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ARTICLE

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The consequences of “New World” colonization on linguistic diversity

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Abstract

The language diversity of our planet is quickly shrinking. This process is often referred to as “natural” but since the life of languages, strictly speaking, depends not on nature but on humans’ activity (or lack of it), it is important to understand what we can do in order to manage language diversity, at least to a certain degree. This article analyzes the state of affairs in the so-called “New World” where the impacts of colonizers were quite tangible and had long-lasting effects on many spheres of life, including languages. The results show that for the moment there is no region with an unconditionally effective language policy in terms of (re)vitalization of indigenous languages but since the situation is in constant flux it is worth further monitoring.

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Introduction

There has been considerable discussion lately about globalization and the inevitable decline of the planet's linguistic diversity, as in (Blommaert 2010). Nevertheless, it is easy to see that the situation in many regions is not the same.

The specifics of the so-called "New World" lie in the fact that colonizers in many cases were more powerful and their languages were more "modernized". As time went on, almost everywhere in the "New World" European languages were approved as official, and even in Greenland, which formally is monolingual, Greenlandic is often supplemented by Danish and English. These facts have been expectedly detrimental for local languages; nevertheless, it is important to understand why the degrees of the impact are different.

Our research questions are: how do language preferences in the "New World" correlate with the usage of languages in governmental spheres, job markets, linguistic landscapes, and education? What factors contribute to the varying degrees of impact on indigenous languages in the "New World"? How does the official status of languages affect their vitality and usage in different regions of the "New World"?

Materials and methods

The materials comprise official documents and publications related to language policy, demographics, educational institutions, and statistics of language use. Sure, it would be very tedious and impractical to analyze every region of the "New World" in this context (there surely would be a lot of very similar tendencies), so it was needed to form some informative sample. I decided to limit myself to regions that meet the following criteria: a) more than one language has official status (no doubt, real usage is more important than statuses but, in many cases, wide usage of unofficial language is complicated); b) at least one of the official languages is "endemic" (to reduce external factors influencing its "popularity", compare the situation with English and French in Canada); c) the corresponding "endemic" languages are not part of dialect continua, as otherwise, the difficulties in identifying the used language may increase. It was also decided to leave sign languages out of the current study, as the spheres of their distribution are often somewhat more special.

After applying the above criteria, the sample came up with ten regions:

- 1) Hawaii (USA) with "endemic" Hawaiian (Austronesian family), alongside English;
- 2) Papua New Guinea with "endemic" Tok Pisin (a creole language based on English) and Hiri Motu (a creole language based on Austronesian Motu), alongside English;
- 3) Vanuatu with "endemic" Bislama (a creole language based on English), alongside English and French;
- 4) Fiji with "endemic" Fijian (Austronesian family), alongside English and Hindi;
- 5) Palau with "endemic" Palauan (Austronesian family), alongside English;
- 6) Northern Mariana Islands with "endemic" Carolinian (Austronesian family), alongside English and Chamorro (official also on Guam);
- 7) Northwest Territories (Canada) with "endemic" Cree (Algic family), alongside

English and French (also Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey, Dogrib, Chipewyan, all of which are parts of dialect continua);

8) Choctaw Reservation (Oklahoma, USA) with “endemic” Choctaw (Muskogean family), alongside English;

9) Haiti with “endemic” Haitian (a creole language based on French), alongside French;

10) Ecuador with “endemic” Shuar (Chicham family), alongside Spanish and Kichwa (forms a part of a dialect continuum).

However, it is necessary to make some additional remarks. The real situation in South America is more complex (for example, there are several languages declared as official in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Colombia), but more or less reliable information on the usage of indigenous languages was found only about Ecuador. Similarly, there are other reservations in the United States but it is the Choctaw one that best meets the required criteria.

Oceania also has more regions of potential interest (all of them officially pair their national language with English, except Easter Island where the main languages are Rapa Nui and Spanish) but due to the number of their population, they will hardly provide serious exceptions to worldwide trends (otherwise much more mentions of them could be expected in the literature). At the same time, New Zealand was excluded from the sample because Māori has official status not only there but also on the Cook Islands (where it is called Cook Islands Māori); nevertheless, the case of New Zealand is quite instructive, so I decided to take it into consideration too.

By examining selected regions with varying language situations, the study uses comparative analysis to understand how different factors affect language vitality. The study assesses correlations between language vitality and usage in public spheres such as governmental spheres, job markets, linguistic landscapes, and education. This involves analyzing the extent to which indigenous languages are integrated into these areas and how this affects their usage and preservation.

These methods collectively allow the study to explore the complex dynamics of language preferences and usage in the “New World” and to draw conclusions about the factors influencing language vitality.

Results

New Zealand

New Zealand came under British control in the 19th century and gained self-government in 1947. Population ~ 5 million people (2023), area ~ 268,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 48,000 dollars (2023).

