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Международный институт экономики и права (РФ)**



**ТЕОРЕТИКО-ПРИКЛАДНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ  
СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО И ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОГО РАЗВИТИЯ  
СТРАН ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ И СНГ**

**ТОМ 1**

**Сборник материалов международной научно-практической конференции,  
посвященной 20-летию Казахской Академии Труда и Социальных Отношений**

**22 мая 2014 г.**

**Алматы-Барнаул-Москва, 2014**

УДК 32:330

ББК 66.0:65.011

Т 33

**Редакционная коллегия:**

Бесбаев М.С. (главный редактор, Алматы, РК), Землюков С.В. (главный редактор, Барнаул, РФ), Бесбаева Б.М., Жакишева С.А. (ответственные редакторы)

**Т 33 Теоретико-прикладные аспекты социально-экономического и политического развития стран Центральной Азии и СНГ: сборник материалов междунар. научн.-практ. конф. / под ред. Б.М. Бесбаевой, С.А. Жакишевой. - В 2-х томах. – Т. 1. - Алматы: Центр оперативной печати КазАТиСО, 2014. – 628 с.**

ISBN 978-601-7372-38-5

Т. 1. - 2014 -628 с.

ISBN 978-601-7372-40-8

Настоящий Сборник подготовлен по результатам международной научно-практической конференции «Теоретико-прикладные аспекты социально-экономического и политического развития стран Центральной Азии и СНГ», организованной Казахской Академией Труда и Социальных Отношений, Ассоциацией азиатских университетов, Алтайским государственным университетом, Институтом истории и этнологии им. Ч.Ч. Валиханова КН МОН РК, Ассоциацией «История и компьютер» стран СНГ, Международным институтом экономики и права. В него вошли доклады и выступления участников конференции, в которых рассматривались различные теоретические и прикладные вопросы социально-политических и экономических процессов в центрально-азиатском регионе и странах СНГ. Сборник адресуется научным сотрудникам, государственным служащим, преподавателям, студентам и всем, кто интересуется прошлым настоящим и будущим стран евразийского пространства.

УДК 316.3/.4

ББК 60.56

ISBN 978-601-7372-40-8 (т. 1)

ISBN 978-601-7372-38-5

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УДК 81'23

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## LANGUAGE SHIFTS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

*Summary.* This paper analyses changes in educational language preferences amongst pupils in Kazakhstan in the period of independence of the Republic. It describes the dynamics of the changes in the preferences for the language of instruction among the students of Kazakhstani schools, which demonstrate and forecast widening / narrowing of the use of different languages in the country. The analysis of recent data demonstrates a significant increase in the number of pupils choosing the Kazakh state language as the language of instruction, and subsequently, the diminishing role of the Russian language in school education.

*Key words:* secondary education, Kazakh language, Russian language.

## ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ СДВИГИ В ШКОЛЬНОМ ОБРАЗОВАНИИ КАЗАХСТАНА

*Аннотация.* В статье дан анализ изменения языковых приоритетов учащихся средних школ Казахстана за период независимости. Показана динамика языковых предпочтений при выборе языка обучения учащимися казахстанских школ, которая позволяет прогнозировать расширение или сужение использования того или иного языка в сфере школьного образования. Анализ данных убедительно доказывает увеличение численности учащихся, выбирающих для обучения в школе казахский язык, и уменьшение объема использования русского языка в среднем образовании республики.

*Ключевые слова:* школьное образование, казахский язык, русский язык.

## ҚАЗАҚСТАН МЕКТЕПТЕРІНДЕГІ ТІЛДІК БІЛІМ БЕРУДІҢ БАСЫМДЫҚТАРЫ

*Аңдатпа.* Мақалада Тәуелсіздік жылдарындағы қазақстандық орта мектеп оқушыларының тілдік басымдықтарының өзгеруіне талдау жасалады. Қазақстандық білім беру саласындағы мектеп оқушыларына сол және басқа да тілді қолданудың тарылуы мен кеңеюіне болжам жасауға мүмкіндік беретін тілді меңгерудегі таңдау жасаудың тілдік басымдықтар өзгерісі (динамикасы) көрсетіледі.

*Бұл талдау республикамызда орта білім алудағы оқушылардың қазақ тілін таңдау көрсеткішінің өсуін және орыс тілін қолдану көлемінің төмендеуін сенімді дәлелдейді.*

***Түйін сөздер:*** мектептегі білім беру, қазақ тілі, орыс тілі.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a multilingual society with more than 100 ethnic groups. Despite this great variety, the most prevalent functional languages of the country are: the Kazakh state language and the Russian language.

