

УДК 371

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### Determinants of Language Choice among Bilingual Students in Kazakhstani Educational Institutions

**Abstract.** The article investigates such sociolinguistic aspects of the modern Kazakhstani society like a language prestige, the change of linguistic behavior of learners of different educational institutions. The author will try to compare the domains of first and second language use by students before and after their moving to an urbanized place in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the purpose of getting high education in universities or colleges. The article is based on the data of official reports and the results of the research work conducted by the author herself. The results of the research will demonstrate the curve of language preference and change in bilingual educational system of Kazakhstan.

**Key words:** bilingualism, language choice, educational institutions.

After gaining its independence, Kazakhstan like any other post-soviet republics, was face to face with the number of problems of different character. There was an urgent need to solve legislative and sociolinguistic aspects of languages: Kazakh – an autochthon language, Russian – a language of international communication and languages of minorities. During the last twenty years much work has been done on status planning of languages present in Kazakhstani society. The given research paper will try to shed a light on determinants of language choice of students of different educational institutions, which, in its own turn, will help to compose the sociolinguistic picture of modern Kazakhstan.

The information for the research paper is taken from the data of the population census conducted in 2009, that of Statistics Agency of Kazakhstan and Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, as well as the results of interviews and observations applied by the author. The respondents are students of institutions of higher education of Kazakhstan studying in Almaty, which comprises sixty people.

Alongside a communicative one, any language has a range of other functions like identifying, emphasizing, ethnosocial, prestigious and alike. Each of these functions mutually corroborate and sometimes refute each other. The prestigious functions of a language, on the one hand, is defined by a higher evaluation of the standard (literary) language compared with other forms of a given language, on the other hand, it is defined by the speakers of a language itself and other languages

as well, while outer and inner evaluation may not coincide [4]. Apart from it, a language prestige influences on a language shift, where the latter can be characterized as a change of a mostly used language by another. [8]. The speed and success of this change in a bilingual society depends on many factors (for instance, social, historical, economical, linguistic and alike). During observing a bilingual and sometimes polylingual society of modern Kazakhstan, it is easily noticed that first and second languages can substitute each other depending on many reasons. As it is impossible to enumerate all the prerequisites of this situations, it is unrealistic to describe the whole sociolinguistic picture of modern Kazakhstan. Despite this, the author will try to sum up the results of the observations and interviews and work out some essential factors of language choice among students of educational institutions of different levels.

According to the data of Ministry of Education and Science, there are 145 universities in Kazakhstan, where 321664 students are taught. 53 of them are situated in Almaty, 13 are situated in the capital of the country, Astana. Consequently, the most number of students are located in the most urbanized city of the country, Almaty.

The group of citizens, who comprises the bigger part of those coming to a megalopolis, is students, former schoolchildren. At first, it is of great prominence to know the number of schoolchildren and to compare it with the number of university and college students.

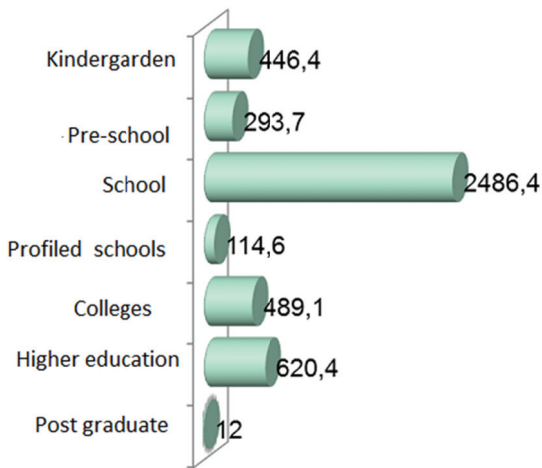


Diagram # 1

The number of students by educational levels, thousand people

Data of Ministry of Education and Science of the Kazakhstan, 2011

It is obvious from the above given diagram that the number of schoolchildren is the bigger than others taking into account all of them. It is a rather big number which proves that a little citizen can miss the pre-school levels of education and prefer not to enter universities or colleges. As well as the high education is compulsory in Kazakhstan, everybody is obliged to go to school. Consequently, one dares to say the forthcoming figures concerning schools covers all citizens from 6 to 18 years old.

