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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS IN RUSSIAN-KAZAKH BILINGUALS: THE ROLE OF FAMILY, EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

Abstract. This paper analyzes the factors influencing language acquisition among bilinguals in Kazakhstan, focusing on the role of family, friends and educational environment. The paper also examines the differences in the level of language skills development depending on the spheres of language use. Most respondents use Russian most of the time, in connection with reading, studying and online communication or as a lingua franca for oral communication, while Kazakh is more often used in family communication.

Keywords: bilingualism, language acquisition, language skills, Kazakh language, sociolinguistics, survey

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ФАКТОРЫ, ВЛИЯЮЩИЕ НА РАЗВИТИЕ ЯЗЫКОВЫХ НАВЫКОВ У РУССКО-КАЗАХСКИХ БИЛИНГВОВ: РОЛЬ СЕМЬИ, ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ И ОБЩЕСТВА

Аннотация. В данной статье анализируются факторы, влияющие на усвоение языка среди билингвов в Казахстане, с акцентом на роль семьи, друзей и образовательной среды. Также в статье рассматриваются различия в уровне развития языковых навыков в зависимости от сфер использования языка. Большинство респондентов в основном использует русский язык для чтения, учебы и общения в интернете или как лингва франка для устной коммуникации, в то время как казахский язык чаще используется в семейном общении.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, усвоение языка, языковые навыки, казахский язык, социолингвистика, опрос.

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РЕСЕЙ-ҚАЗАҚ БИЛИНГВТЕРІНІҢ ТІЛ ДАҒДЫЛАРЫНЫҢ ДАМУЫНА ӘСЕР ЕТЕТІН ФАКТОРЛАР: ОТБАСЫНЫҢ, БІЛІМНІҢ ЖӘНЕ ҚОҒАМНЫҢ РӨЛІ

Аннотация. Бұл мақала Қазақстандағы билингвтер арасында тіл игеруге әсер ететін факторларды зерттейді, оның ішінде отбасы, достар және білім беру ортасының рөліне ерекше назар аударылады. Мақала сондай-ақ тілдерді қолдану салаларына байланысты тіл дағдыларын дамыту деңгейіндегі айырмашылықтарды қарастырады. Зерттеу нәтижелері бойынша, респонденттердің көпшілігі орыс тілін оқу, оқу және интернеттегі қарым-қатынас үшін немесе ауызша қарым-қатынас үшін лингва-франка ретінде пайдаланады, ал қазақ тілі көбінесе отбасылық қарым-қатынас кезінде қолданылады.

Кілт сөздер: екітілділік, тіл игеру, тіл дағдылары, қазақ тілі, социолингвистика, сауалнама

Introduction. The paper will present a study focusing on bilingualism among adults aged 18 to 30 living in Kazakhstan. Bilingualism will be considered as a result of various factors such as

language environment and different contexts of language use.

Scholars identify variety of factors that shape the process of language development and the outcome of language

competence in each language for children in a bilingual environment. More frequently bilingual language acquisition is reported to be formed by the age at which the second language is acquired, the amount and type of language exposure the child receives, and the child's linguistic environment.

One of the key factors that significantly impacts multilingual development is the type and amount of exposure a child receives. Exposure, or language input, includes both the quantity and quality of language a child encounters through family, and later in life from friends, education, and other social settings. Whether at home, in school, or within the broader community, the amount and variety of input can notably affect the acquisition of vocabulary and syntax. For instance, a study on bilingual English-Spanish children revealed a positive correlation between the time spent in a Spanish-speaking environment and the proportion of Spanish words produced by the children compared to English words [Pearson et al., 1997]. Additionally, the rate of vocabulary development was found to be influenced by the number of different speakers a child heard and the percentage of exposure to native speakers [Hoff & Place, 2012].

The competence of the parent or caregiver in the language also plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Bilingual children who had more linguistically proficient parents showed better vocabulary development compared to those whose parents had lower proficiency [Roseberry-McKibbin, Brice, & O'Hanlon, 2005]. Exposure to a variety of linguistic domains — social, academic, and cultural — also leads to improved language skills in both languages

[Genesee et al., 2006].

Another important factor is the onset age at which a young bilingual starts to learn each language. Bilingualism that begins at birth, known as simultaneous bilingualism, occurs when a child is exposed to two languages from the start, whereas sequential bilingualism involves learning a second language after already acquiring the first. Research has shown that early learners and bilinguals from birth process language in a similar manner [Dehaene et al., 1997:254]. However, the age of acquisition was described to influence development of certain linguistic skills, particularly phonology, according to the recent studies [Pallier et al., 2003:76]. Even early childhood learners may demonstrate subtle differences in intonation and sound perception based on the age they began learning the second language.

