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SOCIOLINGUISTIC ISSUES OF LANGUAGE DECOLONIZATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. The article examines the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan from a sociolinguistic perspective in connection with the prerequisites, key aspects, and challenges of linguistic decolonization. Language is considered as a carrier of national consciousness and cultural code, which determines the relevance of studying the processes of expanding the functional scope of the state language and decolonizing public consciousness.

The purpose of the study is to identify the sociolinguistic aspects of linguistic decolonization, to determine its impact on public consciousness and language policy, and to develop scientific foundations for the formation of a decolonized linguistic environment.

The methodology of the research includes a combination of theoretical analysis, discourse analysis, statistical methods, and quantitative sociological survey. The empirical base consists of official documents on language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, data from the 2021 national population census, and survey results collected among various social groups.

The results of the study reveal that, despite the expansion of the functional domains of the Kazakh language, a number of sociolinguistic barriers continue to limit its full dominance, including language attitudes, institutional practices, and the influence of bilingualism. The analysis also demonstrates the coexistence of monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual models in society, reflecting the complexity of the current linguistic landscape.

The scientific significance of the study lies in its comprehensive sociolinguistic interpretation of linguistic decolonization processes and its contribution to the development of decolonial linguistics in the Kazakhstani context. The novelty of the research is determined by the integrated approach combining theoretical reflection, media discourse analysis, and empirical data, which enables a multidimensional assessment of language processes.

The practical significance of the study lies in the development of evidence-based recommendations aimed at strengthening the social status of the state language, improving language policy, and ensuring the effective implementation of linguistic decolonization strategies.

Keywords: linguistic decolonization, sociolinguistics, decolonial linguistics, Kazakh language, language policy, language proficiency, linguistic identity, bilingualism

Introduction

The contemporary issue of the Kazakh language in society is discussed and studied not merely as a means of communication, but as a key indicator of state independence, national identity, and spiritual renewal. The process of linguistic decolonization in Kazakhstan involves expanding the sphere of use of the Kazakh language, as well as decolonizing public consciousness and elevating the linguistic environment to a new qualitative level. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this process requires a reconsideration of linguistic needs, language prestige, and existing functional inequalities between languages.

Although numerous reforms have been implemented since independence to enhance the status of the Kazakh language and expand its use, the linguistic inertia inherited from the colonial period still persists. The current legal framework regulating the use and teaching of the Kazakh language as the state language including the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Articles 7 and 93), the Concept of Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (1996), the Law “On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan” (1997), state programs for language development, and presidential decrees has not yet ensured the full implementation of these objectives. In many cases, these documents lack effective implementation mechanisms, and even when such mechanisms exist, their enforcement remains uncertain within the current linguistic environment. Over the past 35 years, this limitation has become evident. Therefore, the existing legal framework requires revision in accordance with the sociocommunicative demands of contemporary society, where the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs has exceeded 70.1%, and in line with international experience and global practices. Linguistic decolonization should be understood not simply as replacing one language with another, but as a complex socio-psychological process involving the transformation of public consciousness, the revival of national identity, and the dismantling of entrenched linguistic hierarchies.

This article examines the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan from a sociolinguistic perspective in connection with the prerequisites, key aspects, and challenges of linguistic decolonization. The presence of diglossia, characterized by the unequal status of two languages, continues to hinder the full development of the state language. A scientific analysis of the mechanisms of linguistic decolonization may offer ways to overcome these contradictions. One of the central challenges today lies in reducing the gap between the dominant inertia of the Russian language and the demographic growth of Kazakh speakers. The increasing proportion of Kazakh-speaking citizens and the rising demand for the state language among younger generations necessitate a reassessment of the existing linguistic model. In this context, it becomes essential to analyze the imbalance between the *de jure* status of the Kazakh language in official documents and legislation and its *de facto* use in everyday social practice. At the same time, the parallel use of Kazakh and Russian languages often places many Kazakhs in a situation of living within two linguistic and cultural realities.

What are the potential risks of the parallel use of two languages? One of them is the preservation of colonial patterns of thinking. In some cases, Kazakhs begin to believe that their native language is insufficiently developed for domains such as quantum physics or international law. Such perceptions may lead to a form of linguistic alienation, where individuals feel more confident or socially complete only when speaking Russian. Overcoming this condition requires a process of decolonization. The aim of linguistic decolonization is not the elimination of the Russian language in Kazakhstan but the strengthening of the status and functional capacity of the Kazakh language and its transformation into a prestigious official language. In recent years, efforts to remove colonial remnants from the linguistic landscape, toponymy, and official documentation have been gradually implemented. At the same time, within the framework of Kazakhstan's new stage of development often described as the concept of a "Just Kazakhstan" – linguistic reforms, including the transition to the Latin alphabet, require deeper scientific examination as part of the broader process of decolonization.

In international sociolinguistics, issues of linguistic decolonization are widely discussed within the framework of decolonial linguistics. For example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's work *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* is considered one of the foundational texts in the theory of linguistic decolonization [1]. The author emphasizes the crucial role of language in preserving cultural identity. Donaldo Macedo, in his work *Decolonizing Foreign Language Education*, critically examines Western-oriented models of language education and highlights the marginalization of local languages within these systems [2]. One of the founders of sociolinguistics, William Labov, demonstrated the relationship between language change and ethnic, social, and class-based factors [3]. In addition, scholars such as Anne H. Charity Hudley and Mary Bucholtz address the need to reduce Western bias in linguistic research and to prioritize the linguistic experiences of communities from the Global South [4].

