Kirgizes	9.612	9.352	13.718	10.925	23.274
15. Krimčaks	42	87	61	20	35
16. Kumyks	554	873	1.700	643	481
17. Nogais	155	236	539	350	276
18. Tatars	286.878	314.065	322.338	249.052	204.229
19. Krim-Tatars	2.023	834	3.125	1.007	1.532
20. Šors	215	381	382	212	96
21. Tofalars	6	14	0	29	0
22. Tuwinians	85	182	129	35	37
23. Türks	18.377	25.718	49.219	78.711	97.015
24. Turkmens	3.265	2.241	3.716	1.733	2.234
25. Uzbeks	216.258	262.960	330.417	370.765	456.997
26. Uighurs	120.622	147.676	181.155	210.377	224.713

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 *The Uzbek* population is stable; the people remain in the country. Their communities have lived in Kazakhstan for centuries. The population of Uzbek communities has 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, a national theater in the city of Shymkent, mass media: TV and radio broadcasting.

2.4.2 *The Uyghurs* are a Turkic people who have historically inhabited the 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 well integrated into the intellectual and art elites of Kazakhstan. There are Uyghur language primary and middle schools and the Uyghur Studies Institute within the Kazakhstani Academy of Science, national theatre. The Uyghurs are mostly located in the Almaty region.

2.4.3 *The 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 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 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 has increased because of refugees from China (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>).

2.5 *Small-numbered Turkic Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan*

There are several small-numbered Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, e.g. Tuvans, Shor people, Karaims, Krimčaks, Meskhetin (Ahyska), Laz, Hemshilli Turks.

2.5.1 *Tuvans in Kazakhstan*

According to Monica Rind-Pawłowski's information, which she obtained from Chinese Tuvans during her field work in China, there are still many of Tuvans who live in Kazakhstan (M. Rind-Pawłowski, personal communication). Before the October Revolution, their settlement area stretched along the Lake Balghaş. After the revolution, many Tuvans left Kazakhstan, and their current location is unknown. According to the statistic data from 2009, their number is 37 persons, however, this should be thoroughly checked. According to information of their relatives in China, there are several hundred Tuvans living in Kazakhstan. It's important to clarify their ethnic identity, language and cultural background.

2.5.2 *Meskhetian Turks*

The other ethnic group of our special research interest is the Meskhetian Turks, who were all deported from Georgia to Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgiziya) in 1944. According to statistic data, the number of

Turks in Kazakhstan is increasing (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). Interviewing the Turkish population, we have got an impression that they have a strong feeling of self identification, identifying themselves as Ahiska, Hemshilli, or Laz Turks. At the same time, all the interviewers have stressed that they are Turks, but their language is “eski Osman Turk”, i.e. Ottoman Turkic. They used to live in different regions of Georgia. In November of 1944, they had been deported to Kazakhstan from Georgia. It is still not clear whether the Meskhetians (Ahiska) were originally of Turkic origin, or they are Turkicised Georgians. After their deportation, their new settlement areas were the south regions of Kazakhstan (the Shimkent and Jambyl regions). Unlike other deported peoples, the Meskhetians could not return to their old homes. Georgia had given their original area of settlement to Armenians. Thus, in 2000, in order to prevent a civil war with Armenians, tens of thousands of Meskhetian Turks were again expelled from Georgia. Today, their language and culture are being subjected to the depletion of the speakers themselves because of their high assimilation willingness in order to protect themselves from further discrimination, or, even, extinction (field research in Taraz, March of 2014). They have identified themselves as Turks in interviews taken in the framework of this survey. At this point it is worth mentioning that in 1991 in Almaty a "Turkish Center" was founded, which proclaimed Turkey as the protector of the Meskhetian Turkish groups, and Turkish as the "sole standard language" of Meskhetian Turkish speakers. They have Sunday school and cultural centers in bigger cities. International weekly newspaper “AHISKA” is published in Almaty (ahiska60mai.ru). However, there has been neither research on the peculiarities of their language, their self-identification, nor on the socio-linguistic situation of the Meskhetians in Kazakhstan before our project.

2.5.3. Shor population in Kazakhstan

After World War II, there began the era of labor migration to Kazakhstan. People were recruited from all over the Soviet Union to work for the reclamation of new land and in metallurgical factories. In this way, some Yakut, Dolgan, Shor, Chuvash people came to Kazakhstan, and their descendants still live there.

Rind-Pawlowski's research data from her Master's thesis conducted in 2004 in the Mountainous Shoria present voice recordings of Shors, who have told her some of their own work experience in Kazakhstan. There are also some of their children's recordings about their parents' time in Kazakhstan. It is worth mentioning at this point that the Shor language is spoken fluently by approximately only 700 people. The Shor language is under serious threat. It is of particular interest to examine the language skills of 96 Shors living in Kazakhstan and possibly stimulate their activities aimed at preservation of their language and culture (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>).

2.5.4 Krimčaks and Karaims

Languages of these small-numbered ethnic groups, mentioned in the statistics data, are of particular research interest. Information on the reasons for their presence in Kazakhstan is lacking, especially with respect to the Krimčaks and the Karaims. These communities are Jewish by their religion. It's unclear whether they have come in the course of the Stalinist deportations to Kazakhstan, or if they fled voluntarily to become migrant workers even before anti-Jewish persecution. The Karaim and the Krimčak languages are spoken only by a few hundred speakers and their existence is severely threatened. It would 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-Numbered Ethnic Groups in the Kazakhstan Education System

In modern Kazakhstan, similar to the 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. There is no evidence on how high the level of knowledge of their native languages is. 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. Three years ago, Departments of Turkic Studies were organized both at the Gumilev Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana and at the Kazakh National Al-Farabi University in Almaty. During the first three years after the start of their programs, the focus of research and teaching has been almost exclusively on Old Turkic and Kazakh studies. Now, it should also be extended to the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of all Turkic languages, with a special attention to Turkic small-numbered ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The historical, anthropological and linguistic information, which is to be obtained in the course of the cooperative German-Kazakh project, can be included in the curriculum of Turkic Studies courses.

4. Conclusion

The mentality of ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan combined with well-balanced national politics, allowed to form a specific culture of non-conflicted behavior in this heterogeneous society. As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity in independent Kazakhstan has not become a factor for separation and disintegration of society, but on the contrary, it promotes its enrichment and successful sustainable development.

Kazakhstan presents a very interesting area for studying Turkic communities, 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 the 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 working on this project 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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