Successful bilingual acquisition depends on a combination of factors, including the age at which the languages are learned, the quality and quantity of language input, and the linguistic environment. Despite these variables, bilinguals tend to acquire languages as effectively as monolinguals when conditions are comparable.

Methodology and respondents.

The research utilized a sociolinguistic survey method among respondents aged 18 to 30 years old living in Semey, Kazakhstan. The survey was conducted in both online and offline formats, and each participant provided written informed consent for data collection and interview recording. All participants confirmed that they were not diagnosed with dyslexia or dysgraphia and had no history of brain injury.

The questionnaire included

questions about bilinguals' language competence, factors influencing language acquisition, and basic information about the respondents. It was based on the Language and Social Background Questionnaire (UBiLEC) [Unsworth, 2013] and the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) [Marian, Blumenfeld & Kaushanskaya, 2007], which were translated into

Russian and adapted for the Russian-Kazakh language environment.

In the course of the study, 50 respondents were interviewed. The sample was limited by age, from 18 to 30 years old, as most of the respondents are university students. Among them - 32 women, 18 men, average age - 21.6 years (Table 1).

	Women	Men
18-22 (students).	25	11
23-30	8	7

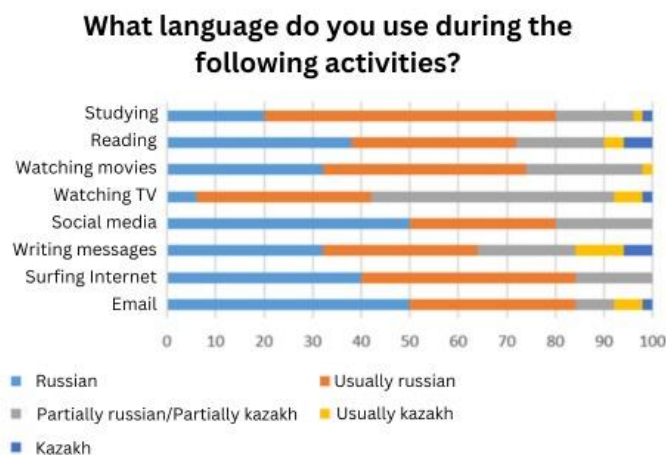
Table 1. Number and age of respondents

Results

1. One of the hypotheses put forward in the study is the existence of different contexts of language use. Although there is a developed terminology for the Kazakh language, both in professional and academic fields, in the field of art, most people in Kazakhstan continue to use Russian for communication in these situations.

In Diagram 1 we can observe the distribution of informants' answers about the use of languages for different activities: reading, studying, watching television, etc. For studying, Internet and

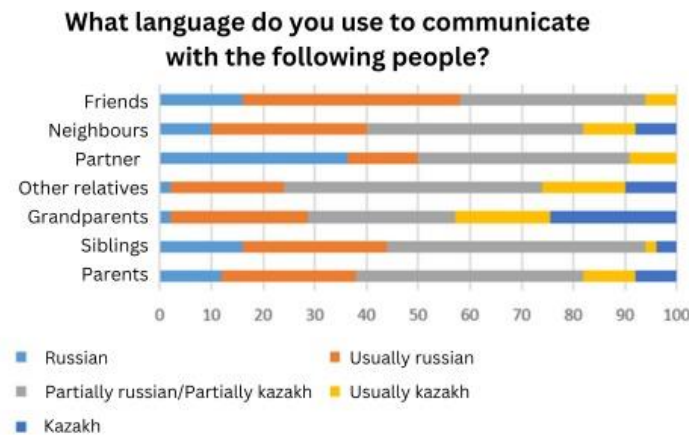
virtual communications (surfing the Internet and social networks, writing letters and messages), the Russian language clearly dominates: the absolute majority of respondents noted that they use either only Russian or more often Russian for these purposes. A different situation is observed for watching television: here the majority of respondents use both languages or more often Russian. This observation can be explained by the gradual development of Kazakh-language television and the increasing transition to the translation of foreign films, television series and programmes into Kazakh.



