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Language Policy in Kazakhstan in the Context of World Practice

Galina Yedgina[1]*, Dzhambul Dzhumabekov[2], Lyudmila Zuyeva[1], Bibigu Dosova[3], Valeriya Kozina[2]

[1]*Department of Archaeology, Ethnology and National History, Karaganda Buketov University, Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan*

[2]*Department of History of Kazakhstan and Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, Karaganda Buketov University, Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan*

[3]*Department of World History and International Relations, Karaganda Buketov University, Karaganda, Republic of Kazakhstan*

Abstract

The problem of language policy formation arises from combined efforts to achieve the long- term goals of civil peace and avoid ethnic conflicts. Globalization poses a range of challenges to society, such as migration and multiculturalism. However, the language situation in postcolonial developing countries is more complex than in developed ones. This paper analyzes the history of language policy in Kazakhstan by comparing the experiences of other post-Soviet countries and developed countries in Europe and North America. The study relies on comparative historical and conceptual analysis of language policies and population censuses. The paper also explores different approaches to language policy formation from influential researchers to highlight the most significant factors behind a successful language policy. The primary goal of language policy in Kazakhstan is to overcome the dominance of the Russian language without violating the rights and freedoms of ethnic groups. The country's strategy involves promoting bilingualism to introduce the Kazakh language into all spheres of public life step by step. The results of the study may help other developing countries to shape their national language policies. They may also find applications in political science, futurology, and political forecasting.

Keywords

Ethnic policy; language policy; postcolonial countries; Kazakhstan; linguistic minorities

* Galina Yedgina, Department of Archaeology, Ethnology and National History, Karaganda Buketov University, 28 Universitetskaya Street, Karaganda, 100028, Republic of Kazakhstan; galina_yedgina@rambler.ru

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Introduction

Academics began to seriously study the challenges of language policy in multiethnic societies after the collapse of European colonial empires when independent new states emerged. This disintegration resulted in a situation where at least two languages had to co-exist side by side within a single community: the local language that appeared dominant and the imperial language generally accepted in public administration, education, and media (Johnson and Stephens 2018; Ricento 2018; Mirvahedi 2021). In addition, there are ethnic languages that may not receive official status but are spoken by a substantial number of people. The status of such languages and their support have become a public policy issue in most developing and many developed countries in Europe (Phillipson 2017).

The collapse of the Soviet Union, among other events, intensified the political activity of indigenous peoples and former national minorities engaged in a struggle for higher socio- political status. The study of language policy is now impossible without turning to ethnopolitics and considering theories of nationalism in the context of political mobilization (Dave 2018).

So far, international institutions gravitate toward maintaining and developing all languages available in society (De Witte 1989). Yet, this strategy comes with a range of practical issues.

In particular, De Witte (1989) points out that a single person does not have the right to demand the recognition of their native language, but about half of the country's population does have such a right. The language recognition process raises a number of challenges and barriers; in particular, a multinational state cannot afford to officially support more than three languages (Kloss 1967). With a multitude of officially recognized languages used in the state governance practice, the authorities will not be able to operate at their peak efficiency (Kloss 1967). According to several researchers, such a policy practice in the field of languages receives implicit support to this day and remains relevant in most European countries where numerous multilingual ethnic groups reside, such as Spain, Ireland, Romania, and more (Spolsky 2018). Van Dyke (1976) emphasizes that the government often has no other choice but to grant different languages different statuses and thus meet at least some proportion of the claims that particular ethnic groups have. In his opinion, which many researchers support, the claim of a particular ethnic group for official language status should be weighed against the costs and gains of securing this status (Van Dyke 1976). There is another traditional view on ethno-linguistic policy in the work published by Green (1987), who believed that the languages of the most powerful ethnic groups should receive

official language status. The downside of this approach is that it prioritizes the interests of the dominant or more influential ethnic groups and thus lays the groundwork for future ethnic conflicts. These conflicts arise as a result of economic and legal inequalities but usually use slogans related to language rights (Rahman and Pandian 2018; Ricento 2018).

