



# Multilingualism: Soft skill or social practice?

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# Outline

- Language as social practice
- Dominant language ideologies
- The case of Kazakhstan
- Concluding remarks

Language as social practice:  
Current understanding in sociolinguistics

# What's a language?

- Distinguishing languages
  - On the basis of structure
  - On the basis of social factors (national borders, cultural borders, religious borders)
- Dialect vs. standard
- Dialect continuum, mutual intelligibility, linguistic distance

# Ideology of languages (Blommaert and Rampton, 2011)

- “the idea that there are distinct languages, and that a proper language is bounded, pure and composed of structured sounds, grammar and vocabulary designed for referring to things”
- Individual languages are ideological constructions historically tied to the emergence of the nation-state in the 19th Century
- In differentiating, codifying and linking “a language” with “a people”, linguistic scholarship itself played a major role in the development of the European nation-state as well as in the expansion and organisation of empires.

# Native speaker fallacy

- Native speaker, mother tongue and ethnolinguistic group as *a priori* classifications
- Native speaker – three ideologies (Pennycook 1994, cited from Doerr 2009)
  - Belief that there is close correspondence between holding a citizenship and being a native speaker
  - Notion that language is a homogeneous and fixed system
  - Idea that being a ‘native speaker’ implies high level of competence in all skills and domains

# Degree of language competence

- Maximum competence
- Partial competence
- Minimal competence
- Recognizing competence

Not all monolingual native speakers would be successful if measured against the norm of the educated native.

# Speech community vs. Linguistic repertoire

Repertoire – “all the “means of speaking” i.e. all those means that people *know how to use and why* while they communicate, and such means, as we have seen, range from linguistic ones (language varieties) over cultural ones (genres, styles) and social ones (norms for the production and understanding of language)” (Blommaert and Bascus 2011).

# Fragmented identity

“Research instead has to address the ways in which people take on different linguistic forms as they align and disaffiliate with different groups at different moments and stages” (Bloomaert and Rampton 2011).

# Heller (2007)

- Argues against the accepted view of bilingualism as the coexistence of two linguistic systems.
- Critiques previous scholarship Weinreich's (1953), Mackey(1968), Ferguson (1964), and Fishman (1968) as remaining “resolutely committed to a paradigm in which languages are understood as whole, bounded systems, associated, moreover with whole, bounded communities” (p.11).
- Proposes a reorientation that views bilingualism as a complex set of practices which draw on linguistic resources that have been conventionally thought of as belonging to two different systems.

Dominant language ideologies

# National language

- Language policy is driven by the nationalist discourse constructing Kazakhstan as a land of Kazakhs who speak Kazakh.
- Language policy has been strongly motivated by a perceived need to promote Kazakh, which had occupied a relatively peripheral position in the Soviet-era marketplace as a national language of a new nation-state.
- Restoring Kazakh as a national language of Kazakhstan involved status and corpus planning, language-in-education planning to increase number of speakers, and prestige building.
- Primordial identity, intrinsic value of learning language

# New language ideology

- Neoliberalism
  - Human capital and realization of potential capabilities
  - Reimagining language as commodity skill
  - Language as decontextualized, neutral and abstract tool for communication
  - Language is a “pure medium of potentiality” (Park 2015)

# Language as pure potential

(Park 2015, Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 37 (5), 453-466)

- “Language can be seen a powerful means of realizing the potential ability of individuals in the global stage” (p. 455)
- It can enable the speaker “to perform and realize her potential within a wider arena beyond that defined by one’s provenance; in other words, multilingualism is seen as facilitating full realization of the speaker’s potential ability by allowing the speaker to move beyond the constraints of the culture and community, reaching many people and traversing multiple markers to explore greater opportunities, no longer stifled by the boundaries imposed by essentialized identity and becoming whatever she needs to be” (p. 455)

# Human capital and ideal neoliberal subject

- “Language and communication are reimagined as major ‘soft skills’ that allow workers to flexibly adapt to constant changing demands of work” (Park 2015, p. 456)
- “Multilingualism acquires new meaning as an index of an ideal neoliberal subject” striving “to improve herself, never being satisfied with she has achieved, but always searching for new ways to further maximize the value of her own human capital” (ibid)
  - Language learner is investing in a valuable skill
  - Language learning becomes a technology of the self (Foucault 1997)
  - Investing in language learning becomes as important as actual competence

