Kazakhstan's Language Reform

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Abstract

Why does Kazakhstan want to switch to a Latin alphabet for Kazakh language by 2025? This paper argues that while the government of Kazakhstan is presenting this language reform as means to modernize the country's economy, the real motivation lies in developing a stronger Kazakh national identity by de-Russifying the Kazakh language. Considering Kazakhstan's complicated Soviet past of language reforms to erase the Kazakh identity, the country has struggled to make sense of its ethnic and civic identities. The proposed Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet is a political message that Kazakhstan is embracing its ethnic pride and divorcing its national identity building from Russia's paternalistic influence. This paper highlights that the timing of this language reform is directly influenced by the changing demographics in Kazakhstan, with ethnic Russians steadily becoming a minority in Kazakhstan. In the light of these events, it is important to follow how Kazakhstan will adjust its discourse of language reforms to balance its bilateral relations with Russia.

الكازاخية□□□□□. Қ□□□қ. Qazaq. In the past century the people of my home country had to learn again and again the different ways to express their identity. The Kazakh language has been torn apart, and then was build up again under Mongolian attacks, Russian Empire and then Soviet Union. Now, it is being modified again by its own government officials, in the name of modernization. Kazakhstan's president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is claiming that the nation shall be flexible in order to compete on the ever-changing international arena. In this case, he is talking about switching the Kazakh language from Cyrillic alphabet to Latin. This proposal has intrigued both domestic and international communities and I intend to understand why is Kazakhstan proposing Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet by 2025?

There was little talk of this potential language reform until 2017, when the President Nazarbayev proposed the Latinization program with a specific deadline. The research question intends to address a potentially politically charged process of alphabet modification which could bring linguistic and cultural changes in Kazakhstan. This inquiry aims to understand the reasoning behind a country's decision based on similar regional policies to Latinize a country's alphabet, like Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. (Bhavna, 46). It is important to make sense of why Latinization of the alphabet is planned to happen by 2025, since Kazakhstan among other ex-Soviet Union countries is constantly under Russia's paternalistic radar. Understanding Kazakhstan's reason to Latinize alphabet might give scholars an insight into the country's agenda as far as its international relations, alliances and domestic goals.

There are push and pull factors that drive these language reforms. Either Kazakhstan is determined to update the Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet to increase the country's global standing. Or the nation is using linguistic reforms to divorce itself from the Russian influence that echoes through the Cyrillic alphabet. It is possible that these stimulants are mutually present. Research suggests a number of factors that explain both arguments.

In my research I explore three plausible forces that are shaping the real reasoning behind Latinization of the Kazakh language at this point in

time. First, I investigate the institutional framework that elevates Kazakh ethnic identity across different levels of social, political and economic life in the nation. This trend is arguably the most plausible cause of Latinization since institutional reforms in regards to language planning are essential in Kazakhstan's national identity building. Hence, Latinization of the Kazakh language becomes a rational link in the chain of legislature that has already been building a platform for Kazakh national identity. Then, I attempt to understand how the ongoing trend of ethnic Russian out-migration weakens the status quo of the Russian culture, language and people in Kazakhstan. This is a plausible cause for Latinization because a shrinking number of Russian language users in Kazakhstan creates an amicable environment to further embrace Kazakh national identity in Kazakhstan. And lastly, my research looks into Nazarbayev's personal preoccupation with his image as Kazakhstan's Father of the Nation and how Latinization of the Kazakh language plays a role in his public figure narrative. Nazarbayev's self-interest in promoting Kazakh national identity though symbolically highlighting Kazakhstan's autonomy over its national language is a probable reason for Latinization by 2025.

As a counterargument, I examine some of Kazakhstan's most recent moves on the international arena that back up the modernization argument for Latinization of the Kazakh language.

Main Body

The talk of changing the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin has been around since Kazakhstan got its independence in 1991. Back then, early Kazakh nationals were pushing to get rid of anything that remained from the country's Soviet Past and replace it with all things Kazakh: from language to history books, from food to actual people (Cameron, 121). At the time Nazarbayev chose to stay clear from acting too radical against its still powerful neighbor to the North. His rhetoric on language reforms as part of national identity building agenda remained non-responsive to provocations of Kazakh nationalist to de-Russify the country. Moreover, the president adopted a discourse that promoted "Kazakhstani" civic identity of post-independent Kazakhstan rather than

pure "Kazakh" ethnic identity. This political move was different in comparison to other ex-Soviet territories that chose to institutionalize legislation that would de-Russify their nation building operations. This difference is essential to understanding how Kazakhstan's discourse around its post-colonial nation building was meant to appear friendly towards all ethnic groups, including Russians.

