

NAREK MKRTCHYAN

## NEW LANGUAGE POLICY OF KAZAKHSTAN: A PROJECT OF KAZAKHIZATION?

### Abstract

The article aims to analyze the role and influence of the language policy of independent Kazakhstan on identity construction processes of the Kazakhs. A language as a marker of ethnic identity emphasizes the boundaries of the particular ethnic entity. In the wake of post-Soviet nation-building, Nazarbayev's administration faced with challenges regarding the use of native language in various spheres. This paper also develops the claim that the marginalization of Kazakh's language and ethnic identity is the result of different historical processes carried out by Tsarist and Soviet authorities. The paper also tries to examine the language policy of independent Kazakhstan as a counter-hegemonic struggle aiming at overcome the negativity derived directly from Russian colonial administrations. The publicization of Kazakh language and transformation of the educational system tend to provide a wide range of opportunities to establish the hegemony of Kazakh identity or in other words to make *Kazakhs first among equals*.

**Keyword:** *Kazakh language, colonization, hegemony, kazakhization, nation-building.*

### Introduction

After the declaration of independence, the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan pledged to revive the native language. The Nazarbayev administration initiated multidimensional policies in an attempt to develop and publicize Kazakh language within informal and formal institutions. The political system of sovereign Kazakhstan has worked hard to initiate various cultural and social policies to create a national identity for the titular group. Also, given the fact that Kazakhstan has historically been multicultural and multiethnic country, in which the Russian language played a dominant role, the promotion of Kazakh language has become a strategically important factor. Kazakhstan's language policy is the reflection of its domestic ethnic policies. In support of the idea of the construction of unified and harmonious Kazakhstani society, a considerable emphasis placed

on the promotion of other ethnic groups' languages, especially on Russian.

To understand contemporary identity and language problems in Kazakhstan the article will discuss various Tsarist and Soviet language policies towards Kazakhstan. Due to long-term Tsarist and Soviet political superiority, the Russian language became a primary medium of communication while transforming the Kazakh language into a poor marker of ethnic association.

The publicization of the Kazakh language became one of the necessary policies for the transformation of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and strengthening the ideas of ethnic identities statehood<sup>1</sup>. The language policy of post-Soviet Kazakhstan plays a vital role in shaping national and civic identities. To link native language with collective identity, the government of Kazakhstan promoted the idea of common language. Thus, language can be seen as a national-collective will. By manipulating the idea of language as a national-collective will, ruling authorities had an opportunity to found their hegemony<sup>2</sup>. Such kind of hegemonic processes would help Nazarbayev's administration to influence and alter people's sovietized thinking and worldviews shaped out within more than five decades.

Even after the establishment of independence many Kazakhs still prefer to speak Russian. The influence of Russian language caused various sociopolitical difficulties for Kazakhstan's nation-building processes. In this context, the establishment of national imagination among ethnic Kazakhs could be measured as a privileged policy. *Based on Benedict Anderson's conceptual thinking one can argue that identity is an "imagined community"*<sup>3</sup> shaped out through *narration*. The concept of "imagined communities" puts more emphasize on nation-building rather than nationalism. Therefore, communication (print-language) creates a sense of nationhood and triggers the rise of national identity by creating unified fields of exchange and

---

<sup>1</sup>Fierman W., "Kazakh Language and Prospects for its Role in Kazakh 'Goriness'," *Ab Imperio* no. 2, 2005, pp. 393-423.

<sup>2</sup>Ives P., *Language and hegemony in Gramsci*, London: Pluto Press, 2004, pp. 111-112.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Press, 2006.

communication<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the production of national identity through Kazakh language is a long way project, which must be implemented not only by certain political authorities but also by the Kazakh's collective will. In the wake of nation-building processes, Nazarbayev administration tied the Kazakh language with the titular ethnic population of Kazakhstan population. The Kazakh as a state language is inclined to be also a significant ethnic symbol in supporting *Kazakhification* of the state<sup>5</sup>.

**Nazarbayev's language policy**

The revival of the national language in Kazakhstan is considered one of the key priorities for the successful nation and state-building processes. The language policy of independent Kazakhstan, especially the proliferation of Kazakh language, seems to be a denotative code of national identity. However, to success the latter process, it is necessary to transform Kazakh into a vernacular language, which could hardly happen shortly. The idea here is that Kazakhstan's language policy is only the very start of the great national project. The ethnic Kazakh elite being agents of the process of *kazakhification* faces a couple of specific difficulties. Firstly, Kazakh elite set up certain preconditions for the development of state language by referring negative ethnic experiences inherited from Russianness, next they have to be careful not to offend the emotional feelings and interests of ethnic Russians, who constitute approximately 24 % of the population<sup>6</sup>.