# Fallacy of neoliberal argument

- “the idea of ability innocent of experience is... fiction” (Sennet 2006, p. 120)
- Language is not an abstract and neutral communication tool; instead “language is deeply embedded in human action; it does not exist as an external system that neutrally refers to social action, but it a form of social action itself” (Park 2015, p. 456)
  - Languages always indexes and reproduces social constraints and social differences
  - Social conditions for language acquisition are not equally distributed and those conditions are reproduced in differing competencies that result from them
  - Not all kinds of ability to speak a given language are valued equally

# False promise

- Downplaying social embeddedness of language obscures the inequalities of the reality of neoliberalism
- The role of language in reproducing inequalities in the job market is erased
- False promise of language learning is denied

Kazakhstan

# Language education

- Two language streams: Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium
  - Equivalent curriculum
  - Parental choice
- Cultural program of “Tri-unity of languages” (2007)
- Multilingual education reform (fall 2016)

# Details

**ТРЕХЪЯЗЫЧНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ**

**ВОПРОСЫ И ОТВЕТЫ**



**КОГДА БУДЕТ ОСУЩЕСТВЛЕН ПОЛНЫЙ ПЕРЕХОД НА ТРЕХЪЯЗЫЧНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ?**

Министерство образования и науки начнет переход **НА ТРЕХЪЯЗЫЧНОЕ ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В 2019 ГОДУ**

**ДО КАКОГО КЛАССА В ШКОЛАХ С КАЗАХСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ ОБУЧЕНИЯ УЧЕНИКИ ОБУЧАЮТСЯ НА РОДНОМ ЯЗЫКЕ?**

В соответствии с трехязычным образованием ученики всех (с казахским и русским языками обучения) школ страны до 7 класса обучаются на родном языке (до 13-14 лет обучаются полностью на родном языке)

**КАКИЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ БУДУТ С 7 КЛАССА?**

Только с 7 класса ученики начнут изучать всемирную историю на русском языке в объеме 1 час в неделю. С учетом объединения предметов «русский язык» и «литература», нагрузка сократится на 1 час

**КАКИМ ОБРАЗОМ БУДЕТ ОСУЩЕСТВЛЯТЬСЯ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В 7-9 КЛАССАХ?**

До 7 класса английский язык будет преподаваться так же как и раньше, только как предмет. Все предметы, кроме английского языка, преподаются на родном языке. С 7 по 9 классы к английскому языку появятся дополнительные часы в игровой форме

**С КАКОГО КЛАССА БУДЕТ ОСУЩЕСТВЛЯТЬСЯ ОБУЧЕНИЕ НА АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ И КАКИЕ ЭТО ПРЕДМЕТЫ?**

В 10-11 классах информатика, биология, химия, физика будут преподаваться на английском языке, всемирная история - на русском языке. математика - с 1 по 11 класс на родном языке ученика

**ВОЗМОЖНО ЛИ ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ СОДЕРЖАНИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ С 2019 ГОДА?**

С 2019 года будет изменено содержание учебников по всем предметам

**ЧТО БУДЕТ С УЧИТЕЛЯМИ, РАБОТАЮЩИМИ В НАСТОЯЩЕЕ ВРЕМЯ?**

Действующие учителя до 2019 года пройдут повышение квалификации в НАЗАРБАЕВ ИНТЕЛЛЕКТУАЛЬНЫХ ШКОЛАХ, НАЗАРБАЕВ УНИВЕРСИТЕТЕ, ФОНДЕ «КАТЕВ», ЦЕНТРАХ ПОВЫШЕНИЯ КВАЛИФИКАЦИИ «ОРЛЕУ»

**ПРИ ПОВЫШЕНИИ КВАЛИФИКАЦИИ ОНИ ПОЛУЧАТ НАЧАЛЬНЫЕ ЗНАНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

**NEWS KZ**

- Implementation to start in 2019
- Grades 1-6 in L1
- Grade 7, history in L2
- English as a subject grades 1-9
- Grades 10-11, STEM subjects in English
- Teacher training

# Motivation

- The new multilingual education is presented by the Kazakhstani government as a means of:
  - improving quality of education in order to modernize Kazakhstan
  - to produce global human capital
  - to create social and ethnic cohesion
  - to ensure educational equity

# Interview with Yerlan Sagadiev, Minister of education, March 9, 2016

- “Мы видим, что у молодежи, обучавшейся в казахских школах, в дальнейшем ограничены возможности в получении качественного высшего образования. Например, у молодых людей, особенно из сельской местности, возникают трудности при поступлении в наши ведущие, самые новые университеты: Назарбаев Университет, КИМЭП, КБТУ, IT-университет - то есть в те вузы, где основным языком преподавания – английский.”
- “Наиболее правильным для нас решением будет обучить казахстанскую молодежь, особенно сельских детей, наряду с родным языком свободному владению английским. Они не только смогут немедленно и свободно получать нужные им знания, но и им откроются двери в самые лучшие университеты, наши и мировые.”

