Language vitality and paths to revival: contrasting cases of Azerbaijani and Kazakh

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Abstract

Russian Imperial and subsequent Soviet policies resulted in the Russian language acquiring a very important role in education and the workplace in both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The extent of the penetration of the Russian language was shaped by the unique constellation of factors for each republic, including geographic, historical, demographic, and political moments. Even in the Soviet era, however, the titular language maintained a much larger domain of use in Azerbaijan’s cities than it did in cities of Kazakhstan. Since 1991, the status of the titular language in both countries has risen and its domains broadened, though only in Azerbaijan does the titular language clearly enjoy a status superior to Russian in urban educational institutions and in the workplace. The difference in the situations in the two countries is due both to the inertia of factors already in place during the Soviet era, as well as to changing environment in the respective countries since their independence, including policies of their leadership.

1. Introduction

In the late Soviet era, language issues were a major focus for individuals and groups seeking more autonomy within the Soviet framework as well as those seeking outright independence. As Moscow’s control over the periphery weakened, the relevance of language to political change became especially clear in the Baltic republics, where the supreme soviets, the official state legislative bodies, most directly challenged Moscow. They passed their own republic language laws and insisted that these held precedence over any all-Union legislation. Even in republics whose political leadership confronted Moscow less boldly, language was often also high on the political agenda. This was evident, for example, in early 1987 in Kazakhstan: In December 1986, disturbances had erupted there after...
Moscow installed Gennadii Kolbin as the replacement for republic party first secretary Dimmukhamed Kunaev. Local sensitivities were especially offended by the imposition of an ethnic Russian from outside the republic to the position long held by the former Kazakh incumbent. Just months after Kolbin's accession to republic party leader, Kazakhstan's party and government announced new policies to improve Kazakh language instruction (Fierman 1998; Ñurman 2005). The high political salience of language manifested itself in a different way in Azerbaijan, where members of the titular nationality widely viewed the weak Azerbaijani language skills of Abdurrahman Vezirov, the republic communist party first secretary, as evidence of his unsuitability to lead his people (Aida Huseynova p.c.).

Until 1991, Moscow was directly involved in determining language policy in every corner of the USSR. This radically changed upon the USSR's collapse. No longer were the former republics subject to supervision or control from a hierarchically organized and Russian-dominated Communist Party and state apparatus. Language policies which the newly independent states began to devise were extremely important as symbols articulating official perspectives about identities their regimes were to foster. The policies, however, were important not merely as symbols; they would also have a profound impact on access to education, economic and social mobility, migration, economic development, and relations with the outside world.

The Leninist-Stalinist concept of nations, which had fundamentally shaped the context of language planning in the USSR, continued as a major, though not explicit, element in the post-Soviet states. According to this concept, individuals constituting a nation have a shared economic life and psychological make-up as manifest in a community of culture, as well as a shared territory and language. A corollary to this is that each nation (внаць) has its own territory that is "home" to its "titular" group; this corollary, widely accepted in the popular consciousness of Soviet citizens, implied that each titular territory delimited the "home domain" of each group's language. This belief survives in the post-Soviet states, and nationalists throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic countries often justify the promotion of the titular language on the basis that it is somehow associated with the particular piece of land within a particular state's borders.

As elsewhere, the belief in the link of language, territory, and ethnic group persists in the two former Soviet republics that are the focus of this article, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. This article will explore some of the differences in language status in these two former Soviet republics (now independent states). Although many languages are spoken in both of these countries, this article will focus on only two languages in each, Russian and the titular language. In particular, this article will examine the relative status of these languages in the fields of education and the workplace. Because in most rural areas the titular language is much stronger than Russian, the analysis will focus on urban areas. The article will trace the rise of Russian's status in the Soviet era in both the Azerbaijan SSR and Kazakh SSR; in so doing, it will demonstrate that despite Azerbaijani's loss of status to Russian, Azerbaijani remained in a much more secure position than Kazakh. After exploring these dynamics, the article will look at language status in the post-Soviet era and argue that whereas Azerbaijani's path to a dominant role has been fairly smooth, Kazakh's progress has encountered serious problems.

Before proceeding I should draw attention to the particular, admittedly ahistorical, way in which I will be using the terms "Kazakhstan," "Kazakhs," "Azerbaijan," and "Azerbaijanis." Unless otherwise noted, I will be using "Kazakhstan" and "Azerbaijan" to refer to the territory of today's "Republic of Kazakhstan" and "Republic of Azerbaijan." Unless explicitly stated, "Azerbaijan" will not be used to refer to "southern Azerbaijan," which is a region of Iran. Even in the course of the twentieth century, the particular territory encompassed by "Kazakhstan" and "Azerbaijan" has changed. For most of my analysis, however, this is not important, and the use of the shorthand outlined just above will greatly streamline the prose. In analogous fashion, for simplicity's sake I will be referring to the ancestors of individuals who today consider themselves ethnic "Kazakhs" or "Azerbaijanis" as "Kazakhs" and "Azerbaijanis."
land use by “their own” ancestors. Despite their disagreement, nationalists on both sides recognize that over the last two to three centuries the Russian–Kazakh encounter has taken place over an enormous and mostly open geographic expanse. Furthermore, by the time of Russia’s advance into territories inhabited by Kazakhs — and this is true whether one speaks of borders preferred by Russian or Kazakh nationalists — the large majority of the population on the Russian side of the border consisted of ethnic Russians.