Within Kazakhstan, significant sociolinguistic research has been conducted by scholars such as B.Khasanuly, M.M.Kopylenko, A.E.Karlinsky, E.D.Suleimenova, Z.K.Akhmetzhanova, A.Abasilov, and A.Mustoyapova. Furthermore, linguists including Sh.Kurmanbayuly, B.Biyarov, and B.Kapalbek have explored the sociolinguistic foundations of the modernization of Kazakh terminology, onomastics, and the alphabet reform associated with the transition to the Latin script, as well as their role in the process of linguistic decolonization. In recent years, younger scholars such as A.Baimyrza and A.Piyazbekova have begun to examine issues related to the decolonization of consciousness and linguistic identity among youth from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines sociolinguistics, linguocultural studies and psycholinguistics.

Materials and methods

During the study, a set of comprehensive sociolinguistic research methods was employed. In particular, discourse analysis was applied to examine the process of decolonization within public consciousness. In order to identify the dynamics of changes in the linguistic environment, a comparative-historical

retrospective analysis was conducted. In addition, a quantitative survey method was used to assess the scope of the state language's use among different social groups.

In processing the data, the principles of systematicity and objectivity were followed. The empirical basis of the study includes official documents related to the language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the results of the national population censuses of 2009 and 2021, as well as media materials reflecting linguistic discourse in contemporary Kazakhstani society.

Results and discussion

The study analyzes the works of foreign scholars who have examined the issue of linguistic decolonization in depth. One of the most influential scholars in this field is the renowned Kenyan writer and dramatist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, whose work *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) is considered a foundational text in the theory of linguistic decolonization. According to the author, the most destructive form of colonization is not the occupation of land but the conquest of the mind. He characterizes language as a "tool of spiritual domination" in the hands of the colonizer. Ngũgĩ argues that when individuals become detached from their native language, they begin to perceive their own culture through the eyes of an outsider. In contemporary Kazakh society, the indifference of certain groups toward their native culture can be interpreted as a manifestation of the "cultural alienation" described by Ngũgĩ.

One of the author's most striking theoretical concepts is the idea of the "cultural bomb". Its purpose is to destroy people's confidence in their language, heritage, and identity. As Ngũgĩ writes, this "bomb" makes people reject their names, language, environment, and even themselves. In the context of Kazakhstan, this phenomenon can be observed in the perception of the Kazakh language as merely a language of everyday communication. Linguistic decolonization, therefore, is not limited to speaking Kazakh; it also involves restoring confidence in the intellectual and scientific potential of the language.

Ngũgĩ further argues that colonial systems establish an artificial hierarchy of languages, where the colonizer's language becomes associated with power and knowledge, while indigenous languages are perceived as symbols of backwardness or rural life. One of the central sociolinguistic problems in Kazakhstan today is the persistence of such a hierarchy. The dominance of the Russian language in official and business domains continues to reproduce the form of "spiritual subordination" described by Ngũgĩ. According to this perspective, genuine independence can be achieved only when the state language occupies a dominant position in key strategic spheres such as the economy, science, and the judicial system. Linguistic decolonization can therefore be understood as a process of transforming public consciousness. As the author emphasizes, knowledge of one's native language represents cultural strength, whereas thinking exclusively in the language of another may perpetuate forms of symbolic dependence [1].

Another influential scholar in the fields of linguistics, critical pedagogy, and multiculturalism is Donaldo Macedo, an honorary professor at the University

of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston). In his work *Decolonizing Foreign Language Education*, Macedo introduces the concepts of linguistic imperialism and subtractive bilingualism, which provide a useful analytical framework for understanding how the Kazakh language was marginalized in key domains of social life during the Soviet period.

According to Macedo, subtractive bilingualism refers to a model of language education in which the acquisition of a second language, usually the dominant or colonial language leads to the gradual weakening, displacement, or disappearance of the learner's native language. The methodology of teaching Russian in Kazakh schools during the Soviet period largely followed this model. In the process of teaching Russian to Kazakh-speaking students, the Kazakh language was not recognized as a language of science or academic knowledge but was instead treated as a limited, everyday means of communication. As a result, students acquired new terminology and academic concepts primarily in Russian, which weakened the cognitive and intellectual functions of their native language.

The decolonization of school curricula in Kazakhstan therefore requires recognizing the Kazakh language not merely as a separate academic subject but as a primary cognitive tool capable of transmitting knowledge across all fields of education. According to Macedo's theoretical framework, genuine bilingualism does not imply the replacement of one language by another but rather the acquisition of global knowledge through the medium of one's native language [2].

Further analysis of the process of linguistic decolonization highlights the significance of the theoretical contributions of William Labov, one of the founders of sociolinguistics. Labov demonstrated that language change is not random but is closely connected with ethnic, class, and broader social factors. His studies established that linguistic variation reflects patterns of social stratification within a given society.

In his classical sociolinguistic research, Labov showed that the pronunciation of certain sounds or words is often associated with the speaker's social status. The division between Kazakh-speaking and Russian-speaking communities in Kazakhstan can be interpreted as a manifestation of the social stratification described by Labov. For a long period, the Russian language was perceived as a marker of the urban elite and higher social strata, whereas the Kazakh language was marginalized and associated with lower social groups. From this perspective, linguistic decolonization can be understood as a process aimed at dismantling this social hierarchy and equalizing the prestige of the state language across different social groups.