Institutional Framework of Nationalism in Kazakhstan

The dynamism of Kazakhstan's national identity takes its most prominent roots in 1970s, under Dinmuhammad Kunayev. This Brezhnev era party leader attempted to cement the concept of "Kazakhstanets", a purely civic identity that had "no ethnic connotation and was used to encourage pride in the republic as an important region of the Soviet Union, a distinctive and multi-ethnic part of the whole that was making vital contributions to the entirety of the USSR". (Olcott, 2010, p. 55).

There appears to be a number of legislative acts that put the ethnic Kazakh group at a bigger advantage than other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. (Dotton, Bhavna, Olcott). Specifically, this research is concerned with examining how such legislature affects the ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan. Syzdykova debriefs the following legislative initiatives as steps towards greater integration of the Kazakh language into all aspects of life in Kazakhstan: "The Decree on Expansion of the Usage of the State Language in State Bodies (1998) and the Decree on Requirements for Placing Information in Kazakh and Russian on Product Labels (1999) enabled the Kazakh language to be revitalized." (Syzdykova, 17). This claim is similarly supported by Smagulova, who argues that "Kazakhization aimed at establishing Kazakh as the state language of independent Kazakhstan" (Smagulova, 448).

It is arguable that the institutional framework of Kazakhstan's national identity building is what fostered a drive towards complete de-Russification of Kazakhstan. Other evidence suggests that government intends to avoid open discrimination of titular Russian status in the Republic. Zabortseva supports this claim by writing: "The following

constitutional articles guarantee the equal status of the Russian language with the Kazakh language in many areas:

- Article 7, paragraph 3 of the Constitution guarantees every person the right to speak and learn their own language, declaring: '…the State shall promote conditions for the study and development of the languages of the people of Kazakhstan'.
- Under Article 19, paragraph 2, everyone has the right to use their native language and culture to freely choose their language of communication, education, instruction and creative activities.
- In addition, in the Law on Education (Article 9, paragraph 3), the right to education in one's native language was also assured. " (Zabortseva, 96).

There is a lack of coherence within the discourse on Kazakhstan's official language identity. On one hand, there are constitutional decrees that proscribe equality among the languages spoken in the Republic. On the other hand, there are new forces suggesting that Kazakhstan is moving away from multicultural agenda towards embracing its ethnic Kazakh identity on the national level. In order to elaborate on this argument this research will explore the path dependency aspect of national identity building in post-colonial nation-states, like Kazakhstan. This exploration is mostly concerned with looking at legislation of post-independent countries that echoes their colonizers. In this case, I will look into Kazakhstan's path dependency tendencies in regards to Soviet Union's identity building of a Soviet person. In particular, this study is looking at how the history of language and how these and other reforms of post-independent Kazakhstan are allowing a proposal for Latinization of the Kazakh language by 2025.

Path Dependency

In the broader field of study on path dependency within historical institutionalism there is a widely accepted notion that: "institutions continue to evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political maneuvering but in ways that are constrained by past trajectories." (Thelen, 19). Studies on other ex-Soviet Union's states, like

Uzbekistan and Ukraine give enough evidence to support such path dependent tendencies among these countries, especially Kazakhstan. This trend is most visible in the language planning of post-Soviet countries that have utilized a model of unification through language similar to the Soviet's unifying language policies (Malik, Central Asia). In other words, even though Kazakhstan exists in a different time than Soviet Union, Kazakhstan's political institutions bear legislative legacies that echo Soviet Union's political institutions. Thus, following the path dependency model, Kazakhstan is likely to adopt developmental trajectories similar to Soviet Union due to Kazakhstan's tangled history of being a Soviet state.

It is visible that path dependency argument is integrated in the identity building one. In a way, these countries have fallen into the mode of path dependency in the process of building their national identity. Birgit N. Schlyter gives a particularly appealing argument in favor of path dependency in Kazakhstan. Likewise, Fierman and Miles have explored the question that path dependency plays in post-Soviet countries that are rebuilding their national identity.