In terms of land borders, Azerbaijan (unlike Kazakhstan) is separated from Russia by the formidable Caucasus Mountains. Furthermore, as Russia expanded into the region south of the mountains, primarily in the early nineteenth century, the territories between Russia and the Azerbaijani khanates were relatively insulated by lands inhabited by a patchwork of non-Slavic peoples. This “isolation” was, of course, substantially attenuated by the Caspian Sea, which served as an alternate route of Russian access to Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, at least through the nineteenth century, Russia’s political and cultural influence in Azerbaijan was balanced or outweighed by Iran. Referring to the entire territory from “the northern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains along the Caspian Sea to the Iranian Plateau” (i.e., both “northern” and “southern” Iran), Tadeusz Swietochowski (1995) notes that from ancient times onward, “Azerbaijan usually shared its history with Iran.” At least since the eighteenth century, no powerful analogous competitor for Russia existed in the case of Kazakhstan.

Differences between Russian Imperial policy in the south Caucasus and the Kazakh steppe profoundly affected respective Kazakh and Azerbaijani receptivity to subjugation by Russia and to Russian culture and language. In particular, Russia’s efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to instill Kazakh intellectuals with anti-Tatar feelings appear to have encouraged Kazakhs to accept Russian rule as an alternative to possible domination by Tatars (Kreindler 1983; Lazzerini 1994).

Lands traditionally inhabited by Kazakhs were entirely under Russian control by the late nineteenth century. This was not true of Azerbaijanis: those living on lands that today constitute the Republic of Azerbaijan had ethnic and linguistic bonds with those living in “southern Azerbaijan,” i.e., a region of northwestern Iran. In the late years of the Russian Empire and in the Soviet era, the ethnic Azerbaijani population in “southern Azerbaijan” substantially exceeded that in Russian/Soviet-controlled territory. Indeed, this remains true today in the era of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan. Irridenta and diaspora Kazakh populations have lived and today live in territories neighboring Kazakhstan; however, they have been scattered among neighbors on all sides; furthermore, more than half of those residing in what are today neighboring independent countries live in what were once other Soviet republics — mostly Uzbekistan and Russia. During Soviet history — a critical period for language development — these populations were not separated by an international frontier from co-ethnics in the titular homeland. Furthermore, they often used the school textbooks from Kazakhstan and even pursued higher education there.7

Aside from their linguistic links with co-ethnics in Iran, Azerbaijanis’ closest linguistic ties are with Turks of Anatolia.8 Given Russian and Soviet fears of pan-Turkism and the central place of Turkey in this ideology, this is an important fact that distinguishes Azerbaijan from Kazakhstan. Although the standard Kazakh language may be as close to Kyrgyz and Karakalpak as Azerbaijani is to Turkish, Kyrgyz and Karakalpak are spoken by relatively small populations, and in the Soviet era these populations lived overwhelmingly inside the USSR. Unlike Turkish, spoken in a country that Soviet leaders viewed with suspicion, neither the Kyrgyz nor Karakalpak language was associated with a “dangerous linguistic neighbor.”

In discussing twentieth century Azerbaijan, including languages spoken there, it is critical to note the intertwined fates of Azerbaijanis and Armenians as well as the conflicts between these groups. This has no doubt also been aggravated by Azerbaijanis’ close linguistic and intellectual ties with Turkey. In twentieth-century Imperial Russia and under Soviet power until the late Gorbachev era, Armenians constituted a substantial population both in Azerbaijan’s cities — especially Baku — and in Nagorno-Karabagh; in the latter territory they constituted the majority. War between Azerbaijan and Armenia erupted in 1988 largely over this territory. The result of the war was a de facto separation of Nagorno-Karabagh from Azerbaijan and a large flow of refugees and displaced persons: Armenians fled from Baku and other cities in Azerbaijan; and Azerbaijanis fled from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabagh, and other territories of the Azerbaijan SSR that Armenia occupied. In the last decades of Soviet power all the way up to the hostilities between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, the size of Azerbaijan’s Armenian population rivaled that of the Russian population: in 1959, Russians comprised 13.6% of the total and Armenians 12.0% (ICTU 1962a); in 1989, both were about 5.6% (Dunlop et al. 1993: 1099).

The departure of Azerbaijan’s Armenians and the loss of Azerbaijani control over Nagorno-Karabagh meant the virtual end of the Armenian language in territory administered from Baku; beyond this, however, because the overwhelming majority of Azerbaijan’s urban Armenians spoke Russian either as a first or second language,9 Armenians’ departure also
meant a decline in the proportion of Russian speakers in the population. The Azerbaijani refugees and displaced persons arriving in Azerbaijan’s cities were primarily rural inhabitants; because they generally spoke poor Russian, their arrival increased the share of urban inhabitants with weak Russian skills. No analogous violent conflict in Kazakhstan spurred the kind of demographic changes that occurred in Azerbaijan. Germans were the only non-Slavic minority ethnic group in Kazakhstan in modern times whose share of the population approached the magnitude of Armenians in Azerbaijan. Although their departure has not been as complete as the exodus of Armenians from Azerbaijan, most Germans have left Kazakhstan. However, as one of the ethnic groups deported to Central Asia by Stalin, the Germans, unlike the Armenians, were in no way rivals for elite positions in Kazakhstan’s urban areas in the way that Armenians had been in Azerbaijan.

Another important difference between Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan is their very different roles as regional centers for language planning in the Soviet Union, especially in the early years. Azerbaijan was the clear leader in the Latinization of the 1920s. Baku, furthermore, hosted the All-Union Turkological Congress in 1926 where the Latin script was formally adopted; and for the years 1928–1931, Baku, as home to the All-Union Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet, was a hub for Soviet language-planning activity. Many Azerbaijans played important roles in this work. By contrast, Kazakh language planners were never at the forefront of language planning for the entire region; in this regard, Kazakhstan was something of a backwater.

