

The Evolution of National Demand Hierarchy and Language Policy: A Case Study of Kazakhstan^{*}

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Whether at the individual or national level, needs share many similarities. For a country, its language policy evolves in response to the country's needs. From the perspective of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, this paper explores the logic behind the evolution of Kazakhstan's language policy. From the perspective of language policy, national needs can be divided into four levels: survival needs, development needs, integration needs, and international influence needs. This study not only offers a new explanation for the evolutionary logic of Kazakhstan's language policy but also provides a reference for predicting a country's language policies.

Keywords: national demand hierarchy, evolution of language policy

Introduction

As one of the five Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan has close ties with China in terms of ethnic composition, history, and culture. Language policy is not only related to the development of individuals, but also to the development of communities, and more importantly, to the development of humanity as a whole. The formulation of language policy must not only pay attention to the current "contexts", but also look at the distant "landscapes", and further keep an eye on the future "visions" (Hu, 2023). Through the study of Kazakhstan's language policy, it can be observed that the academic community has conducted extensive research on this topic and achieved considerable results. A literature review reveals that current studies on Kazakhstan's language policy mainly focus on the following categories.

First, there is research focusing on the language policies of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, alongside analysis of their impacts and underlying contextual factors. Scholars such as Zeng Ting (Zeng & Huang, 2022); Wang Li (L. Wang, 2017); Wang Jia (J. Wang, 2017); Yan Li (Yan, 2019); Jiang Qiuli and Liu Zhengjiang (Jiang & Liu, 2021), and Ayitila Abudureyimu and Liu Nan (Ayitila & Liu, 2019) have explored the implementation dilemmas and language planning of Kazakhstan's language policy from diverse perspectives, including language security, the transition "from political ideal to social reality", the regulation of ethnic consciousness among the Russian community and national identity construction, language ecology, the Silk Road Economic Belt, and the "Belt and Road Initiative". Second, there is research on the impact of Kazakhstan's language policy on China. Xie Qian argued that the transformation of language policies in Central Asian countries

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is forming a new pattern of language order, which brings both opportunities and challenges to the diversified language policy advocated by China for the “Belt and Road Initiative”—particularly for the New Silk Road. To promote the harmonious development of the language rights of ethnic minorities in countries along the New Silk Road and construct a strategy for a diversified and harmonious regional language environment, it is necessary to comprehensively leverage China’s strategic advantages in cross-border ethnic languages, which in turn influences the planning of China’s ethnic language policy for the New Silk Road (Xie, 2017). Zeng Ting analyzed the multilingual education strategies in Central Asia and proposed that China should formulate scientific and rational foreign language education plans, give play to the bridging role of regional international organizations, and further leverage the platform function of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms to promote the dissemination of Chinese language and culture and the smooth implementation of the “Belt and Road Initiative” (Zeng, 2021). Third, there is research on the Latinization reform of Kazakhstan’s written language. Haliguli Niyazi and Tian Chengpeng reviewed the history of previous written language reforms in Kazakhstan, analyzed the reasons for the new round of written language reform in the country, and predicted the potential impacts of this reform—which is of certain reference value for us to further understand the trends of social and cultural development in Kazakhstan (Haliguli & Tian, 2017). Jiang Qiuli and Liu Zhengjiang pointed out that Kazakhstan’s written language has undergone transitions among Arabic script, Latin script, and Cyrillic script. The Latinization of Kazakh written language began in the 21st century, transitioning from Cyrillic script to Latin script. They argued that the Latinization of Kazakh written language is not so much a response to the need for modernization of social development and integration into global development processes, but rather a necessity for breaking away from Russian influence, advancing national independence, and more importantly, strengthening ethnic identity and national identity (Jiang & Liu, 2021).

To sum up, current research on Kazakhstan’s language policy lacks an analysis of the logic behind its policy evolution from the perspective of the Hierarchy of Needs Theory. Based on this gap, this paper aims to draw on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory to analyze the reasons for the evolution of Kazakhstan’s language policy. It is intended to provide an explanation for the evolution of Kazakhstan’s language policy from a different research perspective, further predict the development trend of Kazakhstan’s language policy, and help us better grasp the laws governing changes in language policies.

