

MONITORING THE USE OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH AS A FACTOR OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF REPATRIATED KAZAKHS

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Abstract

The article discusses the functioning of Russian and English among the younger generation of Kazakhs-repatriates enrolled in universities. We considered some of the results of sociolinguistic monitoring and use of English and Russian among Kazakh repatriates, analyzed their correlation with linguistic data. Based on the analysis of survey the causes promoting the English language through the system of higher education in Kazakhstan are considered.

Keywords: repatriates, the Kazakhs, Russian, English.

1. INTRODUCTION

The language situation in Kazakhstan is characterized by the specificity of functioning of the two dominant languages in the socio-communicative space of the Kazakhstani society - state Kazakh and Russian. In this connection the problem of language adaptation of Kazakh immigrants and their integration into the modern Kazakhstani society in line with the ethno-demographic processes taking place in recent decades in Kazakhstan is of special importance.

The paper identifies the functioning of Russian and English among the younger generation of Kazakhs-repatriates at the universities. Some results of sociolinguistic monitoring are considered here, i.e. the use of English and Russian among Kazakh repatriates, and their correlation with linguistic data. Based on the analysis of survey the causes promoting the English language through the system of higher education in Kazakhstan are considered.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It is well known that immigrants arriving from China and Mongolia mostly have poor command or no command of Russian, which directly affects the problem of overcoming the social and psychological difficulties and determine the success of their adaptation to the conditions of modern Kazakhstani reality.

This situation is conditioned by the historical and political conditions when the policy of Russification had been implemented during the Soviet period for a long time. In this regard, the communication between the different ethnic groups in the political, economic, social and other spheres of life in the territory of modern Kazakhstan was carried out mainly in Russian, which led to the dominance of the Russian language in all spheres of communication. Reducing the functional activity of the Kazakh language over that period showed a relatively low motivation of using the native language by the titular nation representatives. After gaining the independence in 1991, the linguistic situation has changed in the direction of strengthening the position of the state Kazakh language. However, as O.A. Altynbekova states Russian retains a dominant position so far in the field of higher education, despite significant changes in the ethnic composition of the population that have occurred as a result of migration processes (Altynbekova, 2007). Therefore, difficulties related to the study and knowledge of Russian arise in the process of immigration of Kazakhs-repatriates to their historical homeland.

The dominant position of English in a globalized world has led to its promotion in the educational space of Kazakhstan (Strategy, 2012), as the integration process, affecting all spheres of human activity, predetermined it as a language of international communication, international, universal and global for the ever-expanding range of representatives of different countries (Cheshire (1991), Pennycook (2010), Crystal (1997), Kachru (1992), Seidlhofer (2005), Jenkins (2007) et al.). According to renowned linguist B. Kachru's theory of «three concentric circles», learning and mastering of English is schematically seen in the form of three concentric circles, where the first circle includes those countries for which English is their native language. The second circle includes those countries for which English has a special status and is used as a second language. The third expanding circle includes those countries for which English is a foreign language (Kachru, 1992). Kazakhstan should be attributed to the expanding circle, where English is seen as a means of international communication. The state policy in the field of language education in the Republic of Kazakhstan is aimed at the harmonious development of the three languages, and therefore English plays the role of the language for successful integration into the world economy. In connection with the transformation and integration processes, covering the world space, the English language has a special role in Kazakhstan. A special attention is given to the development and spread of English at the state level since independence, as evidenced by legal documents (laws «On Education» (2007) and «On languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan» (1997), «State program of functioning and development of languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020» (2011), «State program of education development in Kazakhstan for 2011-2020» (2011)). However, it should be noted that in spite of the measures taken for the development and spread of the English language it is still too early to speak about its full functioning in the language area of the country. There is a noticeable differentiation of the use of English in different institutional contexts: from the its use as an additional language to its functioning as a lingua franca. As for the age, the older generation is characterized by ignorance or poor knowledge of the language. There is a contrary trend among the younger generation. Here didactic language acquisition plays an important role, as in connection with the transformation of the educational system English is mandatory at all levels of the educational system. The issues of multilingual education have become topical, where the special emphasis is given to the study of subjects through English (CLIL). In addition, there is a growing demand for professionals with knowledge of English in a modern society. In this regard, there is a positive trend to use English in various social spheres. English becomes an additional language for youth, which is actively used, along with dominating Kazakh and Russian.