Graph 1. Language use in different actions

2. In addition, the survey included questions about the language of interactions with the potential environment of informants, that may have influenced language acquisition to a greater or lesser extent, and about language use at

different ages. This information provided insight into the respondent's social interactions and the potential impact of these interactions on their language acquisition and development

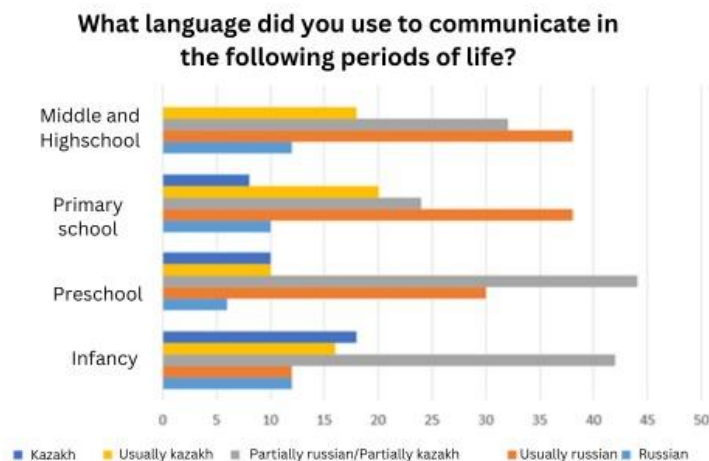


Graph 2. Language use with different people

Graph 2 demonstrates the languages of social interactions of informants. We can see that communication with peers (friends, partner, siblings) for half of the respondents occurs either completely or more often in Russian, almost completely excluding Kazakh, and vice versa, with the older generation of grandparents - either completely or mainly in Kazakh. We can also observe that when communicating with any group of people, the dominant strategy is

to use both languages.

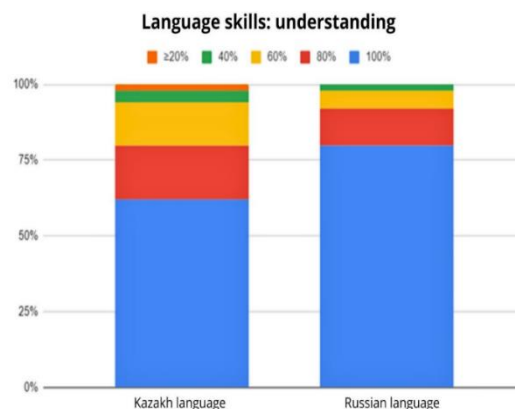
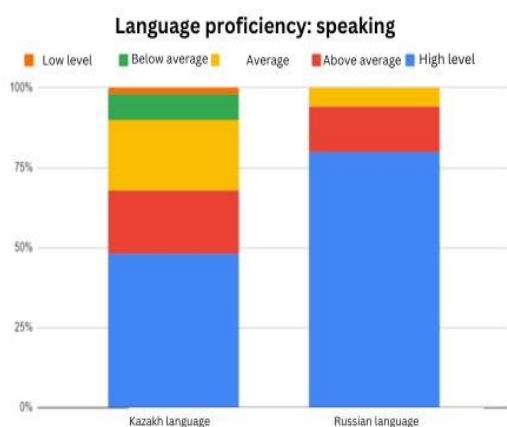
We can also notice that over the course of their lives, respondents have different dominant languages in different periods of their lives. More than 40% of survey participants noted that they used both Russian and Kazakh in infancy and preschool age, but then the amount of Russian language in their lives begins to increase dramatically – up to 40% by middle and high school (Graph 3).



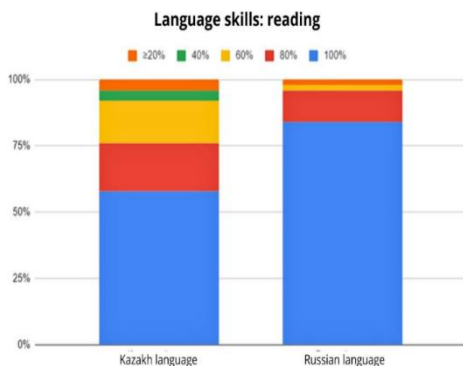
Graph 3. Language use in different life periods

3. Similarly, one of the hypotheses in this paper suggested that the level of proficiency in various language skills (speaking, reading, writing and comprehension) would correlate with the amount of time respondents practice a given skill (with 1.3, oral and written use). However, we can notice a general trend for all skills: most of the

respondents claim a high level of proficiency in Russian (over 75% for all skills, compared to 45-50% on average for Kazakh). At the same time, for Kazakh, there is more confidence in receptive skills such as comprehending oral speech and reading, compared to productive skills, speaking and writing (Graphs 4 and 5).