Although language planners in Kazakhstan appear not to have actively participated in regional language planning, the Kazakh language underwent major corpus development during the Soviet era. In Kazakhstan, as elsewhere, the Soviet regime allowed and at times encouraged a great volume of scholarly linguistic work and corpus development. Despite the fact that (as will be described below) the titular language was restricted to very limited domains in urban areas in the late Soviet era, scholars produced an impressive set of research, including the 10-volume Казах тилиның түсіндірме сөздірі [Explanatory Dictionary of the Kazakh Language] published between 1974 and 1986. The twelve-volume Казах Совет әнімдер еңіздері [Kazakh Soviet Encyclopedia], which came out between 1972 and 1978, is also evidence of the achievements of corpus language planning in the Soviet era. In similar fashion, between 1976 and 1987, the ten volume Азербайджан Совет Энциклопедия [Azerbaijan Soviet Encyclopedia] appeared. Unlike in the case of Kazakh, however, for Azerbaijani a large number of specialized dictionaries were issued, especially at the end of the 1950s and beyond. These included dictionaries in such diverse fields as botany, zoology, economics, chemistry, astronomy, architecture, law, music, petroleum and gas deposits, and various fields of medicine. Numerous multi-volume Russian–Azerbaijani dictionaries became available, and a four-volume explanatory dictionary of Azerbaijani was published between 1966 and 1987.

Demography is one of the critical factors that has shaped language status in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (see Figures 1 through 6). Kazakhs became a minority in Kazakhstan, whereas Azerbaijanis maintained a solid majority in their republic. Among the major reasons for Kazakhs'
weak demographic position were the deaths and mass departure during collectivization, sedentarization, and the resultant famine. Furthermore, large waves of Slavic immigrants came to Kazakhstan, many as laborers in Kazakhstan's factories and mines, and others as farmers during Khrushchev's virgin lands campaign. Kazakhstan also became a dumping ground for "undesirables," some dispatched to the republic to work in its prison labor camps, others as members of "deported peoples."

These and other shocks radically changed the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan and the linguistic environment in the republic; at the beginning of the twentieth century Kazakhs comprised about 75% of Kazakhstan's population and were still about 60% in 1920; by the mid-1930s, however, they were outnumbered by Russians. (According to some estimates, Slavs had comprised under 15% in 1900 and about 30% in 1920.) The data of the 1939 census purport that Kazakhs comprised 37.8% of the population, Russians 40.0%, and Ukrainians 10.7%. Thus, in 1939, the Slavic population already exceeded half of Kazakhstan's total population. The share of Russians and Ukrainians still comprised about 51% in 1959. By that time, though, the share of Kazakhs had fallen to only about 30%.13

The situation varied considerably from oblast to oblast. Even in 1989, by which time the proportion of Kazakhs in the republic had again recovered substantially, Kazakhs still comprised less than 20% of the population in three of Kazakhstan's seventeen oblasts (Qaraghandy, Qostanay, and North Kazakhstan), and between 20% and 25% in four others (Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan, Kokshetau, and Almaty city).14 In all of these cases, the large majority of the non-Kazakh population was Slavic; with the exception of Almaty (then the capital city), all of these oblasts are located in Kazakhstan's north, east, and central regions.15
For our purposes here it is especially important to note that the Slavs who arrived in Kazakhstan settled largely in urban areas and that therefore, despite a sizeable rural-to-urban migration of Kazakhs, the large majority of inhabitants in most of Kazakhstan's towns (which experienced rapid growth in the mid- and late-Soviet era) consisted of Slavs.\(^1\)

In 1939, Kazakhs accounted for only 21.9% of the urban Kazakh SSR population; they were greatly outnumbered by Russians (57.7%); together with Ukrainians, Slavs accounted for just under two-thirds of the total urban Kazakh SSR population (Всесоюзная перепись 1939 года 1992: 75-76). By 1959 the Kazakh urban share had fallen further, to 16.7%. This meant that in cities and towns Russians outnumbered them by a ratio of more than three to one. In the republic capital, Almaty, the Kazakh share was under 9% (ЦСУ 1962с: 164, 172).

Even in 1989, by which time Kazakhs had grown to 26.7% of the republic urban population, Russians, comprising 51.3%, still outnumbered Kazakhs almost two to one (Государственный комитет СССР по статистике n.d.: 300). In the "capitals" of five oblasts (i.e., oblast centers), Kazakhs accounted for under 15% of the population.\(^17\)

Azerbaijanis, unlike Kazakhs, never became a minority in their titular republic. Their share in Azerbaijan's population dropped between 1926 and 1939, but only modestly, from only 62.1% to 58.4%. The other two major groups were Russians (9.5% and 16.5% — 1926 and 1939, respectively) and Armenians (slightly over 12% in both years) (Всесоюзная перепись 1939 года 1992: 71; Кошов 1975). By 1959, however, ethnic Azerbaijanis already constituted over 67.7% of their republic's inhabitants (ЦСУ 1962с: 134).

Although, like Kazakhs, they were a minority in urban areas, unlike Kazakhs they were a large presence: In 1926 Azerbaijanis accounted for...
37.6% of the Azerbaijani SSR's urban inhabitants (Всесоюзная перепись населения 1926 года 1928—1929), this fell only slightly, to 36.7%, in the 1939 census (Всесоюзная перепись 1939 года 1992: 71). In the capital city their presence in 1939 was somewhat weaker — only 29.2%, as compared to 42.5% for Russians and 14.7% for Armenians (1992: 71). By 1959, when Azerbaijanis already accounted for 51.3% of the Azerbaijani SSR urban population, they constituted only 32.9% of the capital's inhabitants (ЦСУ 1962b: 140). This picture, however, is in stark contrast to the situation in Kazakhstan where, as noted above, Kazakhs comprised under 17% of the total urban population and under 9% in the capital city. Furthermore, although, as noted above, Kazakhs had increased to 26.7% of the Kazakh SSR urban population in 1989, by that time Azerbaijanis had grown to 76.7% in Azerbaijan SSR cities (Статистический комитет ЦГ 1992: 127—135). Although the share of Azerbaijanis in the capital was only 66.0%, this is still far above the Kazakh share of their capital city's inhabitants, 22.5% (Dunlop et al. 1993: 1099, 1100).

