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Stratification of Bilingualism in Kyrgyzstan in the Context of Leading Languages

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***Abstract*---**The article is devoted to sociolinguistic monitoring of Bilingualism in the Regions of Kyrgyzstan. It is commonly known that Kyrgyzstan is a polyglossic state with many languages and many nationalities. Bilingualism is reflecting on language situation in regions, which makes the article extremely relevant. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, affected by the previous experiences of multilingualism, examples of the neighboring countries, and new nation-building expectations. The focus of our discussion is the changing role of Russian and its use as the language at the service of the growing Asian economies, denationalized and free from the Soviet historical cultural background. The new hybrid culture and partly regionalized Russian language serve to unify Central Asian republics with Russia. The leading method for the study was the study of the Kyrgyz language in the context of the history of the Kyrgyz people and the geographical position of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan. It was found out that a number of diverse and complex conditions and factors lead to life-long bilingualism. There are no theories of language studying and training is proficient of explaining bilingual spoken behavior and the mechanisms leading to bilingual language growth.

***Keywords*---**language policy, migration processes, multiple languages, Russian-speaking space.

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Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is a Central Asian country where the Kyrgyz make up about 70% of the people. The main languages used in the region are Kyrgyz, Russian, Uzbek, Tajik, Uygur, Dungan, Turkish, and many others. Since proclaiming independence, Kyrgyzstan has continued to build a new historical identity of Kyrgyzstani people Among the post-Soviet states Kyrgyzstan, closely following Belarus, does not reproduce the Russian language to be a threat to its national security or historical uniqueness (Juzefovičs & Vihalemm, 2020; Dali, 2004). Language planning is developing during the period of 28 years, but it gives the impression that the Kyrgyz language is not yet prepared to be an omnipotent means of the national academic, administrative, interethnic and intercultural communication (Cachia et al., 2017; Preece, 2019). Followers of the younger age group usually study Russian for the reason that they want to study at higher education, where the main scientific literature and textbooks are still in Russian, conduct business with Russia, or work or live in Russia where the standard of living is higher. The tensions between some ethnic groups also promote the use of Russian as a lingua franca. Together, proficiency in Russian as a second language is the necessary thing for the new generation (Charamba, 2020).

What is bilingualism and who is bilingual? Defining and measuring bilingualism is a very complex task due to the number and types of input conditions, biological, socio-psychological, and other non-linguistic factors that can lead to a varying degree of bilingual competencies. Briefly, there is no widely-accepted definition or measures of bilinguals (Berns, 2010). As a substitute, a rich range of scales, oppositions, and categories are engaged to characterize bilinguals. If a bilingual can comprehend but cannot express opinion a second language, such a person is called a receptive bilingual, whereas a productive bilingual shows a spoken proficiency in two languages. If the second language is learned in a natural condition before the age of five that person is called an early bilingual, in contrast with a late bilingual who learns his second language after the age of five either in home or in schools. Tags such as fluent vs. non-fluent, functional vs. non-functional, balanced vs. unbalanced, primary vs. secondary, and partial vs. complete refer, either to a varying command in different types of language proficiency (e.g., spoken, listening, writing, etc.), or an asymmetrical relationship (dominance) between two languages (Morett, 2020; Amengual, 2019). A compound vs. coordinate bilingual refers to the way two languages are processed in the brain. The list is by no means exhaustive. Other major distinctions such as simultaneous vs. sequential are discussed in the next section. Similarly, bilingualism can be viewed from individual, societal (attitudes towards bilingualism), and political (i.e., government policies toward bilingualism) perspectives. As a whole, a bilingual person shows many complex attributes rarely seen in a monolingual person (Incera & McLennan, 2018). For that reason, a bilingual is not equivalent to two monolinguals, but something completely different. This working definition of bilingualism is offered by Bloomfield, who claimed that a bilingual is one who has a native-like control of two languages, i.e., a balanced bilingual (Edwards, 2004).

Other questions such as age and amount of exposure to the two languages also result in differences in the pattern of childhood bilingualism (Birdsong, 2018).