One way to provide polyethnic language regulation at the international level is to rely on a limited number of international languages. For example, the official languages of the United Nations are limited to English, French, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and Russian. These languages meet the needs of many governments and thus enable compromise (Thiong'o 2018). As a rule, this has been the compromise solution in postcolonial nation-states, because it allows them to preserve the existing means of communication in their multilingual communities while at the same time simplifying international contacts and facilitating the country's involvement in the international labor market. This suggestion meets strong resistance because it basically means legitimizing the dominant status of "colonial" languages, which were imposed by colonizers and thus, over many years, acquired international status (Mazrui 1976).

Social–political conflicts are often accompanied by linguistic confrontations, in which language becomes a marker of belonging to a particular social group (Horowitz 2000; Albury 2019 De Costa et al. 2020). Hence, it becomes vital to adopt an adequate ethno-linguistic policy in multiethnic countries. Respect for the linguistic rights of citizens is critical in today's multiethnic world, where issues of identity and belonging have become of pivotal importance (Fitzsimmons-Doolan 2018; Johnson and Stephens 2018).

Literature Overview

An example of a fairly successful approach to language policy can be seen in the case of France and New Zealand as the countries integrate new migrants into their language environment. Their approach involves special facilities and training of schoolteachers to guarantee the recognition of the identities of new students and continuous study and dissemination of the best integration practices. This sort of policy of linguistic inclusion, without suppressing or displacing the migrant's language, clearly contributes to reducing conflict (Smythe 2022). An opposite example would be the study of the language and school learning landscapes in situations where communities with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds live side by side. In Romania, different language ideologies and language policies are demonstrated toward migrant

communities, which researchers have found to be an unsuccessful policy (Biró 2019).

Researchers present the case of India as one of the least successful approaches to language policy and highlight the disregard and suppression of numerous tribal minority languages in educational and administrative practices (Mohanty 2022). Such an experience is far removed from Kazakhstan, which has bilingual dominance and does not share India's problem of having multiple tribal languages. However, the discourse of suppression and domination in India's case can serve as a negative example of a policy that should be avoided. Several new multilingual education (MLE) programs in India demonstrate that the number of languages and the social differences in their use are not an insurmountable difficulty; the main problem is the unjustified priority of English and the poor implementation of language policy (Mohanty 2022).

Some researchers point out that family linguistic policy is becoming the main practical approach to language policy. The process of integrating various ethnic groups among themselves leads to the creation of multilingual families, and migration puts entire families in the position of being new speakers in a new environment. Therefore, researchers, based on the experience of decades of integration of refugees and migrants in developed countries, insist on a more holistic and family-based approach to language policy (Smith-Christmas, Bergroth, and Bezcioğlu-Göktolga 2019; De Costa et al. 2019).

In post-Soviet countries, the dominant trend in the national language policy has been proclaiming the language of the titular nation the only state language, with the obligatory preservation of the study of Russian at school and developed academic centers for the study of Russian language and literature (Zamyatin 2020). At the same time, at the legislative level, all these countries proclaim and support all languages of national minorities and communities and offer them rights and opportunities for local development and preservation (Zamyatin 2020; Fierman 2021). The Baltic countries (Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia), in which the population structure threatened the preservation of the national state, actively limited the spread and use of Russian and adopted strict language laws supporting the dominance of the Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian in administration, education, science, and other areas (Dabašinskienė 2022). The countries in Central Asia and Transcaucasia demonstrate the dominance of Russian not through official channels, but as the result of the great differences between local languages and Russian. However, the Russian language continues to be studied and cultivated as a means of maintaining close economic ties with Russia. This

difference allowed two generations of citizens to practically forget the Russian language after independence (Fierman 2021).