Zabortseva makes a good point about the study of Kazakhstan's national identity building policies and inter-ethnic dynamism when she concludes that "[unpredictability exemplifying ex-Soviet policies] is also highly relevant to the cultural and political complexities of Kazakhstan, which is often deemed in the literature to be Janus-faced, as it works to simultaneously promote multiculturalism and a more homogenizing 'kazakhinization' of society." (Zabortseva, 25). In other words, my research acknowledges the complexity of the study itself and the broader context that surrounds the study of inter-ethnic tension in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, I attempt to move beyond that point when trying to unravel the proposed reform for Latinization of the Kazakh language with all due respect to the complexity of the wider course of inter-ethnic tensions that are directly connected to the issue of linguistic reforms in Kazakhstan.

Bhavna's study of Kazakhstan and its intertwined trends of ethnicity and national-identity building support the path dependency argument in regards to Kazakhstan implementing Soviet-like linguistic reforms in the process of the nation's identity building. They emphasize that through

reforms that declare Kazakh as the official language in Kazakhstan, they symbolically connect the notions of language, nation and territory. According to the Article 7 in the Law on Languages, "In state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazak language." (Law on Languages). It is vital to note that quite recently this notion received much attention from the media when Nazarbayev demanded his cabinet members to "only speak Kazakh". This statement was later retrieved by Nazarbayev himself in a correction which stated that Russian is still acceptable on the parliament floor. He insisted that his decree was simply an encouragement to use more Kazakh during official state affairs (Reuters). However, this incident remains a supportive example of Kazakhstan's gradual tendency to elevate Kazakh above the Russian language. "He notes that Soviet Union was big on creating a unified rhetoric of language, nation and territory. Post-Soviet nations, like Kazakhstan adopted this approach to nation-building, similar to how most of post-colonial territories fall into the feedback loop of the already existing institutions. Post-independent Kazakhstan was not sufficiently prepared to address the chaotic, disenfranchised state of affairs within its own borders. In other words, the nation had to take a firm stand on how to build its national rhetoric from zero and keep the social and political fabric of the country from fractions. Since linguistic reforms were essential in Kazakhstan's identity building during Soviet times, it is only reasonable that the country chose to start its national-identity building operation with language reforms. On page 99, Bhavna stresses that: "The representation of the language question as a question of the survival of the Kazakh nation, and the debate on what formal role and status were to be assigned to Russian were connected with questions of control and ownership of the new states".

Russia's response

In order to understand the reasoning behind Kazakhstan's push for Latinization of the Kazakh language, I thought it would be beneficial to understand how the masses in Russia react to the proposal of this linguistic reform. I had all the intentions to see if Nazarbayev's claim of

modernization being the only motivation for this reform convincing enough to the masses in Russia and Kazakhstan. An important aspect of my research was gathering opinions from political and media pundits as well as prominent political figures and linguistic experts in both Russia and Kazakhstan. The rhetoric that was collected mostly concentrated on speculations about the standing of ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan and overall de-Russification of Kazakhstan. Some discourse brought up the topic of Pan-Turkism that seemed to have become a trending direction for Central Asian post-Soviet countries. It is difficult to say at this point whether the media's attention to this proposed linguistic reform is genuine. In other words, there are a lot of conversations among prominent media figures but no official statements from the Russian government in regards to being concerned for the well-being of their ethnic Russian population in Kazakhstan.

The most recent case of Russian government (Duma) expressing official concern over the standing of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan was issued in 1996. "In 1996, a Russian parliamentary committee issued a statement expressing concern at the treatment of the Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan" (MAR 2004). Simultaneously, a Duma speech made a reference to Russia's duty to halt discrimination against Russian minorities and '…act firmly and harshly when this is really necessary'. (Zabortseva, 92).

Out -Migration of Ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan

Chinn and Kaiser explore the parallel trends between ethnicity and nationalism in their "Russians as the new minority" book, which gives a good idea of how Kazakhstan's legislation is impacting the titular standing of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan (Chinn and Kaiser). Based on the ongoing trend of mass Russian out-migration, Kazakhstan's political reforms are antagonizing the ethnic Russian population. In particular, the study draws attention to language reforms that allegedly incentivize ethnic Russians to leave Kazakhstan. This and other studies pointed out that the Law on Languages of 1993 was especially pivotal in how

Kazakhstan's government shaped its national identity building course. This decree made Kazakhstan the only official state language and moved Russian to an arguably ambiguous state of "language of inter-ethnic communication" (Law on Languages).

