

Korean Diaspora of Kazakhstan: New Changes – New Language Perspectives

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Abstract

In December, 2011 Kazakhstan celebrated not only its 20th anniversary, but also 20th year of diplomacy relations between Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea. Many changes have happened for Korean diaspora: Kazakhstan - Korean relations becomes very intensive, there are a lot of spheres of economic collaboration between Korea and Kazakhstan; the interest to Korean language is growing up with huge steps; the number of joint programs in education is increasing considerably; similarities in cultural background favor development of many-sided relations. All these facts do not prove the idea about native language revitalization process for Kazakhstani Koreans, because the Seoul Standard which is coming to Kazakhstan with huge steps is not the language of Korean Diaspora ancestors (Kore Mar), which is steadily disappearing from the language map of Kazakhstan. And also it is still hard to prove reasonably the idea about Korean Language spread in Kazakhstan: there are not enough evidences for it, but obviously, there are some growing indications, proving this idea.

Introduction

In December of 2011 the independent Kazakhstan celebrated its 20th anniversary. It was a long and saturated period influenced life and consciousness of people. First of all, Kazakhstan entered the opened world: people started to go abroad and to have guests from abroad. Now it is hard to meet a person in Kazakhstan who wouldn't have an international communication experience. A citizen of Kazakhstan became to make comparisons taken from their own abroad experience. For instance, food in Kazakhstan is more delicious than abroad; people in our country are friendlier than in Russia; Turkish commercial hospitality is better than anyone's else; to obtain the USA visa is much harder than China's or Thailand's.

Naturally, having had new impressions, people made many other discoveries including understanding of the importance of mastering other languages, proficiency in them and problems of learning languages. If earlier, in Soviet time the process of learning languages was mainly purely theoretical and did not meet practical needs, but now people have an opportunity to use languages. Moreover, they clearly see the benefits of it.

All the Diasporas of Kazakhstan have real concern to these changes. A Korean Diaspora¹ representative made the same discoveries as other Kazakhstan citizens, although some of them turned to be especially important for him (her). The first of them: peoples should know the language of their ethnos. The second: people should speak the language of their nation. The third: foreign language proficiency gives big benefits in having good education and job. The fourth and the last: Russian language proficiency also gives obvious advantages for living in post-Soviet space.

Let's consider the realization of these discoveries starting the last two, according to quantity and quality of changes.

There is no secret that many representatives of Diasporas, including Korean, have lost their ability of speaking native languages and use Russian, which has been spread in Soviet time, for everyday purposes. Considering the role of Russian in Kazakhstani society, it is possible to say that it is not so "alone" in Kazakhstan as 20 years ago. We can hear it as often as Kazakh speaking in streets and in official communication. Kazakhstani Koreans turned to be Russian speaking community due to social-historical reasons. In connection to the changed identity: not a Soviet person anymore, but Kazakhstani – reference points have been changed as well: everyone share the idea of mastering national language. Besides, the opportunity to compare oneself with people who do not speak Russian - and a striking outcome – to speak Russian is much advantageous than not to speak it.

If we analyze the benefit rate according to language proficiency, the picture can be viewed as it shown in the chart below.

¹ Korean Diaspora is Korean ethnos living in Kazakhstan from 1937 as a result of mass deportation from Russian Far East by Stalin's decree.

Table 1.

#	Languages	Advantage degree of languages proficiency in Kazakhstan
1	Russian ² – Kazakh – English	+++
2	Russian – other foreign language - Kazakh	++(+) ³
3	Russian - English	++
4	Kazakh - English	+
5	Kazakh – Russian - English	++
6	Russian – other foreign language - English	++(+)
7	Russian – Korean - English	+++

Discovery of necessity of learning English continues to disturb an ordinary citizen of Kazakhstan. A Korean diaspora representative is not exclusion. They achieved big success in this point. According to the last census report Koreans are on the first place among other ethnic groups by the number of people who said they know English. If we compare these data with the general level of education, we can see them on the first place as well. The connection between these two indicators can be followed and probably corresponds to the general level of their accomplishment which is directly connected to the success in society for them.

As for Kazakh language proficiency, 86% of Koreans think they should know Kazakh. 85,5% were agree that Kazakh should be a mandatory subject at school. About 20% of the respondents said they try to use Kazakh as much as possible. And, finally, 90% of Koreans regarded themselves as full valued citizens of Kazakhstan.

All the listed statistical data shows the process of changing language and national identity of Koreans, realizing and mainly positively accepting the new national identity.