Theoretical Analysis and Its Application in Social Sciences

The Hierarchy of Needs Theory, also known as the Need-Motivation Theory, was proposed by the renowned American psychologist Abraham Maslow in 1943. Maslow posited that human behavior and activities are driven by diverse needs arranged in a hierarchical structure from lower to higher levels, including physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). Applying this framework to the national level, scholars have conducted the following studies: (1) Wang Gaoyang argued that the Hierarchy of Needs Theory is equally applicable to nations, emphasizing that security needs take precedence over higher-level needs like esteem and self-actualization (Wang, 2021). (2) Chu Xinyu analyzed national interests from an international political perspective, categorizing state needs into four tiers: survival and security needs, belongingness needs, self-actualization needs, and esteem needs (Chu, 2006). (3) Gao Fei identified four levels of national needs: survival-based needs, security needs, belongingness needs, and respect needs (Gao & Xiao, 2010). (4) Wang Caixia proposed a five-tier framework: sovereignty needs,

development needs, international responsibility needs, international status needs, and modernization needs (Wang, 2022). (5) Su Ping integrated Maslow's and Alderfer's theories to categorize state needs into three levels: survival needs, international belongingness needs, and international influence needs (Su, 2009).

From the above, it can be observed that scholars have not reached a consensus on the specific levels that national needs encompass. However, through a systematic review of their perspectives, it is evident that scholars have reached consensus on the following aspects: First, humans are a vital component of a nation. Human needs shape national needs, and national needs share comparability with human needs. Second, needs possess a hierarchical nature. Whether for individuals or nations, needs are hierarchical, and the satisfaction of lower-level needs is always prioritized. Third, for both nations and individuals, lower-level needs are material in nature—i.e., needs that ensure survival. Only after lower-level needs are satisfied can attention shift to higher-level needs, which are spiritual in nature. The above insights provide a reference for us to analyze national language policies from the perspective of national needs.

The Relationship Between the National Demand Hierarchy and the Evolution of Kazakhstan's Language Policy

When national needs are examined from different perspectives, they fall into different types. From the perspective of language policy, national needs can be categorized into four distinct types: Survival needs are the lowest-level needs, that is, a nation's pursuit of security. Above these are development needs and integration needs, while the highest-level needs are the pursuit of international influence—which is specifically reflected in needs for international hegemony or self-actualization. The survival of a nation is the top priority and the most fundamental aspect. Only when survival needs are met can development needs emerge; development needs are an extension of survival needs. Integration needs, in turn, can be regarded as the external extension of development needs. It can be said that for a nation to achieve sound development, it must integrate into the world.

A country's national interests represent its highest pursuit and the starting point for all its actions, while national needs determine the orientation of a country's actions. The formulation of language policy is part of a country's actions. Based on this, it can be stated that national needs determine the formulation of a country's language policy. National needs serve as the driving force behind the formulation and development of a country's language policy. Below, we will take the evolution of Kazakhstan's language policy as an example to illustrate how a country's language policy evolves in response to changes in its national needs.

Survival Needs and National Language Policy

Survival needs are the most fundamental needs of a country. When a country has multiple needs, it will prioritize the satisfaction of survival needs. Specifically in terms of language policy, when a country is relatively underdeveloped, it will formulate many language policies that first serve its survival needs. The specific measures are as follows:

Designate the language of the ruling class as the official language. As a carrier of symbols and memories, language embodies profound ethnicity and political value. In 1953, UNESCO pointed out that a national language plays a unifying and integrating role in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields of a unified country and serves as a symbol of the nation. By contrast, an official language refers to the language used in state administration, legislation, and official documents. After the establishment of nation-states worldwide, rulers generally promote language unification, foster a national common language, and highlight the national attribute

of language through language policies. These measures aim to strengthen national cohesion, enhance national identity, and safeguard national unity and stability (Qing & Jiang, 2023). Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country. According to its 2009 census data, there are over 130 ethnic groups within its borders. Kazakhstan's political elites have adopted language policies to consolidate their governing status and maintain their privileges in politics, economy, and society. Driven by survival needs—i.e., the country's need for security, which entails no external threats, the maintenance of internal political stability, and the enhancement of national and ethnic identity—Kazakhstan adopted a language law in September 1989, shortly before its independence, establishing Kazakh as the national language. This move fully reflects the interests of the ruling class and aims to construct national identity through language policy.