[https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/ministr-obrazovaniya-i-nauki-rk-sdelal-pervoe-zayavlenie-290453/](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/ministr-obrazovaniya-i-nauki-rk-sdelal-pervoe-zayavlenie-290453/)

# Constraints

- Discussed: Poor teaching materials, inadequate teacher training, and limited resources
  - «Русскоязычные учителя не знают казахского языка, а казахскоязычные учителя – русского. И мы почти все не знаем английского языка. Вот после курсов по вечерам мы учим английский. Надо же за три месяца подготовиться...» (Primary school teacher)

<http://www.uralskweek.kz/2016/06/08/za-tri-mesyaca-my-uchitelya-dolzhny-vyuchit-anglijskij/>

- Not discussed: Structural factors
- Not questioned: Dominant language ideologies

# Data

- Assessment of literacy skills of 241 students (grade 4) in nine randomly selected schools in (Spring 2016)
- Survey of 2954 students (9-11th grades) in 29 public secondary schools in Almaty (Spring 2014)
- Evaluation of Trilingual education (2021) – Interview with experts, focus groups with students and parents, survey of teachers.

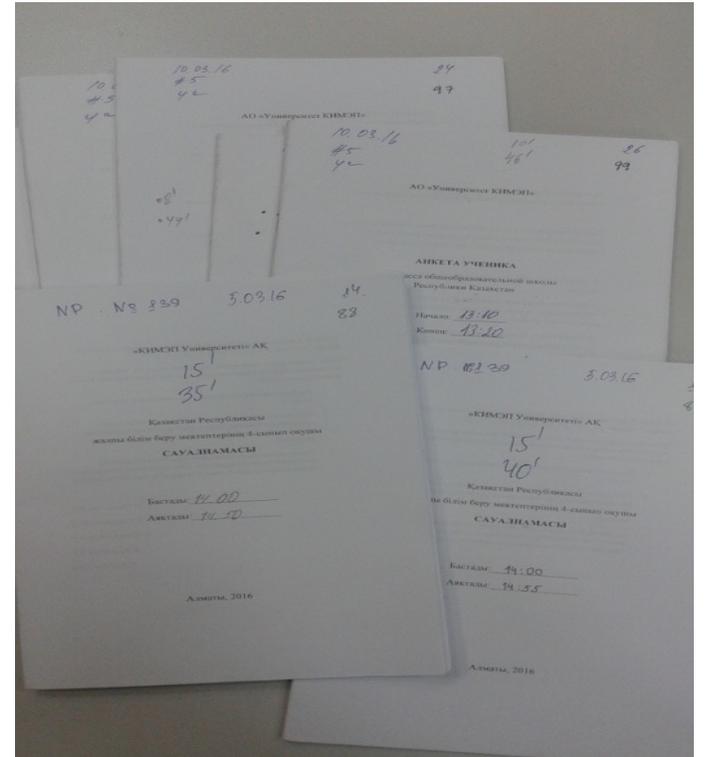


# Survey Tool

Category	#	Sub-category	# *	Examples
Education	25	Language	3	What is the language of education at your school?
		Logistics	5	Do you live your area of registered residence?
		Goals	6	Do you plan on taking the UNT?
		Resources and Activities	17	Do you participate in education activities outside of school?
Language	4	Practice	7	Evaluate your language proficiency in X language.
Personal	23	Household Expenditures	4	How many people live with you in your residence (including yourself)?
		Background	2	Do you have your own room?
		Resources	3	Do you have a mobile phone?
		Technology	2	Do you have a social media account, e.g., VKONTAKTE profile?
		Personal/Family	22	Who is the primary caregiver in your family?
Total	52		71	

# Questionnaire and literacy test

- **Background questionnaire**
- **Literacy test - four parts**
  - **Two texts:** fiction and non-fiction
    - **Non-fiction** text from Grade 4 science textbook (Дүниетану and Познание мира, Алматы кітаб, 2015)
    - **Fiction:** a translated story from English
  - **Literacy tasks include:**
    - expressing and justifying an opinion
    - reading comprehension
    - retrieving an explicitly stated information
    - making straightforward inferences
    - demonstrating functional literacy
    - demonstrating logical reasoning in argumentation