The Māori Language Act 1987 gave Māori the status of an official language (English is an official language de facto, but not de jure), which implies, in particular, mandatory use of Māori in the names of government agencies and the possibility of using it in public services, courts, the armed forces, and public hospitals. The Māori Language Act 2016 prescribes the use of Māori in the promotion of government services and in the provision of information to the public as far as is reasonably practicable but explicitly stipulates the impossibility of going to court on these issues

(and insisting on being addressed or answered in Māori during legal proceedings). Māori is used on the currency, in automatic teller machines, although its use, for example, in urban landscape remains limited (O'Toole 2020: 201–204).

English was mandated as the language of instruction by the Education Ordinance 1847 and the Native Schools Act 1867; although Māori was not totally banned, sometimes the policy was quite strict (often supported by parents hoping for a better future for their children) and schoolchildren that spoke Māori were punished, also physically (Hoskins et al 2020).

Only in the early 1980s, Māori language nests began to appear, and within a few years, their number had grown to several hundred. Māori-medium primary and secondary schools soon followed (Benton 2023: 580). Māori language nests reached their peak popularity at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, after which interest in them began to wane somewhat: in 2014, they were attended by just under 9,000 children, which is 36% less than in 1993 (King 2018: 602). According to the Education Counts website, in 2024, of the 4,409 preschools in New Zealand, 434 (9.8%) were using the Māori immersion method.

As for school education, according to the same Education Counts website, in 2000, out of 729,689 schoolchildren, 16,524 (2.3%) received education with Māori as the predominant language of instruction; in 2012, out of 759,960 – 16,792 (2.2%); in 2024, out of 850,999 – 27,125 (3.2%).

As of 1981, there were virtually no children with whom Māori was spoken (King 2018: 594–595). According to the censuses, in 2001, out of a total New Zealand population of 3,737,277, Māori was spoken by 160,527 (4.3%); in 2013, the same figures were 4,242,048 and 148,395 (3.5%), respectively; and in 2023 – 4,993,923 and 213,849 (4.3%).

As it is possible to see, the overall situation ceased to be critical; nevertheless, the value of the language remains much more linked to considerations of identity (out of 213,849 speakers of Māori, 182,001, or 85.1%, are ethnical Māori, although the general share of Māori in New Zealand is only 17.8%), improving intercultural relationships and self-development than to economic rewards (Te Huia 2020; O'Toole 2020; Berardi-Wiltshire, Bortolotto 2022), therefore it will be probably difficult to expect a significant increase in the proportion of speakers without further changes in the language policy.

Hawaii

In the 19th century, the Hawaiian Islands came under the control of the United States of America. In 1959, Hawaii received the status of a full-fledged state of the USA. Population ~ 1,5 million people (2020; 0.4% of the US population), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers (0.3% of the US territory), GDP per capita ~ 75,000 dollars (2019; US average for 2024 ~ 85,000 dollars).

In 1900, English was adopted as the sole working language of government; since 1943, laws had to be published only in English (Nakata 2017: 19–20). The 1978 Constitution named English and Hawaiian as the official languages of Hawaii, with the caveat that “Hawaiian shall be required for public acts and transactions only as provided by law”.

State and local governments use Hawaiian for certain words and names in official documents (Nakata 2017: 16), local banks accept checks written in Hawaiian and include Hawaiian in ATMs (Wilson 2014: 222), but the language is not used, for example, in governmental proceedings (Andrade 2020: 37). A result of the long struggle for the use of Hawaiian in courts is that although court proceedings are conducted in English (Kai-Hwa Wang 2018), a notice on the site of Hawaii State Judiciary affirms that people are allowed to communicate with the courts in both English and Hawaiian. The current linguistic landscape in Hawaii is dominated by English: aside from some street and place names, a limited number of business names, and familiar greetings, very few official signs contain the Hawaiian language (Townsend 2014: 11, 78). At the same time, knowledge of Hawaiian opens up some employment opportunities in tourism, entertainment, archives, and museums; Hawaiian is the working language at the Hilo campus of the University of Hawaii (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 309–311).

In 1896, English became the only permitted language of instruction, speaking Hawaiian in schools was punished, and teachers even reprimanded parents who spoke Hawaiian to their children at home (Nakata 2017: 19).

Hawaiian language nests and immersion schools began to appear in the mid-1980s (Snyder-Frey 2013: 235; Nakata 2017: 15; Ka'ai 2020: 33). Programs of total immersion usually entail teaching all subjects through Hawaiian, except English language arts, typically introduced at Grade 5; partial immersion at the secondary level typically involves teaching Hawaiian language arts and at least one other subject-matter course through Hawaiian (Wilson, Kamanā 2011: 43). As of 2015, 21 educational institutions and approximately 2,000 students were involved in instruction in Hawaiian (Nakata 2017: 21–22); their approximate share of the total can be estimated given that, according to the Department of Education, in 2024 there were 294 educational institutions and approximately 173,000 students in Hawaii. However, even some school principals consider education in Hawaiian detrimental to students' social adaptation (Wilson, Kamanā 2013: 154–155).