This particular aspect of my research has much broader implications. National identity building is a broad field of study, especially in post-colonial nation-states. The post-Soviet countries have gained a bigger interest among Western and domestic scholars since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Trends like irredentism, nationalism and ethnic favoritism are only aperitifs on the menu of post-colonial research. Kazakhstan's case is particularly appetizing, because it has achieved greater success and stability after independence than its ex-Soviet comrades. In Kazakhstan's case, it is the ethnic Russians that experience irredentism and also have been continuously leaving Kazakhstan to return to Russia (Chinn and Kaiser).

Understanding the motivations behind Kazakhstan's language reforms that have arguably been the catalyst of its national identity building is the key to understanding the impact of Soviet identity building on the future of the post-Soviet territories and well as broader trends of post-colonial territories.

Kazakhstan-Russia bilateral relationship

There are several features in the history of Kazakhstan-Russia relations that may be driving Kazakhstan to Latinize its language and distance itself from Russia, in which case mass out-migration of Russians is an incentive to finally adopt more ethnic Kazakh oriented legislature. The first is the prior history of the Soviet Union's paternalistic tendencies towards its Kazakh constituents in particular and the Soviet people in general. During that period there was political, economic and cultural dependency of Kazakhstan on Russia. When Soviet Union fell, Kazakhstan was determined to rebuild its national identity while maintaining strong ties with Russia. (Nazarbayev). He gained a lot of support from Kazakhstan's ethnic Russians and other minorities by stating things like: "Interethnic and spiritual accord is our strategic resource, the basis for progress of our

society and state." Bhavna explores this aspect of Nazarbayev's image when he declares that Nazarbayev cultivated this self-proclaimed image of the protector of minorities. (Bhavna, p.111). In the light of the aforementioned claims, it is ever more enticing to explore Nazarbayev's shift to distancing Kazakh from other minority languages in the country by switching from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet.

Kazakhstan was one of the 3 countries that had a large number of ethnic Russians after the fall of Soviet Union. Moreover, the tragic legacy of Soviet induced genocides of ethnic Kazakhs left the nation with a demographic that put Kazakhs as a minority in their own country. (Smagulova, 444,) Bhavna has also noted that "Kazakhstan was the only multi-ethnic post-Soviet state in which the titular group did not constitute a majority upon becoming independent". (Bhavna, 118). Despite the atrocities, Nazarbayev made the most effort to promulgate his image of a protector of minorities and even welcome Russians and their culture in Kazakhstan. During his speeches, he would use "Russian with a sprinkling of Kazakh to attest…a command over the state language". (Bhavna, 111).

Other countries, like Ukraine, were more open to criticize their Soviet Union past and implement reforms to distance themselves from the Russian influence. (Richter, 17). As a general rule, Russia has been hostile to countries that have condemned Soviet ruling and remained open to reunification of ex-Soviet nations. Pirchner has argued that Russia still has an agenda to reunite Soviet Union's territories. If Kazakhstan keeps holding on to the remnants of its "Soviet" past, like Kazakh language in Cyrillic alphabet and Russian language as an official language, it risks being politically absorbed by Russia again. So one could interpret Kazakhstan's move as one focused on preserving its political independence and promoting its Kazakh national identity as one not tied to Russia's agenda. And as a reaction to that, Russia may interpret Kazakhstan's move as an attack on remaining ethnic Russian population. In order to understand the complexity that comes from Kazakh-Russian ethnic tensions, it is useful to look at the identity politics that build these two neighboring countries.

