

# PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

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## FORMATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A NATIONAL LANGUAGE

### Abstract

*This article explores the process of the formation of a national language and its distinctive characteristics. Language is a fundamental indicator of a nation's spiritual and cultural identity; therefore, its structure, vocabulary, and developmental path are closely connected with the national worldview. The author describes the historical stages of language development, from tribal dialects to the vernacular and eventually to the national language, using scientific evidence to demonstrate how the Kazakh language has evolved through this trajectory. Furthermore, the article emphasizes the importance of preserving the natural characteristics of national languages to prevent the risk of assimilation. Relying on the works of scholars such as A. Baitursynuly, Q. Qaiyr, and R. Syzdyk, the national identity of the Kazakh language is thoroughly analyzed.*

**Keywords:** national language, language development, historical process, Kazakh language, linguistic features, assimilation

### Introduction

Language serves as the spiritual code, cultural mirror, and worldview of a nation. Its uniqueness lies not only in grammatical structure, phonetic system, or vocabulary but also in the lifestyle and thought patterns of its speakers.

For example, the Kazakh language's richness in figurative meanings, structural flexibility, and abundance of proverbs and sayings reflects the deep philosophical nature of the Kazakh people. Such features show that language is not merely a communication tool but also a form of cultural defense. If a language retains its distinctive traits, it can withstand assimilation and globalization.

### The Nature of the National Language

A national language is more than just a means of communication; it embodies the historical, spiritual, and cultural essence of a nation. It possesses its own internal laws and structural features. These peculiarities differentiate it not only from foreign languages but even from closely related ones.

In regions where related tribes or ethnic groups have lived together for extended periods, and linguistic differences are minimal, their languages may eventually merge and assimilate into one another. This process of assimilation can lead to the loss of unique linguistic identity.

### Historical Development of Language

According to linguistic research, the formation of national languages arises from the interaction of dialects spoken by tribes living in the same geographical area and sharing common lifestyles and socioeconomic conditions. This evolutionary process progresses from tribal dialects to a common vernacular and then to a national language, marking it as a historical and social phenomenon [1; pp. 5–6].

One of the languages that has undergone this transformation is Kazakh, a member of the Turkic language family. The foundation of the modern Kazakh language lies in the interaction among kindred tribes who historically inhabited the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan. Their shared ways of life, traditions, and worldview laid the groundwork for a unified linguistic system. Over centuries of mutual influence, these tribal dialects converged into a common vernacular and ultimately evolved into the national language of the Kazakh people.

### Linguistic Structure of the Turkic Language Family: Internal Dynamics and External Influences

The grammatical structures of languages within the Turkic language family are largely similar. Their core vocabularies also demonstrate a considerable degree of commonality. Despite the proximity in both linguistic structure and lexical stock, each Turkic language possesses its own phonological distinctions shaped by specific historical and sociocultural developments. For this reason, even commonly shared words among Turkic languages may differ significantly in pronunciation, giving each language a unique phonetic identity.

Language is inherently a historical category. As noted by linguists, it develops and evolves according to its own internal laws. While language is not directly subject to any particular political or social formation, it does grow and transform alongside the people who speak it. As a result, the events and transformations experienced by a nation are indelibly recorded in its language. In this regard, the statement, "*Language is the history of the people; the people are the mother of the language*" [2; p. 5], captures the essence of the intrinsic relationship between language and national experience. However, in addition to internal linguistic laws, it is impossible to ignore the influence of numerous external factors. Over time, external pressures can bring about

significant changes in a language, potentially leading to such divergence that even related languages may become mutually unintelligible.

For example, despite being historically classified as stemming from a common origin, the Kazakh and Mongolic languages today demonstrate both overlapping features and stark contrasts. As linguistic research indicates, nearly 20% of the basic vocabulary shared by Kazakh and Mongolian begins with the velar phonemes /k/ or /q/, with a number of these root words displaying similarities in both sound structure and meaning. This suggests a wide usage of guttural sounds during the period when the languages of the Altaic group, including Kazakh and Mongolian, began to diverge [3; p. 58]. Moreover, even between distantly related Turkic languages such as Kazakh and Gagauz (also known as "Kök Oghuz"), mutual intelligibility is minimal. Speakers of each language often cannot understand one another, highlighting the extent of divergence within the Turkic family.

#### **Notable Scholars and Theoretical Contributions**

Akhmet Baitursynuly, regarded as the founder of modern Kazakh linguistics, emphasized the central role of language in national identity, stating that "*Language is the greatest mark of being human.*" His seminal work "*Til-Qural*" ("The Tool of Language") is considered the first scientific attempt to systematize the structural components of the Kazakh language.

Qaidar Abdualiuly conducted extensive research on the formation of the national language, ethnolinguistics, and the intersection of language and culture. His work "*Topical Issues of the Kazakh Language*" provides a detailed analysis of the national character and historical development of the Kazakh language.

Rabiga Syzdyk explored the history and culture of the Kazakh literary language. She studied the phonological and lexical systems of the Kazakh language in depth and identified key factors that contributed to its formation through empirical examples.

Sarsen Amanzholov focused on dialectology, establishing the role of tribal dialects in the evolution of a unified national Kazakh language. Toleu Zhanuzakov made significant contributions in the fields of onomastics and anthroponymy, exploring naming conventions as indicators of ethnic and historical identity.