Kazakhstan began to vigorously promote the Kazakh language, starting with the education sector. For instance, in the 1994-1995 academic year, it reduced the instruction hours for Russian language and Russian-related courses in the curricula of Russian-language schools: for Grade 5, from 11 hours per week to 6; for Grade 6, from 9 hours to 6; and for Grade 7, from 7 hours to 5. The time saved from these reductions was allocated to studying the Kazakh language. Some argued that cutting Russian instruction hours would deprive more people of numerous opportunities, such as competitive advantages for college admissions and access to scientific and cultural knowledge. Furthermore, on November 16, 1996, the Concept of Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan—published in *Kazakhstan Pravda* (Kazakhstan's official newspaper)—stipulated that state organs, departments, and armed forces at all levels must use the Kazakh language for statistical accounting, financial and technical documents, and legal proceedings. It also emphasized that the Kazakh language should play a role in international exchanges within the context of the new social civilization. On August 4, 2011, Kazakhstan's Ministry of Culture released the Bill on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Laws Concerning the National Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which required that the drafting of state documents, the names of institutions, signboards, personal lawsuits, applications, job applications, and the content of radio and television broadcasts all be conducted in Kazakh. Written language reform measures have slowed down educational development and hindered cultural inheritance. Language policy has always been a focal topic among Kazakhstan's political elites: Not only do Russian-speaking residents oppose the Latinization of the written language, but many scholars who support the national language also disagree with it.

An analysis of Kazakhstan's domestic language policies leads to the conclusion: The language policies implemented by Kazakhstan, including the Latinization reform of the national written language, aim to change the current situation of Russian dominance within the country and vigorously elevate the status of the Kazakh language. These policies seek to build a national culture centered on Kazakh culture, in order to enhance the public's national identity—and this is also the ultimate goal of Kazakhstan's language policy.

Continuously adjust the status of the Russian language. The ruling class usually suppresses non-official languages for the sake of national security. For Kazakhstan, in order to vigorously develop the Kazakh language, the country has strongly suppressed the use of Russian and reduced the space for Russian usage. However, during the Soviet era, Russian was not only the official language of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic but also the interethnic communication language. In the 2010-2011 academic year, there were 690,000 students studying Russian in Kazakhstan, a 69% decrease compared to the 1990-1991 academic year (2,224,000 students) before the country's independence (R. Li & J. H. Li, 2022). Under the 1993 Constitution, Kazakh was designated as the national language of Kazakhstan, and Russian as the interethnic communication language. In 1995, the Constitution was amended: It reaffirmed Kazakh's status as the national language, while adjusting Russian's

status to that of an official language. In 1997, the revised Language Law once again reaffirmed the status of Kazakh as the national language.

After adjusting its language policy, Kazakhstan's relevant provisions mainly include the following: It shifted from a unitary language policy to a binary language policy with equal emphasis on the national language (Kazakh) and Russian. Specifically, state organs and local self-governing bodies were allowed to use Kazakh and Russian on an equal basis; meanwhile, the government was required to create conditions for ethnic minorities to learn and develop their own ethnic languages, so as to alleviate tensions between the dominant ethnic group and non-dominant ethnic groups, slow down the emigration wave of Russian-speaking ethnic groups, and further maintain national stability and promote cooperation with other countries within the CIS framework.