As it was already mentioned before, Koreans still at the dawn of perestroika realizes the loss of the native language and now they want to return their connection with the vernacular country. The active cooperation of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea contribute this process. Korea has been one of the first countries coming to the market of the independent Kazakhstan. 2011 year became also the year of 20th anniversary of diplomacy relations between the Republics of Kazakhstan and Korea. In the past 2011 year two countries celebrated the Year of Korea in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

As many people noticed, Kazakhstan people observe that our two nations have many things in common. These are not only economic interests, but connection of cultures united with the common Asian space and history. The most demonstrative illustration of this connection is very high popularity rate of Korean dramas among Kazakhstani people. Namely proximity in culture, customs, and relations makes them so popular in Kazakhstan. Publics enjoy sincerity, kindness, and delicacy inherent eastern people.

The other side of Kazakhstan-Korean relations mentioned before is wide-ranging economic collaboration between the countries. As we are not able to make economic analysis of these relations, we tried to find a method of estimation the rate of this collaboration. We put in Google search “Korean companies in Kazakhstan” and received 14 100 000 results. For comparison we put “American companies in Kazakhstan” had 5 350 000 results, Chinese companies – 7 330 000, German companies - 2 370 000. That is the number of results for Korean companies is 2 times more than others.

According to the media reports, economic collaboration of Kazakhstan and South Korea realizes in huge number of spheres: mine working, oil and gas, construction (e.g. 4 satellite towns around Almaty), load lift assembly, medicine, nonferrous machining, transportation of grain to the Republic of Korea and markets of nearby countries in Asia-Pacific region, the production of motor vehicles, medicine and health products, etc.

All the mentioned facts undoubtedly influence the changes of the language situation in Kazakhstan and in the Korean Diaspora. First of all, its membership has been changed. In Kazakhstan during Soviet time about 120 000 Koreans lived. The most of them turned out there as a result of Stalin’s repression policy in 1937. In connection to development of collaboration between Korea and Kazakhstan, in the last 20 year about 2000 South Koreans came to Kazakhstan. They work in the above-mentioned economic spheres and also in social and educational programs. This number is not very considerable yet, but really demonstrative: now Kazakhstani

² On the first place the language of preferable usage is situated.

³ Brackets point to dependence on other conditions, for example, what exact foreign language a person speaks.

Koreans are divided into local ones and foreign. Thus, the language of communication of local Koreans is Russian and for South Koreans – Seoul Standard of Korean.

Besides, in Kazakhstan from about 1990th the Korean Centre of Education works, whose main task is teaching Korean in Kazakhstan. Anyone wishing to study Korean can do it free of charge. However, if in the beginning of 90th there were a lot of turnover among students and, speaking the language of economics, the demand for Korean language did not exceed supply, these days the number of students in group exceed 40 and many people should wait up to 3-6 month to be enrolled in the course. According to the Centre data, in 2008 275 students studied there, in 2010 – 639, in 2011 – 730 and in the mid of 2012 – 600. The positive dynamics is obvious and interest to Korean language learning is growing up. It should be also mentioned that the main group of students is not elder than 30, that is young people willing to find a good job. The other interesting feature is the ethnic composition of the students: the biggest group is Kazakh people: in 2008 – 57%, in 2010 – 69%, in 2011 – 68% and in the mid of 2012 – 67%. The number of Koreans learning Korean is about half of the number, and the percentage ratio for all number does not change sufficiently. Other nationalities make up 6-7% of total number of students.

Another considerable field of Kazakhstan-Korea collaboration is education. The Republic of Korea is on the one of the leading places by the number of agreements on collaboration with Kazakhstani education institutions. Perhaps, the biggest number of students taking part in student exchange programs is the number of Kazakhstan students visited South Korea. For instance, Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages has 17 partner universities in the Republic of Korea. During the last 11 years about 160 students took part in student exchange programs. Starting 2004, 25 graduates of Ablai Khan UIR&WL had Master's degree in Korea with 7 different specialties. Every year Korean government provides bachelor's and master's grants for Kazakhstani students. Besides, grants covering all the expenses are given to exchange students.

Thus, if this tendency of mutual collaboration of Kazakhstan and Korea continues, it can happen that Korean will become one of the most popular languages in Kazakhstan. In sociolinguistics there is a theory of language spread which is increase in proportion the communicative network in some periods, which adopts a language or a language variation for a specific communicative function. It [language spread] is by-product of military, political, cultural, economic and simply demographic expansion of people whose instrument of communication is language. A language overcomes its rivals not because of its inherent qualities, but because its speakers are more combative, partisan, cultural, pushing.

So far, it is too early to make such an outcome in Kazakhstan now, but some increasing indicators of this fact can be viewed.

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