Soviet ethno-sociologists and political scientists considered language itself a central defining component of ethnicity. According to Arutyunyan, Drobizheva, and Susokolov (1999), ethno-sociological research on identity and culture conducted in the republics of the Soviet Union and later in the Russian Federation emphasized that language is one of the most crucial ethnic identifiers. In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, more than 70% of Estonians, Georgians, Uzbeks, and Moldovans identified themselves by the language they spoke (Arutyunyan, Drobizheva, and Susokolov 1999). According to other researchers, the role national language played in the ethnic identification of bilingual peoples who lived within Soviet Russia was less significant than in other republics of the Soviet Union (Solntsev and Mikhalchenko 1994). At the same time, language is deemed to be as important as other ethnic identifiers like mentality, territory, traditions, and behavioral patterns (Voevoda et al. 2017). Fundamental research in this field is attributed to Guboglo (1993), who examined works of fiction published in Druzhba Narodov (Friendship of Peoples), one of the most famous Soviet journals that existed between 1955 and 1970. He discovered that the number of references to "native language" as an ethnic identifier increased six times within the 1965–1966 period and nine times between 1969 and 1970. Other ethnic identifiers were much less common at the time (Guboglo 1993).

Relying on past academic experience and other sources of information, such as census records, modern Russian researchers reject the traditional way of identifying language and ethnic communities (Tishkov 2019). They indicate that the very concept of "native language" is undergoing significant transformation, becoming a thing of the past under the pressure of evidence and field research. About two-thirds of the world population is bilingual or multilingual from birth (Vakhtin 2018); in this regard, monolingualism appears to be a deviation from the norm. Most bilingual speakers live in bilingual communities where they use two or more languages daily (Vakhtin 2018).

Census records provide evidence that people treat language as a contributory factor in the consolidation of ethnic identity. Population censuses conducted in Soviet Russia, for example, used the term "native language." According to academicians, it reflected not the actual linguistic behavior of a person, but the idea of proper linguistic behavior within the ethnic group to which this person belongs. In other words, the language acted as an element of ethnic self-awareness (Tishkov 2019). During Soviet times, census records provided

relatively stable statistics on native languages. Being fluent in a language of an ethnic group people identify themselves with and acting by its rules is seen as a manifestation of loyalty. The same rings true for other languages: a nation can express its positive or negative attitude toward another nation by respecting or disrespecting its language (Arutyunyan, Drobizheva, and Susokolov 1999; Tishkov 2019).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethno-linguistic communities of the former republics were met with many challenges associated with the subsequent social transformation process and democratic reforms. Nevertheless, it is still possible for them to return to the traditional methods of social organization. This possibility leaves an imprint on the linguistic situation in these countries. Language issues continue to be a substantial part of political discourse and political propaganda in most of the former Soviet republics (Albury 2019 De Costa et al. 2021). The processes often have serious implications for international security (Fitzsimmons-Doolan 2018).

Adequate research on the driving mechanisms and factors behind an effective language policy in independent countries requires an overview of the best sociolinguistic experience. This study aims to analyze the results of the language policy pursued in the multiethnic Republic of Kazakhstan and determine its prospects in the international context. The novelty of this study lies in reviewing a broad range of administrative and political practices from the past and the present and comparing the experience of Kazakhstan and other developed and developing countries that have similar language policy issues.

Methods

The study uses the comparative historical method and analyzes statistical data drawn from different countries. The hermeneutic and historical assessment of language policy involves comparing different concepts and the results of their application.

Research Design

The study examines historical processes that led to the formation of independent post-Soviet countries and the general language policy pursued by the Russian Empire and inherited by the colonial Soviet Union. In doing so, the study considers the language policies of the post- Soviet countries (Kazakhstan included) with regard to the divergent conditions in which their national languages and linguistic groups exist.

The next step involves comparing the primary strategic approaches, which determine both the language policy of individual post-Soviet countries and their shared features and problems, which are also reflected in Kazakhstan's language policy. To this end, the study examines the language policy principles and approaches applied in Europe and North America, both officially and unofficially.

The present study also relies on approaches to solving linguistic issues that were formulated by famous linguists and sociologists. The main language policy directions and strategies are compared. The comparisons involve contrasting Kazakhstan, the colonial Soviet Union, and modern Russia. The paper also considers other solutions for language policy management widely utilized in the world.