Building Kazakh National Identity

The following article of the amendment to the Constitution of Kazakhstan depicts the legislative emphasis on learning the Kazakh language: "It is the duty of every citizen to study Kazakh" (Bhavna, p. 96). Once again, Kazakhstan's post-independence agenda is to build the nation based on strong pillars of language, nation and territory. It is important to note that at the time of Kazakhstan's transition into independence, there were two primary schools of thought on the national-identity building agenda. Internationalists were advocating greater integration of Russian into the social and political fabric of Kazakhstan's life. Nationalists were pushing towards complete de-Russification of all aspects of Kazakhstan's identity. Such divergence of thought had a reasonable platform. Bhavna's research on this aspect of Kazakhstan's national-identity building is especially useful. He starts off by reiterating that officials didn't see Kazakh language surviving if it were to share statehood with Russian language. They said Russian language already enjoyed a "de facto" popularity. Since path dependent political set up fostered Kazakhstan's government to equate state language with state sovereignty and success, they were eager to revive Kazakh as the only state language. (Bhavna p. 97-100). They were advocating for institutionalizing the platform for Kazakh language and its success in the nation, among its people. Another important factor is concentration of ethnic Kazakhs is relatively concentrated in Kazakhstan only. There are not that many ethnic Kazakhs living in large populations outside of Kazakhstan, hence, preservation of Kazakh language is vital on Kazakhstan's territory. (Bhavna, 97-100).

There is a definite link between the identity building policies of Soviet Union and the present state of national identity polemics in post-Soviet nations like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. During its prime years of existence, Soviet Union implemented linguistic, economic and cultural policies that were intended to erase diverse ethnic identities of its constituents and in turn create a "Soviet Person Identity". Needless to say, the Soviet identity was heavily endorsing ethnic Russians and their culture, language and traditions. Languages like Kazakh, Uzbek and Kyrgyz went through language reforms and ended up reforming their original script into

Cyrillic. (Hafeez, 58). Likewise, Russian was made the official language of these states, hence diminishing the cultural value of their traditional languages. After the fall of Soviet Union, new formed nations were faced with a task of rebuilding their national identity through implementing linguistic and cultural policies. Many took immediate steps to make their ethnic languages the official languages and got rid of Cyrillic alphabet. Kazakhstan didn't follow the lead and kept both Kazakh and Russian as official languages. Dissertation by Dotton directly addresses the history of language policy changes in Kazakhstan both during and after its presence in the Soviet Union. Steven Miles also explores this domain by giving a side by side study of language reforms in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. It is arguable that Kazakhstan's decision to Latinize its alphabet is a way to emphasize Kazakh national identity, similar to what Soviet Union did in the past.

Nazarbayev's Personal Agenda

It is important to highlight the magnitude of Nazarbayev's influence on how Kazakhstan's identity has been built both during its Soviet times and after independence. Nazarbayev's name appears in all of my research sources in reference to all legislative acts and how the discourse on the language situation in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev's rhetoric on the standing of Kazakh and Russian has gradually shifted in the course of his presidency. It started off with acknowledging Russian's significance in all aspects of Kazakhstan's post-independency and a call for creating a safe space for Kazakh language to regain its cultural fertility within Kazakhstan. It is important to note that Nazarbayev's rhetoric has always been on the side of caution, especially when it came to addressing bilateral relations with Russia. The following quotation of Nazarbayev is clear evidence that the president was deliberate about keeping a balanced discourse on inter-ethnic coexistence of Russians and Kazakhs:

"It would be a mistake to believe that inter-ethnic agreement in poly-ethnic society, even the most highly advanced and tolerant, could be kept by itself, without an active ethnic state policy, without an active ethnic elite policy". (Zabortseva, 25). By saying this, Nazarbayev had established a

precedent for his future meddling in the inter-ethnic affairs of the country, including his influence on national identity building policies.

Then, Nazarbayev moved towards legislature that strengthened the Kazakh language as the state's official language. In other words, this act institutionalized symbolic unity of Kazakh language, people and land. Gradually, Nazarbayev began to embrace the revival of Kazakh nationalism in the form of greater integration of Kazakh in all aspects of the nation's agenda and simultaneous de-Russification. Based on Dotton's and others research it was interesting to follow the gradual shift of Nazarbayev's rhetoric from advocating a civic "Kazakhstani" identity to one that embraces the ethnic Kazakh identity. A publication by Assyltaeva and others has cited the following of Nazarbayev's speeches to highlight his interest in fostering a civic identity over an ethnic one:

"... we are building our self-identity - to be a single nation of Kazakhstan. For example, Americans are made up of hundreds of people and nations, but are called Americans. No one calls each other Chinese or Korean there. And your nationality - is your business. And this is a right thing. Because one country is to live as one nation". (Assyltaeva and others, 1).