3. Language status in education and the workplace in the Soviet era

As we begin to look at status of Azerbaijani and Kazakh in their "home" republics during the Soviet era, it is worth noting that generally Soviet nationality policy was more lenient in the Caucasus than elsewhere. This general tendency applied to language policy in particular. Thus, although from the mid-1930s onward the Communist Party promoted Russian language throughout the USSR, it was less aggressive in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. The relative leniency is also evident in the Union republic constitutions adopted in 1978: only those of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan retained reference to the titular language as the republic state language. This concession was apparently made in response to demonstrations that erupted in Tbilisi after publication of the draft constitution that omitted reference to Georgian's special status. This is significant, among other reasons, because it demonstrated that the Moscow leadership had to consider local sensibilities very carefully in pursuing language policy in the south Caucasus. Furthermore, the fact that all three republic constitutions (but none in other republics) granted the concession, demonstrates that the Soviet leadership was obliged to balance or coordinate policies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. A concession in only one or two of the republics without the other(s) would have been problematic.

The respective positions of the titular language in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan during the mid- and late-Soviet era are inextricably linked to popular attitudes. Qualitative accounts suggest that urban Kazakhs often grew up feeling that the Kazakh language had no future; among other things this may have reflected views of their Slavic (and russified Kazakh) neighbors who viewed Kazakh with derision. The analogous tendency was much less pronounced in Azerbaijan. Reminiscing in 1989, the Kazakh writer Baqytzhan Momyshuly recounts his attitude in childhood to the opening of the Kazakh-language boarding school in Almaty: he thought the institution was for culturally backward children and those with disabilities. Momyshuly reports that in the Soviet era many Kazakh
I have been unable to obtain analogous data for urban schools in Azerbaijan, but it is obvious that the picture was radically different. In the 1960/61 school year, 68.5% of all (i.e., both urban and rural) school pupils in Azerbaijan attended Azerbaijani-medium classes. This figure was slightly higher than the 67.5% share of ethnic Azerbaijanis in the entire republic population in the 1959 census. Similarly, the share of all pupils in Azerbaijan's primary and secondary schools in 1978/79 (82.5%) was higher than the share of Azerbaijanis in the republic in the 1979 census (78.1%) (Acnaanob 1989: 52–62; Data from the Soviet Census 1980). Even allowing for larger families among Azerbaijanis than Russians and Armenians, such a high share of enrollment for rural and urban areas combined would have been impossible if at least a majority of Azerbaijani urban children did not study in the Azerbaijani medium. The strong position of Azerbaijani in schools is confirmed by the data for Baku, Azerbaijan's capital. There, where in 1986–1987 ethnic Azerbaijanis comprised approximately 66% of the city's population, about 44% of school pupils of all ethnic groups were educated in Azerbaijani (Dunlop et al. 1993; Azerbaijan Ministry of Education 2007).

Despite the dominance of the Azerbaijani language in urban education, Russian schools and Russian tracks of mixed schools in Azerbaijan were as a rule better equipped with books and technical facilities than Azerbaijani schools. Furthermore, the Azerbaijani language was often not taught as a serious subject in the Russian tracks and schools (Garibova in this issue). This was certainly also the case in Kazakhstan; unlike most cities of Kazakhstan, however, Azerbaijani urban areas had a large share of titular nationality population; the urban environment provided all pupils — including those who attended Russian schools — many opportunities to encounter the titular nationality and the titular language in public life.

Both in Azerbaijan as well as in Kazakhstan, Russian language was an obligatory subject in the primary and secondary school curriculum. On paper this had been true since 1938, when the Soviet government and the Communist Party adopted a decree (постановление) mandating that all non-Russian schools in the USSR include Russian in the curriculum (Simon 1991: 150). However, it was only in the Brezhnev era and years immediately after that the campaign for Russian-language instruction reached its height. The Party and state adopted a decree in 1978, "On measures for further improving the study and teaching of the Russian language in the Union Republics," which was followed by another joint decree in 1983, "On further measures for improving the study of the Russian language" in the same spirit; a school reform in 1984 called for additional measures to "insure a mastery of Russian by all secondary school graduates" (Kreindler 1991: 220).
As in primary and secondary education, in higher education Kazakh's status was also inferior to Azerbaijani's. Because in many fields Kazakh-language higher education was (justifiably) viewed as inferior to that in Russian, even many graduates of Kazakh secondary schools chose Russian tracks in universities and institutes. In the 1989/90 academic year, only 17.9% of all students enrolled in Kazakhstan's higher educational institutions studied in Kazakh-language groups. Even among ethnic Kazakh students, only 32.7% were in such groups (Хасайов 1992: 185). Given the efforts starting in 1987 to raise the status of Kazakh in higher education, it is certain that Russian was even more dominant in the 1970s and early 1980s than these data indicate for 1989.

Many of the students in Kazakh tracks in higher education in the late Soviet era were on trajectories to become teachers in rural schools. This was especially true of those in pedagogical institutes; however, some Kazakh-track university students in such fields as mathematics or sciences were also preparing for careers in rural schools. In parallel fashion, Kazakh tracks in journalism also prepared rural youth, many of whom came from and would return to the village upon completion. The same applied to Kazakh institute students in specialities related to agriculture and livestock-raising. Still others, in petroleum engineering, intended to pursue careers in the west of Kazakhstan, where there were high concentrations of Kazakh speakers. Unlike those in agriculture or livestock-related specialties, who might attend all classes in Kazakh, "Kazakh-track" students in technical specialties such as petroleum engineering or medicine would study for the first two or two and a half years in Kazakh (covering general education subjects); specialized technical courses, taken during the second half of institute studies, were generally in Russian. Finally, history and philology faculties at Kazakhstan universities also had Kazakh tracks; at least in the case of the premier university of Kazakhstan, Kazakh State University, admission was very competitive and prestigious.