# Gap between Russian-medium and Kazakh-medium schools

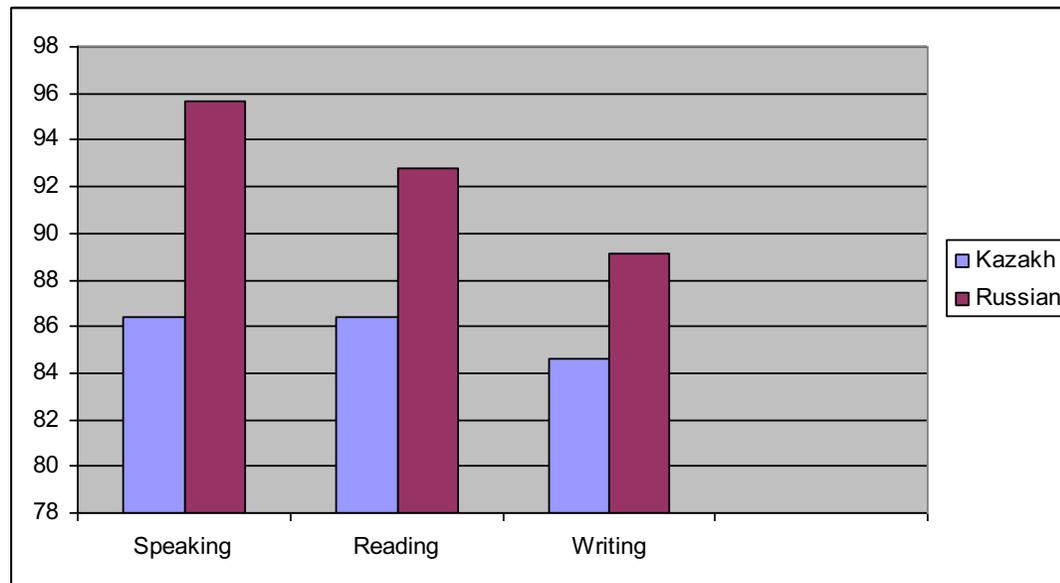
Systematic imbalance in

- Educational opportunities, particularly access to literacy resources and opportunities to acquire literacy skill
- Proficiency in the medium of instruction
- Literacy skills
- Parental language proficiency

# Results: Access

- Students in Russian-medium schools are more likely to come from more economically advantageous households
- Twice as many students from the Russian-medium schools attend tutorials and twice as less say they prepare specifically to UNT.
- Many Russian-speaking students start additional tutoring in secondary school and their parents spend more money on extra-curricular activities.
- Kazakh-speaking students tend to start extra-curricular activities later, in high school, and 20% of respondents reported attend UNT preparation courses that focused on teaching to test.
- Children from Russian-speaking schools report that they have bigger home libraries and read more books for pleasure.

# Results: Literacy skills



- There are more students in Russian-medium school who use MOI at home
- Bilingualism in Kazakh and Russian is higher in Kazakh-medium schools
- On average students from Kazakh-medium schools spent 25% more time on the test than their peers from Russian-language schools
- Students from Kazakh-medium schools performed worse in all parts of the test

# Results: Parents' educational background and language proficiency

- Parents of Russian speakers
  - Are better educated (college educated 80% vs. 32%)
  - Are more likely to have proficiency in English (40% vs. 17% claim good or high proficiency)

Concluding remarks

# Language, nation building and globalization

- Bourdieu's model, operating within the political structure of the nation-state, assigns a particular language variety as the state language. In this linguistic market, speaking the right sort of language (typically state or official) is seen as indexical of being the right sort of person and gives access to the right sort of education, which in turn allows access to other economic and cultural resources.
- Kazakh is a state language and it is the language of a majority of the population.
- Yet we are observing persistent social inequality running along language lines.

# Elite closure

- Deepening existing inequalities and “elite closure” (Myers-Scotton 1993, cited from Block 2018: 579).
- It appears that language policy has unintentionally resulted in widening social difference and social inequality in the globalizing new economy.

# “Polylingual individual”

- Asanova (2007) contends that in Kazakhstan “education policy makers tend to view the reasons of the achievement gaps as residing with schools, rather than occurring due to structural inequalities, including inequalities in learning opportunities for privileged and disadvantaged students” (p. 82).
- Language education policy fails to address these inequalities and significant barriers remaining in place (linguistic, cultural and institutional).
- People are given false promise of social mobility.

# Moving forward

- We need to examine:
  - Language practices of different types of learners.
  - Their access to linguistic resources.
  - How the position of a language within the global knowledge-based marketplace can affect how both the language and its speakers are socially positioned (Heller 2003, 2010).
  - Sociolinguistic and socio-economic consequences of language reforms.
  - The effects of upscaling Kazakh in the context of the expansion of existing political economies and globalization.
  - Dominant language teaching ideologies and their effect on language pedagogies.

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Thank you

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