Graph 4. Skill proficiency: speaking and understanding

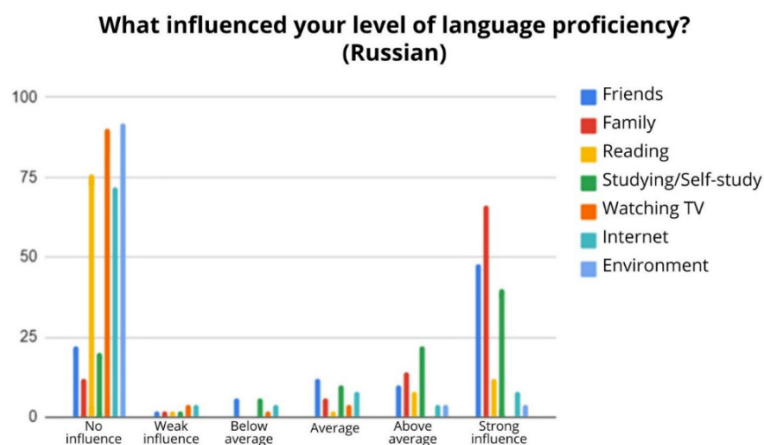


Graph 5. Proficiency in reading and writing

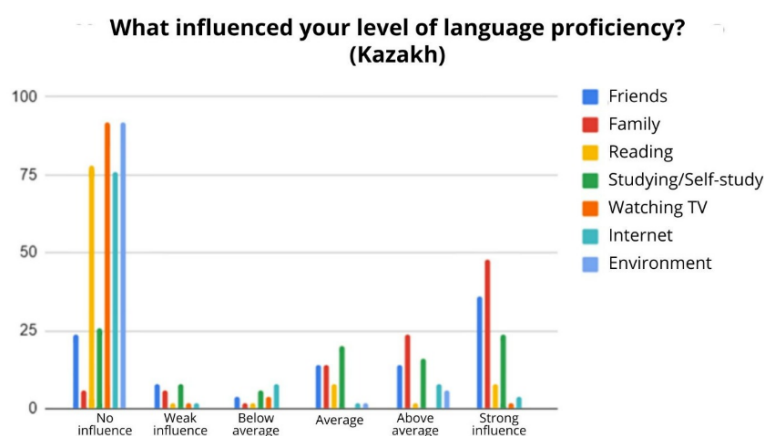
4. Respondents also assessed the influence of their environment, family and friends, and other potential factors: schooling, college or higher education, place of work (if any) and daily activities (reading books, watching various content on the Internet and television).

In Graphs 6 and 7 we can observe that among the significant factors that

influenced the acquisition of both languages, informants most often chose family – 70% for Russian and 50% for Kazakh, friends – about 50% and 35% respectively, and education – about 40% and 25%. Such factors as environment, internet, watching television and reading were considered insignificant by the respondents.



Graph 6. Influence of various factors on the level of Russian language proficiency



Graph 7. Influence of various factors on the level of Kazakh language proficiency

Conclusion. This study focused on the study of bilingual young adults living in Kazakhstan. In the course of interviewing informants, linguistic data were obtained about the contexts of the use of two languages – in which situations, with which groups of people and at which stages of life. In addition, data were collected based on respondents' self-assessment, including the level of proficiency in different aspects of the language and factors that influenced language acquisition, and the frequency of switching between languages.

The majority of respondents demonstrated a high level of Russian language proficiency in all aspects, which

correlates with the data on the significant share of time devoted to the use of Russian in everyday life. Respondents noted that this language acts as an intermediary language when communicating with representatives of other nationalities as well. On the contrary, the level of proficiency in Kazakh varies, with receptive skills (comprehending oral speech and reading) are better developed than productive skills (speaking and writing). This difference may be explained by the fact that Kazakh is more often used in domestic or family contexts, or as a language of communication in cases with a stranger.

About 40% of respondents used both languages in early childhood, but

then Russian began to dominate, especially during the school years and later. This is due to the fact that the majority of respondents were educated in Russian, which stimulated further use of Russian in academic and professional spheres.

Russian also dominates virtual communication, including studying, using the Internet, writing messages and working on social networks. This is due to the fact that most of the content in these spheres is provided in Russian. However, in the television sphere, there is a more balanced use of both languages, which is explained by the growing availability of Kazakh-language content, including translations of foreign films and programs.

The respondents named family, friends, and the educational environment as the most significant factors that influenced the acquisition of both languages. Family and environment play a key role in the early stages of language skills formation for both bilingual and monolingual children, followed by school, where older children spend most of their time.

Thus, the study revealed a complex pattern of language interaction in which Russian dominates in most areas, while Kazakh retains an important role in family and intergenerational contexts. This study focused on studying one age group, which may influence the findings and interpretation. A potential continuation of the study may also include the study of other age groups, which will provide a more complete picture of language dynamics in a bilingual environment at different stages of life.

This study contributes to the understanding of factors influencing language acquisition in bilinguals and the findings can be used by a wide range of professionals, particularly for the development of programs for the development of language competencies in a multilingual environment.

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