In 1978, the number of native Hawaiian speakers was estimated at 2,000 (No'Eau Warner 2013: 135–136); by the time Hawaiian language education programs were launched, of approximately 1,000 speakers, 200 were residents of the closed island of Niihau and 800 were people aged 60 and older (Galla 2018: 110). According to recent estimates, there are 5-7 thousand (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 309) or 10 thousand (Wilson 2014: 225) fluent speakers, and a number of 18,610 people speaking Hawaiian at home (American Community Survey 2009–2013) is less reliable because it probably includes those using just separate terms and phrases. Anyway, although the situation of the Hawaiian language has improved significantly, the percentage of those who speak it remains small (according to the 2010 census, the population of Hawaii was 1,360,301 people).

It is also worth noting that a key role in the increase in the number of speakers was played by education since most parents of new speakers of Hawaiian do not speak it. In addition, the new speakers are ethnically heterogeneous, that is, unlike many other communities, the defining factor here is not a common “physical” or “blood” identity,

but a linguistic one (Brenzinger, Heinrich 2013: 312–314); this can be partly explained by historically active migration processes (Cowell 2012: 179–182; Smead 2012: 212).

Papua New Guinea

In 1884, the eastern half of the island of New Guinea (the future Papua New Guinea) was divided between Germany in the north and the United Kingdom in the south; both parts came under the control of Australia at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1975, Papua New Guinea gained independence. Population ~ 12 million people (2021), area ~ 463,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 2,500 dollars (2025).

The Constitution (adopted in 1975) does not explicitly proclaim any language as official, but calls for all persons and governmental bodies to endeavor to achieve universal literacy in Tok Pisin, Hiri Motu or English, and requires applicants for citizenship to speak and understand Tok Pisin, or Hiri Motu, or a vernacular of the country (there are more than 800 of them), sufficiently for normal conversational purposes. The three languages are also mentioned in PNG National Policy on Information and Communications: English – as the official language of international communication and commerce, Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu – as the official languages of convenience. In practice, Tok Pisin is the dominant language in parliament, and English is the dominant language in the courts, business (Anere 2017: 1), and the linguistic landscape (Volker 2015: 207).

In 1962, English was established as the language of education (Megarrity 2005); since 1976, schools were legally allowed to use the vernacular in Grades 1 and 2 when necessary for specific explanations, and local-language pre-primary schools had attained national support by 1986 (Honeyman 2015). In the second half of the 1990s, the government initiated an education reform that defined the first three years of education to be “in the child’s own language” (Department of Education 1996: 7). Practical realization of this prescription caused many difficulties (among other things, with materials and personnel), and after years of complaints from parents and teachers, in 2013, English was re-established as the language of instruction (Litteral 2015: 95–97), although Elementary Preparatory teachers are allowed to use the local vernacular during their lessons to explain difficult concepts (Government of PNG 2013: 2). To summarize it briefly, well-developed curriculums and acquisition of skills useful for modern life turned out to be more important arguments than support of linguistic diversity and comfort of pupils (Volker 2015).

Censuses do not provide data on the number of speakers, but as of 2022, the website www.ethnologue.com estimated the number of Tok Pisin speakers as a first language at 130,000, as a second language at 4 million; the number of Hiri Motu speakers as a second language was estimated at 100,000 which is a decrease from 120,000 in 1989 (Sankoff 2021: 76), despite at least threefold growth of the population since that time. The Australian National University website estimates the number of Tok Pisin speakers as more than 6 million.

The country’s significant linguistic diversity will inevitably diminish: according to a study by Kik et al (2021), 66% of the families surveyed spoke Tok Pisin, 4% spoke English, and all other languages were spoken in only 30% of families. If parents speak

different languages, the main language in the family usually becomes Tok Pisin or English (Devette-Chee 2021a: 2); sometimes this also happens when the parents have a common “local” language (Volker 2015: 210).

One more question is: how is it possible to have such a low number of English speakers despite at least its omnipresence in schools? PNG’s literacy rate is on the rise (57.3% in 2000, 61.6% in 2010, 63.4% in 2015) but still remains low, and the reasons are many: lack of affordable education facilities and learning resources, weak teaching skills, frequent teacher and student absenteeism, use of the local languages instead of English, general poverty and so on (Devette-Chee 2021b). Nevertheless, the situation is improving, so it is quite possible that over time, Tok Pisin will also begin to be on the decline.

Vanuatu

The first Europeans arrived in Vanuatu in the 17th century. In 1906, the territory came under the joint control of France and Britain. In 1980, Vanuatu gained independence. Population ~ 350,000 people (2023), area ~ 12,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 3,000 dollars (2023). It should also be noted that taking into account the approximate number of local languages (138), most of which have no more than a thousand speakers, Vanuatu is the most linguistically densely populated region on the planet (François et al 2015).

According to the 1979 Constitution, the national language of the Republic is Bislama; the official languages are Bislama, English, and French; the principal languages of education are English and French; citizens of Vanuatu may obtain the services which they may rightfully expect from the administration of the Republic in the official language of their choice, and may make complaints to the Ombudsman in case of violations. The main of many additional recent specifications are listed below.