Labov also emphasized that dominant social groups tend to establish their own linguistic practices as the normative standard, while alternative forms are labeled as incorrect or informal. During the Soviet period, Russian linguistic standards were institutionalized as indicators of education and intellectual authority. For instance, the official *Rules of Kazakh Orthography* (1957, 1978, 1988, 2007) included a provision stating that borrowed words from Russian

should retain their original form and be written according to Russian orthographic rules without modification. Similarly, the 2018 draft of the *Basic Rules of Kazakh Orthography* based on the Latin script states that the names of internationally recognized organizations abbreviated in English should be written according to their original English forms [5, 25]. These examples demonstrate that within the framework of linguistic decolonization, Labov's theoretical insights encourage a critical reassessment of the academic and official standards of the Kazakh language and their liberation from the influence of dominant colonial linguistic norms [3].

As noted above in relation to orthography, linguistic decolonization in Kazakhstan also requires the decolonization of Kazakh linguistics itself. In this regard, the theoretical approaches developed by prominent American scholars Anne H. Charity Hudley, Christine Mallinson, and Mary Bucholtz, who have studied issues of social justice, racial equality, and education in linguistics, provide an important conceptual foundation.

These scholars argue that many linguistic theories have historically been constructed primarily on the basis of European languages and Western cultural contexts. They characterize this phenomenon as a form of linguistic dominance rooted in Eurocentric academic traditions. Indeed, Kazakh linguistics has long been evaluated according to the frameworks of either the Russian linguistic school (Slavistics) or Western Indo-European linguistic models. Such approaches often hinder a deeper understanding of the internal logic, structural features, and cultural identity of the Kazakh language. Therefore, the works of Akhmet Baitursynuly, who examined the Kazakh language from its own linguistic and cultural foundations rather than from a Eurocentric perspective, should serve as a central theoretical reference.

According to these scholars, the primary objective of linguistic research should not be limited to describing language structures but should also involve protecting the rights and linguistic dignity of the communities that speak those languages. In this regard, the model of *decolonial linguistics* proposed by these scholars provides a conceptual framework for freeing Kazakh linguistics from European or Russian academic dominance and for developing it as an independent scientific discipline of global significance [4].

Linguistic decolonization in Kazakhstan represents a complex process characterized by multiple dimensions and challenges. It encompasses the liberation of consciousness described by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the educational reforms proposed by Macedo, the sociolinguistic concept of language prestige developed by Labov, and the call for scientific independence advocated by Charity Hudley, Mallinson, and Bucholtz.

In Kazakhstan, the establishment of the Kazakh language as a fully dominant language in society has been supported by sociolinguistic research conducted by scholars such as B.Khasanuly, M.M.Kopylenko, A.E.Karlinsky, E.D.Suleimenova, and Z.K.Akhmetzhanova, who contributed significantly to the development of a national sociolinguistic research tradition. The concepts of *language situation*, *interference*, and *language planning* developed in their

works provided a scientific foundation for the revitalization of the Kazakh language in the post-Soviet period. In particular, the thesis advanced in the studies of E.Suleimenova [6] and B.Khasanuly [7] that the state language constitutes the core of national identity resonates with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's idea of the decolonization of consciousness and outlines strategic pathways for expanding the functional domains of the Kazakh language [6]. Furthermore, A.Abasilov and A.Mustoyapova have examined the legal and sociolinguistic aspects of language policy, focusing on the institutional foundations of linguistic decolonization [8; 9].

Efforts to eliminate colonial remnants from the internal structure of the language have been actively pursued by a group of linguists including Sh.Kurmanbayuly, B.Biyarov, and B.Kapalbek. For instance, the terminological studies of Sh.Kurmanbayuly are aimed at strengthening the scientific potential of the Kazakh language and developing its specialized vocabulary for academic and professional domains [10]. In the field of onomastics, B.Biyarov has contributed to the process of “decolonizing space” by restoring historical and cultural roots to place names through the study and revision of toponyms [11]. Meanwhile, B.Kapalbek focuses on the sociolinguistic foundations of the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script and on developing methodological approaches for teaching the state language in secondary schools, higher education institutions, and among the adult population [12].

In recent years, younger scholars such as A.Baimyrza and A.Piyazbekova have begun to analyze language-related issues from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and linguocultural studies [13; 14]. By examining phenomena such as **code-switching** and **linguistic identity** among young people, these researchers have adapted the theory of the decolonization of consciousness to the contemporary Kazakhstani context. Their studies demonstrate that linguistic decolonization is not merely an external or legal process but also a profound internal and psychological transformation. These works identify new trends in the formation of linguistic consciousness among younger generations.

In sociolinguistic research, the statistical analysis of the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan is of particular importance. According to the results of the most recent national population census conducted in 2021, the sociocommunicative system of the country includes 124 languages. The majority of the population (70.4%) belongs to the Kazakh ethnic group, while the Russian diaspora constitutes 15.5%, and representatives of other ethnic groups account for 14.1% of the population [15].

Table 1 below presents data on the population of Kazakhstan and their levels of proficiency in their native languages. By comparing numerical and percentage indicators, it becomes possible to identify the main sociolinguistic trends reflected in the data.