Another challengeable factor for the regime is the achievement of legitimacy. It is noteworthy to mention that all of the abovementioned policies government should organize under the umbrella of collective identity. Despite the establishment of ethnic management organizations Kazakhstan's government tries to set up a particular identity mechanism through which ethnic Russian, German, Uyghur, Tatar,

---

<sup>4</sup>Anderson B., op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>5</sup>See: Kesici Ö., "The Dilemma in the Nation-Building Process: The Kazakh or Kazakhstani Nation?", Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe, Vol 10, No , 2011, pp. 31, 58.

<sup>6</sup>Results of the 2009 National population census in the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ed. by Smailov A., Astana: Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011, p. 19.

Ukrainian or Korean citizens can consider the land in which they live as their homeland. In fact, the cornerstone of the project is the establishment of an institute of civic identity. The idea of *land* is essential to understand not only the tendencies of making Kazaks first among equals but also the civic values of identity construction. The fact that current territory of Kazakhstan historically had been native *land* of Kazakhs put the ethnic Kazakhs into a moral obligation to speak their native language. It is essential to mention that for other citizens with different ethnicity the idea of homeland should not be understood as an indicator of “otherness.” Of course, Nazarbayev administration supports the idea of common homeland based on civic patriotism. As President Nazarbayev mentioned in the “*Strategy Kazakhstan 2050*” “*the basis of patriotism in Kazakhstan is equal rights for all citizens based on their share of responsibility for the honor of our homeland.*” Further, he emphasized the importance of Kazakh usage in supporting the peace and harmony: “*Language should function as a unifying influence for the people of Kazakhstan*” who should be worthy and respect history culture and language of Kazakhstan<sup>7</sup>.

**Kazakh as a state language: Official policy**

The process of strengthening of the status of Kazakh language has started since Soviet times. According to 1989 language law the Kazakh became state language and was used at all educational levels<sup>8</sup>. The process continued during first years of independence, and according to the 1992 Degree on Education Kazakh was confirmed as the state language, and in 1993 the first Kazakhstani Constitution defined Kazakh as the *state language* demoting the status of Russian as the *language of interethnic communication*. Although in the formal rhetoric President Nazarbayev repeatedly expressed his gratitude to

---

<sup>7</sup>Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Events of 14.12.2012, Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev, Strategy “Kazakhstan-2050”: new political course of the established state. [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president)

<sup>8</sup>Matuszkiewicz R., “The language issue in Kazakhstan-institutionalizing new ethnic relations after Independence”, *Economic and Environmental Studies*, Vol. 10, no. 2, 2010, p. 215.

the Russian language; he straightforwardly supported the development of an informal organization *Qazaq tili qoghamy* (*Kazakh language society*) devoted to the development of the role of Kazakh language in society<sup>9</sup>. So, Kazakhs were allowed to retain their indigeneity. In the case of post-Soviet Kazakhstan, the 'indigenization' of the country is represented by wresting control from Russian domination. If we consider that colonial subject is also produced by language, then Kazakh's public use of Russian language gives Russia an opportunity to use dominant discourses to its advantage. Kazakhstan's current tendencies to overcome *Russification* are similar to the model of Gramscian 'counter-hegemonic' politics. The critical point here is that the counter-hegemonic struggle of Kazakhs, regarding the language policy of Nazarbayev, is an attempt to re-indigenize not only Kazakhs' language but also culture and education. The hegemony of Kazakh language can be established by developing counter-hegemonic world conception. For example during the first days of its operation the *Qazaq tili* organization has been actively engaged in propagations of official language policy. The members (intellectuals, academics, public figures) of *Qazaq tili* organization emphasized *counter-hegemonic* world conception by claiming that Russian is a colonial language hence Kazakh should be served as the sole state language<sup>10</sup>. Indeed the Kazakh government supported ideologies of Kazakhification, but at the same time due to the deep roots of Russian language among Kazakhstani people, there was a risk of ethnic instability. Taking into consideration the necessity of the peace and stability of multiethnic society of Kazakhstan the article 7. 2 of the 1995 constitution defines that "*in state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language*"<sup>11</sup>.