Unlike in Kazakhstan, in the late Soviet era Azerbaijan's higher education operated primarily in the titular language. This was partly due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of all higher education students in the republic were ethnic Azerbaijans. For example, at the beginning of the 1980s, they comprised 76%. Among them, only about one-fifth studied in Russian-language sectors (Азербайджанский язык в сфере 1982: 38–39). The proportion of students in Azerbaijani-language sectors varied considerably from institution to institution. The Pedagogical Institute, though it was located in Baku, prepared cadre primarily for schools outside the capital. This institute had no Russian track. In Azerbaijan State University, approximately 70% were in the Azerbaijani sectors. By contrast, the figure in the Petrochemical Institute was only about 50%, and in some факультеты of that institute all instruction was in Russian (1982: 39).

Higher education textbooks in the titular language were a problem in both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Few textbooks appeared in Kazakh: in 1966, the number published was 32 (across all higher education disciplines: Деврие 1976: 147). It appears that many more titles appeared in Azerbaijani, where publication of higher education textbooks greatly expanded already in the mid-1950s (Азербайджанский язык в сфере 1982: 38). Nevertheless, even in Azerbaijan the quality and range of subjects were reportedly a serious problem at the beginning of the 1980s (1982: 40).

Russian occupied an important role in the urban workplace in both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Indeed, Russian was a prerequisite for anyone aspiring to official positions in the government, especially in urban areas. Even in Azerbaijan, many members of the titular nationality were more comfortable in Russian than "their own" national language, and they worked among non-Azerbaijans who did not know Azerbaijani. Furthermore, it was also common practice for Azerbaijanis communicating with each other in the workplace to shift into Russian if non-Azerbaijians were present. Nevertheless, inasmuch as already in 1970, Azerbaijanis — overwhelmingly Azerbaijani speakers — comprised over 60% of the republic urban population, Azerbaijani was frequently used in urban work settings.

In Kazakhstan, on the other hand, in the 1970s and 1980s, Russian was the overwhelming language of communication in the urban workplace. Above all this was because Kazakhs were usually a small minority in urban factories and urban offices. Furthermore, most urban Kazakhs had at least some Russian skills, while their Russian colleagues rarely knew much, if any, Kazakh. Although asymmetrical bilingualism in the urban workplace was the rule in both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, the demographic composition of Azerbaijan’s cities meant that the titular language was spoken by a much larger share of the population than in Kazakhstan. Parallel to the pattern in Azerbaijan, Kazakhs speaking in the urban workplace generally shifted to Russian if non-Kazakhs were present. Because of Russian dominance in the urban workplace, it appears Kazakh was little used.

4. The post-Soviet era

As is clear from the above discussion, during the Soviet era the titular language in urban areas in Kazakhstan lost much more ground than the
titular language in Azerbaijan. Since independence, the domains of both Azerbaijani and Kazakh have expanded in their respective countries. Nevertheless, Azerbaijani continues to be in a much stronger position than Kazakh. In Azerbaijan, Russian today might be described as "first among the minority languages," and one which is especially valued by the elite who place a higher value on it as a lingua franca and source of cultural exposure (Garibova in this issue); however, even in the capital city, Azerbaijani is clearly the dominant language. On the other hand, in most Kazakhstan cities, Russian continues to eclipse Kazakh. The difference in language status in the two countries is reflected in their respective laws. Russian has no official status in Azerbaijan that makes it superior to any of that country's other minority languages. In contrast, both Kazakhstan's constitution (adopted in 1995) and the Law on Languages (adopted in 1997) give Russian a role that towers over other minority tongues. Both of these documents explicitly state that Russian "is officially used on a par with Kazakh in state organizations and organs of local self-government." (Закон 1997; Конституция 1995).

Although the similarities and differences in language status in the two countries reflect processes already evident in the last decades of Soviet rule, various contextual factors, including the political paths chosen by the leaders of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, have also affected language status. Leaders in both countries have emphasized the state language as a major symbol of their independent countries' identity. This carries relatively few risks for legitimacy in Azerbaijan, where the large majority of the population is ethnic Azerbaijani and speaks the Azerbaijani language. The situation is different in much more ethnically diverse Kazakhstan. There, although President Nazarbayev has also proclaimed that all fellow citizens (regardless of ethnicity) should learn Kazakh, he has also frequently emphasized Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional nature, and stressed that Russian will continue to play a major role in the country.27

As in previous eras, geography and especially demography have continued to have a profound impact on language status in independent Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Most importantly, Azerbaijan has had much less to worry about in terms of minorities on the border with Russia seeking autonomy to determine their own language policy, let alone calling for unification with Russia. True, it appears that on occasion Russia has supported aspirations articulated by some Azerbaijani Lezgins who seek more autonomy from Baku or demand arrangements that would allow them to join Lezgin co-ethnics inside Daghestan (i.e., in Russia).28 The Lezgins, however, constitute only a few percent of Azerbaijan's population. Furthermore, Russia likely tempers its policies towards the Lezgins, since any change in promotion of Lezgin interests might profoundly affect demands by other ethnic groups elsewhere inside Russia.

Unlike the small minority ethnic group straddling the Russian-Azerbaijani border, in the case of Kazakhstan the minority is Russians. Even before Kazakhstan's independence, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn provoked a vehement response among Kazakhs when he issued a treatise in effect urging secession of northern and eastern regions from Kazakhstan and incorporation into Russia. In the same spirit, in the early years of independence vocal groups of Russians inside Kazakhstan demanded more linguistic rights, sometimes with vague threats couched in rhetoric implying that their territories might be better off as part of the giant neighbor to the north (Commecio 2004). This, along with the ethnic Russian and linguistic dominance in Kazakhstan's north and east, has no doubt moderated linguistic "nationalization" in that country.