During the Soviet years, the Kazakh language was marginalized and pushed outside the framework of official and political activities, which resulted in the loss of vitality and viability for the Kazakh language. This situation is currently being addressed at a governmental level through the State Language Policy. The main direction of this policy is the purposeful creation of the conditions in which the Kazakh language can be used in public life in functions that were previously performed by the Russian language.

The objective of this report is to analyze the dynamics of the changes in popularity and in communicative functions of the Kazakh, Russian and other languages in the *secondary education* of the Republic, where the changes in preferences for the language of instruction amongst school students can vividly demonstrate and forecast further expansion or narrowing of the use of certain languages.

During the Soviet era, the Russian language was highly prestigious, and all the ethnic groups that lived in the Former Soviet Union tried to master it. Russian was important for education and access to world culture, for career prospects and for enhancement of one's social status. Quoting the leading Russian sociolinguist Alpatov, "the majority of Russian-speaking non-Russians did not feel inadequate as to the language they spoke and rarely tried to learn the language of their ethnicity" [1, p. 104].

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the language situation in Kazakhstan started to change as major socio-demographic changes took place (Chart 1). For example, in 1970 thirteen million people lived in Kazakhstan, of which 4.2 million (or 32%) were ethnic Kazakhs and 5.5 million (or 42%) were Russians. In 1979, the population increased to 14.9 million of which 5.3 million (or 36%) were Kazakh and 5.99 million (or 40%) were Russian. In the 1989 census, of 16.2 million citizens, 6.5 million (or 40%) were Kazakh and 6 million (or 37%) Russian. According to the 1999 census, the population had decreased to 14.95 million, of which approximately 8 million people (or 54%) were Kazakh and about 4.5 million (or 30%) were Russian.

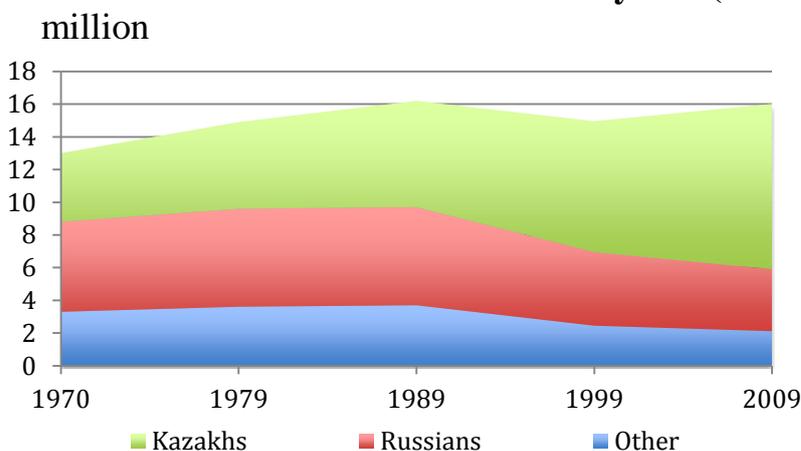
In the first ten years since Kazakhstan's independence there was a significant emigration of many ethnic groups that were mainly Russian-speaking. For some, going back to their historic homeland was important. For example, Germans were deported to Kazakhstan from different parts of the Soviet Union during World War II and 64% of them left for Germany after independence. Greeks left for Greece,

Polish left for Poland, Jewish left for Israel, and the number of Russians living in Kazakhstan dropped by 1.6 million. In the opinion of scientists-sociologists, another reason for emigration by ethnic groups was their psycho-emotional state after the collapse of the former Soviet Union: they may have become frightened of being discriminated against on the basis of their language.

The more recent census data demonstrates further increase in the proportion of the ethnic Kazakh population and decrease in the proportion of the Russian-speaking population. According to 2009 census, the total population of Kazakhstan was 16 million, of which Kazakhs were 63.1%, Russians – 23.7%, Uzbeks – 2.9%, Ukrainians – 2.1%, Uygurs – 1.4%, Tatars – 1.3%, Germans – 1.1%, Koreans – 0.6%, Turks – 0.6%, Azerbaijanis – 0.5%, Belarusians – 0.4%, and more than 100 other ethnicities constituted 2.3% of total population [2].

*Chart 1*

**Changes in the composition of the population of Kazakhstan in the last 30 years (1970-2009)**



However, the Russian language, even in the new geopolitical situation, still remains the language of the intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic communication. According to 1999 census, 75% of Kazakhs knew Russian, while only 14.9% of Russians knew Kazakh. Overall, 12.7 million people or 85% of the population of Kazakhstan knew Russian [3].

