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LOSS OF LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

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Abstract. This study investigates the transformation of linguistic identity in digital communication, focusing on multilingual students in Kazakhstan. The aim of the research is to analyze how globalization and digital environments, particularly online gaming communities, influence language use and contribute to the erosion of linguistic uniqueness. The scientific novelty lies in the integrated approach combining sociolinguistic analysis, experimental methods and digital discourse within a multilingual context. A mixed-methods design was employed, including corpus analysis, surveys, experimental tasks and discourse analysis.

The findings reveal a high frequency of code-switching, extensive use of borrowed English vocabulary and the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms in students' communication. Participants engaged in gaming environments demonstrate a significantly higher level of linguistic hybridity compared to non-gamers. At the same time, the results show that while native lexical usage is reduced, these processes function as adaptive communicative strategies in a globalized digital space.

The study confirms that linguistic identity is a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by both global and local influences. It emphasizes that digital environments not only contribute to linguistic erosion but also foster new forms of expression. The findings highlight the importance of developing balanced language policies that support linguistic diversity while ensuring effective communication in contemporary society.

Keywords: linguistic identity, globalization, digital discourse, code-switching, lexical borrowing, multilingualism, Kazakh language, gaming communication

Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization and increasing intercultural communication, the issue of the loss of linguistic identity has become one of the central concerns in modern linguistics. Languages function not only as tools of communication, but also as carriers of cultural memory, national identity and historical continuity. However, the expansion of global languages, particularly English, along with the influence of mass media and digital technologies have

led to significant transformations in many national languages often resulting in the gradual erosion of their unique linguistic features.

This process is especially evident in multilingual societies where language contact intensifies structural and lexical changes. Kazakhstan provides a particularly illustrative example due to its trilingual environment, where Kazakh, Russian and English coexist and interact. While this multilingualism promotes cultural exchange and global integration, it also creates conditions for linguistic interference and the potential loss of language-specific characteristics.

A notable manifestation of this phenomenon in the Kazakh language is the increasing prevalence of lexical borrowing and code-switching in everyday communication. For instance, younger speakers frequently incorporate Russian and English elements into Kazakh speech, producing hybrid expressions such as “*meetingке барамын*” (I am going to a meeting) or “*deadline өтті*” (the deadline has passed). In such cases, native Kazakh equivalents such as “*жиналыс*” (meeting) or “*соңғы мерзім*” (deadline) are often replaced by borrowed terms which may gradually reduce the functional range of the native lexicon.

In addition to lexical changes, structural and stylistic shifts can also be observed. The influence of Russian syntactic patterns, for example, may affect sentence construction in Kazakh while digital communication encourages brevity and simplification often at the expense of grammatical richness and expressive nuance. Furthermore, traditional Kazakh expressions, idioms and culturally embedded concepts are becoming less frequent in the speech of younger generations which may weaken the connection between language and cultural heritage.

At the same time, digital environments accelerate these processes by promoting standardized and globally recognizable forms of communication. Social media, online gaming and digital content platforms serve as channels through which hybrid linguistic forms are normalized and disseminated. As a result, linguistic identity is increasingly shaped by global rather than local influences.

Despite these challenges, the Kazakh language also demonstrates resilience through ongoing language policy initiatives, educational reforms, and efforts to promote its use in public and digital domains. This dual dynamic between erosion and revitalization makes Kazakhstan a particularly valuable case for studying the broader phenomenon of linguistic identity loss in the modern world.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach to examining the loss of linguistic identity within a multilingual and digitally mediated context.

In particular, the research introduces a focus on the interaction between globalization, digital communication and multilingual practices in shaping linguistic identity. It highlights how digital environments such as social media and online gaming platforms accelerate processes of lexical borrowing, code-

switching and structural simplification. Furthermore, the study offers a context-specific analysis of the Kazakh language which remains underrepresented in global linguistic research, especially in relation to digital discourse.

Another novel aspect is the emphasis on hybrid linguistic forms as both a sign of linguistic erosion and a potential adaptive mechanism. Rather than viewing language change solely as a negative process, this study considers the dual nature of these transformations, recognizing both the risks of identity loss and the emergence of new forms of linguistic expression.