Despite this important difference, in both Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan demographic changes since the late 1980s have increased the share of the titular group, and thus benefited the titular languages. Azerbaijan's ethnic minorities, which constituted about 17% of the population in 1989, had declined to under 10% by 1999 (Umudlu 2001). Much of this was a result of the departure from Azerbaijan's cities of Russians and Armenians. Whereas, as noted above, both Russians and Armenians comprised 5.6% of Azerbaijan's population in 1989, by 1999 they had declined — in the territory still under Baku's administration — to 1.8% and less than 0.5%, respectively.29 Azerbaijan's ethnic composition also became more mono-ethnic due to the arrival in Azerbaijan of Azerbaijanis fleeing Armenia and Armenian-occupied territories. The refugees and displaced persons have settled primarily in Baku and other major urban areas. A report from 2001 purports that almost 88% of the population of Baku — which accounts for around half of Azerbaijan's urban population — consists of Azerbaijanis (Umudlu 2001).

Though Kazakhstan remains far less mono-ethnic than Azerbaijan, it has also experienced a dramatic shift in population over the last twenty years. Non-Kazakhs accounted for slightly over 60% of the country's population in 1989; today there are probably about 40%.30 The shift has been particularly stark in urban areas where, as noted above, in 1989 Kazakhs were outnumbered by Russians almost two to one. Just a decade later, in 1999, Kazakhs outnumbered Russians: members of the titular nationality (who had accounted for under 27% of urban residents in 1989) already comprised 43.2%; Russians (who had accounted for over 51% in 1989) had declined to 41.1% (Агентство Республики Казахстан по статистике 2000: 15). As of 2004 the urban population in Kazakhstan was 48.5% Kazakh and 37.0% Russian (Агентство Республики Казахстан...
The demographic change has been reflected in changes in the language of education in Kazakhstan's urban schools. As of 1990, fewer than 17% of Kazakhstan's urban children were being educated in the Kazakh medium; by 2004 the share was over 46% (Fierman 2006: 106). The change in urban medium of education, however, was not merely a function of change in ethnic composition of Kazakhstan's cities. Rather, it also reflected the larger share of ethnic Kazakh parents sending their children to Kazakh-medium schools or classes. In 1990 the share of urban Kazakh children educated in Kazakh was about 51%; by 1999, it had grown to over 72%. (For urban and rural areas combined, the increase was from about 66% to 81%) The overwhelming majority of Kazakhstan's pupils not educated in Kazakh was studying in classes taught in Russian. This was still the case of approximately two-fifths of all urban pupils in 1999, including over a quarter of all ethnic Kazakh urban pupils (2006: 107).

The picture was radically different in Azerbaijan, where as of the 2004/05 academic year, even in urban areas over 93% of all school pupils (i.e., not just ethnic Azerbaijanis) were attending Azerbaijani-medium classes (Education 2005: 69). Given that a miniscule number of non-Azerbaijanis attend Azerbaijani-medium classes and given that non-Azerbaijanis comprise at least some of the remaining 7% of school pupils, it is clear that well over 90% of Azerbaijani study in Azerbaijani-medium classes. Disaggregated data on language of education for Azerbaijan's urban areas as a whole are unavailable. However, the overwhelmingly dominant position of Azerbaijani in urban primary and secondary education is evident from the fact that as of 2005, approximately 84% of Baku's primary and secondary school pupils studied in Azerbaijani-medium classes (Azerbaijani Ministry of Education 2007).

While the role of Russian as medium of instruction for primary and secondary education in Azerbaijan is clearly inferior to its role in Kazakhstan, it still maintains a significant place: according to the Azerbaijan Ministry of Education (2007), Russian continues to be at least one of the languages of instruction in over 350 schools. Furthermore, some ethnic Azerbaijani parents still choose Russian-medium classes based on a perception that the quality of education in them is superior.
including in all official governmental offices, the press, and on public signs (Указ президента 2001).

Although Kazakh’s expansion in the workplace lags far behind Azerbaijani’s, it is unquestionably used much more today than a decade or two ago. Naturally, the highest level of use of Kazakh in the urban workplace is in those cities where Kazakhs are in the majority, in particular Kazakhstan’s south and west. Elsewhere, though, Russian continues to dominate in many domains of public urban life. Although the government of Kazakhstan has greater leverage in promoting the use of Kazakh in government institutions than in other public settings, the articulated policy has been ambiguous, and at least until recently “kazakhization” has progressed slowly.

Even before independence, Kazakhstan had drawn up a plan for shifting government office work throughout the republic within five years from Russian to Kazakh; this was supposed to apply even to oblasts with small Kazakh minorities and large Slavic majorities (Казахстанская правда 1990). This plan represented a breathtakingly unrealistic assessment of what could be accomplished. Indeed, little progress occurred during the next decade. In an apparent attempt to remedy the situation, the Kazakhstan government adopted a postanovlenie in 1998 “On broadening the spheres of use of the state language in state organs” (Постановление правительства 1999: 200–202). This document, however, also failed to spark much action: a new state program adopted in 2001, “On the functioning and development of languages for 2001–2010,” explained that progress to date in shifting to Kazakh had remained limited primarily to the translation of documents; the usual practice was still to produce documents in Russian and then translate them into Kazakh (Государственная программа 2001).

