

Balance between Government's Perception of National Identity and Language Policy: the Case of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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Abstract. This paper aims to highlight the relationship between national identity and language through policies made by the government of a multiethnic country. The case-study of Kazakhstan illustrates the lack of balance between these two policies made by the same government and points the reasoning behind that. Previous studies on this relationship have covered the imbalance between national identity policy and language policy in democratically developing countries, where decisions are yet imposed from top to the bottom. Precisely, the scholars elaborated on minority groups and their rights as diaspora. That theoretical contribution differs from the case discussed in this paper. Therefore, my argument is based on the need to develop local self-government with real power to make language policy, as a step to improve national identity in reality, not simply in policy.

Keywords: national identity, language policy, nationalism, state-building, local self-government, democratization.

1. Introduction

National identity is a popular term nowadays. Nau defines it as a concentration of citizens' consensus to keep the nation together [1]. However, definitions vary, as some scholars insist on inability to formulate concrete national identity due to its constantly changing character [2]. Yet, the actor responsible for distinguishing national identity remains to be unclear. In this paper, I consider 'national identity' as a policy made by the government of a state which is reflected in legislations, official speeches and other publications. Therefore, it is not the idea itself, but its representation: the way the government perceives state's success or failure to maintain nation's unity. Simultaneously, discourse analysis of these documents may reveal what kind of national identity the government is trying to establish and hence promote; as well as possible it may enable us to look at what mechanism or steps are proposed. This methodology is applied to discuss Kazakhstan's case.

Self-proclaimed as a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are an individual, his life, rights and freedoms, the Republic of Kazakhstan is a former part of the Union of Soviet and Social Republics (U.S.S.R.) that became independent in 1991 [3]. Constructing its national identity as a multicultural unit (employing original *Eurasianistic* theory to define the phenomenon of this mixture concentrated in a single state, where equal respect is paid to every ethnic group), country's government can be classified as successful, because, first of all, Kazakhstan has avoided the fate of other multiethnic former Soviet states that are torn in conflicts; second, it has attained an international role as a peaceful, trustworthy party and thus receives significant foreign investment and recognition (i.e. chairmanship of the OSCE summit in 2010); and third, it receives support from other parts of the former U.S.S.R. and involves into initiating integration with them (i.e. Eurasian Economic Council).

At once, under the long history of dependence, Kazakhstan was subject to exposure of Russian culture and Russian language (as it was the only national lingua franca) as predominant cultural identity. Importantly, Kazakh ethnic group was not dominant in the territory of Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Republic in their number. Therefore, the government constantly accentuates the need to preserve Kazakh language that was 'forgotten'

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during Soviet era. However, the country has at least 7 largest ethnic groups and should consider their rights and languages as well.

Hence, the dilemma is whether the country with multi-ethnic population is truly able to follow its multicultural national identity by supporting only one language. Can the example of Kazakhstan be considered somewhat a model or a problem deserving thorough solution? This arouses the urge to illuminate on the issues of Kazakhstan’s case as well as theoretical approaches to the problem of balance between language and identity in international relations studies.

2. National Identity of Kazakhstan

There is no clearly defined national identity as a set, unchangeable dogma to be followed by the population as proposed from top to the bottom. Through the discursive analysis of the legislation and officially published documents it was established that government promotes multiculturalism and multicultural identity as the national identity. The following chart shows the results obtained.

Table 1. Discourse analysis of national identity of Kazakhstan

[Semantic unit]	[Addresses of the President 1997-2010]	[The Conception “Ideological Consolidation of Society as a Means of the Progress of Kazakhstan” 1993]	[The Conception of Making Historical Consciousness in the Republic of Kazakhstan 1995]	[The Conception of Formation of National Identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1996]	[The Doctrine of National Unity of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Astana, 2010]
[Multiculturalism/multicultural identity]	84	18	17	15	7
[language]	70	7	7	6	47
[Kazakh]	91	15	14	14	40
[Russian]	14	2	1	3	3
[Minority]	0	0	0	0	0

It was particularly common during 1990s when the state was still searching for its status and role in the international arena, as well as means to unite population. However, the detailed view of how language is placed equally or even higher than identity is clear. The imbalance between Kazakh and Russian (as a language, as group) is tremendous. Kazakh is seemed to gain higher level of attention from the government, unlike Russian. And considerably, there is no mentioning of any minority, since the notion and definition whatsoever are missing in the Constitution and country’s legislation itself.

