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**SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF OGUZ TURKS IN  
POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN: THE FIRST RESULTS OF A  
SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY CARRIED OUT IN 2013-2014**

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**1. Introduction: Language situation in Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan is a unique region of language interaction. In the Soviet period, Kazakhstan was called the “laboratory of friendship”. More than 130 different ethnic groups live on the territory of Kazakhstan. Some of these ethnic groups came to Kazakhstan as refugees because of various conflicts, or were exiled to Kazakhstan during the Stalin era in the course of the so-called deportation, some migrated there in search for work, while some groups represent the indigenous population of this area.

Kazakhstan gained its independency in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is a multiethnic country. According to the results of the Kazakh national census of 2009 (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>), representatives of 26 Turkic ethnic groups live there, Oguz peoples occupy a very important place among them: almost 100 000 Azeri, about 500 Gagauz people, more than 2000 Turkmen and almost 100 000 Turks live in Kazakhstan. The latter group is very diverse: we find here speakers of different Turkic dialects, representatives of various Turkicized peoples.

During the Soviet time, the number of people belonging to other ethnicities than Kazakh was bigger than Kazakh population of the Republic. Russian was the state language, and the language of inter-ethnic communication in the country. After the Republic of Kazakhstan came into existence, the Kazakh language had to establish itself as the state language in a hard competition against the Russian language (which is still considered to be an official language in Kazakhstan). Monitoring of this competition was the main topic of sociolinguistic work in Kazakhstan while languages of other ethnic groups got little attention for a long time (see Sulejmenova 1996, 2008; Axmetžanova Z.K. 2005; Altynbekova O.B. 2006a, b; Sulejmenova Ė.D., Smagulova

Ž.S. 2005; Sulejmenova Ė.D., N.Ž. Šajmerdenova, Ž.S. Smagulova, D.X. Akanova. 2007; Dave 2007; Report of the independent expert on minority issues. Mission to Kazakhstan. 2009; Agentstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po statistike 2010; Altynbekova & Ajdarxanov 2010). At the same time, they have been under the pressure of both Russian and Kazakh. Only recently, their needs got more attention of the Kazakh authorities. An Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan was created that unites more than 40 associations of various ethnic groups. The associations have with numerous regional branches and are very active in the social life of Kazakhstan (see Picture 1).

During the years of independence the prestige of the Kazakh language as the state language is increasing in the society. This factor objectively stimulates activation of interaction between the Kazakh language and other Turkic languages of Kazakhstan. Thus, the need for linguistic documentation of Kazakhstani Turkic language world is of great importance. We do not only need data from well-established Turkic languages, but also from less known Turkic varieties (see such understudied Turkish idioms as Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz, etc.), endangered languages (Shor, Karaim, Krimčak, see e.g. Erdal & Nevskaya 2006), languages strongly influenced by contacts with Kazakh and Russian (Karakalpak, Karačay, Balkar, Tatar, etc). It's important to note, that practically all the Turkic groups living in Kazakhstan possess their titular territory elsewhere (either as an independent statehood or an autonomous unit within a larger state).

During the Soviet period, the Russian language was the language of cross-cultural communication not only of Slavic group, but also for all the rest. The Kazakh language is now recognized as the state language according to the Constitution, the Russian language is the official language, and English is supposed to be used as the language of international communication (the Projekt Gosudarstvennoi programmy). What place should native languages of ethnic minorities take in this situation?

## **2. Reasons of migration of Turkic ethnic groups to Kazakhstan**

Speakers of many Turkic languages and their varieties in Kazakhstan were separated from the main bulk of their speech communities mainly in the course of deportation from the Caucasus in 1944. Some Turkic ethnic groups were isolated from their main historical area already in 1935-1937 during the time of creating collective forms and nationalization of private property of wealthy peasants in the Soviet Union (e.g. Azerbaijanis, Kumyks). Some came to Kazakhstan in 1944, e.g. Turkish ethnic groups (Ahiska, Hemshilli, Laz, etc.), Karaims, Krimčaks, Karačays, Balkars; some migrated to Kazakhstan even earlier (Tatars, Uzbeks). Summing up we can enumerate the following reasons of the present day multiethnic language landscape in Kazakhstan:

- Living side by side for centuries and mutual migrations (Uzbek, Uyghur and Kirgiz).
- Deportations of Kumyks and Azeri in 1935-1937 during the collectivization period in the USSR.
- Deportations of Turkic ethnic groups from the Caucasus and the Crimea in 1944 (Karachay, Balkar, Karaim, Krymčak and Crimean Tatar as well as various Turkish groups).