On a global scale, linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf introduced the *Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis*, which posits that language shapes human thought and influences perception of reality. This hypothesis underscores the profound impact of national language on worldview and cognition.

#### **Language Divergence and Convergence: Historical Patterns in the Formation of National Languages**

In some cases, even after a national language has been firmly established on the basis of tribal dialects, distinct linguistic features specific to certain tribes or clans may re-emerge due to unique historical circumstances. This may lead to the development of a new, independent language or even the formation of a separate ethnic identity. For example, many linguists have

long supported the hypothesis that the Nogai and Karakalpak languages, both classified within the Kipchak branch of Turkic languages, split off from Kazakh in later periods. These languages are considered sub-branches of Kazakh, given the high degree of similarity in their grammatical structure, vocabulary, and even phonological systems.

Thus, both processes—linguistic separation and unification—may serve as the foundation for the formation of national languages. However, under certain historical conditions, a previously separated language or people may once again become intertwined with the group from which they originally diverged. In such cases, the process of linguistic separation may reverse.

An illustrative case is that of the Karakalpak Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, which was part of Kazakhstan in the early 20th century. In the 1940s, out of concern that continued integration with the Kazakh people could lead to linguistic assimilation and the loss of their distinct identity, the Karakalpaks opted to join the Uzbek SSR, whose language—despite being more distant linguistically—was perceived as safer for preserving their own national character. This move, driven by a desire to maintain ethnic and linguistic uniqueness, contrasts sharply with the case of Belarusian. The Belarusian language, closely related to Russian, has undergone significant assimilation over centuries of coexistence. Many scholars now argue that the distinctions between the two languages have eroded to the point of near-invisibility.

#### **Language Contact and Influence: The Case of Kazakh and Russian**

What happens when languages of entirely different origins coexist in the same geographic and sociopolitical space? In Kazakhstan, the interaction between Kazakh and Russian is a prominent example. However, there is a noticeable lack of sociolinguistic research analyzing the mutual influence of these two languages. In particular, the functional boundaries between them have not been clearly defined to this day. Research focused on the role of Kazakh-Russian bilingualism in contemporary Kazakhstani society is also largely absent, despite the urgency of this issue.

In a bilingual environment, linguistic contact affects not only pronunciation but also lexical, morphological, syntactic, and stylistic norms. These influences may lead to the distortion of the Kazakh language's natural form and the emergence of nonstandard phenomena, which in turn affect language culture and require closer attention.

Language change is not arbitrary; it is driven by the needs and behavior of its speakers. The practical use of language in various contexts reveals both the internal logic of its evolution and the impact of external social functions. Thus, the linguistic situation in a society, along with public demand and state language policy, plays a crucial role in shaping how languages develop.

In Kazakhstan, although the official status and support of the Kazakh language contribute positively to its social functions and development, the widespread use of Russian in public services, higher education, and

professional sectors continues to limit the Kazakh language's full realization. This situation has also contributed to the erosion of some of its literary norms.

### The Legacy of Linguistic Assimilation and the Importance of Language Policy

During the Soviet era, linguistic assimilation was often misinterpreted as natural linguistic evolution. As noted in earlier Soviet linguistic ideology: "As society develops, so does language. Innovations in social life first and foremost affect the lexicon of a language. This can be observed in the Kazakh vocabulary through the introduction of hundreds of new terms such as 'soviet', 'socialism', 'communism', 'kolkhoz', 'sovkhoz', 'tractor', and 'combine harvester'" [4; p.6].

These words were often imposed on the language without phonological adaptation and were accepted without resistance, sometimes even celebrated in textbooks and educational materials. Such ideological impositions severed the organic growth of the language and disconnected it from its cultural roots. This danger had been foreseen by Kazakh intellectuals like **Khalel Dosmukhameduly**, who warned:

"Even the fundamental elements that define a nation's identity may be subject to unnoticed change. A nation pursuing 'modernization' will first witness changes in its language" [5; p. 82].

Today, linguists continue to observe the consequences of this past, including changes to Kazakh's phonological system and morphosyntactic structure. **S. Myrzabek**, a noted phonologist, wrote:

"We now find ourselves unable to distinguish the phonemes and syllables of our own language. The Kazakh language has lost its immunity. And yet, we criticize Russians for mispronouncing Kazakh words, forgetting that their linguistic immunity is intact while ours is not. The result is that we are on the verge of dismantling even the fundamental laws of our native language" [6; p. 8].

Words and names borrowed from Russian, often with suffixes like *-ov*, *-ev*, and *-in*, have become so normalized that they now disrupt the inner phonological rules of the Kazakh language. Examples can be seen in

public announcements such as: "Next stop: *Seifullina, Baitursynova, Auezova*" instead of the grammatically correct "*Seifullin Street*," or "*Anyone getting off at Seifullin?*"—indicating how Russian suffixes alter not just spelling but cognitive linguistic patterns.

### Conclusion: Linguistic Resilience and National Identity

Language contact throughout history has taken many forms—beneficial or detrimental—depending on the sociopolitical context. The founder of Kazakh linguistics, **Akhmet Baitursynuly**, warned nearly a century ago:

"Our nation is only just beginning to develop. Its future remains uncertain. The Kazakh people may either perish or continue living with their own language like other nations. Until the 20th century, it was the Kazakhs who preserved the Turkish language in its purest form. If we now squander this ancestral heritage, we will have done a great disservice" [7; p. 399].

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