Research Limitations

This study addresses the experience of some post-Soviet countries, the language policy of which had unique features or discrepancies of political, social, and other types. Some post- Soviet countries were not considered. The study may not cover every factor influencing the consequences of language policy. In addition, it discusses the most general concepts that tend to determine a country's strategy for language policy and does not consider individual factors.

Results

The ethnic and linguistic policies aim to achieve a relatively homogeneous society by using a range of diverse methods, from genocide (physical destruction) to violent assimilation and de-ethnicization. Some researchers believe that almost all states, to one degree or another, adhered to ethnicity-related policies at different stages of development (Horowitz 2000). One instrument of these policies is the incitement of interethnic enmity; minorities found themselves under economic pressure, and the use of their languages in public was banned (Voevoda et al. 2017; Tishkov 2019).

Issues related to interethnic relations and language remain acute in almost all post-Soviet countries and intertwine with the problems of regional development. Soviet language policy was generally in line with the colonial language policy and had both positive and negative long-term effects on the situation (Voevoda et al. 2017; Spolsky 2018). This policy enabled almost full literacy of the population; Soviet power contributed to the establishment, research, and first standardization of many ethnic languages, primarily the unwritten ones (Zhumanova et al. 2016). A vivid example is the modern Uzbek language, which developed as a union of several different dialects

selected by the Soviet political force. Those dialects were later considered part of a single Uzbek language. A different choice of geographically distributed dialects would give a completely different result. In other words, the "Uzbek language" could be divided into several completely independent languages (Aripova 2020). A similar process occurred with the Kazakh and Karakalpak languages, which have few differences and could be successfully combined into a single language during the Soviet era. Considering that political criteria were detrimental to the delimitation of languages in the language policy of the Soviet Union, the difference between the two languages is political, not linguistic (Tishkov 2019). During the Soviet era, a tremendous amount of work was done to delineate and standardize those languages that were considered separate (Voevoda et al. 2017; Shaibakova 2019; Tishkov 2019).

Many Soviet Union languages received considerable attention until a massive Russification campaign was initiated in the mid-1930s. The campaign sought to displace local languages in all spheres of the country's activity (i.e., administration, education, official communication, courts, etc.) and forced the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet of most unwritten or newly written languages, such as Kazakh in particular (Fierman 2005). "Slogans of the language policy remained the same, but the actual state of affairs has changed since the mid-1930s," writes Zhumashev (2002, 112). The Cyrillic translation of the scripts signaled this change.

The new language policy was finalized in the Decree of the Central Committee of the All- Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) on the Obligatory Study of Russian Language in Schools in the National Republics and Provinces on March 13, 1938 (Zhumashev 2002, 112). The Russian language dominated in higher and primary education. In Kazakhstan, Russian gradually became the language of everyday communication, especially in cities. The Soviet government viewed the spread of the Russian language as one of its most important tasks. In 1989, about 90% of the Kazakh population wrote and read exclusively in Russian, and only 30% of the population could use the Kazakh language, which received an official status (Sartori and Shabley 2019).

Language policies differ among post-Soviet countries as a result of the divergence of their developmental paths after independence. In the Baltic countries, the titular nations' populations are relatively small, whereas their official languages are used in all spheres of public life. The same is true or partly true for Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, where the people of the titular nations speak old written languages and use either national (Georgia and Armenia) or the Latin alphabet (Azerbaijan). In these countries, the role of the national literary language as a uniting factor has a long history and appears

in many historical sources. Even in the Soviet era, people in those countries had the right to receive education in the national language. In the republics of Central Asia, many ethnic groups (e.g., Kazakhs) lack an older written language. This problem exists in the context of complex ethnic dynamics. Even with a relatively small percentage of the Russian-speaking population that does not belong to Central Asian ethnic groups, Russian remained the dominant language after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Aksholakova and Ismailova 2013). It continues to be the language of the cultural, social, and political elites, as well as of administration and business. In the meantime, the percentage of the population of Kazakhstan (Kazakhs) is growing at the expense of Slavic and other ethnic groups (Figure 1).