In the context of dynamic changes in the language situation in Kazakhstan there is a need in in-depth study and understanding of issues related to the policy of three languages, the use of the Russian language, promotion of English and language preferences and problems among the younger generation of Kazakh repatriates, which is the subject of this article. The present study is based on data from a sociolinguistic survey of Kazakh repatriates to identify attitudes towards Russian and English, the motives of the study, as well as views on the policy to promote the English language in Kazakhstan.

3. METHODOLOGY

To study the characteristics of cultural and linguistic adaptation of the young generation of Kazakhs-repatriates we developed the questionnaire, consisting of 5 sections: Section 1. The degree of knowledge of languages, Section 2. The choice of language in different situations and the frequency of its use, Section 3. Opinion of the language situation in Kazakhstan, Section 4. Questions of language adaptation, Section 5. The socio-economic characteristics. The survey was conducted in the Kazakh language, this article covers only the issues relating to the preferences of respondents regarding the use of Russian and English, motives of their study and attitudes to the policy of trilingualism. 100 Kazakhs-repatriates living in Astana and

studying in high schools attended the pilot survey. Age characteristics of the respondents vary between 17 and 26 years old. All respondents are students of higher educational institutions.

We used closed questions in determining the respondents' attitude towards the language situation, their views on the learning and use of languages. The answers are presented on the Likert scale: 1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Disagree 4) Strongly Disagree, 5) Difficult to say.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the study we analyzed a number of questions aimed at identifying the attitudes of immigrant students to the Russian language (Agmanova, 2014). Responses of students in percentage ratio are presented in the following chart.

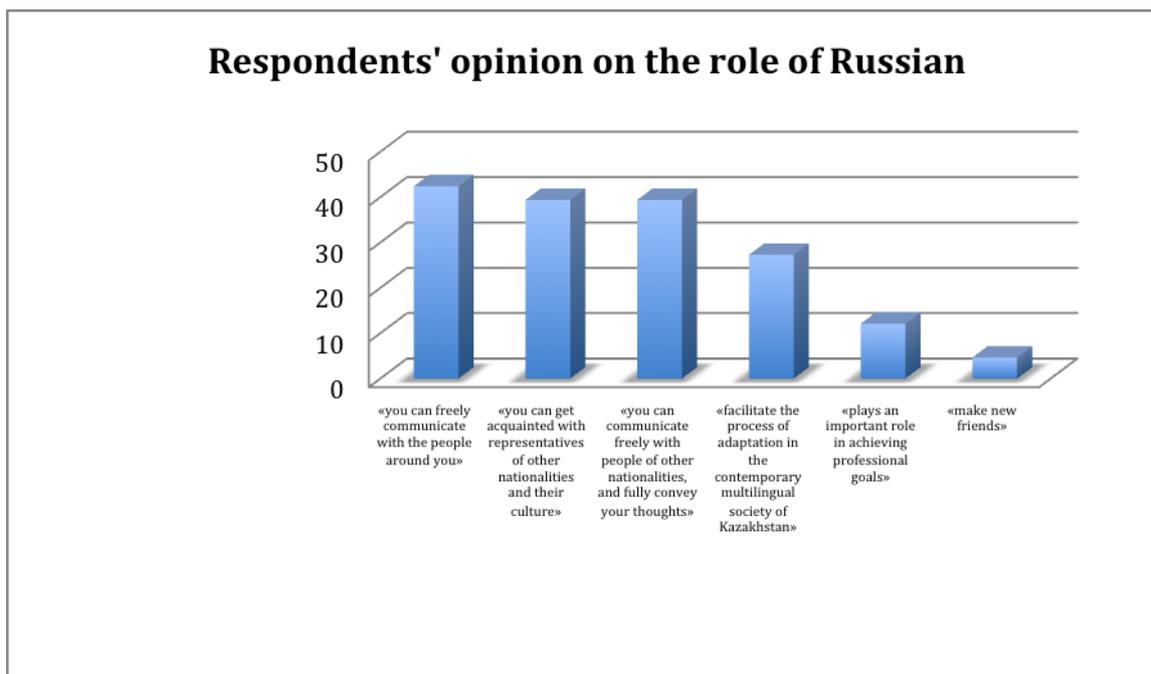


Fig. 1. Respondents' opinion on the role of Russian

As illustrated in the diagram, the process of successful language adaptation of Kazakh repatriates and their integration into a modern polylingual Kazakhstani society is associated with the study and use of the Russian language. There is a noticeable predominance of such answers as «you can freely communicate with the people around you» (42.4%), «you can get acquainted with representatives of other nationalities and their culture» and «you can communicate freely with people of other nationalities, and fully convey your thoughts» - to 39.4%; «facilitate the process of adaptation in the contemporary multilingual society of Kazakhstan» - 27.3%. These responses reflect the importance of the study of Russian by Kazakh repatriates, as it plays an important role in the process of inter-ethnic communication in a multiethnic society in Kazakhstan. Statistical data from the responses «plays an important role in achieving professional goals» - 12.1% and «make new friends» - 4.65% reflect the views of students regarding the relatively not so high role of the Russian language in their future professional advancement. In addition, the use of the Russian language in interpersonal interaction is kept to a minimum, which illustrates a slight degree of interethnic contacts.

