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## DEFINING THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN MODERN KAZAKHSTAN

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**Abstract.** In the context of globalization and expanding international processes, there is a growing need to take a closer look at the language situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main goal of the present paper is to characterize the language situation in modern Kazakhstan based on the analysis of specialized literature. The importance of this investigation is determined by the need to study the modern realities of communication and the functioning of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages in the context of the implementation of the “Trinity of Languages” project as an objective factor in the transformation of the language situation. The research is carried out within a sociolinguistic perspective and based on the methods of analysis and synthesis of theoretical materials and results of empirical studies on the language situation in modern Kazakhstan. The analysis showed that the language situation in Kazakhstan is exoglossic unbalanced four-component and comprises languages of four functional types: local languages, a regional language (Russian), a macro-intermediary language (Kazakh), and a professional language (English). While the Kazakh and Russian languages are dominant, English is becoming widespread, especially in the fields of economics and education. The theoretical value of this study is that it can contribute to the further development of sociolinguistics when considering the problems of the language situation and multilingualism. The practical significance of the work is that the results obtained can be used in theoretical courses in general linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics.

**Keywords:** language situation, multilingualism, sociolinguistics, exoglossic language situation, endoglossic language situation, Kazakh, Russian, English

### Introduction

Globalization processes and the development of intercultural relations have actualized the problem of studying the general language situation of different countries. Today, the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres of human activity have been affected by globalization and integration processes

highlighting an intensive convergence of countries and peoples, being particularly noticeable in the spheres of culture and education. In connection with the active entry of Kazakhstan into the globalization space, greater attention is needed to the functioning of languages in the country.

Recently, research interest in the language situation of Kazakhstan has increased in the aspect of the implementation of the “Trinity of Languages” project as an objective factor in the transformation of the language situation. Therefore, a thorough exploration of the language situation as one of the main indicators of how the population has become adapted to new socio-political and socio-cultural realities is an urgent theoretical and practical task.

Over the past decades, sociolinguistic studies of the language situation in Kazakhstan have been conducted, during which valuable data were collected. Researchers note that the modern language situation in Kazakhstan is primarily characterized by a high degree of linguistic diversity, which is caused, first of all, by the unique diversity of the population’s ethnic composition. In fact, more than 126 genetically and typologically diverse languages are developed and used on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, among which the Kazakh (state) and Russian languages occupy a special place. Being a unique feature of the mentality and interests of each ethnic community within the country, polyethnicity creates a specific socio-cultural context for different aspects of the investigation into the language situation of Kazakhstan.

A multifaceted and comprehensive description of the language situation will make it possible to understand the versatility and complexity of a multiethnic society’s actual linguistic life, with different languages not functioning in isolation from each other, yet being always interconnected in complex and multidimensional macrosystems. The ultimate goal of this research is to characterize the language situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. This article will present the findings of the survey of specialized literature related to the topic of the language situation in modern Kazakhstan.

### *Theoretical framework*

The concept of a language situation is one of the most important and fundamental in sociolinguistics. It was first used in the 1930s in the works of linguists studying the languages of Africa and Asia to denote the set of languages that served communication in a given territory. Already in the early 1970s, the problem of the language situation began to be considered essential and most specific for sociolinguistics, and therefore became the focus of attention for linguists. One of the first definitions of a language situation was given by C. Ferguson, who attributed the term to “the general configuration of language use at a given time and place” [1, p. 157]. He also noted that when analyzing a language situation, it is essential to take into account such parameters as the number of languages, their type and the circumstances of their use in the area

being studied, as well as the number of people speaking these languages, their attitudes and opinions.

V. A. Avrorin defined the language situation as a specific way languages and their different forms interact in a nation's social life at a certain stage of its historical development. The scholar also argued that the language situation should include the social conditions for the functioning of languages, the sphere and context of their use, and the forms of its existence [2]. Moreover, this term was used by the scholar for both monolingual and multilingual situations. He understood a monolingual language situation as a set of functions of all available language forms "in all environments and spheres of social activity under certain social attitudes in a given nation's life" [2, p. 256]. The situation of bilingualism or multilingualism arises when not one, but two or more languages function within the administrative and political region.