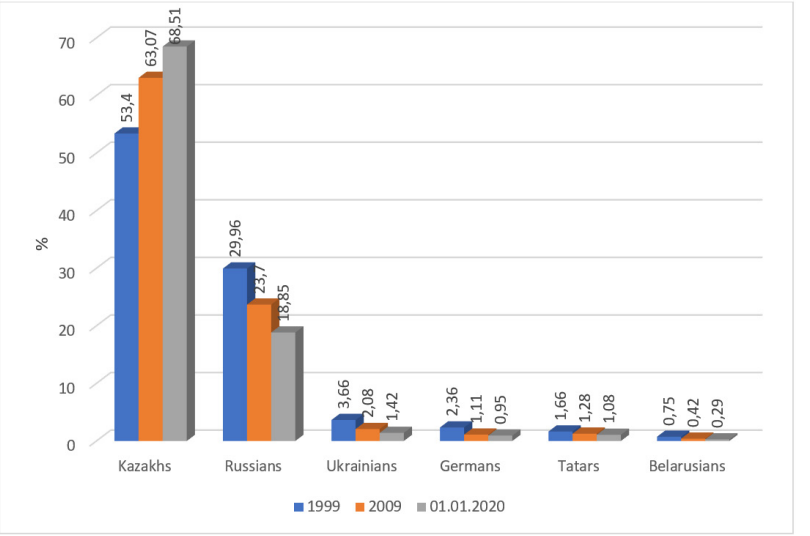


Figure 1. The ethnic composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan according to 1999, 2009, and 2020 population censuses (Smailova 2010).

Modern Kazakhstan is *de facto* bilingual, as are most of the postcolonial countries (Rahman and Pandian 2018; Spolsky 2018; Han, De Costa, and Cui 2019; Nguyen and Hamid 2021). International practice suggests many different forms of bilingualism. Canada, for example, protects languages according to the principle of individual linguistic rights, also known as the personality principle (Guo and Wong 2015). Switzerland, on the other hand, relies on the principle of language territoriality (Vizi 2016). Belgium adheres to this principle as well; however, the country also has monolingual regions where special provisions were adopted to protect the local language. The provisions have been in place since 1971 (Swenden 2002; Veny and

Warnez 2016). Spain grants both individual regions and nationalities the right of autonomy according to the Constitution of 1978, although the official language is Castilian. The government of Spain also recognizes other Spanish dialects while demanding that every citizen learn Castilian, whereas regional languages may have official regional statuses (Canga 2016). The countries listed above differ in ethnic composition, but their liberal-democratic system is flexible enough to solve ethno-cultural conflicts without destroying the integrity of the state.

Unfortunately, Kazakhstan does not share the experience of the countries mentioned above, not to mention that multiculturalism in its most general form does not fit with the country's official ideology. Kazakhstan's motto – One country. One destiny – suggests that citizens of the Republic share common interests and territory and that their ethnicities fade into the background. The country's model of ethnic and language policy thus remains imprecise (Aksholakova and Ismailova 2013; Dave 2018). Researchers hold that Kazakhstan has a substantial number of traits inherited from the Soviet Union that can be attributed to the consequences of the Soviet colonial policy (Zhumashev 2002). The country's linguistic, religious, and ethnic demographics did not form naturally; in fact, they formed under imperial policy. The Russian empress Catherine the Great, for example, has made substantial contributions to the adoption of Islam in Kazakhstan (Sartori and Shabley 2019). She also promoted the first mass publication of the Koran in 1787. By the second half of the 19th century, the Russian Empire established its territory, and imperial policy began to shift toward forced Russification and Christianization (Voevoda et al. 2017). The Soviet government has followed this path. Changes began with the Decree on the Obligatory Study of Russian Language in Schools in the National Republics and Provinces (adopted on March 13, 1938) and Cyrillic translation in 1940 (Phillipson 2017; Rahman and Pandian 2018; Tishkov 2019; Nguyen and Hamid 2021). Subsequently, the Soviet government started a massive propaganda campaign to strengthen the spread and dominance of the Russian language. There were commemorative events dedicated to the 100th anniversary of A.S. Pushkin and other Russian writers. More than 200 universities were opened to produce Russian language and literature teachers.