Table 1. Population by Ethnicity and Native Language

Population of Kazakhstan	Total					
	Number of persons of this ethnicity		Native language			
			Language of their own ethnicity		Language of another ethnicity	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	19 186 015	100				
Kazakh	13 497 891	70,4	13 380 107	99,1	117 784	0,9
Russian	2 981 946	15,5	2 853 224	95,7	128 722	4,3
Uzbek	614 047	3,2	583 456	95,0	30 591	5,0
Ukrainian	387 327	2,0	77 258	19,9	310 069	80,1
Uighur	290 337	1,5	247 322	85,2	43 015	14,8
Tatar	218 653	1,1	129 314	59,1	89 339	40,9
German	226 092	1,2	77 252	34,2	148 840	65,8
Korean	118 450	0,6	49 222	41,6	69 228	58,4
Turkish	85 478	0,4	71 935	84,2	13 543	15,8
Azerbaijani	145 615	0,8	108 538	74,5	37 077	25,5
Belarusian	76 484	0,4	42 299	55,3	34 185	44,7
Dungan	78 817	0,4	74 107	94,0	4 710	6,0
Kurd	47 880	0,2	41 770	87,2	6 110	12,8
Tajik	49 827	0,3	45 950	92,2	3 877	7,8
Polish	35 319	0,2	7 737	21,9	27 582	78,1
Chechen	33 557	0,2	26 452	78,8	7 105	21,2
Kyrgyz	34 184	0,2	26 264	76,8	7 920	23,2
Other ethnic groups	264 111	1,4	111 666	42,3	152 445	57,7

Source: National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021.

As shown in the table, the level of preservation of the native language among the Kazakh population is extremely high, reaching 99.1%, which indicates a strong linguistic identity. Only 117,784 individuals (0.9%) identify another language as their native language. The preservation of the native language among Russians is also relatively high (95.7%), although 4.3% of respondents reported another language as their mother tongue.

Among Ukrainians, Poles, and Germans, the use of their ethnic native languages is significantly weaker, ranging from approximately 19% to 55%, while the majority identify Russian as their native language. This situation reflects the historical effects of Russification and the language policy of the Soviet period.

In contrast, Turkic-speaking ethnic groups demonstrate a relatively high level of native language preservation, ranging from 59% to 95%. Only a small proportion (5-25%) identify another language, most commonly Russian, as their mother tongue. Similar to the Kazakh population, these groups tend to use their native languages as a central marker of cultural and ethnic identity.

Among other ethnic groups such as Koreans, Chechens, Kurds, and Dungans, the level of native language preservation ranges from 41% to 94%, while between 7% and 57% report another language as their mother tongue.

Considering its demographic composition, Kazakhstan can be characterized as a *multiethnic* and *multilingual state*. From a theoretical perspective, this situation indicates the presence of established patterns of *bilingualism* and *multilingualism* within the country.

Table 2. Language Proficiency by Ethnic Groups

Population of Kazakhstan	Proficiency in:									
	One language		Two languages		Three languages		Four languages		Five or more languages	
Total	4 205 514	24,5	7 727 082	44,9	4 923 864	28,6	292 858	1,7	45 394	0,3
Kazakh	1 852 259	15,6	5 800 099	48,7	4 030 103	33,9	193 945	1,6	30 488	0,2
Russian	1 620 461	57,4	842 229	29,9	341 210	12,1	15 501	0,6	2 259	0,01
Uzbek	72 705	13,7	262 066	49,2	162 130	30,4	32 540	6,1	3 333	0,02
Ukrainian	187 711	50,7	127 614	34,5	51 327	13,9	3 031	0,8	388	0,002
Uighur	38 649	14,8	118 794	45,6	82 456	31,7	17 754	6,8	2 761	0,02
Tatar	55 871	27,3	99 234	48,4	42 709	20,9	6 051	3,0	981	0,01
German	101 961	48,5	78 126	37,1	28 453	13,5	1 699	0,8	178	0,001
Korean	36 478	32,7	44 315	39,7	28 311	25,4	2 180	2,0	265	0,002
Turkish	15 003	19,6	35 347	46,1	21 308	27,8	4 136	5,4	904	0,005
Azerbaijani	24 755	18,7	63 407	47,9	35 408	26,8	6 485	4,9	2 317	0,01
Belarusian	72 838	52,2	38 001	35,6	25 911	11,7	8 521	0,5	400	0,002
Dungan	16 762	24,7	38 690	57,0	11 520	17,0	747	1,1	109	0,001
Kurd	8 085	18,9	25 169	58,8	8 602	20,1	787	1,8	193	0,001
Tajik	7 581	17,5	23 441	54,2	10 372	24,0	1 656	3,8	230	0,001
Polish	18 167	54,4	11 048	33,1	3 872	11,6	248	0,7	35	0,000
Chechen	8 038	25,8	15 862	50,9	6 468	20,8	689	2,2	79	0,000
Kyrgyz	6 310	20,9	16 464	54,4	6 445	21,3	867	2,9	184	0,001
Other ethnic groups	61 880	25,2	125 177	51,0	55 570	22,6	2 653	1,1	290	0,1

Source: National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021.

As shown in the table, monolingual speakers constitute approximately 24% of the population, most of whom are Russians and representatives of several European minority ethnic groups. About 29% of the population speaks three languages, typically a combination of Kazakh, Russian, and English, or their ethnic language alongside these languages. Individuals who speak four or more languages represent only about 2% of the population, indicating that highly advanced multilingualism remains relatively limited.