The situation of bilingualism and polylingualism is also taken into account in the definition of L. B. Nikolsky, who believes that a language situation is "a set of languages, sublanguages and functional styles serving communication in an administrative-territorial association and in an ethnic community" [3, p. 79-80]. In the understanding of G. V. Stepanov, a language situation is called "the relationship of a language (or part of it), characterized by a given state, to other languages or to another part of the same language, and manifested in various forms of spatial and social interactions (syntagmatic plane)". An element of a language state receives its concreteness from other elements of a holistic formation [4, p. 31].

In the theory of sociolinguistics, the definition of a language situation proposed by A. D. Schweitzer has received wide recognition. In his understanding, a language situation is "a model of the socio-functional distribution and hierarchy of socio-communicative systems and subsystems that coexist and interact within a given political-administrative association and cultural area in a given period", as well as social attitudes that members of the corresponding language and speech communities adhere to in relation to these systems and subsystems [5, p. 206]. The main ideas in this definition are the coexistence and interaction of languages, hierarchical relationships between languages associated with the perception and functioning of languages in society. In his later definition of the language situation, the scholar already focuses on the diversity of language forms functioning in a certain space [6].

Special attention should be paid to the definitions proposed by V.A. Vinogradov and N. B. Mechkovskaya, who provided important insights into the understanding of the language situation. V. A. Vinogradov defines a language situation in a broad sense as "a set of forms of existence (as well as styles) of one language or a set of languages in their territorial-social interrelationships and functional interaction within the boundaries of certain geographic regions

or administrative-political entities”, and in a narrower sense – as a spatial and social interaction of different languages or forms of languages [7, p. 616-617]. According to the definition of N. B. Mechkovskaya, a language situation is a set of language entities, i.e. languages and language variants (dialects, jargons, functional styles, etc.) serving a particular society (ethnic group and multiethnic community) within the boundaries of a certain area [8].

Based on the above definitions, the language situation is traditionally defined as a set of forms of language existence that simultaneously function in the space under consideration. Sociological studies of the language situation allow us to obtain prompt and reliable data on modern trends, problems and features of the development of the state and other languages in various socio-demographic groups. Such sociolinguistic studies make it possible to assess the prospects of language policy, predict trends in the development of a language (or languages) and, ultimately, make management decisions on the problems of implementing state language policy [9].

A certain typology of the language situation is selected by each researcher taking into account a specific case. Taking into account the peculiarities of modern Kazakhstan, the most appropriate typological system of the language situation is the typological system of L. B. Nikolsky [3]. According to his typology based on the totality of languages, sublanguages and functional styles, language situations are divided into exoglossic (totalities of languages) and endoglossic (totalities of subsystems of one language) and then are further subdivided into balanced (the languages or language subsystems that comprise them are functionally equivalent) and unbalanced (the components are distributed across spheres of communication and social groups) situations. This makes the following four types of language situations theoretically possible: exoglossic balanced, exoglossic unbalanced, endoglossic balanced, and endoglossic unbalanced [10].

An exoglossic language situation is generally understood to be a set of languages that are functionally equivalent. However, an exoglossic balanced language situation rarely consists of languages that are absolutely equivalent in a social-functional sense. Due to various factors (socioeconomic, ethnic, demographic, geographic), even legally equal polyfunctional languages can be different in specific communicative situations. The functional inequality of the components of exoglossic unbalanced situations provides grounds for dividing this group into three subgroups. The criterion for such division is the number of languages that serve communication in a given society. L. B. Nikolsky identifies two-, three-, and four-component language situations [3].

The constituent components of a two-component language situation are languages and sublanguages that serve everyday speech, in other words, those related to local languages, and a macro-intermediary language. A macro-intermediary language is understood to be a language that primarily acts as a

means of interethnic communication in a multinational state, or a form of a national language that ensures nationwide communication in a multinational state.