The situation with other post-Soviet countries was different. For instance, the role of the Belarusian language weakened. According to the 2019 population census from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, only 31.7% of the country's population used the national language for everyday communication. At the same time, 54.1% of the population considered

Belarusian as their native language and 42.3% identified their native language as Russian. Only 28.5% of the population considered themselves Belarusians, however, and reported communicating in their native language daily. Census records also display a decreasing trend for people identifying themselves as Belarusians, from 41.3% in 1999 to 26.1% in 2009 (National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus n.d.). Today, Belarusians carried on the wave of self-identification that the Color Revolutions provoked, and increasingly show interest in the Belarusian language.

In Ukraine, Russian is widely used in everyday life. It is dominant in some regions, but the official language is Ukrainian. It is compulsory in schools, government institutions, courts, media, and so forth. Ukrainian is the only state language; during the 2001 census, 29.6% of Ukrainians considered Russian as their native language. Among them, 14.8% were ethnic Ukrainians (All-Ukrainian Population Census 2001, n.d.). Russian remains the language of everyday communication for the majority of Ukrainians, 61 to 82% according to various estimates (Goodman and Karabassova 2018).

Moldova is also illustrative of the Soviet language policy. The country's current government acknowledges that Moldovans use the Romanian language. Soviet linguists were consistent in their efforts to prove the existence of and standardize the Moldavian language. In this case, the language became known as the result of a purely political decision. Currently, linguists question the existence of a distinct Moldavian language (Rotaru 2020). Moldova returned to the Latin alphabet, which is also used in Romania; Transnistria, however, continues to use the Cyrillic alphabet.

The modern language policy of independent Kazakhstan started to take shape after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The transformation began with the adoption of the Law on Languages in 1989, which had the character of a political manifesto of independence and saw the light earlier than the Declaration of State Sovereignty. The country's leaders strove to preserve civil peace and avoid ethnic conflicts that were common across Central Asia and the Caucasus at the time. From the very beginning of his presidency, Nursultan Nazarbayev ensured the official status of the Kazakh language while maintaining ethnic equality. He consistently proclaimed a national non-exclusiveness policy and respect for the rights of all citizens (Mazhitayeva et al. 2016; Mkrtchyan 2017). In 1995, a unique institution in the field of national policy appeared: the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. In 2008, it received constitutional status. The Assembly aimed at solving the national language issues and protecting the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country (Aksholakova and Ismailova 2013; Madina et al. 2017).

The modern language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan had three stages of development. The first stage involved developing the ideological and legislative framework to support the language policy. It encompasses but is not limited to, the Laws of Kazakhstan as of July 11, 1997, and the Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan (with amendments and additions as of January 18, 2021). These legislative acts proclaim an equal opportunity to use national languages for self-organization purposes and civil initiatives and the right to use ethnic languages in schools and local administration.

The second stage involved defining and selecting tools to implement the language policy, creating administrative controls and mechanisms to support national languages, and establishing an infrastructure and financial grounds for language policy. In this stage, the government adopted a National Plan of Action for 2011–2013 aimed at implementing the State Program for the Functioning and Development of Languages until 2020.

During the third stage, the government established public institutions to execute the language policy and maintain compliance. These institutions are part of the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the National Agency for Press and Mass Media, the State Onomastic Commission, and so forth. (Zhumanova et al. 2016).

So far, Russian (75%) is the dominant language used in Kazakhstan for communication purposes, followed by Kazakh (20%). Other languages are spoken natively by less than 5% of the population (Zhangazy 2011; Dotton 2016). Between 2006 and 2011, there were several pilot programs related to multilingual education, the use of languages in administration, and in other situations. The results they provided were later used to draw up the state language policy. Schools elected to test the pilot education programs to ensure that they provided better assimilation of the target languages and the knowledge delivered in these languages. The programs thus provided people speaking Kazakh and other local languages with greater access to higher education. Teachers reported an improvement in the quality of communication between students and better general tolerance. Many schools enrolled in the pilot programs become resource centers for other schools that have joined the multilingual education campaign. Between 2008 and 2015, the number of students taking multilingual courses doubled, whereas the number of students entering universities increased by 30%. The average score for the national exam increased from 59.8 to 105.8 points (the highest possible score is 125). Students also scored higher on national language exams; the Kazakh language test scores increased from 16.4 to 23.3 points, and the Russian language test scores increased from 12.6 to 21.6 points. The same