For 2009 census, the questions on languages have been reworded and focused not on full proficiency but on comprehension of different languages. According to this census, 74% of total Kazakhstan population can understand the Kazakh speech, while 94.4% understand Russian. 98.3% of ethnic Kazakhs understand Kazakh, while 92% of them understand Russian. Only 25.3% of ethnic Russians understand Kazakh, while Turkic ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan (Uzbeks, Uygurs, Tatars, Turks, Azerbaijanis, Dungans, Kurds, Chechens, Kyrgyz and others) understand both Kazakh and Russian speech well.

Due to the new language policy and language planning in sovereign Kazakhstan, measures for realization of the 2001–2010 and of the 2011–2020 State Programmes for Development and Functioning of Languages, changes in the demographics of the population of the country, and for other reasons – there has

been a considerable increase in popularity and widening of communicative functions of the Kazakh language. This can be most vividly demonstrated by the changes in the choice of language of schooling by Kazakhstan's younger population since the country's independence.

Thus, in *schools of primary and secondary education* of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the number of day-time students choosing the Kazakh language as the main language of instruction has been constantly increasing: in the last 20 years (from 1990/91 to 2011/12 academic years) the number of students studying in the Kazakh language increased by 57.8%, while the number of students studying in Russian decreased by 59.6% (Table 1, Chart 2). Furthermore, the number of students studying in the Languages of other Ethnic Groups (LEG), including Uzbek, Uygur, Tadjik, and foreign, is also increasing [4].

Table 1

**Historical distribution of students in primary and secondary schools by the language of instruction in the Republic of Kazakhstan\***

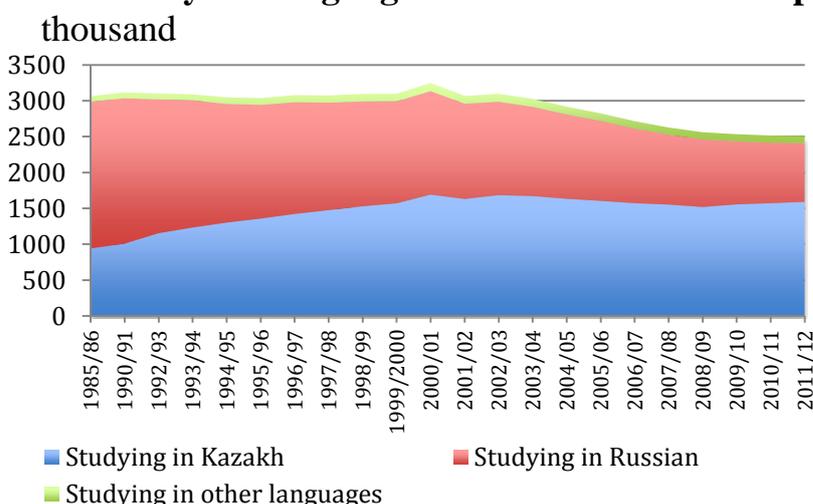
<b>Academic year</b>	<b>Number of pupils, thousands</b>	<b>Studying in Kazakh (in %)</b>	<b>Studying in Russian (in %)</b>	<b>Studying in LEG** (in %)</b>
1985/86	3062.5	30.7	66.8	2.5
1990/91	3116.0	32.35	65.05	2.6
1992/93	3101.4	37.2	60.15	2.65
1993/94	3089.3	39.9	57.4	2.7
1994/95	3048.0	42.70	54.3	3.0
1995/96	3036.6	44.7	52.2	3.1
1996/97	3078.0	46.2	50.6	3.2
1997/98	3073.9	48.0	48.75	3.25
1998/99	3095.2	49.4	47.2	3.4
1999/2000	3097.1	50.7	45.9	3.4
2000/01	3247.4	52.1	44.4	3.5
2001/02	3066.2	53.2	43.3	3.5
2002/03	3096.4	54.4	42.0	3.6
2003/04	3025.8	55.25	41.1	3.65
2004/05	2917.4	56.0	40.3	3.7
2005/06	2824.6	56.8	39.5	3.7
2006/07	2715.9	57.9	38.3	3.8
2007/08	2627.3	59.1	37.1	3.8
2008/09	2561.6	59.3	36.8	3.9
2009/10	2534.0	61.4	34.7	3.9
2010/11	2516.1	62.5	33.5	4.0
2011/12	2508.2	63.4	32.7	3.9
2012/13	2519.4	64.2	32.0	3.8
2013/14	2567.3	64.7	31.5	3.8

\*These data do not include pupils of special correctional institutions

\*\*LEG- languages of other ethnic groups

Chart 2

**Historical distribution of students in primary and secondary schools by the language of instruction in the Republic of Kazakhstan**



It is interesting to note that changes in the number of students enrolled at schools in different years were the result of the changes in demographics of the population with regards to birth rate and migration processes. According to the data in Table 1, the largest enrolment in primary and secondary schools was in the academic year 2000/01, while in 2005–2011 the number of students dropped by more than 16.4%.