Following the adoption of this program, individual oblasts began announcing their shifts of office work (делопроизводство) to Kazakh. The first shift supposedly occurred in Qyzylorda, where Kazakhs comprise about 95% of the population. By the beginning of 2005, four other oblasts had followed Qyzylorda’s lead, and plans were in place for all government internal office work throughout the country to be shifted to Kazakh by 2008.37 As the end of 2007 approached, however, a “Concept paper on expanding the spheres of functioning of the state language and raising its competitiveness for 2007–2010” noted that “even in regions with an overwhelming majority of Kazakh population” the indicators of office work in Kazakh were “not positive;” and in central government organs “only 20% to 30% of documents” were being prepared in Kazakh.38

The problems in shifting to Kazakh even in government work vividly illustrate the vast difference between the linguistic environment in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. In February 2005, a review of language of office work (іс жүрізі/делопроизводство) in Atyrau Oblast (on paper, one of the first to shift) revealed that only about 15% of the documents circulated (карак айналым) were in Kazakh (Іс кагаздары 2005). As the chair of Kazakhstan’s Committee on Languages noted in an interview in late 2006, some oblasts had approached the shift to Kazakh just “nominally” (формально): they created translation departments that “rubber stamped” Kazakh translations of Russian originals; in fact, as he disclosed, rarely did anyone read or use the Kazakh text (Алфавит научного подхода 2006). A comprehensive assessment of the real state of affairs is exceedingly difficult, among other reasons because of multiple and contradictory deadlines for shifting government office work to Kazakh.39

Oblast officials have pointed to Kazakhstan’s central government apparatus as one of the primary reasons for the sluggish shift. They allege that because much of the correspondence and paperwork sent from the capital is in Russian, it is easiest to use that language (Іс кагаздары 2005). At lower levels (район or towns) in predominantly Kazakh areas of Kazakhstan, Kazakh appears to be used substantially more than at the oblast level or above.

The slow progress of linguistic kazakhization in government offices is reflective of the policy established by Kazakhstan’s President Nazarbayev, who has urged patience in the shift to Kazakh. Speaking in the late summer of 2004, he said, “It is precisely the Russian language which unites our nation [нация] and it will take time for the Kazakh language to begin to fulfill this unifying role” (Президент Казахстана 2007). A similar message was delivered by a Kazakhstan Constitutional Council postanovlenie issued in response to an inquiry from a group of deputies who asked for a clarification of the meaning of the Constitution regarding use of language in government. Although the postanovlenie indicated that the Constitution should not be interpreted as making Russian a “second state language,” it also emphasized that the Constitution does mandate equality (равенство) in the use of Kazakh and Russian in state organizations and organs of local self-government (В республиках 2007).

Space does not permit an exploration of office work outside of state institutions. However, based on first-hand observation and numerous interviews in spring 2007 in five cities of Kazakhstan, it appears that on the whole, the success of kazakhization of office work in private enterprises in urban areas of the country with large non-Kazakh populations is even less than in state institutions.
5. Conclusion

As has been illustrated above, Russian Imperial and subsequent Soviet policies resulted in the Russian language acquiring a very important role in education and the workplace in both Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The extent of the penetration of the Russian language was shaped by the unique constellation of factors for each republic, including geographic, historical, demographic, and political moments. Even in the Soviet era, however, the titular language maintained a much larger domain of use in Azerbaijan's cities than it did in cities of Kazakhstan. Since 1991, the status of the titular language in both countries has risen and its domains broadened, though only in Azerbaijan does the titular language clearly enjoy a status superior to Russian in urban educational institutions and in the workplace. The difference in the situations in the two countries is due both to the inertia of factors already in place during the Soviet era, and to the changing environment in the respective countries since their independence, including policies of their leadership.

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Notes

* An unusually large number of colleagues and friends have helped me in collecting data for this article. I am especially grateful to Jala Garibova for her assistance in gathering critical information from Azerbaijan. I would also like to express particular thanks to Aida Huseynova of Baku, as well as Eleonora Suleymanova and Aigul Kazhenova of Almaty. The views expressed here, however, are my own, and I take full responsibility for any factual errors or errors of interpretation.

1. This did not mean, of course, that the new states could ignore pressure from other countries, especially Russia.

2. This foundation is provided in Stalin's (1913) treatise Marxism и национальный вопрос 'Marxism and the national question'.

3. The major exception to this statement is certain rural areas of northern and central Kazakhstan.

4. Although this article focuses on questions of language status, it should be noted that Russian language had a major influence on language corpus in the case of Azerbaijani and Kazakh, as well as all other languages spoken in the USSR.

5. This use is particularly problematic in the case of "Azerbaijanis" since until the twentieth century "Azerbaijanis" identified themselves as "Turks" (distinguishing themselves from Persian speakers); indeed, in Iran today both they and non-Azerbaijani Iranians still often use this term in the same way. Furthermore, in the early twentieth century Russians referred to "Azerbaijanis" living in the Russian Empire as "Tatars."

6. For a discussion of administrative status correlated with language of instruction in schools, see Anderson and Silver (1984).

7. The major country outside the USSR where Kazakhs lived was China, followed by Mongolia. According to one estimate, around the time of independence 1.27 million Kazakhs lived in China, and 150,000 in Mongolia. At about the same time, 850,000 Kazakhs were said to live in Uzbekistan, 655,000 in Russia, and another 89,000 in Turkmenistan (Hacemi 1992: 266–268).

8. Here "Azerbaijanis" refers to those both in northern and southern Azerbaijan.

9. According to the 1989 census, over 77% of urban Armenians in Azerbaijan spoke Russian, including approximately 20% who even for census purposes declared it their "mother tongue" (Goskomstat 1989: 486–487).

10. For more information on this, see, for example, Разговор национальных языков (1980).

11. For a list of some of these, see Азербайджано-русский словарь в 4-х томах (Baku: Эта, 1986), Там 1, стр. 25–28. The explanatory dictionary, Azərbaycan Dilinin İzahh Ləğəti (2000) was published by the Azə SSR Academy of Sciences.


13. For a variety of reasons, estimates vary considerably on the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan in the early twentieth century. It is obvious, however, that in this period Kazakhs still constituted a majority of Kazakhstan's population, while Russians and other Slavs a sizeable but rapidly growing minority. For some of this discussion, see Алеев и А. Б. Гаврилов (1991) and Тарзина, in particular pp. 50–58. For careful analysis of data available at the time, see Sheehy (1987).

14. Reflecting the Russian orthography, the common English spelling of the city's name in the Soviet era was "Alma-Ata." I have unified the spelling in this article, spelling it everywhere except in certain bibliographic items "Almaty."