Unfortunately, the population census of 2009 does not give any information about schoolchildren whose first language (not a native one) is Kazakh. But the next figure indicates the language of instruction and education at school.

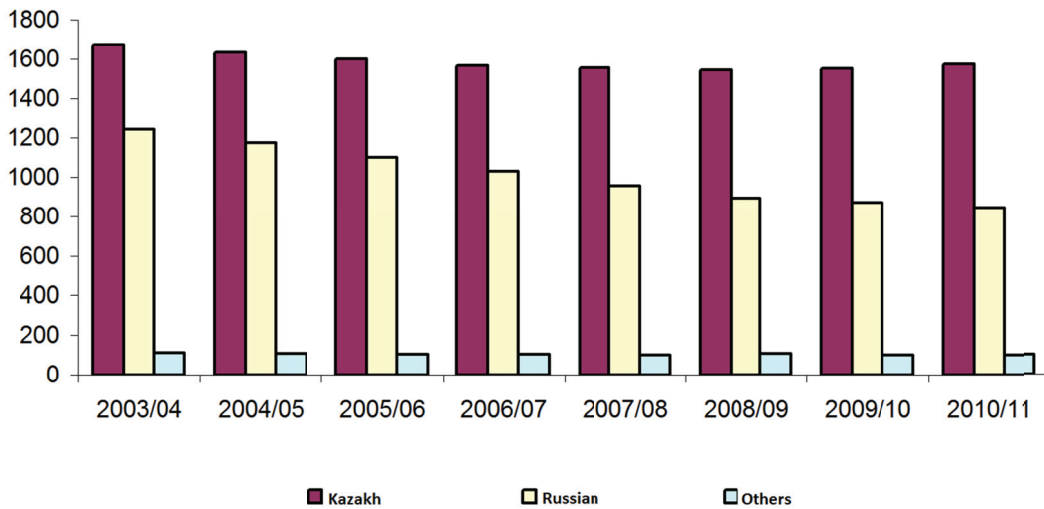


Diagram # 2

Number of schoolchildren according to their language of instruction, thousand people  
Data of Ministry of Education and Science of the Kazakhstan, 2011

As it is seen in the above given diagram, schoolchildren whose language of instruction is Kazakh keep on their positions, while those whose language of instruction is Russian is decreasing from 1 300 000 people in 2003/04 to 800 000 people last year, that is to 61%. The number of learners who are taught in the language of diaspora minorities constitutes comparatively less part, 3% as a whole and relatively does not increase or decrease.

Further on, the correlation between the Kazakh and Russian languages at organizations of technical and professional education, i.e. colleges. For this purpose, let's consult the diagram #1 where it is demonstrated the exact number of students of schools, colleges and universities, 1 146 000, 4 891 000 и 620 000 people respectively. An absolutely different view is seen apart from schools. 53% of students of technical and professional educational institutions preferred Kazakh as

a language of instruction, while this number in schools is 65%. In general the demand for Russian as a language of instruction is dropping, but compared with schools this number keeps on being

high – 33% / 46% in favour of technical and professional educational organizations. The number of learners taught in the languages of diaspora minorities is comparatively less and constitutes only 0,23%.



Diagram # 3

Number of college students according to their language of instruction  
Data of Ministry of Education and Science of the Kazakhstan, 2011

Further on, the author will try to compare the data on language choice of students of above given institutions and that of higher education. The total number of students taught at higher schools is 620442 for 2010/11 study year, 319940 students among them

chose the Kazakh language as a language of instruction, which comprises 51,5%. Here, one can observe the slight tendency of the state language demand. Anyway, compared with preceding stages of education the Kazakh language is less chosen.