In the study, we also identified the main reasons for learning Russian by immigrant students. It should be noted that during the process of learning a second language students are guided by several motives at the same time, that may vary under the influence of external and internal factors. We have identified the motives of studying Russian, grouped on the classification proposed by Ya Lukina based on the analysis of the responses to the question «What is the purpose of your studying Russian?», which is presented as an open type (2008):

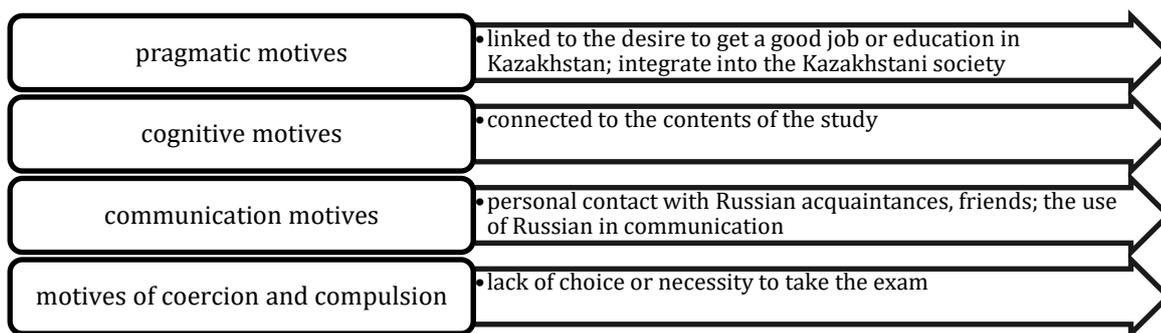


Fig. 2. The motives of learning Russian

Thus, analysis of the data revealed a) pragmatic motives: «for professional purposes», «to continue education», «to find the place in society» «it will not be superfluous to know other languages», «to meet the demands of the times», «to easily integrate into the community»; b) cognitive motives: «in order to deepen the knowledge»; «It is good to know three languages»; c) communication motives: «to speak Russian fluently in any domain»; d) the motives of coercion and compulsion: «because we are studying the subject», «because it is a studying subject», «I'm afraid that when applying for a job they ask me if I knew the Russian language». It should be noted that emotional, aesthetic and didactic (related to the learning process) motives were not found in the above classification among the data available, which once again underlines the dominance of pragmatic and cognitive motives and a high degree of relevance of it to students-returnees.

The results of the survey of immigrant students of Kazakhstani universities allowed to define the causes of promoting English through the higher education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Interesting data were obtained from the analysis of the issues regarding the promotion of English, which are presented in Figure 2.

The data obtained allow us to state a positive attitude towards English among Kazakhs-immigrants: a) 85.2% of respondents believe that English is becoming increasingly popular; b) according to the opinion of 66.6% of the respondents, knowledge of English is prestigious; c) 74.6% of respondents believe that knowledge of English is beneficial in economic terms; d) 81.4% of the respondents agree with the view that English makes it possible to get a good job; e) 85.1% of respondents are considering English as a means of familiarizing the world community; f) 67.3% of respondents disagreed with the statement that «the knowledge of English does not matter».