Among the Kazakh population, the majority are bilingual or trilingual, usually speaking Kazakh and Russian, with English sometimes added as a third language. The proportion of monolingual Kazakhs is relatively low (15.6%), which reflects a comparatively high level of multilingualism. In contrast, a

significant proportion of Russians remain monolingual, primarily using the Russian language. Their levels of bilingualism and trilingualism are lower compared with those of Kazakhs.

The language proficiency patterns of other ethnic groups may be divided into two general types. The first group includes Turkic-speaking ethnic communities (such as Uzbeks, Uighurs, Turks, Kyrgyz, and Azerbaijanis), among whom bilingualism is predominant, accounting for approximately 45-55%. Around 20-30% of individuals in these groups speak three languages, most commonly their ethnic language together with Kazakh and Russian, while the proportion of monolingual speakers remains relatively low (13-20%).

The second group consists of Slavic and European ethnic communities (including Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Poles, and Germans). In these groups, the proportion of monolingual speakers is significantly higher (40-50%), with most individuals using either their ethnic language or Russian as their primary language. The level of trilingual proficiency among these groups is comparatively low.

The table below presents data on the level of proficiency in the state language (Kazakh) and its use in everyday communication among different ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. A comparison of numerical and percentage indicators reveals several significant trends. Although the overall level of proficiency in the state language is relatively high (80.1%), only 49.3% of the population report using it in daily communication. This indicates a considerable gap between knowledge of the language and its regular practical use. Thus, despite the official status and widespread recognition of the Kazakh language, its share in everyday and public communication remains comparatively limited.

Table 3. Population Proficient in the State Language

Population of Kazakhstan			Total population					
			Proficient in the state language		Of which:		Not proficient	
					use in daily life			
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	17 194 712	100	13 768 406	80,1	8 472 661	49,3	3 426 306	19,9
Kazakh	11 906 894	69,2	11 861 654	99,6	7 550 482	63,4	45 240	0,4
Russian	2 821 660	16,4	708 069	25,1	262 389	9,3	2 113 591	74,9
Uzbek	532 663	3,1	383 322	72,0	252 331	47,4	149 341	28,0
Ukrainian	370 071	2,2	87 676	23,7	28 157	7,6	282 395	76,3
Uighur	260 414	1,5	186 661	71,7	118 271	45,4	73 753	28,3
Tatar	204 846	1,2	103 524	50,5	46 704	22,8	101 322	49,5
German	210 417	1,2	53 082	25,2	17 642	8,4	157 335	74,8
Korean	111 549	0,6	40 754	36,5	17 954	16,1	70 795	63,5
Turkish	76 698	0,4	46 791	61,0	27 502	35,9	29 907	39,0
Azerbaijani	132 372	0,8	77 388	58,5	42 488	32,1	54 984	41,5
Belarusian	72 838	0,4	16 607	22,8	4 729	6,5	56 231	77,2
Dungan	67 828	0,4	34 075	50,2	18 085	26,7	33 753	49,8

Kurd	42 836	0,2	25 358	59,2	13 884	32,4	17 478	40,8
Tajik	43 280	0,3	27 540	63,6	17 910	41,4	15 740	36,4
Polish	33 370	0,2	7 372	22,1	1 735	5,2	25 998	77,9
Chechen	31 136	0,2	12 745	40,9	6 024	19,3	18 391	59,1
Kyrgyz	30 270	0,2	17 707	58,5	10 515	34,7	12 563	41,5
Other ethnic groups	245 570	1,4	78 081	31,8	35 859	14,6	167 489	68,2

Source: National Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021.

As shown in the table, even among the Kazakh population approximately one third (36.6%) do not use the Kazakh language in daily communication. This reflects the continuing influence of urbanization, Russian-speaking environments, and historical language policies. Among Turkic-speaking ethnic groups (Uzbeks, Uighurs, Turks, Azerbaijanis, Tatars, and Kyrgyz), the level of proficiency in the state language is relatively high, ranging from 50% to 72%, while the level of everyday use is also comparatively significant (22-47%).

In contrast, among Slavic ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Poles), the level of proficiency in the Kazakh language remains relatively low, approximately 22-25%, and the proportion of those who use it in daily life is only 5-9%. This indicates that even those who possess some knowledge of the language rarely use it in everyday communication. Such a situation reflects the continuing influence of the dominance of the Russian language during the Soviet period and the persistence of the Russian-speaking information space in contemporary society.

Among other ethnic groups (Koreans, Tajiks, Chechens, Dungans, Kurds, and Germans), the proportion of individuals who know the state language ranges from 25% to 63%, although the level of its daily use (8.4-41%) remains comparatively lower.

These findings suggest that although the legal status of the state language in Kazakhstan is relatively strong, its social and communicative dominance has not yet been fully established. Therefore, the primary task of language policy is not merely to increase the percentage of people who know the language but also to expand its actual use across all spheres of public life.

A quantitative research method was employed to collect empirical data through a survey conducted using Google Forms. A total of 150 respondents participated in the survey. Among them, 105 respondents (70.0%) were Kazakh-speaking, while 45 respondents (30.0%) were Russian-speaking. The Kazakh-speaking group consisted mainly of women (58.1%), with the majority belonging to the 26-40 age group (38.1%). In contrast, the Russian-speaking group was dominated by men (68.9%), with most participants aged 18-25 (46.7%).