- Industrialization during the Second World War, and the *Virgin Lands* Campaign during the 50s and 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that were connected with work migration of millions of people of various ethnicity.
- Mixed marriages.
- Work migration in the post-Soviet period.

**Table 1.** presents the results of the recent censuses in Kazakhstan.

**Table 1.** Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (Oguz Turkic groups are highlighted): the dynamics of changes in their number in the last 40 years.

	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009
Total population in RK	13.026.274	14.709.508	16.222.324	14.981.281	16.009.597
Nationalities:					
1. Kazakh	4.228.367	5.282.481	6.486.029	8.011.452	<b>10.096.763</b>
2. Azeri	57.607	73.240	88.887	78.325	<b>85.292</b>
3. Altay	575	630	675	462	<b>221</b>
4. Balkar	2.714	2.258	2.926	2.079	<b>1.798</b>
5. Bashkir	21.500	32.577	41.060	23.247	<b>17.263</b>
6. Chakass	401	475	575	355	<b>223</b>
7. Chuvash	22.871	22.310	21.717	11.864	<b>7.301</b>
8. Dolgan	17	18	56	25	<b>3</b>
9. Gagauz	772	752	953	678	<b>493</b>
10. Yakut	175	438	303	115	<b>119</b>
11. Karaim	50	33	33	28	<b>231</b>
12. Karakalpak	463	620	1.357	1.497	<b>2.828</b>
13. Karachay	2.447	2.082	2.038	1.400	<b>995</b>
14. Kirgiz	9.612	9.352	13.718	10.925	<b>23.274</b>
15. Krimchak	42	87	61	20	<b>35</b>
16. Kumyk	554	873	1.700	643	<b>481</b>
17. Nogay	155	236	539	350	<b>276</b>
18. Tatar	286.878	314.065	322.338	249.052	<b>204.229</b>
19. Crimean Tatar	2.023	834	3.125	1.007	<b>1.532</b>
20. Shor	215	381	382	212	<b>96</b>
21. Tofalar	6	14	0	29	<b>0</b>
22. Tuwan	85	182	129	35	<b>37</b>
23. Turkish	18.377	25.718	49.219	78.711	<b>97.015</b>
24. Turkmen	3.265	2.241	3.716	1.733	<b>2.234</b>
25. Uzbek	216.258	262.960	330.417	370.765	<b>456.997</b>
26. Uighur	120.622	147.676	181.155	210.377	<b>224.713</b>

### 3. The International research project “Interaction of Turkic Languages and Cultures in the Post-Soviet Kazakhstan”

#### 3.1. Objectives of the project and cooperation partners

A project carried out at the Free Berlin University, the Eurasian University in Astana (the main cooperation partners), and at the Taraz State University by a group of German and Kazakh researchers aims at a research on the sociolinguistic situation of non-Kazakh Turkic ethnic groups in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The heads of the project are Irina Nevskaya and Claus Schönig (Germany), and Saule Tazhibaeva and Nurila Shaimerdinova (Kazakhstan). The project is financed by the Volkswagen Foundation. This article will present some preliminary results of this project that

started on March 1, 2014. Some issues of the project were referred to in Nevskaya & Tazhibayeva 2014a and 2014b.

Objectives of the projects are as follows:

To clear up the real sociolinguistic situation in Kazakhstan with respect to Turkic languages present in the country, which includes the following issues:

- social strategies of Turkic ethnic groups in the new conditions of independent Kazakhstani statehood (the opening of previously closed ethnic groups, the choice of the education language for their children, etc);
- assimilation processes vs. retaining the ethnic identities, as well as the main factors influencing these processes;
- ethnic vs. civic in the mass-consciousness of the Turkic ethnic groups in modern Kazakhstan; the role of the state policies and of spontaneously developing tendencies;
- reasons for increase and decrease in numbers of certain Turkic ethnic groups during the independence period (such as the growth of Karaims and decrease in number of Siberian Turks)

To document especially endangered, or unstudied Turkic varieties.