The distinction between simultaneous and sequential bilinguals in research on bilingual language acquisition is based on age and the degree of exposure to two languages (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Cargile et al., 1994). When the kid is exposed to two languages to more or less the same degree from birth onward, the pattern of language development is referred to as simultaneous, whereas sequential bilingualism defines the attainment of one language first and the second language later, preferably before the age of seven. Likewise, the term late bilingual is used for those sequential bilinguals who acquire their second language at a relatively younger age than adults learning a second language (Anderson et al., 2018).

Although there is unanimous agreement among researchers about the validity of the simultaneous and sequential bilinguals, there is no agreement among researchers about the exact line of demarcation between the two (Bhatia, & Ritchie, 1999). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, affected by the previous experiences of multilingualism, examples of the neighboring countries, and new nation-building expectations (Canturri et al., 2013; Kulenkampff et al., 2008).

Features of bilingualism in Kyrgyzstan

One of the most interesting features of the childhood bilingualism is how children learn to isolate the two languages, mostly in a natural setting (i.e., a simultaneous bilingual) in early stages (Tran et al., 2019). After all, when parents offer input, they do not tag or prime their input with a language identification label. Even if parents go to the absurd length of identifying the language of each word or sentence, they use, these labels are semantically empty for children. Moreover, bilingual parents unwittingly make the mission of separating the two languages even harder for kids because of their normal tendency to mix two languages. In short, a child is provided with three distinct types of linguistic inputs: two languages, each in an unmixed/pure form, and one with a mixture of two languages (Verbitskaya et al., 2020). Given this state of affairs, how does the child learn to discrete the two languages in question? This task is not challenging for a monolingual child because only one language serves as a source of input. The two hypotheses which attempt to shed light on this question are the unitary system hypothesis and the dual system hypothesis (Bhatia & Ritchie, 1999).

In contrast to sequential childhood bilingualism, adults who learn a second language after they have learned their mother tongue experience the learning of a second language as a laborious and conscious task (Kōu & Bailey, 2014; Zofia & Adam, 2013). It is said earlier, unlike kids who are able to universally and uniformly get native competency in their mother tongue, grown person rarely attain native-like competency in their second language. Depending on the level of their motivation and hard work, grown person can learn a second language with varying degrees of competence. Nevertheless, there comes a point during the second language learning that even the most capable learner cannot bypass the period of “fossilization”. This phase is marked with second language errors which no amount of training can correct. For these reasons, second language (L2) learning is observed as fundamentally dissimilar from first language (L1) acquisition. The hypothesis which aims at accounting for these differences

between the child and the adult language is called the fundamental difference hypothesis (Berns, 2010).

Surrounded by Kazakhstan in the north, Uzbekistan in the west, Tajikistan in the southwest and the People's Republic of China in the southeast, Kyrgyzstan is one of the Central Asian countries. The Tian Shan Mountains, the Fergana Valley and the Lake Issyk-Kul are geographic symbols of the land and important pieces of the national identity. Kyrgyz is a Turkic language understood by people who speak other Turkic languages and is closely connected to Kazakh, so that speakers of these languages can understand each other without having studied each other's languages; however, Mongolian and Altaic elements are greater in Kyrgyz than in Kazakh (Derbisheva, 2007).

Kyrgyz developed as a distinct language of a separate ethnic group in the fifteenth century, and has been studied since the late nineteenth century. The first manual of Kyrgyz was published in 1922, and since 1924, grammars of Kyrgyz began appearing. The epic poem "Manas" is a well-known source for the education of the history of the Kyrgyz language and culture. As to alphabet, the Kyrgyz have used adapted versions of Arabic (sporadically until 1923, later officially), Latin (1928-1940) and Cyrillic script (since 1940). All in all, during the Soviet times, the unified literacy, both for the written and oral forms of the language, was elaborated, codified, normalized and spread among the population; Kyrgyz literature, art, and history were popularized. At present, some voices suggest the transition to the Latin script – this reflects attempts to unify all Turkic-speaking countries around Turkey. In the course of their history, the Kyrgyz were influenced not only by different Turkic neighbors, but also by Mongols, Kalmyk, Afghani, Pamirs, Uyghurs, Chinese, and Russians. In 1876, the territory became a part of the Russian Empire; in 1919, a part of the Soviet Union; and in 1936, a Soviet Republic (Bilecen et al., 2018; Putrayasa, 2017). Despite these changes, many Kyrgyz remained nomads and herders and traveled independently of the borders. In the Russian Empire and in the first years after the October revolution, both Kazakhs and Kyrgyz were called Kyrgyz, with the present-day Kyrgyz subdenominated on occasion as "Kara-Kyrgyz" (kara meaning "black") This joint past leads to many local jokes, for example: Kazakhs who feel richer and more civilized and therefore dominant in the area, ask the Kyrgyz to get together again in the joint state; the Kyrgyz respond that they are ready, but only under the name they had together before mid-1920s (Derbisheva, 2007).