A three-component language situation is characterized by three functional types of languages used in a given state: local languages, regional languages, and a macro-intermediary language. Regional languages include: languages of nations and other large ethnic communities that have a literary form, as well as unwritten languages of large nationalities. Four-component language situations include a set of local and regional languages, a macro-intermediary language, and a religious or professional language.

In contrast to exoglossic language situations, which are sets of different languages, an endoglossic language situation is generally understood to be a language situation consisting of a set of subsystems of a single language. Endoglossic balanced language situations are described as comprising several subsystems of the national language being absolutely identical in terms of their functional. That is, according to this typology, the subsystems of the national language in an endoglossic balanced language situation serve all communication spheres in a number of language communities that live within the boundaries of the territorial-political association under consideration. At the same time, A. D. Schweitzer and L. B. Nikolsky come to the conclusion that the modern world hardly has a language situation of this type. The scientists argue this by the fact that if a state is formed, even on a territory inhabited by relating ethnolinguistic communities, one of the forms of speech is inevitable to be accompanied by the advancing role of a means of national communication [10].

An endoglossic unbalanced language situation normally occurs in a vast majority of mono-ethnic countries in which a single national language is utilized in all communication spheres. The main principle in distinguishing the varieties of endoglossic unbalanced language situations is to identify the number of language subsystems and determine what functional type they belong to. In the group of endoglossic unbalanced situations, one-component language situations are distinguished (when society is served by one language that is not divided into sublanguages); two-component language situations (when sublanguages of two functional types are used: a territorial dialect and a literary language); and three-component language situations, which differ from the previous subgroup by the presence of a regional form of the literary language among the constituent elements [10]. Thus, a language situation is a reflection of the objectively existing distribution of social positions between language communities.

### **Materials and methods**

The study of the language situation in Kazakhstan is carried out within the framework of the sociolinguistic approach. Methodologically, the present study

is based on the concept of a language situation as a set of language forms that simultaneously function in the space under consideration [3, 10], as well as on L. B. Nikolsky's typological system of a language situation [3]. Among research methods are also analysis and synthesis of theoretical materials and results of empirical studies in the sphere of the language situation in modern Kazakhstan. The research was conducted based on English-language, Russian-language and Kazakh-language secondary sources defining and characterizing the language situation, some of which have been included in the list of references at the end of this article.

### **Results and discussion**

Historical and geographical factors are among the essential factors conditioning the language situation in Kazakhstan. Regarding the Kazakh language, it changed its status significantly from the peripheral position in the Soviet times to that of a state language, being characterized as a symbolic capital providing access to political and social resources [11]. The Russian language occupies an influential position in Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape, serving as a key medium for international dialogue with neighboring Russian-speaking states, a role largely shaped by Kazakhstan's geographical proximity. Domestically, it facilitates communication among various ethnic groups within the country. As a result, the linguistic context of contemporary Kazakhstan is frequently described as bilingual, with both Kazakh and Russian languages operating concurrently within a shared communicative environment. However, in the current situation, the Kazakh language serves primarily as an instrument of state and financial-economic measures, while the Russian language is a means of ideological influence, an instrument and object of education, and an integral part of spiritual culture [12].

Researchers note the increasing role of the Kazakh language, which is facilitated by the use of financial and economic instruments, qualification and certification activities, a general increase in Kazakh language competence (especially among young people), ethnodemographic changes in the communicative and linguistic space, increased motivation to study the Kazakh language and the desire to overcome the change of language. But the main unifying reason is the effectiveness and consistency of a targeted language policy, as well as tangible state support for the dissemination of the Kazakh language, aimed primarily at Kazakhs [12]. As a result of consistent and targeted state support, researchers note the ever-increasing role and ever-expanding scope of the Kazakh language use.