The project is important for Turcology and Sociology in Kazakhstan especially due to the following factors:

- At the university level, questions regarding the Turkic ethnicities in Kazakhstan are increasingly coming to the fore. Three years ago, Departments of Turkic Studies were organized both at the Gumilev Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana and at the Kazakh National Al-Farabi University in Almaty. During the first three years after the start of their programs, the focus of research and teaching has been almost exclusively on Old Turkic and Kazakh studies. Now, it should also be extended to the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of all Turkic languages, with a special attention to Turkic small-numbered ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The historical, anthropological and linguistic information, which is to be obtained in the course of the cooperative German-Kazakh project, can be included in the curriculum of Turkic Studies courses.
- Sociolinguistic research in the first two decades of independency was aimed at investigating the situation of the state language in Kazakhstan in the conditions of its rivalry with the Russian language. Minorities' languages were not taken into account.

### **3.2. Questionnaire**

In order to reveal the linguistic attitudes of the Kazakhstani Turkic groups regarding their native language, Kazakh and Russian, show their language uses in everyday life, their ethnic/social identity as defined in the passport and as defined by themselves, their ethnic identity and their linguistic identity, acceptance of hybrid identities among other questions, we composed a questionnaire and presented it to representatives of various Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. It is presented to respondents either in Kazakh or Russian.

It includes questions to the following main issues:

Part 1.

- A. General information and ethnic self-identification, ethnicity and nationality as noted in the passport (the respondent, his/her parents, spouse and closest friends)
- B. Educational status and the language of the education (the respondent, his/her parents).
- C. Profession
- D. Place of residence
- E. The history of the family's migrations (in case the respondent, or his parents were not born in Kazakhstan)

Part 2. Language proficiency

- F. The degree of language proficiency, the language of communication in the family, frequency of native language use in communication between different generation of the family; language of education of the respondent; language use in different situation of communication and in other situations of language use (books, mass media, etc.); possibilities of education in the native language, support of the language by the state (schools, media, etc.), language attitudes (what language one should speak to children in the family, in the kindergarten, what language should be the language of education at different levels; should children learn their native language at school, etc.); mass media and the native language, what factors are most decisive ones in the definition of ethnicity (language, religion, traditions, etc.).

Part 3. Interethnic relationship

- G. Most frequent mixed marriages between the people of what ethnic groups? Nationality in mixed marriages? Attitudes of the community to mixed marriages?

Part 4. Culture

- H. Traditions of the ethnic group, problems with keeping to traditions, changes in the traditions in the recent time.

Part 5. Religion (religion of the respondent, education of religion leaders, religious holidays, etc.)

Part 6. Literature (knowledge of oral traditions, of modern literature in the native language and of Kazakh literature).

The results will be put into a databank, evaluated and made accessible for broader public via the Internet. See an extract of the questionnaire below (Picture 2): Part 2, subdivision 3 "Proficiency in different languages": native (E-3a), Kazakh (E-3б), Russian (E-3в), as well as up to three further languages (E-r-e) Proficiency in further languages other than the native tongue, Kazakh and Russian is especially important for ethnic groups that came to Kazakhstan from other regions. We have added English translations of stimuli as notes after the picture.

**Е-3 Тілді меңгеру дәрежеңіз**  
**Степень владения языками**

	<i>Е-3а Ана</i> Родной	<i>Е-3б қазақ</i> Казахск.	<i>Е-3в Орыс</i> Русский	<i>Е-3г</i> <i>басқа</i> другой	<i>Е-3д</i> <i>басқа</i> другой	<i>Е-3е</i> <i>басқа</i> другой
1. Еркін сөйлеймін Говорю свободно						
2. Қиналып сөйлесемін Говорю с затруднениями						
3. Сөйлемеймін Не говорю						
4. Еркін оқимын Читаю свободно						
5. Қиналып оқимын Читаю с затруднениями						
6. Оқымаймын Не читаю						
7. Еркін түсінемін Понимаю свободно						
8. Қиналып түсінемін Понимаю с затруднениями						
9. Түсінбеймін Не понимаю						
10. Еркін жазамын Пишу свободно						
11. Қиналып жазамын Пишу с затруднениями						
12. Жазбаймын Не пишу						