Despite the emotive appeal to internationalism, Nazarbayev "has made continual reference to his pride in being a Kazakh, his desire to honor his ancestors, and the need for those who live in the republic to respect the traditional Kazakh culture. In a speech given in 1994, Nazarbayev stated:

'A nation cannot exist without a state [;] it vanished. It is not our people's fault, but its trouble that it has become a minority in the land of its ancestors. It is quite appropriate if in some cases the interest of the indigenous nation, the Kazakhs, are given special emphasis in this state.' " (Olcott, 2010, p. 31).

Needless to say, this transition is directly related to the first two arguments of this research: Russian out-migration and institutionalized favoring of ethnic Kazakhs. His personal speeches and official addresses to the Kazakhstani people and to the global community are clear indicators of Kazakhstan's official stand on this linguistic issue. For example, his most

recent State of the Nation Address given on January 10, 2018 projects Nazarbayev's vision of creating a more Western oriented agenda for Kazakhstan in the near future:

"The future of the people of Kazakhstan lies in the fluent use of Kazakh, Russian and English languages. A new methodology for studying the Kazakh language at Russian-language schools has been developed and is being implemented. If we want the Kazakh language to live in the centuries, it is necessary to modernize it, without loading it with excessive terminology. In recent years, however, 7,000 well-established and globally accepted terms have been translated into the Kazakh language. […] It is necessary to revise the approaches to the validity of such translations and to bring our language terminologically closer to the international level. The transition to the Latin alphabet will help to resolve this issue. A clear timetable for the transition to the Latin alphabet up to 2025 should be established at all levels of education. Knowledge of the Russian language remains important. Since 2016, in updated curricula, Russian is taught in Kazakh-language schools already from the first grade. The transition to teaching certain natural science disciplines in English in the tenth and eleventh grades will start in 2019. As a result, all our graduates will master three languages at the level necessary for life and work in the country and in the global world. Then a genuine civil society will emerge. A person of any ethnic group will be able to choose any kind of work, up to the extent of getting elected as the President of the country. The people of Kazakhstan will become one nation. The content of training should be harmoniously complemented by modern technical support. It is important to continue work on developing digital educational resources, connecting to broadband Internet and equipping our schools with video facilities. It is necessary to update the training programs in technical and vocational education with the involvement of employers and taking into account international requirements and digital skills. It is necessary to continue the implementation of the "Free Vocational Education for All" project. The State gives the young person the first profession. The government must fulfil this task. Video lessons and video lectures from best teachers of secondary schools, colleges and universities should be posted online. This

will allow all people of Kazakhstan, including those living in remote areas, to gain access to the best knowledge and competencies." (State of the Nation Address, January 10, 2018).

Since Nazarbayev concentrated his authority in all of Kazakhstan's affairs, it is rational to look at such a major linguistic reforms through the lenses of Nazarbayev's personal agenda.

According to the number of recent articles and media coverages of the proposed Latinization project, Nazarbayev has treated this initiative with outmost care. He was the one to announce the proposed reform and address it on national television. As the commissions were forming to work and outline the proposed reform, Nazarbayev announced that he envisions the new Latinized Kazakh alphabet with apostrophes to signify special letters of the Kazakh language. His proposition was immediately ridiculed among the Kazakhstan's and international linguistic community in a sense that it will not be a functional alphabet. Nazarbayev then backed away from taking a role of orchestrating the actual nuances of this linguistic transition. However, such proximity to the Latinization of the Kazakh language shows that the president is personally invested in the success and the course of this reform. He understands that language is a power tool in the national-identity building and his proposal will have a major impact on his legacy as the Father of the Nation. The duality of Nazarbayev's discourse on the standing of Kazakh and Russian languages is puzzling at best and incoherent at worst.

Another evidence of Nazarbayev's personal interest in advancing Latinization of the Kazakh language is visible at the educational level. In the interview to "Den' TV", an analytical internet-channel, a philologist Tatyana Mironova gave her expert opinion on Latinization as means of recoding of the Turkic people and discrimination of Russians in Central Asia. (Mironova). She mentioned that Latinization and overall de-Russification of Kazakhstan is most evident at the level of academia. Nazarbayev universities, the most highly regarded institutions of higher education in Kazakhstan, attract mostly Western faculty members and promote Western model curriculum and modules. Since Nazarbayev universities are the very blueprint of the president's educational vision in

the country, it is safe to conclude that he supports de-Russification of Kazakhstan's educational system.