The civic discourse on language issues still exists in contemporary Kazakhstan. In Strategy Kazakstan 2050 President Nazarbayev

---

<sup>9</sup> Fierman W., op. cit., p. 410.

<sup>10</sup> Luong P. J., "The Transformation of Central Asia: States and Societies from Soviet Rule to Independence", Cornell University Press, 2004, p. 128.

<sup>11</sup> Section I, Article 7, point 2, Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

<http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/konstituciya>

simultaneously emphasizes the necessity of the promotion of the state language and importance of Russian language by mentioning that “*No one can ignore the fact that through the Russian language in centuries the Kazakhstan citizens gain additional knowledge, increase their perspective and communications both domestically and abroad*”<sup>12</sup>. Despite the existing discourse on bilingualism, there are *monolingualizing* tendencies in Kazakhstan. The *monolingualizing* tendencies in Kazakhstan are evident in different practices of society like *the law, education, mass media, etc.* According to the 1999 census, approximately 95 percent of ethnic Kazakhs of Kazakhstan population mentioned that they have proficiency in Kazakhs language<sup>13</sup>. Of course the results of the census could be contradictory, but it is obvious that there was a tendency to show their ethnic aspirations by confirming their proficiency in native language. In the same way, Bhavna Dave explains the census-based language politics of Kazakhstan as a demonstration of “*the ‘steady success’ of its ethnolanguage policies*”<sup>14</sup>.

Another important policy of national language promotion in Kazakhstan is the government’s decision to change alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin.<sup>15</sup> Initially, Latin alphabet was replaced with Cyrillic one by Russian authorities to ease learning and understanding processes of Russian concepts<sup>16</sup>. The discourses on alphabet change

---

<sup>12</sup>Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Events of 14.12.2012, Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev, Strategy “Kazakhstan-2050”: New Political Course of the Established State.

<sup>13</sup> Dave B., *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 113.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid*, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup>The Latin Kazakh alphabet consists of 30 letters. There are 9 vowels and 21 consonants in this alphabet.

<sup>16</sup>In this context, one should emphasize the influential role of Ibray Altynsarin (1841–89) in supporting Russianness among the Kazakhs. He was an inspector of public schools for Turgai oblast (province), where he developed Russian-Kazakh school system. Furthermore, he made a significant contribution to the development of translation of Russian literature into Kazakh and introduced Cyrillic alphabet for the Kazakh language. During the Soviet period, the Kazakh alphabet was changed to Cyrillic to ease the learning processes of the Russian language. See, Bacon E., *Central Asians under Russian rule: a study in culture change*, Cornell University Press, 1966, pp. 101-102.

have existed in Kazakhstan since the 1990s. In 1992 the director of the Institute of Languages of Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan and chairman of *Qazaq tili* organization Abdulai Qaydarov raised the question of alphabet change, and in 1995 Turkologist Musaev came out with an initiative to combine elements of Kazakh Latin scripts and Turkish Latin scripts<sup>17</sup>. However, in 1996 State Committee for Nationalities Policy took a first official decision about the introduction of the Latin script in 1996<sup>18</sup>. The issues of alphabet change entered into political agenda in 2006 when President Nazarbayev spoke about the necessity of moving the Kazakh alphabet to Latin script<sup>19</sup>. This decision is an essential issue to understand ethnic aspirations of Kazakhstani elite. In 2012 the Latinization of Kazakh alphabet was recognized by president Nazarbayev as an essential aspect for modernization of Kazakh language, and as he mentioned: *“from 2025 we need to modernize our language to use Latin fonts and a Latin alphabet”*<sup>20</sup>. Of course, there would be various difficulties connected with existing Cyrillic based published literature, but the State Terminology Commission established in 1998<sup>21</sup> will work in an attempt to modernize and adopt terminology to Kazakh Latin alphabet. Thus, the replacement of Kazakh alphabet is a long-run but strategically important decision for Kazakhstan regarding country's integration into the global world. It seems that Kazakh Latin alphabet will give opportunities to Kazakhs to overcome the Russian (Soviet) colonial consciousness and to give birth to new national and sovereign identity among the Kazakhs. Thus, on 27 October 2017 President

---

<sup>17</sup>See: Landau J. M. and Kellner-Heinkele B., *Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan*, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2001, p.140.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>19</sup>Tanayeva L., "The Politics of the Latin alphabet in Kazakhstan", *The Annual of Language & Politics and Politics of Identity*, 2017, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup>Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Events of 14.12.2012, Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev, Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050": New Political Course of the Established State.