**Picture 2.** An extract of the questionnaire.

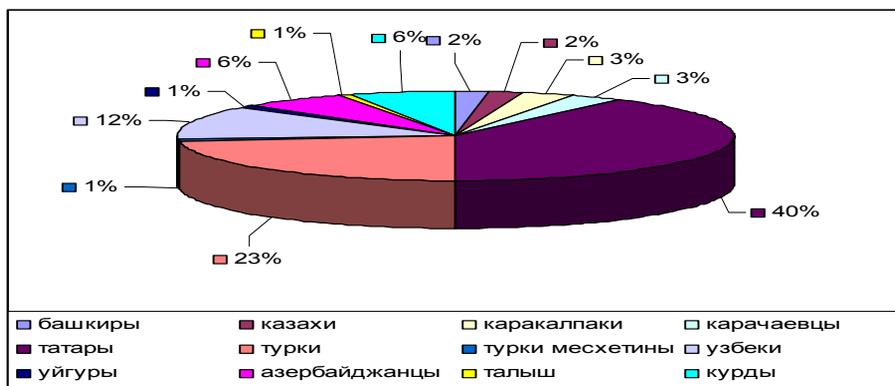
Notes. 1. I speak (the language) fluently. 2. I have difficulties to express myself (in this language). 3. I do not speak (the language). 4. I read without difficulties (written texts in the language). 5. I have difficulties while reading (written texts in the language). 6. I can not read (written texts in the language). 7. I understand everything (when people speak this language). 8. I have difficulties in understanding (when people speak the language). 9. I do not understand (when people speak the language). 10. I can write (in this language). 11. I have difficulties to write (in this language). 12. I cannot write (in this language).

### 3.3 Collection of data and first results

2013-2014: the Eurasian University decided that students of the Turcological Department can gather their professional practical experience working as volunteers in the framework of the International project. They got 6 weeks for collecting data using the questionnaire. All in all, the students conducted about 2000 interviews.

About 1000 interviews have already been put into the online database and analyzed.

In addition, the questionnaire can be answered by any person using, the online mask with questions in both Kazakh and Russian. According to our preliminary analysis of the first results of the questioning 40% of the respondents were Tatars, 23% Turks, 12% Bashkir, 6% Azeri, etc., see Picture 3.



Picture 3. The percentage of respondents belonging to different ethnic groups

The participants of the project in Kazakhstan and Germany also collected oral interviews in the framework of the project in March 2014, see Picture 4.

The results can be viewed on our Internet site (under construction), using various filters and with visual representation of answers.

There are interesting mismatches, e.g. between the nationality as written in the passport of the people, and their self-identification, between the traditional choice of the nationality (after the father or mother), and the actual nationality, between the declared language preferences and the use of the native language, among many other things.

#### 4. Oguz Turkic groups in Kazakhstan. The case of the so-called Meskhetian Turks

The Oguz Turkic groups in Kazakhstan are the Gagauz, the Turkmen, the Turks, and Azeri. They mostly live in the south of Kazakhstan in Almaty, Jambyl and South Kazakhstan regions. The Azeri and the Turks are especially numerous.

According to the results of the Kazakh national census of 2009, representatives of 26 Turkic ethnic groups live there, among them almost 100 000 Azeri, about 500 Gagauz people, more than 2000 Turkmen and almost 100 000 Turks.

##### 4.1 The case of the so-called Meskhetian Turks

One of our special points of interest are the so-called Meskhetian Turks.

The Meskhetian Turks were all deported from Georgia to Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirgiziya) in 1944.

The number of Turks in Kazakhstan is increasing (<http://www.eng.stat.kz>). Interviewing the Turkish population, we have got an impression that they have a strong feeling of self identification, identifying themselves as Ahiska, Hemshilli, or Laz Turks, see Pictures (5)-(7). It is still not clear whether the Meskhetians (Ahiska) were originally of Turkic origin, or they are Turkicised Georgians. At the same time, all the interviewers have stressed that they are Turks, but their language is "eski Osman Turk", i.e. Ottoman Turkic. They used to live in different regions of Georgia. In November of 1944, they had been deported to Kazakhstan from Georgia.

After their deportation from Georgia, their new settlement areas were the south regions of Kazakhstan (the Shimkent and Jambyl regions).

Unlike other deported peoples, the Meskhetians could not return to their old homes. Georgia had given their original area of settlement to Armenians. Thus, in 2000, in order to prevent a civil war with Armenians, tens of thousands of Meskhetian Turks were again expelled from Georgia.

Today, their language and culture are being subjected to the depletion of the speakers themselves because of their high assimilation willingness in order to protect themselves from further discrimination, or, even, extinction (field research in Taraz, March of 2014). They have identified themselves as Turks in interviews taken in the framework of this survey.