The intellectual level of the participants was relatively high: 79.7% of respondents across both groups possessed an academic degree. In terms of social

status, the sample included students (36.5%), civil servants (22.2%), researchers and lecturers (4.8%), and representatives of the private sector (36.5%). These indicators ensure the representativeness and objectivity of the research results.

The main section of the questionnaire consisted of four questions. A total of **105** Kazakh-speaking respondents (Group A) and **45** Russian-speaking respondents (Group B) participated in answering these questions. Each question offered four possible response options.

To the first question, “In which contexts do you most frequently use the Kazakh language?”, 77.1% of respondents in Group A and 68.9% in Group B reported that they use the Kazakh language equally in both formal and informal contexts (Figure 1). This finding indicates that the Kazakh language is increasingly functioning not only as a family language but also as a broader instrument of public communication.

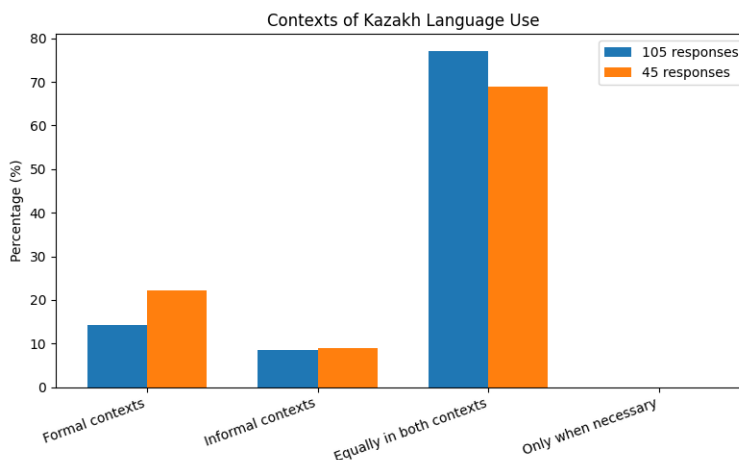


Figure 1 – Distribution of Kazakh Language Use across Communication Contexts

An analysis of the responses to the question “What do you think is the main factor limiting the use of the Kazakh language?” reveals several important trends. Among respondents in Group A, 39% identified the lack of internal motivation and practical need to use the Kazakh language as the primary limiting factor. An even larger proportion of respondents in Group B (57.8%) shared this view (Figure 2).

Another significant barrier identified by respondents is the inertia of Russian in everyday communication, which was mentioned by 31.4% of Group A and 33.3% of Group B. At the same time, respondents in Group A considered the weak enforcement of language legislation to be an important obstacle (21.9%), whereas participants from the Russian-speaking group attached considerably less importance to this factor (6.7%).

These findings suggest that expanding the functional domains of the state language requires not only legislative measures but also the development of

socio-economic incentives that increase public motivation to use the language, along with more effective mechanisms for monitoring the implementation of language policy.

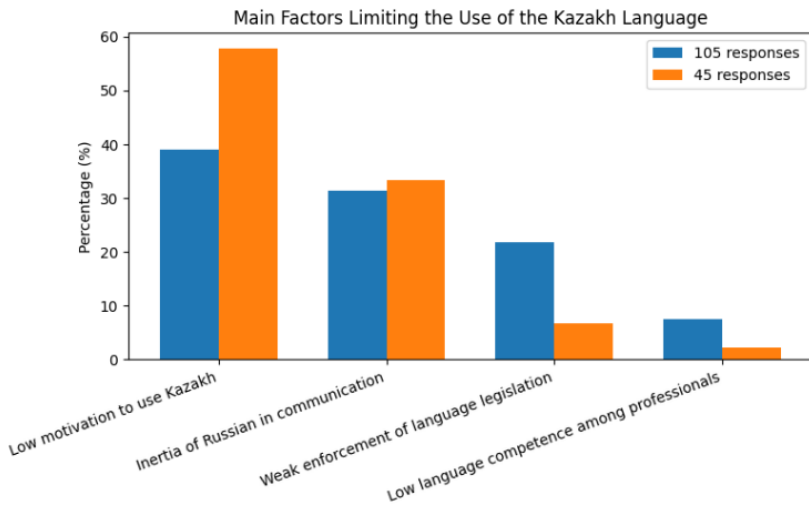


Figure 2 – Main Factors Limiting the Use of the Kazakh Language

An analysis of responses to the question “How do you expect the role of the Kazakh language in society to change over the next 10 years?” shows that the majority of respondents (46.7%-57.8%) expressed confidence that the use of the Kazakh language will expand and that it will become the dominant language in society. At the same time, 37.1%-28.9% of participants predicted that Kazakh-Russian bilingualism will continue to persist. These findings indicate that there is a generally positive public attitude toward strengthening the role of the state language. However, they also demonstrate that the influence of the historically formed linguistic situation is likely to remain significant in the near future (Figure 3).