<sup>21</sup>Matuszkiewicz R., op. cit., p. 220.

Nazarbayev signed a decree to change Kazakhstan's official script for the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin script<sup>22</sup>.

Despite the fact that the restructuring of Kazakhstan's educational system was in favor of Kazakh language, there are still many problematic issues regarding the low level of Kazakh skills in educational institutions. Kazakh and Russian medium schools were simultaneously established in Kazakhstan, in which both Russian and Kazakh languages are elective. However, as Fierman mentioned most mixed schools have both KMCs (Kazakh-medium classes) and RMCs (Russian-medium classes) and the growth of mixed urban schools from 242 in 1998 to 723 in 2004 is a sign both of the difficulties and success in expanding Kazakh-medium education in urban areas<sup>23</sup>. The opening of Kazakh speaking educational institutions would be transformed into counter-hegemonic spaces if there would be Kazakh textbooks and both students and teachers would have a perfect command of the state language.

One of the most efficient methods of dissemination of national ideas is what Anderson called "*print capitalism*"<sup>24</sup>. The lack of Kazakh-language published literature weakens the strengthening of vernacular language. Most of the textbooks are not introduced in Kazakh, and there are some school textbooks with both Russian and Kazakh titles. For example one of the textbooks of Kazakhstan published in 1997 entitled *Uchimsya I Uchim Govorit Po Kazakhskii* (Learn and teach to speak in Kazakh)<sup>25</sup>. Also, many textbooks in technical subjects in Kazakhstan are in Russian. In fact, the Russian language still has a dominant role in many educational institutions of Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, the creation of Kazakh language textbooks and curriculums would change the situation in favor of Kazakh language.

---

<sup>22</sup>Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, [http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda\\_news/meetings\\_and\\_receptions/meeting-with-adilbek-dzhaksybekov-head-of-the-presidential-administration-and-marattazhin-first-deputy-head-of-the-presidential-administrat?q=Latin%20script](http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/meetings_and_receptions/meeting-with-adilbek-dzhaksybekov-head-of-the-presidential-administration-and-marattazhin-first-deputy-head-of-the-presidential-administrat?q=Latin%20script)

<sup>23</sup>Fierman W., "Language and Education in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Kazakh-Medium Instruction in Urban Schools", *The Russian Review* 65, 2006, p. 102.

<sup>24</sup>Anderson B., op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>25</sup>Landau J. M. and Kellner-Heinkele B., op. cit., p. 200.



One of the aspects of Nazarbayev's innovative policies is the development of Kazakh educational system by international standards. The encouraging example of the said is the establishment of English language Nazarbayev University (2009) and Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. The support of English in Kazakhstan being the representation of trilingual ideology of Nazarbaev's language policy is also a part of Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy. To change the orientation of *gifted* students from Russian language institutions of higher education and provide multidimensional knowledge, Nazarbayev set up preconditions for the development of English speaking or western institutions of higher education.

Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools in which education is in Kazakh, Russian and English, make a significant contribution to implementing and testing educational programs for kindergarten, pre-school education programs, and 12-year study<sup>26</sup>. Even after establishing such modern schools the Russian language continues to dominate in education processes. As mentioned by the director of Nazarbayev Intellectual school of Physics and Mathematics of Uralsk Sholpan Kadirova: *"The history of Kazakhstan and Geography should be taught only in Kazakh, Russian literature and informatics in Russian language and physics, chemistry, biology, and mathematics should be taught in team decisions together with foreign teachers"*<sup>27</sup>, whose lectures are often translated into Russian to ease the learning process.

Thus we can argue that since independence Kazakh language has not established itself not only as a language of science. Under this light, we want to emphasize the importance of incorporation of native language into the various *academic disciplines* for the creation of national identity. One of the most successful methods of counter-hegemonic politics is the creation of cultural hegemony among *others*. One should pay attention to the fact that resistance against "colonial" heritage takes place through culture (literature, language).