trend was observed for nonlinguistic subjects: the average test scores for the national math and history exams rose from 7.3 and 13 points to 20 and 21.6 points, respectively. According to an intra-school estimate, the multilingual education program enhanced the quality of education in the country by 60% (Kopzhassarova et al. 2015; Stoyanova 2016).

The OSCE representative in Kazakhstan, Athanasia Stoyanova, reports that the majority of parents (64.7%) and students in years 1–4 (85%) and 5–6 (58%) would like to have different subjects taught in different languages. Parents and teachers support the early study of a second language because, as they say, it facilitates the mastery of the subsequent languages, provides more learning opportunities, and makes it easier for children to learn the official language if it is not their native language (Stoyanova 2016; Olcott 2015).

Based on the census data, more than 9.982 million Kazakhs consider the Kazakh language their native tongue. More than 1.8 million representatives of other ethnic groups speak the Kazakh language to varying degrees. The literary Kazakh language took shape in approximately the second half of the 19th century, due to educators' efforts, and relied primarily on the Arabic script. In 1929, most non-Slavic peoples in the Soviet Union shifted to the Latin alphabet, and in 1940, the Kazakh language transitioned to the Cyrillic script. The driving force of this transition was the ongoing policy of the Soviet Union aimed at universalizing the Russian language and unifying the alphabet and educational processes in the country (Zhumanova et al. 2016). Modern Kazakhstan plans to return to the Latin alphabet, by 2025 (Dotton 2016). This decision sparked a broad public discussion about the expediency of this step. Referring to the successful experience of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, the supporters of Latinization argue that it will facilitate foreign language education and make the Kazakh language easier for foreigners to learn. The downside is that Latinization can lead to psychological problems associated with the fear of losing the Soviet spiritual heritage and being unable to communicate with representatives of other ethnic groups in other countries. In addition, the transition to another alphabet comes with financial consequences (Dotton 2016; Dave 2018).

In Kazakhstan, Russian has both the official status and the status of the language of interethnic communication, which brings it closer to that of colonial languages in predominantly Francophone, Anglophone, and Hispanic communities in Africa and America (Thiong'o 2018; Reagan 2019; Shaibakova 2019). On the one hand, most Kazakhs speak Russian under the influence of the Soviet education system, not because of their personal choice or family tradition. The same happened in all colonial countries where the

dominant language is the language spoken in the metropole (Zhumanova et al. 2016; Voevoda et al. 2017; Tishkov 2019). On the other hand, a substantial portion of the country's population consists of representatives from ethnic groups who consider Russian their native language and use it as an ethnic marker of belonging (Mazhitayeva et al. 2016). Therefore, many social groups can perceive the transition to the Latin alphabet as an infringement of the rights of the Russian language.

The distant goal of the language policy in Kazakhstan thus is to make Kazakh the language of interethnic communication (Olcott 2015; Zhumanova et al. 2016). This is a slow process requiring the training of highly qualified teachers to enable education in the Kazakh language. Today, Kazakhstan seeks to achieve a bilingual population, not just promote the spread of the Kazakh language. The latter requires expanding its scope of application and developing the terminology. Once this goal is achieved, the Russian and Kazakh languages will have equal power, and the population will no longer fear that their language rights are violated. Nor they will fear losing cultural heritage and contact with relatives and friends in other post-Soviet countries (Kulzhanova 2012; Kopzhassarova et al. 2015). Another important goal of the language policy is to promote the desire to learn the Kazakh language in traditionally Russian-speaking regions: Northern, Eastern, and Central Kazakhstan (Dave 2007).