It is hypothesized that the increasing influence of globalization and digital communication in a multilingual environment leads to the gradual loss of linguistic identity, manifested through intensified lexical borrowing, frequent code-switching and structural simplification of the Kazakh language.

Additionally, the study assumes that:

1. Hybrid linguistic forms used in digital communication contribute to the weakening of traditional linguistic norms.

2. Younger generations are more susceptible to linguistic identity transformation due to their active engagement in digital environments.

3. The dominance of global languages, particularly English and Russian, accelerates the process of linguistic erosion in Kazakh.

Despite these tendencies, conscious language policy and educational practices can mitigate the loss of linguistic identity.

The aim of this study is to examine the phenomenon of the loss of linguistic identity in the context of globalization with a focus on its causes, manifestations and impact on national languages.

Objectives of the study are included:

1. To identify the key factors contributing to the loss of linguistic identity (e.g., globalization, digitalization, language dominance).

2. To analyze the main manifestations of linguistic erosion, including lexical borrowing, code-switching and structural changes.

3. To examine the impact of digital communication and media on language transformation.

The issue of linguistic identity and its transformation under the influence of globalization and digitalization has attracted significant attention in contemporary linguistic research. Scholars increasingly recognize that language is not only a means of communication but also a key marker of social, cultural and individual identity.

One of the foundational approaches to linguistic identity is presented in the works of Joshua Fishman, who emphasized the role of language in maintaining ethnic and cultural identity. Fishman (1991) argued that language shift and language maintenance are closely linked to sociopolitical and cultural factors, particularly in multilingual societies. His framework remains relevant

in analyzing how dominant languages influence minority or less widely used languages [1].

The impact of globalization on language has been extensively explored by David Crystal who introduced the concept of English as a global language. Crystal (2003) highlights that the spread of English contributes to both linguistic enrichment and linguistic homogenization. This duality is crucial for understanding the processes observed in multilingual contexts such as Kazakhstan [2].

In the field of sociolinguistics, Jan Blommaert emphasizes the importance of language in globalization processes, particularly in digital communication. Blommaert argues that linguistic practices are increasingly shaped by mobility, technology and transnational interactions. His concept of “superdiversity” is particularly relevant for analyzing hybrid linguistic forms in online environments [3].

The rise of digital communication has also led to the development of new research directions focusing on computer-mediated discourse. Susan Herring (2004) examines language use in online communication and identifies key features such as abbreviation, informality and multimodality. These characteristics are evident in gaming discourse where efficiency and speed are prioritized [4].

Gaming discourse itself has emerged as a distinct field of study. Researchers such as James Paul Gee highlight that video games create “semiotic domains” where language, identity and social practices intersect. Gee argues that players develop new forms of literacy and identity through participation in gaming communities which aligns with the findings of this study [5].

The phenomenon of code-switching has been widely studied as a marker of bilingual and multilingual identity. Carol Myers-Scotton introduced the Markedness Model which explains how speakers choose linguistic codes based on social context and communicative goals. In digital environments, code-switching becomes more fluid and frequent, reflecting dynamic identity construction [6].

Recent studies also focus on linguistic change in digital environments. Androutsopoulos explores language variation in online spaces, emphasizing the role of user practices in shaping digital discourse [7]. Similarly, Tagg examines the sociolinguistics of digital communication, highlighting the emergence of hybrid language forms [8].

Despite the growing body of research, there remains a gap in studies that combine digital discourse analysis, multilingualism and linguistic identity within the Kazakh context. Most existing research either focuses on traditional sociolinguistic frameworks or examines global trends without sufficient attention to local linguistic realities.

Materials and methods

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of

linguistic identity loss in a multilingual and digital context. The integration of methods allows for a deeper understanding of both observable linguistic patterns and participants' perceptions of language use.

The research is based on a descriptive and analytical design with elements of corpus-assisted and sociolinguistic analysis. It focuses on identifying linguistic features that reflect the erosion of linguistic identity and examining how these features function in real communicative environments, particularly in digital discourse. Several complementary methods were used to collect and analyze data:

Corpus Analysis is a dataset of digital texts was compiled from social media platforms such as Instagram, Telegram and gaming chats. The corpus includes examples of informal written communication produced by multilingual users. The analysis focuses on identifying lexical borrowings, code-switching instances and hybrid linguistic forms.