Analysis of the current situation of the use of two languages in Kyrgyzstan

At present, the state language of Kyrgyzstan is Kyrgyz with its national symbolic and cultural function, though Russian, divorced from its links to particular ethnicity, functions since 2000th as an official language. Yet, discussions about the future of bilingualism and the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan are usually heated, and the absence of knowledge of Kyrgyz by some ethnic Kyrgyz is also a major point of contention (Videsott et al., 2010; Aldim et al., 2018). The periodic issues of 'Russian Language in Kyrgyzstan' contain numerous debates about the delimitation of functions for both state and official languages in Kyrgyzstan. The feeling of being bearers of an endangered language compels native speakers of Kyrgyz to fight for its rights. They argue that Kyrgyz is a means of ethnic

solidarity and unity and a people's common national property, reflecting the degree of cultural growth, and that it should completely satisfy people's communicative needs, resolving (self-) contradictions and aiding sovereignty. Members of the two largest ethnic and linguistic minorities, Russian and Uzbek, also have concerns. They are currently underrepresented in administrative, judiciary, and government structures. In some territorial units, Kyrgyz speakers dominate but in urban regions and in some valleys, they are in a minority, even among the ethnic Kyrgyz (Huskey, 1995).

The Uzbek minority is seeking and is calling for proportional representation in administration, which has led to certain ethnic tensions. In particular, Uzbeks claim that there are not enough training opportunities and educational materials in their language. Ethnic Russians also express their displeasure with disproportional representation in the power structures through migration. They not only rely on the Russian authorities, but also self-organize in the name of the struggle for their rights and their group identity. It is not astonishing then that multilingual practices dominate the country's linguistic landscapes. Official signage contains parallel texts in Kyrgyz and Russian, and at times English (Figure 1). The language of advertising also uses these three languages (Figures 2 and 3), but the texts may be mixed, rather than parallel, they may also contain neologisms, calques, hybrids etc. Affected through the images translated by the mass media, most Kyrgyz approve of good relations with Russia. Overall, about 70% of the electronic and paper-printed sources of information are in Russian, mostly from Russia with added materials concerning Kyrgyzstan (Huskey, 1995).

Figure 1. Ministry of internal affairs of the Kyrgyz republic

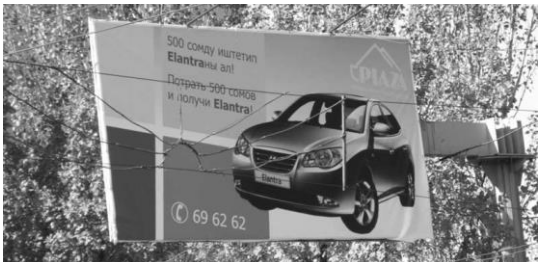

Figure 2. An example of using multiple languages in advertising

Figure 3. An example of using multiple languages in advertising

Some Russian-language publications, such as “Slovo Kyrgyzstana” (“Kyrgyz Word”) or “Vecherniy Bishkek”, are local. Some local broadcasting and media are in local languages. As far as literature is concerned, today, about 92% of the books in the National library are in Russian, 6% in Kyrgyz, and 2% in other languages, but only a few new publications in Russian arrive on a regular basis. Rural libraries are in decline. Institutional communication in Kyrgyzstan is commonly multilingual. An analysis of such communication comes from a study by Elebayeva et al. (2000), who examined interactions in three Bishkek enterprises: one state-owned Kyrgyz, and two joint ventures, a Kyrgyz-Russian and a Kyrgyz-Turkish firm. The investigation was focused on educated administrative personnel aged between 20 and 50; these participants represented 10 ethnicities and knew, collectively, 15 languages. The researcher found that about 60% of the respondents spoke Russian as their mother tongue. Representatives of ethnic minorities (e.g., Uyghur) were able to speak several Asiatic languages, while ethnic Russians preferred to acquire Western European tongues. Minority languages, like Dungan, Uzbek, or Tadjik, were used for communicating with friends and family. Foreign languages (English, German, French) were used for reading, Internet searches, listening to the radio, and watching movies and TV shows. In the Kyrgyz-Turkish firm, Turkish and English were also employed for professional communication and documentation; the two other companies favored Russian for the same purposes (Maksimenko, 1999).