It is also interesting to compare the data on the choices of the language of schooling since 1985/86 when the period of so-called “perestroika” began. During the five years from 1985 to 1990, the following tendencies started to show: an increase of 1.65% in the number of students studying in the Kazakh language, a decrease of 1.75% in the number of students studying in Russian, a 0.1% increase in the number of children studying in the languages of their ethnicities (LEG).

These tendencies have become more apparent in the decades following the independence of Kazakhstan. If in 1985, there were 939.5 thousand children studying in the Kazakh language, then as of the beginning of 2009/10 academic year there were 1.55 million enrolled to study in the state language – that is an increase of 165.1%. In 1985/86, 2 million kids studied in Russian, while in 2009/10 there were only 868.5 thousand students studying in Russian – a decrease of 2.36 times. In the 20 years – from 1986 to 2006, the number of students of the Uzbek ethnicity choosing Uzbek as the language of instruction at their schools increased by more than 30%, Uygurs – by more than 20%, Tadjiks – by 2.2 times [5].

The recent data indicates that the number of schools with Kazakh as sole language of instruction is 2.3 times more than the number of Russian schools and the number of students studying in Kazakh is 1.8 times higher (Table 2).

Table 2

**The number of schools and students by the language of instruction  
as of 2009/10\***

Language of Instruction	Number of students	Schools with one sole language of instruction		Schools with two or more languages of instruction	
		Number of schools	Number of students	Number of schools	Number of students
Kazakh	1.551.019	3.817	1.041.892	2.138	509.127
Russian	868.487	1.648	413.934	2.057	454.553
Uzbek	79.109	61	43.592	82	35.517
Uygur	14.723	14	5.248	49	9.475
Tadjik	3.568	2	1.079	10	2.489
Turkish	372	1	372	–	–
Ukrainian	159	1	159	–	–
English	1.272	6	1.060	2	212
German	287	–	–	3	287
Total	2.518.996	5.550	1.507.336	2.152	1.011.660
*Schools that are part of professional institutions are not included in the total number of schools, although the number of students studying there is included into the total (2,534 thousand).					

As the Table 2 demonstrates, in 2009/10 there were 7,702 day secondary schools, of which 3,817 schools with the Kazakh language of instruction, 1,648 – with Russian, 61 – with Uzbek, 14 with Uygur, 2 schools with Tadjik, 6 – English schools, 1 Turkish and 1 Ukrainian. There are 2,152 schools with two or more languages of instruction.

Since academic year 1992/93 until 2009/10 the number of the Kazakh schools has increased by 644, and number of students in them is 810 thousand higher. Thus, the total number of students studying in Kazakh has increased by more than 610 thousand. In the same period, the number of the Russian schools decreased dramatically – 1,665 schools less and the number of students studying in Russian decreased by 426.8 thousand.

The analysis of these data allows us to project that these tendencies will continue in the future. However, it is important to note that the student body of the Kazakh language schools continues to be composed of mainly ethnic Kazakhs: in 2009/10, 98.5% of the pupils studying in the State language were ethnic Kazakhs.

Another important factor to take into account while conducting any social research in the Republic is the historically established regional socio-economic, demographical and language differences in various parts of Kazakhstan, which also affect the choice of the language of schooling by students of different regions. For example, in northern and central regions of the Republic with higher concentration of the Russian population, Russian is still a predominant language of

communication and in the southern and eastern regions of the country – Kazakh is the predominant language in social life, including in education.

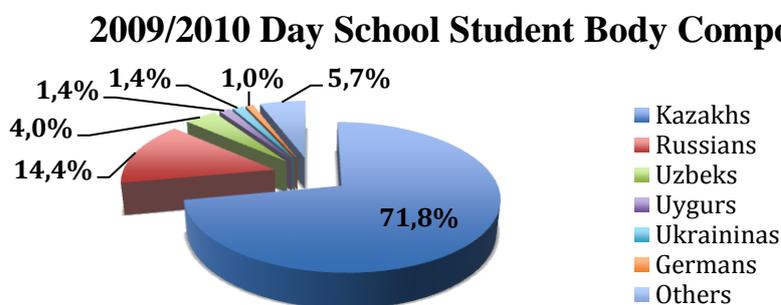
Another factor in the choice of the language of instruction is the rural vs. urban place of residence of students. So, in 2011/12, out of all students who chose to study in Russian, 64% were from the city and 36% were students of rural areas. While the proportion of city students choosing Kazakh is 41.5% and 58.5% in rural areas. Therefore, in urban areas the Russian language is still more popular among city students.