Survey (Questionnaire) is a structured questionnaire was administered to participants to assess their language preferences, frequency of code-switching, attitudes toward native and borrowed vocabulary and perceptions of linguistic identity.

Semi-Structured Interviews is in-depth interviews were conducted to gain qualitative insights into participants' linguistic behavior, motivations behind language choice and awareness of linguistic change.

Discourse Analysis is selected excerpts from digital communication were analyzed to examine how linguistic identity is constructed and negotiated in context.

The study involved 60 participants aged between 18 and 30, representing the younger generation most actively engaged in digital communication. All participants are residents of Kazakhstan and function within a multilingual environment (Kazakh–Russian–English) in M.Auezov university.

The sample was divided into two groups:

1st year students (n=30) are active participants in digital gaming communities (e.g., MMORPG and RPG players).

4th year students (n=30) are users of social media platforms not actively involved in gaming environments.

This grouping allows for a comparative analysis of linguistic behavior across different types of digital discourse.

The following instruments were utilized:

- questionnaire Form consisting of both closed-ended (Likert scale, multiple-choice) and open-ended questions;
- interview Guide designed to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for detailed responses;
- text Corpus compiled from authentic digital communication (screenshots and chat logs, anonymized for ethical compliance);

Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequency distribution), allowing for the identification of general trends in language use. Qualitative data from interviews and discourse samples were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and interpret the sociolinguistic significance of linguistic choices.

Additionally, comparative analysis was conducted between the two participant groups to determine the influence of gaming environments on linguistic identity formation and transformation.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent prior to participation. Personal data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. The study adheres to ethical standards in linguistic and social research.

The experimental component of the study involved a total of 60 students aged between 18 and 23, all residing in Kazakhstan and functioning within a multilingual environment characterized by the use of Kazakh, Russian and English. The participants were divided into two equal groups based on their engagement in digital gaming. 1st year students (n=30) consisted of students who actively participate in online gaming communities, while 4th year students (n=30) included students who do not engage in gaming activities. This division enabled a comparative analysis of linguistic behavior across different types of digital experience.

Task 1: Chat Simulation

Participants were asked to complete a task simulating real-life communication in a gaming environment. They were instructed to write responses as they would naturally do in a game chat. The situations provided included reacting to losing a game, inviting a friend to play, explaining unavailability due to being busy and giving advice to a teammate.

The responses were analyzed to identify key linguistic features, including the frequency of code-switching between languages, the use of gaming-related slang and the presence of lexical borrowings, particularly from English and Russian. This task aimed to capture authentic patterns of informal digital communication and to examine how linguistic identity is expressed in simulated gaming contexts.

Task 2: Lexical Choice Task

Instruction: Choose which option you would normally use:

Concept	Option A (Kazakh)	Option B (Borrowed)
Meeting	жиналыс	meeting
Deadline	соңғы мерзім	deadline
Game level	деңгей	level
Message	хабарлама	message

Task 3: Self-Assessment Survey

The third task consisted of a self-assessment questionnaire designed to explore participants' attitudes toward language use and their awareness of linguistic behavior in a multilingual and digital context. A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure responses.

The survey included statements such as: "I often mix languages in daily communication," "Borrowed words are easier to use," "I prefer English words in digital communication," "Kazakh words sound more natural to me" and "Gaming influences my language".

This task aimed to identify participants' subjective perceptions of code-switching, borrowing and language preference. It also provided insight into the relationship between language attitudes and actual linguistic practices observed in digital communication.

Task 4: Open-ended Questions

The fourth task involved open-ended questions intended to collect qualitative data on participants' linguistic behavior and self-reflection. Participants were asked to respond to questions such as: "*How do you usually speak with friends online?*" and "*Do you think your language has changed because of the internet or games?*"

The responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and key themes, including the normalization of code-switching, perceived influence of digital environments, attitudes toward borrowed vocabulary and awareness of language change. This task allowed for a deeper understanding of how participants perceive and interpret their own linguistic identity in a digital and multilingual setting.