In the public sphere: Vanuatu State Law Office ensures all bills are in English and French, the Parliament ensures that debates are in Bislama though bills are in English and French (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 13); in general, it is English that prevails in the legal context (Schneider 2022). Any document to be disseminated for public consumption through the Government Network must be in Bislama, English, and French, “or, in worst cases, in English and French” (Government of Vanuatu 2020b: 38); any public institution may use a vernacular language to disseminate a piece of information if it deems necessary (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 24).

The private sector is free to communicate information in any of the official languages, but if the government deems it necessary, it may require private sector institutions to also use the two other official languages, and in times of emergency private sector institutions may use all the three official languages or a vernacular language; information sent out to Vanuatu citizens through mobile phones should be also in Bislama; languages should not be an obstacle to access job opportunities, hence, job advertisements, in some cases, should not have strict language requirements; products from Vanuatu shall also be labeled in Bislama; user instructions for any product or service should be in any of the three official languages (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 22–24, 29, 33). In practice, Vanuatu’s language market continues to be dominated by English and French (Vandeputte 2020: 281).

In 2012, it was permitted to use Bislama or a local vernacular in the first two years of school, with the possibility to use the agreed local vernacular languages to support children as long as is necessary (Vanuatu Ministry of Education 2012: 2). Later instructions are more strict: services in the educational sphere shall be provided in English and French, and may also be provided in Bislama and vernaculars when necessary; teaching and learning in all schools around the country shall be done in English and French, vernacular languages and Bislama may also be allowed in a classroom only to ease understanding of young children; Bislama teaching in classrooms shall first go through careful consultation with all the national stakeholders before it shall be applied; teaching and learning in Rural Training Centers may also be conducted in Bislama; for education and training institutions and providers it is enough to disseminate information in the language of instruction, not in all three official languages (Government of Vanuatu 2020a: 20–21, 24).

Since the British-French condominium, there has been an informal dividing line between regions that give priority to English or French in education (Van Trease 1995). According to the 2009 census, of a total of 61,931 students aged 5 years and over, English was the language of instruction for 29,357 (47.4%), French for 13,259 (21.4%), English and French for 927 (1.5%), and the local language for 1,861 (3.0%); data for the languages of the remaining students are not available.

According to the Ministry of Education and Training data for 2020, Bislama was used as the language of education only in pre-school institutions (for 1,352, or 8.3%, out of 16,253 students); in primary schools, out of 56,633 students, 38,561 (68.1%) studied in English, 17,862 (31.5%) in French; in secondary schools, out of 23,943 students, 17,128 (71.5%) studied in English, 6,815 (28.5%) in French.

The presence of Bislama in education is sometimes further restricted: for example, the relevant prohibitions are spelled out in the statutes of the Louis-Antoine de Bougainville School and the Catholic School of Montmartre – but in practice, these prohibitions are often violated both outside and inside the classroom (Vandeputte 2020: 280). At the same time, many parents perceive the presence of Bislama in educational programs as an obstacle to learning English and French (Vandeputte 2020: 279–281) and question the usefulness of Bislama in future life (Willans 2017: 9–11).

The 2009 census provides data on the language spoken at home: of 47,373 private households, Bislama was the main language for 15,985 (33.7%), English for 930 (2.0%), French for 297 (0.6%), local languages for 29,947 (63.2%), and other languages for 214 (0.5%). Of the 195,800 persons aged 5 years and over living in private households, 143,977 (73.6%) spoke (“can write and read a simple sentence”) Bislama, 125,313 (64.0%) spoke English, 72,245 (36.9%) spoke French, and 98,232 (50.2%) spoke other (local) languages.

The 2020 Census contains a question on the chronologically first language learned: out of a total of 239,839 residents aged 3 years and above living in private households, this is Bislama for 34,723 (14.5%), English for 4,955 (2.1%), French for 1,942 (0.8%), and other (local) languages for 198,216 (82.6%). 90.1% of the population aged 15 years and above can read or write a simple sentence in Bislama, 76.9% in English, 40.0% in French, and 70.9% in other (local) languages.

From the data presented, it is easy to see that the population masters Bislama (especially if involved in interethnic and urban communication (Lavender Forsyth 2024)). At the same time, the knowledge of English and French is also growing. Given the situation in education, Bislama works as lingua franca between “anglophones” and “francophones”, and in view of the recent changes in language policy, the situation certainly deserves further monitoring.

Fiji

Fiji came under British control in 1874. From 1879 to 1915, into the country came ~ 60,000 workers from India (according to the 2007 census, Indo-Fijians made up ~ 37.5% of the population). Independence was gained in 1970. Population ~ 925,000 people (2018), area ~ 18,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 6,000 dollars (2023).

The 1990 Constitution specifies English, Fijian, and Hindi as official languages, and English as the official language of Parliament (with the possibility to address the Speaker in Fijian and Hindi). The 1997 Constitution emphasizes the equality of Fijian, Hindi, and English. The 2013 Constitution makes no explicit mention of official languages but states that it will be adopted in English with subsequent translation into Fijian and Hindi and that Fijian and Fijian Hindi will be taught as compulsory subjects in primary schools.