On March 1, 1995 President Nazarbayev established the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan – the advisory agency [7]. This agency does not seem to correspond fully to the task of supporting multi-cultural identity of the country. All non-titular ethnics that inhabit country are called ‘small people’ (*малые народы*). However, it is never expressed clearly which language is given the function of the one to unite variety of ethnic groups that inhabit the country. Unspoken, this function is attributed to Kazakh language, as also there is no notion of ‘Kazakhstani’ in the Doctrine and only word ‘Kazakh’ is used to describe all population, despite ethnicity.

Rather than uniting diverse ethnic group, the purpose of this identity formation seemed to be in strengthening Kazakhstan’s international status and seeking economic profit. Eurasianism was promoted as a link to integration of former Soviet countries. Nevertheless, the state seems to pay higher attention to Kazakh ethnic group in its identity formation. Despite the nominal acceptance of other ethnic group, their role in

contributing to this formation process is not strong yet. If the country chooses its national identity proceeding from its ethnical/cultural composition, should it also adapt its language policy to it?

3. Language policy construction

There are three theoretical models that I consider: monocultural, bicultural, and multicultural. By 'monocultural models' I assume the models of studies that focus on relatively monotone cultural element of national identity's composition. Equal level of competence in a titular language makes the country 'mono,' however it cannot be achieved by the outside force or force per se. If historically the language is not spread and used well enough, it can still be developed through educational reforms and methods, but granting it official status will not likely result in its real application.

Bicultural models are characterized by existence of two notions of culturality of the country and existence of two equally accepted languages. That pattern is common in the countries that used to be parts of colonial empires and are found in Asia. All three cases are of the countries that have been under imperial rule before. That explains why they experience problems with formulating their national identity and language policy in a balance. Importantly, the process of building national identity in majority of such country has started with the return to history and finding the role of certain identity's components. In Hong Kong it thus resulted in acceptance of Chinese culture, but still keeping their own Hong Kong's identity as a peculiarity [4].

Multicultural models will refer to the studies on the cases of multiculturalism as the identification orientation of a state application of recognized rights to use the language in official matters. The multicultural multilingual models are diverse, but yet they are similar in the fact that numerous spoken languages are recognized and the state bears the responsibility of their protection. Whether it is a success or not, depends on the country, as some acknowledges lingual diversity in legislation, while others draw the territorial division with certain languages. Importantly, the last case assumes strong administrative institute to decide upon the national language, as well as provide linguistic freedom.

Language policy of Kazakhstan is based on its Constitution, Law "On the Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" 1997, The Concept of the Languages 1996, and the State Program on Languages' Functioning and Development. Country is following monolingual language policy with the strong support of Kazakh language, which is however not spoken in daily life as much as supposed to, and the multicultural identity is not working either. Hence, the language policy is monolingual, expressing the strong nationalism from the top level. Kazakhstan's nationalism is not negative, but nevertheless it has an impact for emigration and turning country into mono-ethnic one.

3.1. Language policy and/in national identity

The problem of balance or imbalance between national identity and language policy and criteria for evaluating these two policies has been elaborated by Hornberger [5], Myhill [6] and Blommaert [7]. From the contributions of these three scholars it becomes apparent that national identity in the country that lacks civic representation/democratic government leads to imposition of a single language policy, as an element of national identity's construction, but, in fact, misbalances national identity as a real means of uniting people of such country, which is especially common in the countries with multi-ethnic society and presence of strong nationalistic sentiments.

In case of Kazakhstan, Kazakh language policy was constructed for the political reasons of Kazakh ethnical domination; the public proclamation of multiculturalism as a basis of national identity and unity is never taking place in reality, but aims only for international role.

The targeted audience of national identity as a policy made by the government includes all the groups of the country. However language policy is aimed mainly at Kazakh and partially Russian speaking groups. Kazakh is fixed as attribute of Kazakhstan's only language needed to develop its unity as one nation. Mechanisms differ also: language policy receives special committee in the government to work on developing Kazakh language, while national identity is the matter of the Assembly of people of Kazakhstan, which yet is not a full part of governing body. Targets pursued are not the same, as language policy is aimed at strengthening Kazakh ethnical group as dominant and protecting its cultural specifics; national identity has not yet domestic goal, but rather foreign: to receive certain economical and political gains. The Kazakhstan's

government is not supporting deconcentration of power within the country. The decisions are top-down and with the adopted amendments to the Constitution and other changes the system is not likely to alter in near future.