Results

The analysis of code-switching frequency revealed significant differences between gamers and non-gamers.

Table 1. Use of Code-Switching

Group	Frequent (%)	Occasional (%)	Rare (%)
1 st year students Gamers (A)	68%	25%	7%
4 th year students Non-gamers (B)	42%	38%	20%

Gamers demonstrated a notably higher frequency of code-switching compared to non-gamers. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the statistical significance of this difference.

The lexical choice task revealed a strong preference for borrowed English terms.

The results demonstrate a clear distinction between gamers and non-gamers in terms of code-switching frequency. Gamers show a substantially higher proportion of frequent code-switching (68%) compared to non-gamers (42%), while the latter group exhibits higher percentages in the “occasional” and “rare” categories.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this finding suggests that code-switching is not random but serves as a strategic communicative tool. It reflects both linguistic competence and social alignment within digital communities.

Table 2. Preference for Borrowed vs Native Words

Concept	Borrowed (%)	Native (%)
Meeting	72%	28%
Deadline	81%	19%
Level	76%	24%
Message	55%	45%

The data indicate a consistent preference for borrowed English terms across all lexical categories. The highest preference is observed for terms closely associated with digital contexts, such as “deadline” (81%) and “level” (76%), while even more neutral terms like “meeting” show a strong dominance of borrowed forms (72%).

Importantly, the reduced use of native Kazakh equivalents suggests a narrowing of their functional domain. This supports the argument that lexical borrowing is a key mechanism of linguistic identity transformation and may lead to gradual lexical erosion if such patterns persist over time.

Table 3. Self-Assessment Results

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Gaming affects language	74%	16%	10%
English dominates in games	88%	7%	5%
I use gaming slang in real life	63%	22%	15%
Kazakh words sound more natural to me	52%	28%	20%

The self-assessment results reveal a strong awareness among participants of the impact of gaming on their language use. A majority (74%) acknowledge that gaming influences their linguistic behavior, while an even higher percentage (88%) recognize the dominance of English in gaming environments.

Interestingly, despite 52% of respondents stating that Kazakh words feel more natural, their actual linguistic practices (as shown in previous tasks) contradict this preference. This discrepancy highlights a gap between linguistic attitudes and behavior, suggesting that language change is often unconscious and driven by contextual factors rather than deliberate choice.

Table 4. Linguistic Features in Chat

Feature	Gamers (%)	Non-gamers (%)
Slang (GG, noob)	82%	35%
Code-switching	68%	45%
Abbreviations	65%	40%
Pure Kazakh	18%	38%

The analysis of linguistic features in chat communication further supports the quantitative findings. Gamers exhibit significantly higher usage of slang (82%), abbreviations (65%) and code-switching (68%), whereas non-gamers show a higher tendency to use pure Kazakh forms (38%).

The low percentage of pure Kazakh usage among gamers (18%) indicates that hybridization is becoming the dominant mode of communication in digital contexts. This reflects a shift from traditional linguistic norms toward more flexible and adaptive language practices.

The results indicate that gamers rely significantly more on hybrid and globalized linguistic elements, while non-gamers show a higher tendency toward maintaining native language structures.

Qualitative Insights from Open-Ended Responses

Thematic analysis revealed four dominant patterns:

- normalization of code-switching;
- influence of digital environments;
- perceived efficiency of English vocabulary;
- awareness of linguistic change.

These findings support the quantitative results and demonstrate that hybrid language use is both widespread and socially accepted.

The qualitative data provide important contextual support for the quantitative findings. The normalization of code-switching suggests that hybrid language use is no longer perceived as deviation but as a standard communicative practice.

Participants’ emphasis on the influence of digital environments confirms that language change is closely tied to technological and social contexts. The perception of English as more “convenient” further explains its dominance in lexical choices.

At the same time, the expressed concern about the decline of “pure” Kazakh language indicates an awareness of linguistic erosion. This duality such as acceptance of hybrid forms alongside concern for language preservation reflects the complex and dynamic nature of linguistic identity in a globalized world.