After independence, English has continued to dominate official life and business, although some documents were also translated into Fijian and Hindi; only English is used on the currency, with the exception of the one-dollar coin, which features a traditional ceramic water jug and its Fijian name: saqamoli (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 30–32). Difficulties in expanding the scope of Fijian were also due to the lack of a strong literary tradition (Goundar 2019: 61), and for Hindi, to the fact that many Fijians do not master the Devanagari writing system, while Fijian Hindi itself remains poorly described (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 33; Goundar 2019: 65).

The Education Commission’s 1969 regulation establishing English as the language of instruction from grade four onwards is still in force (Nicholls 2014: 10). The language of instruction in primary schools is chosen by the religious, community, and parent-teacher committees (Shameem 2002: 390). This choice is often (especially in rural areas) facilitated by the traditional division of schools into “Fijian” and “Indian”, despite attempts to eliminate this division (Mugler 1996: 282).

According to statistical research of 1985, in grade 1, Fijian was used 20% of the time, (other) local languages 80% of the time; in grade 2, the percentage was 40% for Fijian, 40% for local languages, 20% for English; in grades 5 and 6, Fijian had 40% of the time, local languages – 10%, English – 50% (Roberts 2007: 19). Currently, English is the dominant language of instruction, especially in multicultural schools (ibid), including in the primary grades (Lagi 2016: 92), but teachers often switch between languages while giving explanations (Nicholls 2014: 63; Lagi 2016: 93).

At the same time, teachers (Nicholls 2014: 95), parents (Lagi 2016: 95), and students themselves (Nicholls 2014: 3) express opinions about the greater importance of English for future life.

Fijian and Fijian Hindi are roughly equally distributed as the first languages of approximately 95% of the population of Fiji, while English is the first language of 1-

3% (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 26). In absolute figures, the number of Fijian speakers is estimated at 400-500 thousand (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 63; Roberts 2007: 8).

Although English is the home language of a clear minority of students (Nicholls 2014: 60), a survey conducted as early as 1993 showed that in the capital region, people with different primary languages actively used English as lingua franca (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 86); a later study shows the same tendency for inter-ethnic communication in schools (Hopf et al 2017). In addition, some parents use English to make the learning process at school easier for their children (Lagi 2016: 90), and the most familiar written language for schoolchildren is also English (Nicholls 2014: 60). As a result, more and more parents complain about children's poor knowledge of their language, especially in urban areas (Mangubhai, Mugler 2006: 103; Roberts 2007: 34).

Palau

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Palau Islands gradually came under Spanish control. In 1899, the archipelago was sold to the German Empire. In 1914, the Japanese Empire established its control, followed by the United States in 1944. In 1994, Palau gained independence, however, the country remains highly dependent on US funding, and its economy also relies heavily on tourism, mainly from Japan and China (Matsumoto 2020: 36). Population ~ 17,000 people (2021), area ~ 459 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 17,000 dollars (2024).

The Constitution (adopted in 1981) proclaims Palauan and English as official languages. Japanese, Tobian, and Sonsorol are additional official languages in one state each, but since the population of these states, according to the 2015 census, is 119, 25, and 40 people, it can be expected that the impact of these statuses on the actual linguistic situation is minimal.

Without knowledge of English, it is impossible to apply for prestigious jobs, such as civil servants or employees of Palau Community College: the country's only university (Okayama 2015: 111–112, 148). Almost all documents, with the exception of legal documents on land disputes, are written in English; Palauan is present on a small number of information signs: in shops, in the national hospital, and in the national museum (Okayama 2015: 244, 277). At the same time, the use of Palauan is complicated by the large influx of migrants (especially from the Philippines, where English is one of the two official languages): as of 2012, approximately 27% of Palauan citizens were born in another country (Okayama 2015: 6).

In 1963, English was designated as the language of education, and a bilingual education program was launched in 1973 (Okayama 2015: 68–69). Since 1997, instruction in Palauan has been part of the curriculum in both primary and secondary schools; many students do not understand either English or Palauan well, so teachers alternate between the two languages in varying proportions (Okayama 2015: 175–192). Textbooks for all subjects except Palauan studies are written in English (Okayama 2015: 226).

Interestingly, many English-speaking parents send their children to schools where Palauan is predominantly used because they see no other way to acquire the language; as a result, the use of English in schools increases (Matsumoto 2020: 48).

According to the 2005 census, of the 14,154 residents aged 18 years and over,

Palauan was the only language spoken at home by 8,753 (61.8%), while English was spoken at home by 2,268 (16.0%) and Japanese by 115 (0.8%). In the 2020 census, the same numbers were, respectively, 13,576 and 5,367 (39.6%), 8,893 (65.6%), and 20 (0.15%).