Many researchers have emphasized the central role of a family in language determination and sustainability (Fierman 2005). The reason why the Kazakh language did not immediately replace the Russian language after the adoption of the Law on the Language in 1989 is that Russian had become the language of everyday communication for Kazakh families (Mkrtchyan 2017; Higgins 2018; Mirvahedi 2021). One can expect a complete transition to the local language in the Baltic countries, the Caucasus, and Ukraine, but it is impossible to achieve this transition in Central Asia, where national languages have never been used for business management purposes (Mazhitayeva et al. 2016; Madina et al. 2017).

Discussion

The Kazakh approach to the state language policy is cautious and incomplete. It focuses on maintaining civil peace, rather than achieving abstract historical justice or ethnic domination. In this context, the Kazakh motto "One Country. One Destiny" should be seen as an accentuation of the dominance of the official discourse of a political nation that unites various ethnic groups that traditionally live in the same territory and have common interests. The

second part of the motto "One Destiny" emphasizes the historical, territorial, and cultural community, as well as the common interests of various ethnic groups and linguistic groups living in the country (Kopzhassarova et al., 2015; Mazhitayeva et al., 2016). The struggle against the dominance of the Russian language is due to the fact that it is the language of the former external imperial influence and control, while the Kazakh language represents the nation of Kazakhstan, which emphatically does not seek to dominate or suppress the rights of minorities (Voevoda et al., 2017; Mkrtchyan 2017).

Many researchers consider a similar approach to solving the problem of national language development in postcolonial countries (Fitzsimmons-Doolan 2018; Bamgboṣe 2019; De Costa et al. 2021). They often emphasize that shaping the language policy step by step without mapping out the ideologically determined goals in advance can help multiethnic societies solve their complex language issues.

Most developing countries, especially those with complex postcolonial experiences and a history of internal ethnic conflicts, face the need to shape their language policies based on a changing ethnic and political landscape. They also are under the constant pressure of external political and economic factors (Vizi 2016; Canga 2016; Phillipson 2017). Challenges, such as migration, the multiethnicity of megacities, and the international influence of English as the dominant language of science, education, and business, push countries to raise the attractiveness of their state languages (Spolsky 2018; Thiong'o 2018; Nguyen and Hamid 2021). Kazakhstan's stepwise strategy for promoting bilingualism in a postcolonial environment is a vivid example of how this can be done successfully.

The complexity of the linguistic process in developing countries is closely related to the dominance of colonial languages. Even though the equality of languages is recognized and promoted at the political level, the dominance of English is still evident in those postcolonial countries where it was used as the paramount metropolitan language. The same problem exists in the post-Soviet space where the dominant language was Russian (Phillipson 2017; Bamgboṣe 2019). Reducing the influence of the dominant language is a slow process. Some researchers argue that some countries are striving to support their own state languages in regions within the zone of their economic, political, and cultural influence. For instance, Russia and China can exert pressure on the language policy in Kazakhstan as its closest partners and dominant sources of soft power (Goodman and Karabassova 2018; Han, De Costa, and Cui 2019; Reagan 2019; De Costa et al. 2020).

Conclusion

Many countries with a colonial past have problems in the area of language policy because of their colonial past. Other reasons problems may arise intense ethnic conflicts and pressure from the international cooperation process. In a globalized reality, all countries of the world have to deal with a range of ethnic, religious, and cultural challenges. The newly independent, postcolonial countries, however, encounter more severe challenges. The Republic of Kazakhstan is one of them. This paper examines the historical process of language policy development in Kazakhstan by making comparisons with the colonial language policies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The paper also explored the experience of other developed and developing countries in Europe, North America, and the post-Soviet space. The study sought to identify the determinants of successful language policy on which many developing countries can rely. According to the present findings, the language policy of Kazakhstan aims at gradually making Kazakh the dominant language in all spheres of public life by promoting bilingualism while preserving all the rights and freedoms of all ethnic groups. The policy aims to eliminate the dominance of the former artificially dominant language of Russian imperial reach and Soviet colonization and to develop a new pluralistic language policy.

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The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this article.

Availability of data and material

Data will be available on request.

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