	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
The total number of higher schools	140	144	145	148
Number of students	717053	633814	610264	620442
Students taught in Kazakh	334998	301815	303720	319940
%	47,0	47,6	49,8	51,5

Table # 1

The main data of the higher and post-graduate education  
Data of Ministry of Education and Science of the Kazakhstan, 2011

Having analyzed the data, the author, unintentionally, will come face to face with some questions, such as:

- Does the legal age of learners play an important role in choosing a language of instruction?
- What are the motives of learners' choice of a language of instruction?
- What are the reasons of demand of state language reduction as a language of instruction at universities and colleges compared with schools?
- Does urbanizedness influence on choice of a language of instruction?

As well as under age students of secondary schools may not have a right to choose a language of instruction, their parents are responsible for their children's choice. As a result of corpus planning of the state language in Kazakhstan (like legislative basis, planned activities on increasing the state language prestige, an obligatory assessment before employing etc.) parents, usually being more Russian speakers, intentionally choose the Kazakh language as a language of instruction for their children. However, this does not represent an obstacle for graduates of Kazakh secondary schools to choose Russian as a language of instruction, having entered universities or technical and professional institutions. There are a lot of reasons of this tendency, starting from the prestige of Russian to some individual problems of defining one's own ethnolinguistic identity. The author states that the main reason of this circumstance is that Russian comprises the most of the intellectual capital that, in its own turn, unintentionally influences on the choice of a language of instruction. Consequently, the shift of language domain, that is, the use of Russian in many spheres leads to the increasing of its users.

While investigating a language shift, it is urgent to clarify who speaks what language to whom and [6]. Here, it is of great importance to differentiate communication between bilingual vs. monolingual and bilingual vs. Bilingual. In the former case, a bilingual person by choosing a language of a monolingual ceases to serve as an object of sociolinguistics. Language interaction of two bilinguals with all ensuing circumstances helps to give an answer to the last of the questions asked before. As a result of the gained data, it was cleared out that the more the number of social spheres of communication of students accommodating in a megalopolis are, the more the diapasons of a language (read Russian) as a means of communication between representatives of

different nations are. It is quite interesting that the presence of one Russian-speaking monolingual person among Kazakh-Russian bilingual people makes Russian as a language of communication in that environment. This can be accepted like a demonstration of politeness, as well as in other bilingual societies [7]. However, those who do not follow these 'rules' have strong Kazakh identity and usually do not receive negatively evaluated remarks. Contextual and functional reasons of communication are also considered as factors influencing a language shift. Despite the fact that the Kazakh language is not deprived from style and genre diversity, coherent terminology, some situations are accompanied by Russian texts, or Kazakh texts with abundant Russian conversions.

The author does not state that having arrived in the city; a monolingual student becomes bilingual, or Kazakh-speaking – Russian-speaking. Perhaps, the center of linguistic competence shifts, that in its own turn, enlarges the domains of the Russian language use.

After trying to give answers to these questions, the author is able to state that the language behavior of the learners changes in favor of Russian. This fact, one more time, demonstrates the insufficiency of corpus planning of the state language, that is, the Kazakh language.

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Мақала заманауи Қазақстанның қоғамының тілдік мәртебе, тілдік қылықтың ауысуы тәрізді әлеуметтік-лингвистикалық аспектілерін қарастырады. Мақала авторы урбандалған қалаға жоғарғы немесе орта мамандандырылған білім алу мақсатында келген оқушы-студенттердің бірінші және екінші тілді қолдану аяларын салыстыруға тырысады. Мақалада мемлекеттік мекемелердің ресми мәліметтерімен қоса, автордың жеке ғылыми зерттеу жұмыстарының нәтижелері де қолданылған. Бұл нәтижелер Қазақстанның қостілді білім беру саласындағы тілдік таңдау мен тілдік артық көру мәселесінің қисық сызығын байқауға мүмкіндік береді.

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Статья исследует такие социолингвистические аспекты современного казахстанского общества, как престиж языка, смена языкового поведения учащихся различных образовательных учреждений. Автор попытается сравнить сферы использования первого и второго языков до и после переезда учащихся в урбанизированный город с целью получения высшего или среднеспециализированного образования. В статье использованы официальные данные различных государственных учреждений и результаты научной исследовательской работы автора. Результаты позволят проследить кривую языкового предпочтения и выбора в двуязычной образовательной системе Казахстана.