It is possible to add several more specific observations to these statistics: the older generation often complains that youngsters do not know how to speak Palauan correctly and often switch to English (Matsumoto 2020: 47); out of more than 300 participants in a research survey, not a single one asked for a version of the questionnaire in Palauan, that is, English is absolutely dominant as a written language (Matsumoto 2020: 51); according to a survey by the Japan Foundation in 2017, Palau is in third place in the world in terms of the number of people studying Japanese, and the Japanese of young Palauans is expectedly closer to the literary version than that of older ones (Matsumoto 2020: 42–43).

Northern Mariana Islands

Spain laid claim to the Northern Mariana Islands in the 16th century. In 1899, they were sold to the German Empire, in 1918, came under the control of the Japanese Empire, and in 1947, were transferred to the United States as a trustee. In 1986, they became an unincorporated territory of the United States. Population ~ 55,000 people (2022), area ~ 464 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 21,000 dollars (2019).

The Constitution (ratified in 1977) names as official languages Chamorro, Carolinian, and English, and specifies that the legislature may provide government proceedings and documents in at least one of the three languages. There are prescriptions for the establishment of the Chamorro-Carolinian Language Policy Commission which should, among other things, establish and enforce policies regarding Chamorro and Carolinian translations, certify all Chamorro and Carolinian translators, promulgate rules and regulations for Chamorro and Carolinian languages used on all government or public documents and public places, make recommendations on policies governing the usage of Chamorro and Carolinian language in the government sector (Fifteen Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature 2007), but it appears that in practice English is the only useful language on the job market (Ellis 2012: 352).

In 1972, bilingual education programs were launched and quickly gained momentum. However, despite the efforts of enthusiasts, it was not until 1985 that these programs were officially approved, and officially implemented in 1988, by which time the initial enthusiasm had already faded (Ellis 2012: 346). At the same time, parents usually preferred to address their children in English, which would be useful both at school and at work, and to expect that children would learn local languages from their peers and through bilingual education programs (Ellis 2012: 352).

Among the more recent immersion initiatives, it is possible to mention the Carolinian Immersion Program at Kagman Elementary School in Saipan, due to which 12 kindergarten students and 16 first graders take Carolinian classes entirely in the native language (KUAM News 2023).

According to the 1990 census, there were 3,000 people speaking Carolinian. Today it is difficult to find Carolinian speakers below the age of thirty or so (Ellis 2016:

199), and while a few decades ago, many members of the younger generation spoke a mixture of Carolinian and English, now it is much more difficult to detect traces of Carolinian in children's speech (Ellis 2012: 353–354).

Northwest Territories

At the beginning of the 18th century, these lands came under the control of the British Empire; in 1870 – under the control of Canada. The Northwest Territories have existed in their current borders since 1999. Population ~ 41,000 people (2021; 0.1% of Canada's population), area ~ 1.3 million square kilometers (13.5% of Canada's territory), GDP per capita ~ 108,000 thousand dollars (2017; average for Canada in 2024 ~ 55,000 dollars).

The Language Act was approved in 1984, mentioning the indigenous (aboriginal) languages of the Northwest Territories but designating only French and English as official languages. In 1990, the Act was amended recognizing the official status of the indigenous languages and creating the position of the Languages Commissioner (with authority to investigate complaints in regard to compliance with the Act; and also, to engage in activities related to the promotion and protection of the official languages which is now fulfilled by the Minister Responsible for Official Languages and the Official Languages Board). The amendments of 2001 have brought the number and names of the official languages to the current state. The Act provides the possibility to receive government services in the official languages where there is “a significant demand” and it is “reasonable”.

There are additional payments for bilingual civil servants, but the data on the number of such employees is contradictory: in 2021/22, out of a total of 6,300 employees, either 340 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 9) or 171 (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 18) received additional payments, in 2023/24 their number was 169 (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 19), but it remains unclear whether knowledge of languages also implies their use. Teachers receive additional payments specifically for the use of indigenous languages: their number was 105 in 2010 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 9), 37 in 2021/22 (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 18), and 50 in 2023/24 (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 19).

NWT Fire Information Officers with the Department of Environment and Climate Change have local language interpreters available when on an incident (Government of Northwest Territories 2024: 16). The lobby signage/directory for the Yellowknife office is in all official Indigenous languages (ibid: 18). Ensuring the right to receive services in any of the official languages and supporting government employees who speak the official languages – as well as increasing the presence of Indigenous languages in the linguistic landscape – are among the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Government Operations (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023).

In the 2021/22 school year, 4 of the 49 schools in the Northwest Territories were implementing indigenous language immersion programs in primary grades, with the number expected to increase to 5 schools the following year (Government of Northwest Territories 2022: 10). The Standing Committee on Government Operations plans to

further increase the presence of the indigenous languages in education (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 7): a teacher training program has been established for the 2023/24 school year, with the possibility of further expansion (Government of the Northwest Territories 2023: 5).

The total number of speakers of indigenous languages in the region is decreasing: in 2014 there were 7,900 of them (of which 320 were Cree speakers), in 2019 – 6,800 (260), with half of them over 50 years old, and fifth – over 65 (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 4). According to the study by the Bureau of Statistics, the number of people wishing to learn indigenous languages is several times greater than the number of speakers; specifically for Cree, 3,470 people expressed such a desire (19th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly 2023: 4–5). Nevertheless, it is obvious that not every (adult) person who wants to learn the language manages to master it well, even under ideal conditions.