Development Needs and National Language Policy

Promote the national official language and make it the national common language. Although Nazarbayev once clearly stated at the 15th Session of the Kazakhstan People's Assembly that "Russian will always be an indispensable part of the country's culture and will play an important role in accessing advanced global knowledge and technology and facilitating interethnic communication", the lack of a clear legal status for Russian has caused anxiety among the Russian-speaking population regarding interlingual relations. The sole national language policy has reduced them to second-class citizens; thus, demanding that Russian be granted the status of a second national language or an official language has become a political demand of the Russian-speaking population. Although Kazakhstan's Constitution and Language Law have not explicitly defined Russian as an official language, Russian "can be used on an equally official basis with Kazakh" in state organs and local self-governing bodies. From a legal perspective, state institutions have no obligation to use Russian, and official documents are not required to be fully translated into Russian. It is noted that the widespread proficiency in Russian among Kazakhs provides Kazakhs with access to modern information.

Integration Needs and National Language Policy

Adjust foreign language policy and develop foreign language education. As a country progresses in its development, it will aspire to gain recognition from other countries and develop a need to integrate into the world. This prompts the country to adjust its language policy, and there are two common approaches to this end: first, encouraging people to learn influential foreign languages; second, allowing the use of ethnic minority languages within a certain scope. Take Kazakhstan as an example. In 2006, to integrate into the international community rapidly, President Nazarbayev explicitly proposed the "Trilingual Policy"—with Kazakh as the national language, Russian as the interethnic communication language, and English as the language for smooth integration into the global economy. The implementation and development of this multilingual policy have enabled primary and secondary school students in Kazakhstan to study English, Russian, and Kazakh simultaneously starting from the first grade, a practice that continues throughout their primary and secondary education, with corresponding language textbooks provided. This language policy reform marks a crucial turning point in Kazakhstan's language policy, demonstrating the country's determination to integrate into the world. One key reason for this is that English, as an international language, has become an indispensable tool in people's work and daily lives. This more inclusive language policy has gained wide recognition from other countries around the world. Furthermore, in December 2012, Nazarbayev put forward the Trinity Language Policy in the Kazakhstan-2050 National Development Strategy, emphasizing that "language should serve as a cohesive force for the Kazakh nation". Kazakhstan also approved the 2020-2025 Implementation Plan for Kazakhstan's Language Policy,

which aims to promote the transition of the Kazakh script to the Latin alphabet, highlight the dominant status of the Kazakh language, and strengthen the teaching and application of English.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the initiative to “jointly build the Silk Road Economic Belt” during his visit to Kazakhstan. In October of the same year, President Xi Jinping put forward the “21st-Century Maritime Silk Road” during his visit to Indonesia. The two initiatives, collectively referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), mark their 10th anniversary this year. Over the past decade, the BRI has been guided by the vision of “policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds” and adhered to the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits. As a catalyst for people-to-people communication, language has played a vital role in this process. Over the past 10 years, China and Kazakhstan have co-established Confucius Institutes to cultivate multi-skilled talents, facilitated bilateral and multilateral cooperation, and driven the rapid economic development of both sides. Up to now, China and Kazakhstan have jointly established five Confucius Institutes. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has compiled its first Chinese-Kazakh Dictionary, which not only provides strong support for Chinese language teaching, translation, and research in Kazakhstan but also enables people in Central Asia to better understand China and learn advanced Chinese technologies and concepts. In addition, China and Kazakhstan have carried out student exchange programs. Studying in China has long been a dream for students from Central Asia, with approximately 14,000 Kazakh students currently studying in China. The number of Kazakh students studying in China has grown from 109 in 2001 to 11,784 in 2018, an increase of 108 times over 18 years—surpassing the number of students from other countries along the Belt and Road during the same period.

Allow the inheritance and use of ethnic minority languages within a certain scope. The above facts indicate that after a country’s basic security needs are met, it tends to adjust its language policy for the sake of development—among these adjustments, foreign language policy is the easiest to modify. Since Kazakhstan lacks a nationally dominant ethnic language, it adopts a relatively tolerant attitude towards the development of various ethnic languages. In 1997, Kazakhstan revised the Language Law, reaffirming Kazakh’s status as the national language; both Russian and Kazakh can be used officially in state institutions and local self-governing bodies.

Interpretation of Kazakhstan’s National Language Policy

Dynamic Interpretation of the Evolutionary Laws of National Language Policy

Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that as a country develops, it will generate different needs at different stages, and these different needs will drive the country to adopt different actions. Kazakhstan’s language policy has been continuously evolving, driven by its own needs. By analyzing the logic behind the evolution of Kazakhstan’s language policy, we can provide predictions for the further formulation of its future language policies.