It is also important to note that the language policy in Kazakhstan is characterized by an outstanding feature consisting in the state support for multilingualism that facilitates economic planning. Language policy in Kazakhstan resolutely supports diversity in society, promoting individual multilingualism. At



the same time, the language situation in modern Kazakhstan is unique due to the functioning of two or more languages associated with a targeted official language policy that promotes the idea of multilingualism as one of the most essential conditions for the country's socio-economic modernization. In this regard, English is considered an appropriate language to be developed in the country. In the professional sphere, special attention is paid to developing multilingual resources that will enable industries to interact and professional terminology to be systematized multilingually. To master the English language and improve its proficiency level is of utmost significance to permit the country's integration into the global community, access to modern technologies, implementation of world science and education's results and achievements, as well as sustainable development.

Nevertheless, learning English as a foreign language remains challenging, which is mainly caused by the lack of a language environment and the use of outdated language teaching methods. Moreover, English in Kazakhstan remains inaccessible to the majority of the population, with only a relatively small part of the middle class having chances to gain greater access to English-language resources. On the other hand, Kazakhs are argued to be highly motivated to learn English, because this prestigious language is believed to provide numerous economic and educational opportunities [11].

Characterizing the language situation in Kazakhstan, sociolinguists such as E. D. Suleimenova, N. Zh. Shaimerdenova, Zh. S. Smagulova, D. Kh. Akanova, O. B. Altynbekova, and more recently N. Biray, B. Zh. Kurmanova, and A. Utegenova [13] define its exoglossic unbalanced nature. At the same time, further characteristics by types of unbalanced exoglossic language situation are not given. In her study, S. A. Shunkeyeva attempted to answer the question of whether the language situation in Kazakhstan is two-, three- or four-component [14]. With regard to modern Kazakhstan, she characterizes the language situation as an exoglossic unbalanced three-component, the components of which are local, regional languages and a macro-intermediary language. S. A. Shunkeyeva defines local languages as the languages of ethnic groups representing national minorities, including Azerbaijani, Ingush, Tajik, Tatar, Turkish, Uzbek, and Chechen. The main features of these languages are their use primarily in oral informal communication, in limited communicative spheres only within ethnic groups, and the presence of a literary form for most of them. In addition, some of these languages are used in local television and radio broadcasts and in schools.

S. A. Shunkeyeva classifies Russian as a regional language, which does not have a legislatively enshrined status, is neither a state nor an official language, but at the same time is the language of a large ethnic community living in the territory of Kazakhstan, has a developed literary form, and is used for teaching. According to the researcher, both Kazakh and Russian can act as a macro-intermediary language. The Kazakh language claims the title of a macro-intermediary, since its state status is legislatively enshrined, and it is also characterized by demographic power, which ensures nationwide communication not only within one ethnic group, but also interethnic communication. On the other hand, according to the

researcher, the Russian language can claim the title of a macro-intermediary in Kazakhstan due to its communicative power: although the Russian language is not a state or official language and the languages of the majority of the population, it serves interethnic communication within the country. Understanding the Russian language as a macro-intermediary is, it seems, complicated by the fact that territorial zones where the Russian language is practically absent from the social communication of the population are ignored. These zones are mono-ethnic areas where Kazakhs live compactly. B. Zh. Kurmanova divided such mono-ethnic areas into two groups according to the population of the indigenous population: the first group includes areas with an indigenous population of 91% to 95%, the second group includes areas with an indigenous population of 95% and higher [15]. Based on the presence of mono-ethnic areas, as well as the ever-increasing role of the Kazakh language, confirmed in studies of recent years, it is more logical to classify the Kazakh language as a macro-intermediary language, while the Russian language retains its place as a regional language in the typology under consideration.

Thus, according to S. A. Shunkeyeva, the main characteristics of the language situation in Kazakhstan are exoglossicity, imbalance, and three-component nature [14]. It seems that such a description of the language situation in modern Kazakhstan still remains insufficiently complete, since it does not take into account the role of the English language, which is promoted by the state in accordance with the governmental language policy, which aims at developing and supporting the “trinity” of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages.