---

<sup>26</sup>Ministry Of Education And Science Republic Of Kazakhstan, National Report On The State And Development Education And Science of The Republic of Kazakhstan (Short Version), Astana, 2011, p.63

<sup>27</sup>You Tube (Aug. 2012), Хабар, НННН, рср, [Video File] Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuZUGDAcVVQ>

The example of discourse on literature/cultural resistance would be the works of Soviet Armenian prominent writer Hrant Matevosyan, in which resistance is represented not only by “*bringing of undesirable topics into literature but also in discourse strategies*”<sup>28</sup>. Such kind of manifestations could hardly be imagined in Kazakhstan, in which discourse works in favor of Russians. Since Soviet times Russian has been considered as a language of science and everyday life in many former Soviet republics. However, it is important to mention that the languages like Armenian and Georgian did not suffer due to the strong Russian influence, but conversely owing to the translation, the terminology of various sciences had been adopted to the Armenian language. Indeed, this is also speaking about the languages’ rich vocabulary. As a consequence, the classes of history, literature, philosophy, physics, chemistry, biology, and even astronomy were in the native Armenian language.

The media is making a significant contribution to the reproduction of certain ideologies. According to the law on languages, at least fifty percent of media broadcasting should be in the Kazakh language<sup>29</sup>. Russian language TV programmes broadcasting in Kazakhstan played a pivotal role regarding socialization. Mass media became an excellent tool in the hands of Kazakhstani elite to transform members of the society into the consumers of their ideologies. The prioritization of Kazakh language in the spheres of mass media gives opportunities for the Kazakh language to become quite powerful regarding ideological leadership. However, even after such legal backing, many broadcasters of Kazakhstan have ignored the spirit of the law by granting Kazakh a secondary importance<sup>30</sup>. Indeed, the situation is problematic for the government, and even the Ministry of Communications and Information mentioned that only 10 percent of

---

<sup>28</sup>Bayadyan H., “Soviet Armenian Identity and Cultural Representation”, In *Representations on the Margins of Europe: Politics and Identities in the Baltic and South Caucasian States*, Ed. by T. Darieva, W. Kaschuba, Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2007, p. 208.

<sup>29</sup>Dave B., “A Year of Growing Unrest and Opposition”, Ed. by Peter Rutland in *Annual Survey of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: 1997- The Challenge of Integration*, M.E. Sharpe, 1998, p. 369.

<sup>30</sup>Fiermann W., op. cit., p. 408.

television was broadcasted in Kazakh<sup>31</sup>. According to Article 10 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan ‘*On television and radio broadcasting*,’ the weekly broadcasting time in Kazakh cannot be less than taken all languages together<sup>32</sup>.

The policies of Nazarbayev regime to make the indigenous language as the state language have also symbolic power aiming to create a sense of domination. Kazakhs' intentions to prioritize the role of their language in the multiethnic country seem to be a tendency to attain official and exclusive status for their ethnicity. Although the constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan defines that Kazakh and Russian shall be used on equal grounds, the mastering of Kazakh is becoming obligatory for non-Kazakh speaking people. Every citizen of Kazakhstan who wants to work in high official positions should learn Kazakh because since 1992 a program has been initiated by the Kazakhstani government to translate all official documentation into the state language<sup>33</sup>.

The mastering of Kazakh language is also a pledge for a good career in Kazakhstan. The Article 41.2 of the state constitution defines that “*A citizen of the Republic shall be eligible for the office of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan if he is by birth not younger than forty and has a perfect command of the state language*”<sup>34</sup>, and accordingly the Article 58. 1 of the same constitution states that “*The*

---

<sup>31</sup>In Kazakhstan, 10% of TV broadcasting is conducted in Kazakh, *Electronic Publication, (В Казахстане 10% телевидения ведется на казахском языке, Сетевое издание, (In Russian)*, <https://www.zakon.kz/201358-v-kazakhstane-10-televeshhanija.html>

<sup>32</sup>Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on January 18, 2012 No. 545-IV on broadcasting with amendments and supplements as of 01.01.2017, (Закон Республики казахстан от 18 января 2012 года № 545-IV о телерадиовещании, с изменениями и дополнениями по состоянию на 01.01.2017 г.), (in Russian), [https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=31114820#pos=232;-108](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=31114820#pos=232;-108)

<sup>33</sup>The efforts to promote official documents in Kazakh are encouraged by some state sponsored programs like “Conception of Broadening the Sphere of Use of Kazakh Language 2006”, “The State program for the development and functioning of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020” adopted by the Decree of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan No. 110 dated June 29, 2011 etc.

<sup>34</sup>Section III, Article 41, point 2, Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted by referendum August 30, 1995, <http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/konstituciya>

*Chambers shall be headed by their chairpersons who are elected by the Senate and the Majilis from among the deputies who have a perfect command of the state language*”<sup>35</sup>. Thus, administrative spheres of Kazakhstan are among the most influential areas reflected by the *kazakhization* policies. Since the first years of independence, a visible shift has been recorded in state apparatus regarding ethnic composition: ethnic Kazakhs started to predominate in various governmental and administrative institutions.