It is also important to note that the overall situation with the Cree language is much less dire, with a total of 96,000 speakers according to the 2016 census. However, based on formal criteria, it is “endemic” to the Northwest Territories: at the moment, Cree has not received official status in any other region (of Canada).

Choctaw Reservation

Oklahoma became a part of the United States in 1803, and the Choctaw Reservation in its modern borders has existed since 1867. Population ~ 227,000 people (2020; 0.07% of the US population), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers (0.3% of the US territory), GDP per capita in Oklahoma ~ 53,000 dollars (2019; US average for 2024 ~ 85,000 dollars).

Much space in the existing literature is devoted to the struggle of Choctaw people for their rights but I have not managed to find information about the status of the language and regulation of its usage: for example, there are no mentions of Choctaw language in the current Constitution of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma (ratified in 1983). In practice English is the only language used in the workplace, while Choctaw can be seen on signs at buildings and casinos (Kickham 2015: 22). And although the site of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma offers some career possibilities for Choctaw tribal members, knowledge of the language is not mentioned as an advantage.

Currently, the main role of Choctaw in educational programs is a (possible) object of study (Oklahoma 2014: 5): according to the site of Choctaw Tribal Schools, this project is realized in six elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There were attempts to introduce the Choctaw Bilingual Education program in Mississippi with Choctaw as a primary medium of instruction with a gradual switch to English as early as the 1970s (York et al 1976: 7); there are some mentions of more recent immersion programs but without concrete quantitative data (Kwachka and Thompson 2018). Be it as it may, observations show that the students usually do not overcome a basic level of language proficiency (Pauls 2024), and 13 years of the Choctaw Community Education Program have not produced a single speaker of the language (Kickham 2015: 2). Maybe a full-fledged language nest could be more productive but, according to the data on the site of Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, for the moment it is on the stage of planning.

Estimates of the number of Choctaw speakers vary: at least 4,000 in 2007, with all first language speakers over the age of 50 (Kickham 2015: 19–20); the 2015 census put the figure at 9,600. Still, without further changes, this number will inevitably decrease because parents no longer transmit the language to their children (Kickham 2015: 2).

Haiti

The Spanish first arrived in the future territory of Haiti in 1492, and then gradually took control of it. In 1697, the corresponding lands were transferred to France. In 1804, Haiti gained independence. From 1915 to 1934, it was controlled by the United States. Population ~ 11.5 million people (2023), area ~ 28,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 2,500 dollars (2025).

The 1918 Constitution declared French the official language. The 1983 Constitution left French as the official language and designated two national languages: French and Haitian. The 1987 Constitution declared Haitian the national language, Haitian and French the official languages, and explicitly established the state's obligation to use both languages to inform citizens. However, this requirement is generally ignored: a quick glance at government websites and documents is enough to see the almost total dominance of French (DeGraff et al 2022: 51); French is also the language of most court proceedings (Kuhn 2020: 10).

Among other language provisions in the Constitution are the following: reasons for detention or arrest must be stated in both Haitian and French, customs documents must be completed in French, and tax returns may be filed in both French and Haitian. Banknote inscriptions are in French, partly duplicated in Haitian. As for employment opportunities, many of them require the use of French (Ulysse, Burns 2022: 167).

Signs on government buildings are in French only; municipal buildings in the capital have signs in French, and those in provincial towns – in French and Haitian. Large stores and large businesses in the capital have signs and advertising posters in French, medium-sized businesses – in French and Haitian, and small businesses – in Haitian only (Kozhemyakina 2021: 148).

In 1979, it was permitted to learn Haitian and study in Haitian in schools. In 1982, a decree was passed mandating the use of Haitian as the language of instruction from first to tenth grade, while French was determined as an additional language of instruction in sixth grade, but a moratorium was placed on this decree later that year (DeGraff et al 2022: 48–50).

Despite many further discussions, experiments, and plans (Dewar 2019: 13–14; DeGraff et al 2022: 73), for now, the language of education remains French, and Haitian appears (in some places quite actively) in the educational process “out of necessity”, since students – and sometimes teachers – do not always have sufficient knowledge of French (Dewar 2019; DeGraff et al 2022: 37–38): according to the results of testing in 2009, approximately 85% of 367 teachers showed a level of proficiency in French between A2 and B1 (Wolff, Aithnard 2014: 359). At the same time, there are also cases when students are punished, humiliated, and even expelled from school for speaking Haitian (DeGraff 2017).

A study of parents' views on the possible use of Haitian as a language of

instruction in schools found that while parents acknowledged the importance of Haitian for their children, they saw a problem with the limited scope of Haitian in society and the labor market, compared to French (Dewar 2019).