It is also important to note that English functions as part of the linguistic repertoire of Kazakhstan’s population, alongside Kazakh, Russian, and other local languages. For example, as a result of the study of the language situation in Kazakhstan, the following forms of bilingualism, trilingualism and multilingualism were identified: Kazakh-Russian, Russian-Kazakh, Russian-English, Kazakh-English, Russian-English-Japanese/French/Turkish, Uzbek-Kazakh-Russian, Kazakh-Russian-Uzbek-English, Russian-French-German-English, Russian-Uzbek-German-English, Kazakh-Russian-English-German/French/Chinese/Turkish/Uzbek/Korean, Kazakh-English-German-French/Chinese [14]. Therefore, it is necessary to reconsider the number of components in the language situation of Kazakhstan.

In order to provide a more precise classification, it is necessary to refer to L. B. Nikolsky’s typology of language situations. In their work *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, A. D. Schweitzer and L. B. Nikolsky characterize the language situation in Ethiopia as comprising local languages – such as written Tigre and unwritten Tigray, Galla, and the languages of the Sidama group – while Italian serves as a regional language and Amharic functions as a macro-intermediary language [10, p. 106]. However, the language situation in Ethiopia is not three-component, but four-component, since English is widely used there, being essentially a means of communication for intellectuals from “the propertied classes” preparing to work in the government apparatus or in the spheres of science, technology and foreign trade, acting as a tool of “class-professional”



communication. An analogy can be drawn with the situation in Kazakhstan, where currently only the wealthy middle class has broader access to English [11] as a means of attaining economic and educational opportunities.

Thus, it seems more logical to characterize the language situation in Kazakhstan as a four-component one, which is characterized by the functioning of the languages of ethnic groups as local languages, the Russian language as a regional language, the Kazakh language as a macro-intermediary, and the English language as a professional language.

In recent years, English has also gained ground in the digital communication environment of Kazakhstan, particularly among youth on social media platforms, which contributes to its informal use and integration into hybrid forms of communication. This tendency further confirms the relevance of identifying English as a distinct component in the language situation typology.

### **Conclusion**

In the framework of this study, the language situation is defined as a set of forms of language existence that simultaneously function and interact in the region under consideration with a multi-ethnic composition. The study of language and ethno-linguistic situations is multifaceted and includes various issues related to the features of language policy, the impact of external factors, the ethno-demographic and social structure of society, the quantitative composition of functioning languages, their demographic and functional capacity, and the features of the development of bilingualism or multilingualism.

The conducted analysis allowed us to classify the language situation in modern Kazakhstan as exoglossic, unbalanced, and four-component, with the following functional types: local languages (minority ethnic groups), a regional language (Russian), a macro-intermediary language (Kazakh), and a professional language (English). The increasing role of Kazakh as a state language is supported by targeted state policy, while Russian retains a strong position in interethnic communication. English, although limited in access, functions as a professional and educational language, indicating a shift towards multilingualism. These findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language dynamics in Kazakhstan and may inform further language policy development.