15. Almaty city was not part of any oblast, but formally it was not an oblast; however, it was treated much like an oblast, reporting as oblasts did to the republic level administration.

16. Large numbers of Slavs also settled in certain rural areas of Kazakhstan, in particular during the Virgin Lands campaign.

17. According to Хасимова (1992: 148–158), the shares were 8.6% in Petropavlovsk, 8.9% in Qostanay, 10.6% in Oskemen, 12.6% in Qaraghandy, 14.7% in Pavlodar, and 18.8% in Kokshetau. In Almaty city, Kazakhs comprised 22.5%. Slightly different figures are provided in the newspaper Ana nazi 11 October 1990.

18. In 1939, the number of Russians (almost 36%) was practically equal to the number of Azerbaijanis; Armenians constituted another almost 15%.

19. Жаман Керашев, whose article is devoted primarily to criticizing Suleymanov's alleged Russophile tendencies, nevertheless recognizes that in the 1970s the famous author served as the "passport" for Kazakh writers.

20. The writer Chingiz Huseynov is something of an exception, since he did write about sensitive issues related to nationality in Russian. However, Huseynov studied and then spent his entire literary career in Moscow; he was not a fixture in the Azerbaijan literary scene like the Kazakh "national" writers who composed in Russian.
21. One of the schools in Kazakhstan was a boarding school attended largely by children from other parts of the republic. The other (School No. 12) was largely for local children. Although on the whole Kazakh-language education was popularly regarded as inferior, School Number 12 had a very strong reputation and many families of the cultural and political elite sent their children to this institution. Given its limited capacity, this school could serve only a small fraction of children living in Almaty. The Kazakh population of the city in 1979 was 147,000 (16.5% of the total); by 1989 it was 251,000 (22.5% of the total) (Госкомстат Исполн 1989 г.: 320).

22. Without data for number of pupils, it is impossible to identify the magnitude of the boom. However, data for number of schools for 1988 and 1990 are available. In 1988 there were 181 schools in urban areas with only Kazakh-medium instruction; by 1990 the number had grown to 268. Likewise, in 1988 there had been 242 schools with more than one language of instruction; by 1990 the number had grown to 411. (The number for “mixed” includes a small number of schools where the “mix” of languages did not include Kazakh, and might have been, for example, Russian and Uzbek or Russian and Uyghur.)

23. A small number of non-Azerbaijani students studied in the Azerbaijani medium; moreover, Azerbaijanis constituted more of the school-age population than the 67.5% population of all ages.

24. The calculation is based on the report in this source that 76% of students in Azerbaijani’s higher educational institutions were ethnic Azerbaijanis, and that over 60% of the students in these institutions were in Azerbaijani sectors.

25. Despite the clear picture of a much stronger role for Azerbaijani than Kazakh in education in respective republics, it is puzzling that per capita book production in the titular language for members of the titular nationality was substantially higher in Kazakhstan than in Azerbaijan in 1980. At a time that Kazakhstan’s Kazakh population was about 12% higher than the number of Azerbaijanis in Azerbaijan, the number of books published in Kazakh in the Kazakh SSR was about 45% higher than the number of books published in Azerbaijan in the Azerbaijan SSR. Even if a larger share of Kazakhstan’s Kazakh-language books were destined for use in Kazakh irredenta communities of Uzbekistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, it does explain this discrepancy (Новакин, CCCP 1981: 140 – 142).

26. In 1989, only about 1% of Kazakhstan’s urban non-Kazakhs claimed fluency in Kazakh. At the same time, almost 78% of Kazakhs in urban areas claimed a mastery of Russian (Госкомстат Исполн 1989 г.: 296, 300). Among the employed population the share was undoubtedly even higher.

27. For example, see his comments of 2007 (“Президент ...”).

28. Official Azerbaijan government data indicates Lezgins constitute about 2% of the country’s population (Умадуй 2001).

29. Official Azerbaijani data show that 1.5% of the country’s population was Armenian in 1999. This appears to include Nagorno-Karabagh. The Minorities at Risk assessment at the University of Maryland estimates that only 30,000 Armenians lived in parts of Azerbaijan administered from Baku (Minorities 2004). Even in 1989, one-third of Azerbaijan’s Armenians had resided in Nagorno-Karabagh (Dunlop et al. 1993: 1099).

30. In 2004 non-Kazakhs comprised less than 43% of the population; over the previous four years the non-Kazakh population had decreased by approximately 3% (Акдиметов, 2004: 18).

31. Indeed, because the economic scene in Kazakhstan is more favorable than in other Central Asian countries, some individuals of mixed heritage in such countries –

Uzbekistan who were registered as Uzbeks or members of other nationalities have changed their ethnic category in order to take advantage of this program.

32. In 2006/07, Russian was the only medium of instruction in 19 schools; in 333 schools it was one of two languages of instruction (the other being Azerbaijani); one other school with Russian also had tracks in Azerbaijani and Georgian (Azerbaijan Ministry of Education 2007).

33. Ministry of Education officials informally gave two imprecise estimates. One was “approximately 10% in Russian” and the other was “80% to 90%” in Azerbaijan. Although a very small number of higher educational students may be studying in other languages such as English or Turkish, this is almost certainly a negligible number.

34. The figure of 43.95% was cited by KyprancKaji (2007). What these figures do not tell, however, is that even in Kazakh groups, instructors frequently resort to the use of Russian, and it is common to use Russian textbooks because not all of them exist in Kazakh.

35. The other four oblasts are Atyrau, Manghystau, Zhambyl, and South Kazakhstan (Убайдуллаев 2005).

36. This concept paper was an official document approved by the government of Kazakhstan on 21 November 2007 (“Концепция ...” 2007).

37. For an exposé of the situation in Qaraghandy Oblast, see Жиблаев (2007).

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