Discussion

Media plays an incredibly powerful role in shaping consciousness and beliefs, particularly among teenagers. Academics and educators widely acknowledge that media are the number one influence over what teenagers

consider to be the cultural, ethical and political norms. Youth culture, teenage slang and ethnic identity are formed largely by the media. Media have also been affirmed as being the predominant method by which language is learned [9].

The results of the study clearly demonstrate that digital environments, particularly gaming communities, significantly influence linguistic behavior and contribute to the transformation of linguistic identity.

First, the high frequency of code-switching among gamers (68%) compared to non-gamers (42%) indicates that gaming environments promote multilingual communication practices. This supports the hypothesis that digital interaction accelerates hybrid language use.

Second, the lexical choice task reveals a strong preference for borrowed English terms over native Kazakh equivalents. Words such as “*deadline*” and “*level*” are used more frequently than their Kazakh counterparts, suggesting a gradual reduction in the functional use of native vocabulary. This reflects the process of linguistic erosion at the lexical level.

Furthermore, the widespread use of gaming slang (82% among gamers) demonstrates the formation of a distinct subcultural linguistic identity. These elements are not limited to gaming contexts but extend into everyday communication, indicating a shift in language norms among younger speakers.

The findings also highlight the role of digital platforms in shaping language preferences. The dominance of English in gaming environments (88%) reinforces its status as a global lingua franca, influencing language choice even in local communication.

At the same time, the presence of native Kazakh usage, particularly among non-gamers, suggests that linguistic identity is not entirely lost but rather transformed. This supports the idea that hybrid linguistic forms represent both a threat to linguistic uniqueness and an adaptive response to globalization.

In conclusion, the study confirms that linguistic identity in multilingual societies such as Kazakhstan is increasingly shaped by digital and global influences. While this leads to the erosion of traditional linguistic features, it also results in the emergence of new, hybrid forms of communication.

At the same time, the persistence of native language elements and the awareness of linguistic change suggest that this process is complex and multidimensional.

Conclusion

The present study examined the phenomenon of linguistic identity transformation in digital communication with a particular focus on multilingual students in Kazakhstan. The findings demonstrate that linguistic identity is not a static construct but a dynamic and adaptive process shaped by globalization, digitalization and everyday communicative practices.

The results confirm the initial hypothesis that the increasing influence of digital environments and dominant global languages contributes to the gradual erosion of linguistic uniqueness. This is primarily manifested through the widespread use of lexical borrowings, frequent code-switching and the emergence of hybrid linguistic forms. The experimental data revealed that students actively engaged in gaming environments exhibit a significantly higher degree of linguistic hybridity, indicating that digital gaming communities function as powerful agents of language change.

At the same time, the study shows that the transformation of linguistic identity should not be interpreted solely as a negative process. The emergence of hybrid forms reflects not only linguistic erosion but also adaptive strategies that enable speakers to navigate complex multilingual realities. In this sense, linguistic identity in the digital age becomes fluid, context-dependent and performative.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in its integrated approach, combining sociolinguistic analysis with experimental data from digital discourse. Unlike traditional studies that focus on language shift or borrowing in isolation, this study demonstrates how digital environments accelerate and normalize these processes, particularly among younger generations. Furthermore, the research contributes to the underexplored field of Kazakh-language studies in digital contexts, offering empirical evidence of how global and local linguistic elements interact in real communication.

The study also highlights a critical tension between linguistic preservation and linguistic innovation. While participants express awareness of the importance of maintaining their native language, their actual language use reflects a shift toward efficiency, global norms and digital convenience. This discrepancy underscores the need for balanced language policies and educational strategies that support both linguistic diversity and communicative competence in globalized environments.

In conclusion, linguistic identity in contemporary multilingual societies is undergoing a profound transformation influenced by digital communication and global cultural flows. The Kazakh language, as demonstrated in this study, is not disappearing but evolving within a hybrid linguistic space. Future research should further explore longitudinal changes, expand the range of digital platforms analyzed and investigate effective strategies for preserving linguistic and cultural identity in the age of globalization.