In 1991 in Almaty a "Turkish Center" was founded, which proclaimed Turkey as the protector of the Meskhetian Turkish groups, and Turkish as the "sole standard language" of Meskhetian Turkish speakers. They have Sunday school and cultural centers in bigger cities. International weekly newspaper "AHISKA" is published in Almaty ([ahiska60mai.ru](http://ahiska60mai.ru)), see Pictures 8 and 9.

At the same time, there has been neither research on the peculiarities of their language, their self-identification, nor on the socio-linguistic situation of the Meskhetians in Kazakhstan before our project. One of the objectives if the project is to document Turkic varieties that the Meskhetian Turks are speaking.

#### **4.2 The Role of Turkic Oguz Ethnic Groups in the Kazakhstan Education System**

In modern Kazakhstan, similar to the Soviet times, there is native education only for Uzbeks and Uighurs. There are 60 schools that perform their entire teaching in Uzbek, as well as 15 purely Uighur schools. Other Turkic languages such as Turkish can best be learned at voluntary Sunday schools, as well as at classes of extracurricular activities.

There are no studies on how many small ethnic groups want mother tongue education for their children. Perhaps, only Kazakh or Russian schools are preferred by education-oriented parents, as university education takes place exclusively in Kazakh or Russian, and the passing of a language test is an admission requirement. There is no evidence on how high the level of knowledge of their native languages is. Particularly for the smaller ethnic groups it is possible that their native language has been replaced partially or completely by a more dominant language.

At the university level, questions regarding the Turkic ethnicities in Kazakhstan are increasingly coming to the fore. Three years ago, Departments of Turkic Studies were organized both at the Gumilev Eurasian National University (ENU) in Astana and at the Kazakh National Al-Farabi University in Almaty. During the first three years after the start of their programs, the focus of research and teaching has been almost exclusively on Old Turkic and Kazakh studies. Now, it should also be extended to the linguistic and cultural peculiarities of all Turkic languages, with a special attention to Turkic small-numbered ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The historical, anthropological and linguistic information, which is to be obtained in the course of the cooperative German-Kazakh project, can be included in the curriculum of Turkic Studies courses.

## 5. Conclusion

Kazakhstan is a unique region, where processes of mutual influence and interpenetration (or, possibly, even of partial mixing) of Turkic languages belonging to different classification groups within the Turkic family (Kipchak, Karluk, Oguz, Sayan-Altai) are under go. According to the results of the Kazakh national census of 2009, representatives of 26 Turkic ethnic groups live there. The mentality of ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan combined with well-balanced national politics, allowed to form a specific culture of non-conflicted behavior in this heterogeneous society. As a result, the cultural and linguistic diversity in independent Kazakhstan has not become a factor for separation and disintegration of society, but on the contrary, it promotes its enrichment and successful sustainable development.

Turkic minorities' languages in Kazakhstan and their varieties have kept some archaic features and developed innovative ones. Innovative features have emerged through contacts with other languages of Turkic origin, such as Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Tatar, or languages of non-Turkic origin as Russian. Code shifting is taking place very easily. Turkic speakers are using elements of their native linguistic codes while speaking Kazakh or Russian, they easily change the languages during conversation.

The so called Meskhetian Turks in Kazakhstan tend to go over to Standard Turkish under the influence of Turkish mass media, close contacts and work migrations to Turkey. Only the old generations still preserve these varieties which makes them endangered.

The data we are using were obtained thanks to a questionnaire we composed for this purpose and presented to representatives of various Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

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APPENDICES



**Picture 1.** Taraz, March 2014. A Poster of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan at the celebration of Nauruz. (A Photo taken by Irina Nevskaya)



**Picture 4.** Research in the South of Kazakhstan in March 2014.



**Picture 5.** Ahiska people. The village of Merke. (A Photo taken by Irina Nevskaya)



**Picture 6.** A Shemshili woman. Taraz 2014. (A Photo taken by Saule Tazhibayeva)



**Picture 7.** A Laz person with a German participant of the project Monika Rind-Pawlowski. (A Photo taken by Irina Nevskaya)



**Picture 8.** The head of the Taraz branch of the Association of the Ahiska people is showing the participants of the project the newspaper "Ahiska". Taraz, 2014. (A Photo taken by Irina Nevskaya)