Due to some factors (growth rate, the return of ethnic Kazakhs, and immigration of other nationalities), the use of Kazakh language is growing in Kazakhstan. Indeed, under such conditions, Russian language competence can be diminished. On the other hand, the public use of Russian in social institutions created some obstacles for the promotion of Kazakh language identity. The manifestation of the later became evident especially during the emigration of ethnic Kazakhs from Diaspora communities. The representatives of Kazakh Diaspora communities in Mongolia and China have preserved their identity, culture, and language better than Kazakhstan's Kazakhs<sup>36</sup>. Language is among the most important markers of identity and belonging to a nation. In Strategy Kazakhstan 2050 Nazarbayev conceptualized the Kazakh language as a *spiritual pivot* of Kazak nation, which should be developed by the active use of it in all areas of society<sup>37</sup>. One of the efficient ways of the popularization of Kazakh language in different spheres of the society is the incorporation of the state language standards into inter-personal communications. The workplaces of Kazakhstan are among the most critical areas for the strengthening the position of Kazakh state language. However, the state-owned language policies have been negatively affected by the use of Russian language in workplaces. The problem became much more provocative during repatriation to Kazakhstan. Furthermore, at first glance, it

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Kuscu I., Ethnic Return Migration and Public Debate: The Case of Kazakhstan, IOM, International Organization for Migration, 2005, pp. 8-9.

<sup>37</sup>Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Events of 14.12.2012, Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev, Strategy “Kazakhstan-2050”: New Political Course of the Established State, [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president)

seems that there would be no problem after repatriation. However, diaspora Kazakhs faced difficulties connected with language in the homeland. The employment for ethnic diaspora Kazakh became a problem because of their zero-knowledge of Russian. To solve the problems, Kazakhstani government amended the Law on Migration and in 2007 an article was added to the Law according to which 'oralmans' or Kazakh return migrants would have opportunities to learn Russian language in temporary accommodation centers<sup>38</sup>. The amendments seem to be quite contradictory to Kazakh government decisions regarding language policies. Ironically speaking in order to become full members of the Kazakh society, the *orlamans* should learn Russian language. Thus, this phenomenon is a compelling case to understand the necessity of the establishment of Kazakhs' cultural hegemony to encourage language policy both at state and society levels.

However, the roots of Russian language are really quite profound, and the language policy of Nazarbayev is just the start of counter-hegemonic struggle, and nobody knows how long it will last. During one of his speeches in the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev told: *"I dream of the day when I will speak the state language, and everyone will understand me"*<sup>39</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the article examined the language policies of independent Kazakhstan and its role on national identity formation processes. The revival of Kazakh language is comprehended as an essential medium to replace Soviet identity with new national one. The paper argued that the destructive impact of Russian language has the potential to be transformed into a positive source of national identity formation. The Russian language is considered as a barrier for ethnic Kazakhs, and the overcoming of that language barrier will establish and strengthen new post-Soviet national identity. However,

---

<sup>38</sup>Kuscu I., "Kazakhstan's Oralman Project: A Remedy for Ambiguous Identity?" Indiana University, Central Eurasian Studies: Pro Quest, 2008, p. 149.

<sup>39</sup>Lillis J., Kazakhstan: Astana Emphasizing Ethnic Harmony Following Kyrgyz Violence, Eurasianet, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62251>

the Russian language has quite deep roots among the ethnic Kazakhs, and the creation of the hegemony of Kazakh identity by the native language is possible only through the establishment of Kazakh's cultural hegemony in the society. Nazarbayev's language policy is only the start of 'counter-hegemonic struggle' towards *indigenization* and *khazkhification* of Kazakhs. The policies of Kazakh elites to prioritize the role of their language in the multiethnic country seem to be a trend to attain official status for their ethnicity. Thus, current mandated use of Kazakh as a state language is more effective at an administrative or ceremonial level, than at the societal (vernacular) level. Moreover, , the issue of identity and language cannot be finally solved by a state authority or a successful leader alone, as long as a society not been able to reveal a large part of the intelligentsia, which will take upon its shoulders that important task. However, no one can argue that Nazarbayev's language and educational policies of national identity lead to the successful development of identity, language, and culture. The latter is a responsible social order to accompany the social processes in the proper national course of reforming the way of lives.