4. Solution?

Taking into consideration political power and its stability in Kazakhstan, the solution in the form of power change are not possible. The focus should be put into the other level. Even though this paper analyzed only government's position in national identity, it should be important to look at identity as a notion expressed by all population.

The views of different ethnics on their identity are not identical. According to the data obtained through poll in 2009, different ethnical groups while answering to the question "Speaking of your identity – what is the most important for you?" demonstrated that ethnical and religious factors play higher role than inhering overall Kazakhstan citizenship. This sociological research – entitled "Interethnic interaction: resource-related and limiting potential of integration and disintegration" - was accomplished by the Kazakhstan Institute of Socio-Economical Information and Prognosis (KISEIP) by the request of Fund of the First President of Kazakhstan. The survey was conducted in 6 regions of Kazakhstan and included 521 respondents. The results are shown in the following chart (in percentages):

Table 2 Views of Kazakhstan's ethnical groups on their identity

	[Kazakhs]	[Russians]	[Uzbeks]	[Ukrainians]	[Uyghurs]	[German s]	[Koreans]	[Kurds]	[Chechens]
[Citizenship, citizen of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan i]	50.0	43.3	64.7	46.3	73.3	63.3	83.3	67.2	25.9
[Your ethnicity]	18.3	28.3	23.5	44.4	5.0	23.3	10.0	8.6	20.7
[Your religion]	26.7	11.7	5.9	1.9	8.3	3.3		8.6	44.8
[No answer]	5.0	16.7	5.9	7.4	13.3	10.0	6.7	15.5	8.6

According to Hobsbawn, language defined the national identity. [8] Therefore it is more realistic to change the language policy rather than perception of national identity which is still not formed fully yet and is never a fixed unit. Can the bicultural model with bilingual language policy be applied in Kazakhstan? The switch from Kazakh to Russian and vice versa is not going to solve the problem. The real multiethnic factor of the country will still be underrepresented. If both languages are accepted equally, still it will not represent the national identity of multiculturalism, as other ethnic groups will still be lacking same treatment of their linguistic rights.

The multilingual models are also not likely to significantly improve situation, as the number of languages is large and then, for example, recently advocated provision of English will be lost, as there is no titular ethnic group of English native speakers.

The more successful will be to refrain from defining any language as official in the Constitution and legislations (benign neglect). At the beginning it might cause spread of nationalistic sentiments. But in long term, it will become clear that this measure is a step towards democracy, as no group will be discriminated on lingual basis. The provision of language policy should be the responsibility of not the state government, but lower administration of regions.

Originally, in classical apprehension any community of a state is 'imagined' and its identity is thus also a product of 'creation.' [9] It is the consensus of the citizens that brings them together within the state. In the classical definition, state contains territory, population and government. It does not include language. Language is chosen by the government. If the state is democratic (meaning fair representation through legal election), then its language policy is based on population and then it leads to definition of national identity consequently.

However, if it is not democratic, language is defined by minority groups or diasporas within their own societies. But in case of Kazakhstan, such minorities groups are only nominal, as even 'minority' is not defined officially. Ethnic groups do not have consolidation, partially because it is easier to migrate.

5. Summary

Kazakhstan due to its dependent role could not develop its identity as a viable unit of self-consistency at once. This is explained by its economy: within the USSR it has been only a source of natural resources. Collapse of the Soviet Union led to years of re-building the state and economy from almost zero level. Overcoming 'oil dependence' has never been accomplished fully as this industry is the driving force for the development. Oil is the main article of export, thus it is the key in trade between Kazakhstan and the European Union. Political sphere is subject to constant transformation.

Having population enclosed of numerous ethnical groups and striving for consolidated democracy, Kazakhstan's ruling power leader and elites promote multicultural direction within the construction of national identity. This can be noticed within the framework of multilateral international agreements and integrational initiatives, such as the EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Council). In 2010 it was chairing the summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

The originally proclaimed model of multiculturalism is in fact not followed. It is neither yet a model, nor a strategy. It is a tool for achievement of foreign political goals, both economical and political. Moreover, presently this national identity as expressed by the government is contradicting with the language policy also proclaimed by the same government. Thus, multiculturalism is put against the Kazakh nationalism which is formed in the policy aimed at supporting Kazakh language only with not equal acceptance of Russian and lack of public use of other languages. Language policy as practiced in other parts is positioned inside the national identity's concept. But nevertheless it is hard to make it correspond to the ethnical structure of the country. If language policy is imposed from top to bottom, it may not be limited to this government, but outside force (one aspect of that is migration). That creates the potential cause for the conflict.

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