Power of Language

Once the proposed Latinization of the Kazakh language is seen as a mechanism of power delegation in Nazarbayev's hand, an even bigger question emerges out of this study: what is the power of language?

There is a much broader field of studies that has to do with linguistic capital and language as a power tool. Whether Kazakhstan's language reform is way to modernize the country or run away from Russia, it is certainly a weapon of choice for the country's officials. Hence, language as a power tool becomes the philosophical engine within the bigger picture of academic inquiry. Craith, Adams, Bourdieu and Schmid grasp bigger and broader range of questions that concern language and its place in politics, identity building and power. They are philosophical readings in regards to linguistic capital, linguistic relativity and language planning as part of national identity building. Potentially, Kazakhstan's proposal for Latinization will help understand how language and language related reforms play a role in national identity building.

On page 99, Bhavna supports the notion of language as a power tool of identity building politics when he says: "The representation of the language question as a question of the survival of the Kazakh nation, and the debate on what formal role and status were to be assigned to Russian were connected with questions of control and ownership of the new states". With the ongoing trend of ethnic Russian out-migration, any language reform that affects the titular status of ethnic Russians is looked at through the prism of Kazakh nationalism. Hence, Latinization proposal is seen as a potentially aggressive or at the very least disadvantageous reform to the ethnic Russians. De-Russifying the Kazakh language by divorcing it from Cyrillic alphabet can be interpreted as another means to ostracize the Russians living in Kazakhstan. Such immediate reaction to language reforms is a knee-jerk response to the legacy of Soviet national identity building practices and it not a cause to blame Kazakhstan for its legislature.

Counterargument: Latinize to modernize

Antonio Gramsci's quote that "A language contains a certain conception of the world" is rather apt to highlight the importance of this research. What will be Kazakhstan's new vision and role in the world after the proposed Latinization is complete? What does Kazakhstan want to be the outcome of this transition from Cyrillic to Latin? Nazarbayev claims that modernization of his country is the main motivator for change of alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin. (Mironova). In other words, he is pushing for the least threatening to Russia interpretation of his language policies. He has promoted his visions for globally competitive Kazakhstan and that Latinization of Kazakh language is one of the ways he plans to advance the nation's presence on the international arena. Dotton's research supports this argument by referencing language reforms that took place in Kazakhstan's schools and made English a required class across the nation. She cited Nazarbayev's vision of having its citizens fluent in three languages. It makes sense to become more appealing to the global community that has been dominated by English speakers. Hence, the push for further linguistic connection to the West through Latinization of the Kazakh language is sensible. Dotton's research has addressed how Kazakh language has already adopted a "second life" in a Latin script without any official language reforms. Many street sign, restaurants and brands have been utilizing the Latin alphabet for Kazakh words. (Dotton). Of course, any official language reforms will have to be standardized to one particular model of Latinization. But it is important to note that many businesses have used Latinized Kazakh language as a way to be more "western" and modern.

Similarly, Kazakhstan has been branching out into diverse realms of economic, political and cultural initiative on the global arena. Kazakhstan's name has been on the major international papers headlines in regards to its business affairs and foreign investments especially. For example, Kazakhstan's Eastern neighbor, China, has invested money to run the 21st century Silk Road through Kazakhstan as part of its Belt and Road Action Plan. Another big role that Kazakhstan has taken on the international arena is its advocacy for turkicanti-nuclear legislation. Three years into its independence, Nazarbayev officially declared Kazakhstan's

full nuclear disarmament and now possess no nuclear weapons. Such bold initiative has put Kazakhstan on the same line as developed nations of the Western world that also advocate for nucleardisarmament. Moreover, Kazakhstan has launched a project to create the world's biggest uranium bank in partnership with the U.S.

Most importantly, Kazakhstan has been attracting many Western investors because of its oil reserves. Kashagan oil field in Kazakhstan has been praised to be the richest oil field in the world of the last 30 years and such prosperous business opportunities with the Western world seem very promising for Kazakhstan's modernization.