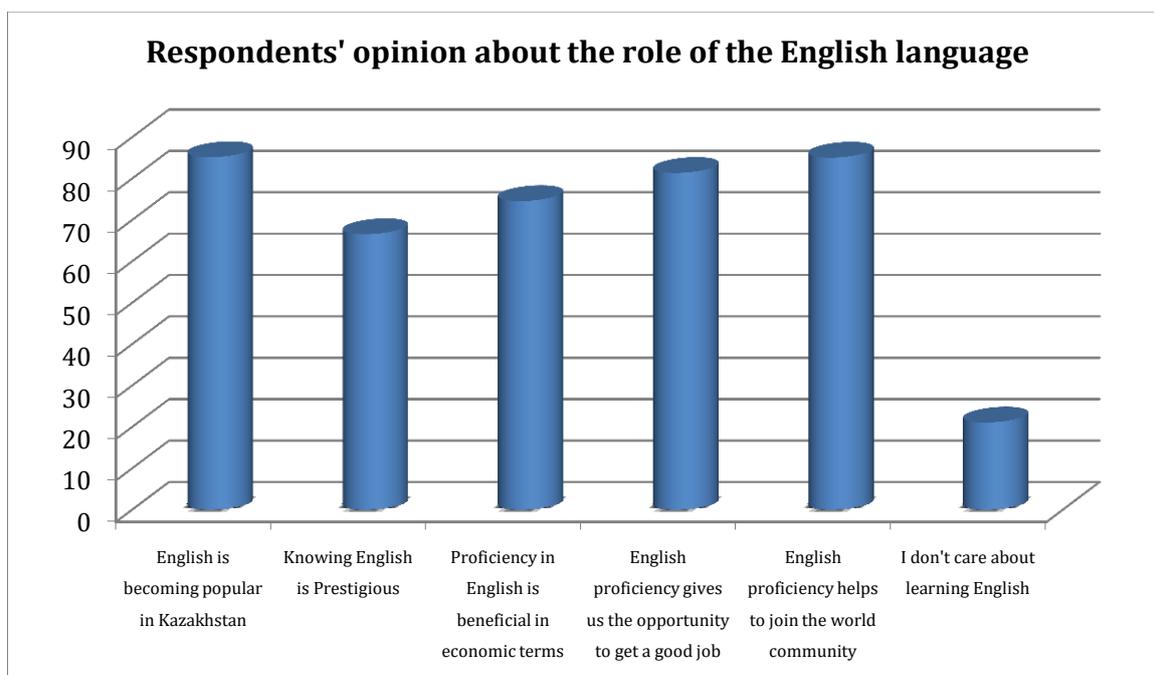


Fig. 3. Respondents' opinion about the role of the English language

The respondents' answers illustrate the preference given to English as compared to Russian. 81.3% of respondents favor to learn English from the first grade, which is much higher in comparison with the data related to the study of English from the second grade (52.1%) and the fifth grade (37.2%). The question of learning English from the first grade depending on the success of learning and development of Kazakh (considered from the point of view of this fact), revealed a negative (55.5% of respondents believe that learning English from the first grade has a negative impact on the assimilation and development of their native language) and positive (44.5%) influence. Overall, 78.9% of respondents agree with the view that the support of English is a deliberate policy on the part of the state. The policy aimed at the development of three languages, is considered positive by respondents: 70.4% of respondents believe that the development of three languages will lead to a strengthening of the position of Kazakh, 59.6% of respondents consider that the development of trilingualism will strengthen the position of English. However, concerns about the weakening of Kazakh in connection with the development of trilingualism expressed 59.6% of respondents, 46.6% of respondents agreed with the opinion that English will supersede Kazakh in the future. Regarding Russian, 58.8% of respondents did not agree that English will replace Russian in the future.

The responses reflect the opinions of the repatriates about the prospects for the development of languages: a) Kazakh will inevitably prevail in all spheres of social life (88.9%); b) English will improve its position along with the dominance of Kazakh (56%); c) English will inevitably prevail in all spheres of social life (14.8%); d) English and Kazakh will be equalized according to the degree of use, the real bilingualism will come (14.8%). The role and place of English in the education system of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the media, strong support from the government promotion of English language contribute to the development of emerging trends to strengthen its position.

5. CONCLUSION

The results confirm the complexity and ambiguity of the process of adaptation of students-returnees, their social readiness to language interaction in a multiethnic Kazakhstani society. There is a positive dynamics in the motivation to master Russian, which is related to the the process of mastering intercultural competence facilitating the successful adaptation of students-returnees in terms of Kazakhstan's multiethnic society. Analysis of experimental data shows that the dominance of pragmatic and cognitive motives and a high degree of relevance to students-repatriates is conditioned by the linguistic realities of the modern Kazakhstani society.

Analysis of the survey results suggests that Kazakh repatriates support the policy of promoting the English language. Many respondents attributed the further development of their professional activities with knowledge of English. Proficiency in English is seen as one of the main factors related to career opportunities in Kazakhstan.

Thus, these data suggest the effectiveness of policies expanding the use of the state language, as well as the promotion of the English language within the framework of the trinity of languages.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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