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ТІЛДІК БІРЕГЕЙЛІКТІҢ ЖОЙЫЛУЫ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы көптілді студенттерге назар аударып, цифрлық коммуникация жағдайындағы тілдік бірегейліктің трансформациясын қарастырады. Зерттеудің мақсаты – жаһандану мен цифрлық ортаның, әсіресе онлайн ойын қауымдастықтарының тілдік қолданысқа әсерін және тілдік өзіндік ерекшеліктің әлсіреуіне ықпалын талдау. Зерттеудің ғылыми жаңалығы – көптілді ортада социолінгвистикалық талдауды, эксперименттік әдістерді және цифрлық дискурс зерттеуін біріктіретін кешенді тәсілді қолдануында. Зерттеу барысында аралас әдіснама қолданылып, корпус талдауы, сауалнама, эксперименттік тапсырмалар және дискурс талдауы жүргізілді.

Зерттеу нәтижелері студенттердің тілдік тәжірибесінде код-ауысудың жоғары деңгейін, ағылшын тілінен енген сөздердің кең қолданылуын және гибриді тілдік формалардың қалыптасуын көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, ойын ортасына белсенді қатысатын студенттерде тілдік гибриділік деңгейі ойынға қатыспайтындарға қарағанда әлдеқайда жоғары екені анықталды. Сонымен бірге, ұлттық лексиканың қолданылу аясы тарылғанымен, бұл үдерістер жаһанданған цифрлық кеңістікте бейімделу стратегиясы ретінде қызмет атқарады.

Зерттеу тілдік бірегейліктің динамикалық және контекстке тәуелді құбылыс екенін, оның жаһандық және жергілікті факторлардың ықпалымен қалыптасатынын дәлелдейді. Сондай-ақ, цифрлық орта тек тілдік эрозияға әкеліп қана қоймай, жаңа тілдік қолданыс формаларын қалыптастыратыны атап өтіледі. Зерттеу нәтижелері тілдік әртүрлілікті сақтау және қазіргі қоғамда тиімді коммуникацияны қамтамасыз ету үшін теңгерімді тіл саясатын әзірлеудің маңыздылығын көрсетеді.

Тірек сөздер: тілдік бірегейлік, жаһандану, цифрлық дискурс, код-ауысу, кірме сөздер, көптілділік, қазақ тілі, ойын қарым-қатынасы

УТРАТА ЯЗЫКОВОЙ САМОБЫТНОСТИ

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Аннотация. Данное исследование посвящено трансформации языковой идентичности в условиях цифровой коммуникации с акцентом на многоязычных студентов Казахстана. Цель исследования заключается в анализе того, как глобализация и цифровые среды, особенно онлайн-игровые сообщества, влияют на языковое использование и способствуют утрате языковой самобытности. Научная новизна работы заключается в комплексном подходе, объединяющем социолингвистический анализ, экспериментальные методы и исследование цифрового дискурса в условиях многоязычия. В исследовании применен смешанный методологический подход, включающий корпусный анализ, анкетирование, экспериментальные задания и дискурс-анализ.

Результаты показывают высокую частотность код-свитчинга, широкое использование заимствованной английской лексики и формирование гибридных языковых форм в речи студентов. Установлено, что участники, вовлеченные в игровые среды, демонстрируют значительно более высокий уровень языковой гибридности по сравнению с неиграющими. При этом, несмотря на сокращение использования исконной лексики, данные процессы выступают как адаптивные коммуникативные стратегии в условиях глобализированного цифрового пространства.

Исследование подтверждает, что языковая идентичность является динамичным и контекстно обусловленным явлением, формируемым под воздействием как глобальных, так и локальных факторов. Подчеркивается, что цифровые среды не только способствуют языковой эрозии, но и формируют новые способы языкового выражения. Полученные результаты указывают на необходимость разработки сбалансированной языковой политики, направленной на сохранение языкового разнообразия и обеспечение эффективной коммуникации в современном обществе.

Ключевые слова: языковая идентичность, глобализация, цифровой дискурс, код-свитчинг, заимствования, многоязычие, казахский язык, игровая коммуникация

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