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**ҚАЗІРГІ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ТІЛДІК ЖАҒДАЯТТЫ АНЫҚТАУ**\*Утегенова А.<sup>1</sup>, Ергалиева Н.У.<sup>2</sup>, Қужбанова Н.Е.<sup>3</sup>, Алмагамбетова Н.А.<sup>4</sup><sup>\*1</sup> Қ. Жұбанов атындағы Ақтөбе өңірлік университеті, Ақтөбе, Қазақстан  
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**Аңдатпа.** Жаһандану үдерісі мен халықаралық қатынастары ауқымының кеңеюі жағдайында Қазақстан Республикасындағы тілдік жағдаятқа ерекше назар аудару қажеттілігі туындап отыр. Бұл тілдік жағдаяттың елдің әлеуметтік және мәдени өмірінде маңызды рөл атқаруымен байланысты, өйткені ол ұлтаралық қатынастардың дамуына, білім беру жүйесіне және мемлекеттік саясатқа ықпал етеді. Зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – арнайы ғылыми әдебиеттерді талдау негізінде қазіргі Қазақстандағы тілдік жағдаятты сипаттау. Зерттеудің өзектілігі қазіргі заманғы коммуникациялық үдерістер мен қазақ, орыс және ағылшын тілдерінің қызмет ету ерекшеліктерін зерттеу қажеттілігімен анықталады. Бұл зерттеу «Үштұғырлы тіл» жобасының іске асырылуы аясында тілдік жағдаяттың өзгеруінің объективті факторын талдауға бағытталған. Аталған жоба көптілді қоғам қалыптастыруды көздейді, онда әрбір тіл белгілі бір қызмет атқарады. Зерттеу әлеуметтік лингвистикалық бағытта жүргізіліп, теориялық материалдар мен эмпирикалық деректерді талдау және синтездеу әдістеріне негізделген. Талдау нәтижелері Қазақстандағы тілдік жағдаяттың экзогlostы, теңгерімсіз және төрткомпонентті құрылымға ие екенін көрсетті. Ол төрт функционалдық типтегі тілдерді қамтиды: жергілікті тілдер, өңірлік тіл (орыс тілі), макро-дәнекер тіл (қазақ тілі) және кәсіби тіл (ағылшын тілі). Қазақ және орыс тілдері басым болғанымен, ағылшын тілінің қолданылу аясы кеңейіп, әсіресе экономика, білім және ғылым салаларында сұранысқа ие болып келеді. Зерттеудің теориялық маңыздылығы – оның әлеуметтік лингвистика саласының дамуына және көптілді қоғамдағы тілдік үдерістерді тереңірек зерттеуге ықпал етуінде. Ал жұмыстың практикалық маңызы – алынған нәтижелер жалпы тіл білімі, әлеуметтік лингвистика және психолінгвистика пәндері бойынша оқыту үдерісінде қолданылуы мүмкін. Бұл зерттеу материалдары тіл саясаты мен мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынасты зерттейтін мамандар мен студенттер үшін пайдалы болады.

**Тірек сөздер:** тілдік жағдаят, көптілділік, әлеуметтік лингвистика, экзогlostы тілдік жағдаят, эндогlostы тілдік жағдаят, қазақ тілі, орыс тілі, ағылшын тілі

## ОПРЕДЕЛЕНИЕ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ СИТУАЦИИ В СОВРЕМЕННОМ КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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**Аннотация.** В условиях глобализации и расширения масштабов международных отношений возникает острая необходимость более внимательного отношения к языковой ситуации в Республике Казахстан. Это обусловлено тем, что языковая ситуация играет важную роль в социальной и культурной жизни страны, оказывая влияние на развитие межнациональных отношений, систему образования и сферу государственной политики. Основной целью данной работы является характеристика языковой ситуации в современном Казахстане на основе анализа специализированной литературы. Актуальность исследования определяется необходимостью изучения современных реалий коммуникации и функционирования казахского, русского и английского языков в контексте реализации проекта «Триединство языков», который является важным фактором трансформации языковой ситуации. Данный проект направлен на формирование многоязычного общества, в котором каждый язык выполняет определенную функцию. Исследование проводится в социолингвистической перспективе, используя методы анализа и синтеза теоретических материалов, а также эмпирических данных. Анализ показал, что языковая ситуация в Казахстане является экzogлоссной, несбалансированной и четырехкомпонентной. Она включает языки четырех функциональных типов: локальные языки, региональный язык (русский), макро-посреднический язык (казахский) и профессиональный язык (английский). Несмотря на доминирующую роль казахского и русского языков, английский язык продолжает активно распространяться, особенно в таких сферах, как экономика, образование и наука. Теоретическая значимость исследования заключается в его вкладе в развитие социолингвистики и изучение языковых процессов в полиязычном обществе. Практическая значимость работы состоит в возможности использования ее результатов в курсах общей лингвистики, социолингвистики и психолингвистики, что делает ее ценной для специалистов и студентов, изучающих языковую политику и межкультурную коммуникацию.

**Ключевые слова:** языковая ситуация, полиязычие, социолингвистика, экzogлоссная языковая ситуация, эндоглоссная языковая ситуация, казахский язык, русский язык, английский язык

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