Another sociolinguistic investigation of language use in state institutions surveyed 364 respondents, 85% of whom were Kyrgyz, 8% Russians, 2% Kazakhs; among the remaining 5% were ethnic Uzbeks, Azeri, Ukrainians, Dungan, and Bashkirs. When asked about language use in communication with clients, 44% of the respondents preferred Kyrgyz (13% of these used mostly Kyrgyz) and 37% preferred Russian (22% of these used Russian only). Some 8% reported that they never use Kyrgyz and only less than 2% reported never using Russian. Regardless of official bilingualism, however, the documentation in Kyrgyz is already dominating, and there is a clear tendency to translate official papers into Kyrgyz even when they were first written in Russian (this fact influences the quality of written Kyrgyz, especially if it was studied as a second language by the translator). Many documents written first in Kyrgyz serve as models for other people because being mostly socialized in oral variety of their mother tongue, they cannot produce such official texts themselves. Only 16% of administration workers are fluently bilingual in Kyrgyz and Russian. This is why, despite the wishful idea of shifting to Kyrgyz, it cannot yet be introduced as a language of administration and there is no examination in the national Kyrgyz language for

representatives of the administration. There is also no examination for those who wish to obtain Kyrgyz citizenship, although some steps have been made in this direction, and the first versions are forthcoming. On the other hand, local scientific (including linguistic) work is mostly produced in Russian, a situation that is distinct from current linguistic research traditions in Ukraine and in the Baltic countries where work on national languages is published in these languages. In fact, most active linguists still have difficulties writing scientific articles in Kyrgyz, only Kyrgyz-specialists use Kyrgyz in academic research and publications. Even specialists in Turkic philology prefer to write in Russian or in English, in order to communicate with colleagues worldwide (Huskey, 1995). Another factor in favor of Russian in academic life is a long scientific tradition, whereas there is almost no tradition of participating in the English-dominated scholarship and a lack of English-language competence among academics.

Recently, several international conferences dedicated to the linguistic situation in Kyrgyzstan and the future of the Russian language were held in Kyrgyzstan. The Congress on the problems of the Russian language in the CIS-countries was dedicated to the strengthening of the position of the Russian language in Central Asia and the strengthening of the relations with Russia (Orusbaev et al., 2005). A Forum on the functioning of the Russian language in the Central Asian region of the member states of the CIS was sponsored through the Russian non-commercial educational-training expert foundation within the framework of the Federal program 'Russian language'. This forum emphasized the need to review the teaching of the Russian language and its use in the mass media with the goal of enhancing its role in the cultural, humanitarian, and educational spheres of collaboration.

Conclusion

A number of diverse and complex conditions and factors lead to life-long bilingualism. These issues – biological, social, psychological, and linguistic – reason for a varied pattern amongst bilinguals, viewed around the world. Therefore, a bilingual is neither two monolinguals in the brain, nor are two bilinguals' clones of each other. These difficulties specify why no theory of language studying and training is proficient of explaining bilingual spoken behavior and the mechanisms leading to bilingual language growth.

In a study of communication and access to information in science, it was found that scientific institutions are worse financed and maintained than during the Soviet times, scientific production is commonly based on paper technologies; scholars, including members of the younger generation, cannot use English, and are not properly acquainted with computers and the Internet; as a result, access to local or worldwide scientific literature is difficult. What is proposed is the development of a national scientific and technical information system and virtual laboratories. Despite the predominance of Russian in academic life, ethnic diversity of the speakers of Russian and the influences of their mother tongues upon the Russian they speak work as pidginization factors, a situation that concerns local linguists.

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