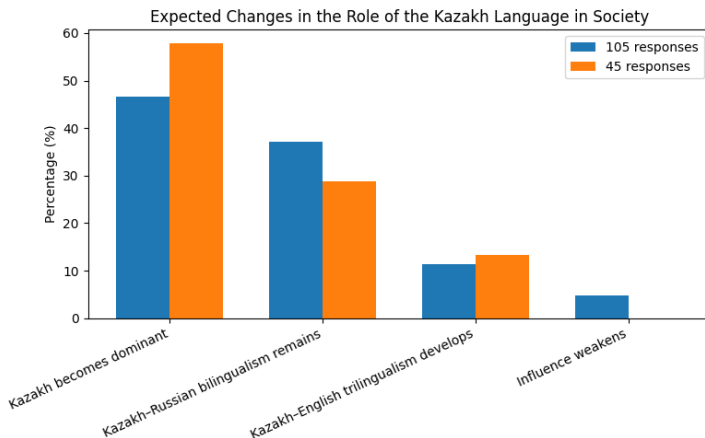


Figure 3 – Expected Changes in the Role of the Kazakh Language in Society

An analysis of responses to the final survey question, “What measures should be taken to make the Kazakh language more prestigious and widely used in society?”, reveals several important trends. Approximately 48.6%-46.7% of respondents identified the most effective measure as making proficiency in the Kazakh language a mandatory requirement for career advancement and higher salaries. In addition, 32.4%-42.2% of participants emphasized the importance of developing high-quality modern media content in the Kazakh language. These findings indicate that the strategy for strengthening the prestige of the Kazakh language should focus not only on symbolic or legislative measures but also on economic incentives and the development of contemporary cultural and media industries that promote the active use of the language in public life (Figure 3).

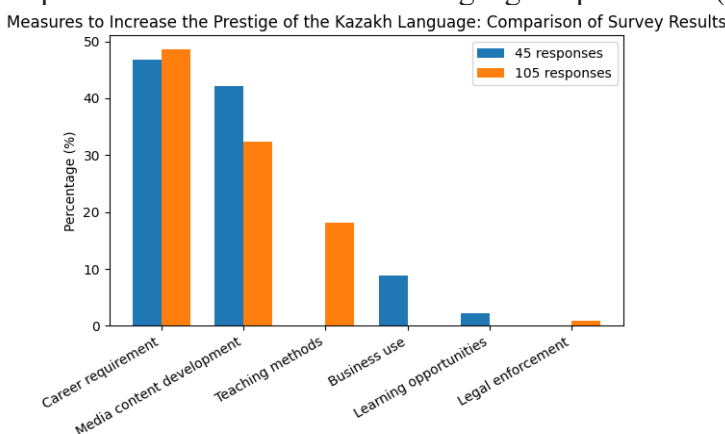


Figure 4 – Comparison of survey results on measures to increase the prestige of the Kazakh language

In summary of the survey analysis, it can be stated that there is a growing demand in society for a new stage in strengthening the status of the Kazakh language. In order to genuinely elevate the status of the state language, it is necessary to move from ideological paradigms toward economic mechanisms and the creation of competitive content. Only when the Kazakh language becomes a language of success and career advancement will the gap between its legal status and its actual use be eliminated.

Conclusion

1. Liberation of consciousness is the primary priority. The idea of the “decolonization of the mind” proposed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o is also highly relevant for Kazakhstan. Linguistic decolonization involves not only expanding the functional domains of the Kazakh language but also strengthening national linguistic identity and overcoming the consequences of the “cultural bomb.”

2. Donaldo Macedo’s critique of “subtractive bilingualism” provides an important lesson for the education system of Kazakhstan. The success of linguistic decolonization depends on establishing the Kazakh language not merely as a subject of study but as the main cognitive instrument of both the

natural sciences and the humanities. In this regard, the works of Kazakh scholars such as Sh.Kurmanbayuly, B.Kapalbek, and B.Biyarov, aimed at modernizing onomastics, terminology, and the alphabet, should be actively implemented in practice.

3. From the perspective of William Labov's theory of social stratification, the Kazakh language should become the highest "prestige language" in society. The approaches developed by B.Khasanuly, E.Suleimenova, A.Abasilov and A.Mustoyapova for strengthening the status of the state language are aimed at transforming the Kazakh language into a key mechanism of career advancement and social mobility.

4. The paradigm of "decolonial linguistics" proposed by Anne H. Charity Hudley and Mary Bucholtz calls for freeing Kazakh linguistics from Western bias. This implies recognizing the internal logic of the Kazakh language and acknowledging its unique place within the global linguistic landscape as an independent scientific school.

5. Opinions and discussions expressed in various media outlets, websites, and social networks demonstrate that Kazakhstan is consciously transitioning from a post-colonial phase toward a stage of deliberate decolonization. The most important instrument of decolonization is increasing the prestige of the language. This process is implemented through the regulation of onomastics, the restoration of terminology to its national foundations, and the successful completion of alphabet reform. Only after linguistic decolonization is fully achieved will it be possible to speak of Kazakhstan's complete spiritual sovereignty.

6. According to the results of the latest population census and sociolinguistic surveys, 70% of respondents consider the Kazakh language to be the main marker of national identity, which indicates that linguistic consciousness is shifting toward a process of decolonization. It can also be observed that the functional domains of the Kazakh language have expanded (particularly in public administration and service sectors), and that young people increasingly perceive Kazakh as the language of the future and of business. However, the socio-economic inertia of the Russian language and the dominance of the Russian media space remain significant factors slowing the process of linguistic decolonization. Overcoming these obstacles requires not only administrative resources but also a transformation of public consciousness.