The Comprehensive Role of Multiple Needs in the Formulation of Kazakhstan’s National Language Policy

A country may have numerous needs during a certain period, and accordingly, it will formulate language policies that align with its national security requirements. However, the relationship between these needs and the formulation of language policies is not one-to-one. Sometimes, a single need can lead to the development of multiple language policies. For instance, in its pursuit of integration into global development, Kazakhstan introduced the Trilingual Policy in 2006. This language policy not only addresses the country’s national security and development needs but also helps Kazakhstan integrate into the world and secure more opportunities.

Looking at the evolution of Kazakhstan's language policies, we can identify certain patterns in how a country's language policies develop. First and foremost, a country prioritizes its national security. Additionally, it is quite common for a single language policy to meet multiple needs simultaneously. Furthermore, there are discernible rules governing the formulation of a country's language policies: When multiple linguistic needs conflict, the country will first satisfy the basic-level needs, such as those related to security. A case in point is Kazakhstan's adoption of a relatively inclusive language policy, which permits Russian to serve as an inter-ethnic communication language.

Implications for Our Country

Analyze the International and Domestic Situations to Reserve Language Talents for Our Country

For China, at the current stage, a careful analysis of the international and domestic situations reveals that while China's domestic language resources are relatively abundant, its foreign language resources are relatively scarce. There are over 7,000 languages used worldwide, yet the number of languages that China understands and uses is quite small. This is extremely detrimental to China's participation in international competition—it not only affects China's international development but also endangers national security. Therefore, we must properly handle the relationship between the national common language, ethnic minority languages, and foreign languages, strengthen efforts to cultivate language talents for neighboring countries, and reserve strategic language talents for China.

Step up Efforts to Promote the National Common Language and Contribute to the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation

Promoting and popularizing the national common language and writing system is an important way to forge a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, a fundamental support for building a high-quality education system, and an effective measure for implementing the rural revitalization strategy. However, in reality, due to historical and geographical factors, there remains a significant gap between western and eastern China. The proficiency in the national common language is weak in ethnic minority areas and border areas, and there is still a large gap from the requirement put forward by General Secretary Xi Jinping that the promotion rate of the national common language and writing system should reach 85% by 2025. For this reason, General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized on many occasions the need to “strengthen the promotion of the national common language and writing system”. The Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China also reaffirmed the need to intensify the promotion of the national common language and writing system. Prior to this, in 2022, the Ministry of Education and the National Language Commission issued *Several Opinions on Strengthening the Role of Higher Education Institutions in Supporting the High-Quality Promotion and Popularization of the National Common Language and Writing System*, which put forward three key tasks and ten specific measures, emphasizing the need to step up efforts in promoting the national common language and writing system to improve the level and quality of its popularization. We should achieve effective alignment between the promotion of the national common language and writing system and rural revitalization, ensure economic and social development, and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Conclusion

This paper, based on a review of literature and focusing on core concepts such as “Kazakhstan”, “language policy”, “hierarchy of needs theory”, and “evolution”, explores the logical relationship between the evolution of

Kazakhstan's language policy and changes in national needs, analyzes the logic behind the evolution of Kazakhstan's language policy, and on this basis, puts forward suggestions for China from several aspects. Objectively speaking, in the 30 years since Kazakhstan's independence, the evolution of its language policy has gone through three stages: national language promotion, trilingualization, and Latin script reform. Yet it should also be noted that in the face of global security deficits, language security has been elevated to a national strategic status.

Objectively, by exploring the evolutionary logic of Kazakhstan's national language policy from the perspective of the hierarchy of needs, this paper has, to a certain extent, broadened the academic research field of international language policy, enriched academic research outcomes, and possesses theoretical value and innovation for promoting language services in support of national strategies. However, it should also be acknowledged that due to limitations in literature collection, the analysis of language policy is confined to a single research perspective. In the future, more in-depth research can be conducted on this basis, with a view to providing a more authoritative perspective.

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