The analysis of the data allows us to conclude that in modern post-Soviet Kazakhstan the schooling in the Kazakh state language is becoming more prevalent and the larger number of students decide to study in Kazakh schools.

It should also be noted that one of stimulating factors for secondary education in Kazakh is the provision of State grants and bursaries for university education in the state language.

The ethnic composition of the student body also changed dramatically. For the beginning of 2009/10 academic year, the student body of the day secondary schools was composed of 71.8% students-ethnic Kazakhs, 14.4% Russians, 4% Uzbeks, 1.7% Uygurs, 1.4% Ukrainians, 1% Germans, 5.7% other (Chart 3). These data demonstrates again that the number of enrolled students ethnic Kazakhs is increasing, the number of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians is decreasing, while the proportion of other ethnicities to total number of students didn't change much compared to previous academic year.

*Chart 3*



It is interesting to compare the language choices for university education vs. secondary schooling. In 2011/12, there were 630 thousand university students, of which 54.4% enrolled to study in Kazakh (compared to 63.4 % in schools) and 44.1% chose Russian (compared to 32.7% in schools). If we compare with 1990/1991, this proportion was 86.3% for Russian and 13.65% for Kazakh (Table 3).

Almost equal proportion of Russian vs. Kazakh language priority for education in universities today demonstrates a still fairly significant role of the Russian language in higher education, although the tendency is for its lessening.

In 2011/12 the ethnic composition of university student body is 78.35% ethnic Kazakhs, 14.6% Russians, and 7% other ethnicities.

*Table 3*

**Distribution of university students by the language of instruction  
in the Republic of Kazakhstan\***

Academic year	Number of students, thousands	Studying in Kazakh (in %)	Studying in Russian (in %)	Studying in LEG** (in %)
1990/1991	287.3	13.65	86.3	0.05
1991/1992	283.3	17.9	82.0	0.1
1994/1995	266.7	29.0	71.0	–
1995/1996	260.0	30.9	68.9	0.2
1996/1997	255.8	30.4	69.2	0.4
1997/1998	293.5	27.3	72.2	0.5
1998/1999	318.8	26.9	72.4	0.7
1999/2000	365.4	28.0	71.5	0.5
2000/2001	440.7	30.1	69.3	0.7
2001/2002	514.7	31.5	67.75	0.75
2002/2003	597.5	36.2	62.9	0.9
2003/2004	658.1	38.6	60.5	0.9
2004/2005	747.1	40.0	58.8	1.2
2005/2006	775.8	42.6	56.5	0.9
2006/2007	768.4	43.95	54.9	1.15
2007/2008	717.1	46.7	52.2	1.1
2008/2009	633.8	47.6	51.3	1.1
2009/2010	610.3	49.8	48.6	1.6
2010/2011	620.4	51.6	46.8	1.6
2011/2012	629.5	54.4	44.1	1.5
2012/2013	571.7	56.3	41.7	2.0
2013/2014	527.2	57.9	40.1	2.0

Therefore, in the period of sovereignty of Kazakhstan, big changes took place in the educational domain of the country. Thanks to the new language policy legislation and its realisation, emigration of large part of the Russian-speaking population, changes in the ethnic and civil identification, changing mentality of the young citizens of the Republic, and other reasons – the number of students choosing the state Kazakh language as the language of instruction in schools, as well as at universities, increased significantly. The popularity of the state language for the new generation of Kazakhstani youth continues to grow, as it has already become the dominant language in the primary and secondary education.

1 Alpatov, V.M. 150 languages and politics: 1917–2000. – Moscow: КРАФТ+ИВ РАН, 2000.

2 The results of the 2009 population census in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Statistical collection: <http://www.eng.stat.kz/Pages/default.aspx>

3 National structure of population of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Vol. 2: Population of Kazakhstan by ethnicities and language proficiency // The results of the 1999 population census in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Statistical collection. – Almaty, 2000.

4 Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Statistical collection. – Almaty, 2012.

5 Altynbekova, O.B. Ethno-linguistic processes in Kazakhstan. – Almaty: Ekonomika, 2006.