In conclusion, linguistic decolonization in Kazakhstan represents a natural stage of post-Soviet transformation. It requires not only institutional reforms (including onomastics, terminology, and alphabet reform) but also the internal psychological readiness and liberation of consciousness of every citizen. The theoretical perspectives of the scholars discussed in this article constitute the intellectual foundation of a new Kazakhstan in which linguistic justice is established and the state language possesses full functional capacity.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ ТІЛДІК ОТАРСЫЗДАНДЫРУДЫҢ ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК ЛИНГВИСТИКАЛЫҚ МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада Қазақстандағы тілдік ахуал тілдік отарсыздандырудың алғышарттары, негізгі аспектілері мен проблемалары аясында әлеуметтік лингвистикалық тұрғыдан қарастырылады. Тіл ұлттық сана мен мәдени кодтың тасымалдаушысы ретінде сипатталып, осы тұрғыдан мемлекеттік тілдің қызметтік аясын кеңейту және қоғамдық сананы отарсыздандыру үдерістерін зерттеудің өзектілігі айқындалады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – тілдік отарсыздандырудың әлеуметтік лингвистикалық аспектілерін айқындау, оның қоғамдық сана мен тіл саясатына ықпалын анықтау және отарсыздандырылған тілдік ортаны қалыптастырудың ғылыми негіздерін ұсыну.

Зерттеу әдіснамасы теориялық талдау, дискурстық талдау, статистикалық әдістер және сандық әлеуметтанулық сауалнама тәсілдерінің кешенді қолданылуына негізделеді. Эмпирикалық база ретінде Қазақстан Республикасының тіл саясатына қатысты ресми құжаттар, 2021 жылғы ұлттық халық санағының деректері, сондай-ақ әртүрлі әлеуметтік топтар арасында жүргізілген сауалнама нәтижелері алынды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері қазақ тілінің қызметтік аясын кеңейту үдерісіне қарамастан, оның толыққанды доминанттылығына бірқатар әлеуметтік лингвистикалық кедергілердің әсер ететінін көрсетеді. Олардың қатарында тілдік ұстанымдар, институционалдық тәжірибелер және қостілділіктің ықпалы бар. Сонымен қатар талдау қоғамда біртілділік, қостілділік және көптілділік модельдерінің қатар өмір сүретінін көрсетіп, қазіргі тілдік кеңістіктің күрделілігін айқындайды.

Зерттеудің ғылыми маңыздылығы тілдік отарсыздандыру үдерістерін кешенді әлеуметтік лингвистикалық тұрғыдан түсіндіруімен және оны қазақстандық контексте деколонизациялық лингвистиканың дамуына қосқан үлесімен сипатталады. Зерттеудің жаңалығы теориялық пайымдауларды,

медиа дискурсты талдауды және эмпирикалық деректерді ұштастыратын кешенді тәсіл арқылы тілдік үдерістерді көпқырлы бағалауға мүмкіндік беруімен анықталады.

Зерттеудің практикалық маңыздылығы мемлекеттік тілдің әлеуметтік мәртебесін арттыруға, тіл саясатын жетілдіруге және тілдік отарсыздану стратегияларын тиімді жүзеге асыруға бағытталған ғылыми негізделген ұсыныстар әзірлеумен байланысты.

Тірек сөздер: тілдік отарсыздану, әлеуметтік лингвистика, деколонизация лингвистика, қазақ тілі, тіл саясаты, тілдік деңгей, тілдік бірегейлік, қостілділік

СОЦИОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ ДЕКОЛОНИЗАЦИИ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

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Аннотация. В статье языковая ситуация в Казахстане рассматривается в социолингвистическом аспекте в контексте предпосылок, ключевых аспектов и проблем языковой деколонизации. Язык характеризуется как носитель национального сознания и культурного кода, что обуславливает актуальность изучения процессов расширения функциональной сферы государственного языка и деколонизации общественного сознания.

Цель исследования заключается в выявлении социолингвистических аспектов языковой деколонизации, определении ее влияния на общественное сознание и языковую политику, а также в разработке научных основ формирования деколонизированной языковой среды.

Методология исследования основывается на комплексном применении теоретического анализа, дискурсивного анализа, статистических методов и количественного социологического опроса. Эмпирическую базу составили официальные документы, касающиеся языковой политики Республики Казахстан, данные национальной переписи населения 2021 года, а также результаты опроса, проведенного среди различных социальных групп.

Результаты исследования показывают, что, несмотря на расширение функциональных сфер казахского языка, его полноценное доминирование по-прежнему ограничивается рядом социолингвистических факторов. К их числу относятся языковые установки, институциональные практики и влияние двуязычия. Кроме того, анализ выявляет сосуществование в обществе моделей монолингвизма, билингвизма и мультилингвизма, что отражает сложность современной языковой ситуации.

Научная значимость исследования заключается в комплексной социолингвистической интерпретации процессов языковой деколонизации и вкладе в развитие деколониальной лингвистики в казахстанском контексте. Новизна работы определяется интегративным подходом, объединяющим теоретическое осмысление, анализ медиадискурса и эмпирические данные, что позволяет осуществить многомерную оценку языковых процессов.

Практическая значимость исследования связана с разработкой научно обоснованных рекомендаций, направленных на повышение социального статуса государственного языка, совершенствование языковой политики и эффективную реализацию стратегий языковой деколонизации.

Ключевые слова: языковая деколонизация, социолингвистика, деколониальная лингвистика, казахский язык, языковая политика, уровень владения языком, языковая идентичность, билингвизм

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