All of this gives validity to the modernization reasoning behind Kazakh language approaching Latinization. Nevertheless, it is important to account that Kazakhstan's complicated history with Russia and its subsequent national-identity building reforms serve as indicators that Latinization is more of a political move than a purely
economic one. Zabortseva summarizes this point quiet succinctly when stating the following:

" The future trends in Russia-Kazakhstan relations are now, as ever, linked to the prevailing trends in the confrontation between Russia and the West, while also being entwined with the growing role of the EEU and the broader geopolitical rends in Eurasia" (Zabortseva, 184).

Conclusion

The question originally animating this research persists: why is Kazakhstan proposing Latinization of its official Kazakh language by 2025? This research has shown that official governmental rhetoric around this language reform is focused on modernization of Kazakhstan, especially utilizing language as one of the main driving forces of modernization. Concurrently, this research explores three other potential explanations for the proposed language reforms in Kazakhstan. A closer look at the history of language reforms in Kazakhstan has shown that institutionalizing linguistic dynamism of the national-identity building played a major role in how Kazakhstan envisions itself in relation to language, nationhood and territory. This research focused on Kazakhstan's path dependency of Soviet

language reforms that build the "Soviet person" and its implications on shaping the rhetoric around language reforms of the post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Another argument explored the ongoing trend of Russian out-migration from Kazakhstan as a catalyst to language reforms that allow for de-Russifying legislation. This line of argumentation explored the history of Kazakhstan and Russia relations and its present bilateral standing. Lastly, this research explored how Nazarbayev's personal interest in being perceived as Kazakhstan's Father figure motivated him to push for linguistic reforms of such nature. He is determined to maintain an image of the protector of Kazakhstan and more importantly, the Kazakh people. It is plausible that through language reforms that embrace the ethnic Kazakh identity, Nazarbayev intends to leave his personal mark on shaping a strong Kazakh oriented identity of his nation.

What is Kazakhstan's ultimate goal? Does Kazakhstan want to openly embrace that ethnic Kazakh identity is the foundation of Kazakhstan as a state? Or does Kazakhstan want to maintain its focus on multinational haven of Central Asia? If Kazakhstan wants to have a stable and unified image on the global arena then the country can't promulgate the ambiguity in regards to its identity. There is certainly a possibility of jeopardizing Kazakhstan's standing with Russia if Kazakhstan chooses to focus on reviving its ethnic Kazakh identity as part of the national identity. This research has covered how titular standing of Russians in post-Soviet countries is important if the host country wants to maintain amicable relations with Russia. We must consider the recently popular trends of ethnic Russian out-migration from Kazakhstan, shifting demographics that make Kazakhs an overwhelming majority in their own state and parallel legislation that appears to favor Kazakhs over Russians. This is pivotal in regards to the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia.

It is also important to note that most of the studies that were used in this research were conducted by Western academics. There was a certain tone of setting very high expectation of a country that has only been independent for 26 years. The research often left its findings as an invitation to diagnose Kazakhstan's future standing on the international arena as one that is inevitably and ultimately predetermined by Russia's

agenda. It appears to be these findings come off as to stress Kazakhstan's yet immature state of affairs and ignorance to mechanism of democracy, pluralism and globalism. It is important to highlight that Kazakhstan's path dependency is a by-product of harsh and exploitative Soviet legacies. The nation has to balance its appetite to the ways of the Western world with paternalistic and potentially threatening neighboring Russia. As of now, Kazakhstan was able to maintain stability and promote growth without extensively ostracizing ethnic Russians. With the greater volunteer out-migration of ethnic Russians Kazakhstan is eager to capture this organic opportunity to further de-Russify its identity.

Kazakhstan's recent proposal for Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet is due to cause speculation in regards to the underlining message of this linguistic shift. Any change, especially when it suggests a potentially politically charged move provokes curiosity, criticism and resistance. This research is concerned with understanding the reasoning behind Latinization proposal under the prism of conflicting forces that make up Kazakhstan's complex national identity building dynamic. Setting aside the modernization argument, it was important to look at 3 other competing factors: out-migration of ethnic Russians, legislature that has worked to elevate the symbolic power of the Kazakh language and Nazarbayev's personal interest in this linguistic transition.

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