Reliable data on language proficiency in Haiti is not easy to find: in general, researchers agree that (almost) everyone speaks Haitian, while figures for French include 5% (Hebblethwaite 2012), 42% (Wolff, Aithnard 2014: 18) (most likely an overestimate, since the publisher is Francophonie), at most 5% (DeGraff 2016: 435), around 5% (Marcelin 2020: 1), less than 10% (Dupuy 2023: 428).

How is it possible to explain the continued strength of the Haitian language? In recent decades, the country has been periodically shaken by armed coups and natural disasters. About half of Haiti’s population is illiterate; among children who enter the first grade, a large proportion drops out of school at an early age, and at most 10% graduate from high school (DeGraff 2016: 435). I personally visited Haiti in 2010 and saw houses made of cardboard boxes in the suburbs of the capital, as well as many school-age children who are forced to earn a living instead of studying. It is obvious that in such conditions, the language policy has less influence on the language preferences of the society.

Ecuador

In the 15th century, the territory of the future Ecuador came under the control of the Incas, most of whom were Quechua Indians. In the 16th century, the territory came under Spanish control. In 1830, Ecuador gained independence. Population ~ 17,5 million people (2023), area ~ 284,000 square kilometers, GDP per capita ~ 6,500 dollars (2024).

Even the more widespread Kichwa (the language of ~ 3.2% of the population, according to the 2022 census) did not immediately achieve official recognition: only in the 1979 Constitution were “Kichwa and other languages as parts of the national culture” added to the official Spanish.

The path of the Shuar was as follows: in 1964, a federation for the protection of the rights of the Shuar people was created (Valeš 2014: 50); in the Constitution of 1998, not only Kichwa but also Shuar (“and other indigenous languages”) were mentioned as official languages for the ethnic groups that speak them; in the current Constitution (2008), the official language is Spanish, and the official languages of intercultural communication are Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar (for the other indigenous languages, official status is provided for the corresponding ethnic groups in the places of their compact residence).

In practice, only Spanish is used in the official sphere; the role of other languages remains symbolic and does not bring any regular financial benefits. Moreover, Kichwa is the only indigenous language that is at least more or less actively discussed in this context, since even the level of description of other languages remains very low (Valeš 2014).

Starting from the 1940s, there were some experimental initiatives in the sphere of bilingual education. 1982 saw a ministerial agreement that provided formalization of bilingual-bicultural education in areas with a predominantly indigenous population. The Constitution of 1983 included a prescription that in education systems developed

in areas with a predominantly indigenous population, Kichwa, or the language of the respective culture was to be used as the primary language of education, and Spanish – as the language of intercultural relations (the current Constitution formulates that the language of the respective nationality will be used as the primary language of education and Spanish – as the language of intercultural relations). In 1988, the National Directorate of Bilingual Intercultural Indigenous Education was created (Ministerio 2013: 23).

Throughout the 1990s, most Shuar schools became part of the national Intercultural Bilingual Education System (Buitron, Deshoulliere 2019: 180). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the bilingual programs raises many questions, since in practice presence of indigenous languages in them is very limited (Mashinkias Chinkias 2012: 121–122; Valeš 2013: 132–133; Rodríguez Cruz 2015: 666; Haboud 2019: 10), often producing less than modest results (Limerick 2018). And since only Spanish offers economic advantages, using other languages, for example, in mathematics lessons would be “irresponsible” (Robinette 2015: 20).

According to the 2001 census, the number of Shuar speakers was 46,261 (with an overall population number of 12,156,608 or 12,142,429); the 2011 census does not give a precise number of Shuar speakers, but indicates that out of 1,017,469 speakers of indigenous languages, Shuar is spoken by 6.05% (that is 61,557; out of 14 483 499 or 14 459 077 of the total population); according to the 2022 census, Shuar is spoken by 58,770 (out of 16,938,986 of the total population). The apparently stable quantity of Shuar speakers ceases to be such if we take into consideration the general growth of the population; moreover, it is Morona Santiago province which is the home of the most Shuar speakers and at the same time maintains the highest fertility rate. And even if for the moment the loss of Shuar has not had a very noticeable effect on the number of speakers, the language is less widely used by youngsters compared with elders in all communities (Valeš 2013: 134).

On the other hand, how is it possible to explain that the shrinking of the Shuar for the moment is not very drastic? According to the 2010 census, 78.5% of the indigenous people in Ecuador lived in rural areas, 48% of indigenous households had no access to clean drinking water and 72% were not connected to a public sanitary sewage network. Moreover, according to the National Survey of Employment, Unemployment and Underemployment (Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo), in 2003, the average years of schooling for urban adult (24 years or older) population was 10.39 years, while for rural adult population only 5.68 years; in 2017, the same numbers were, respectively, 11.31 and 7.50 years. If the trend towards modernization continues, the situation with Shuar can quickly become much worse.

Discussion

Many studies of language policy, like (Spolsky 2021), mention a lot of factors that can potentially influence the language choices of communities. Nevertheless, as we saw above, some of these factors can be named “primary”, and in competition between historical, ideological, cultural, and utilitarian factors, unfortunately for many scientists (see also (Garcia 2015)), it is the economic perspectives that usually win. Of

course, it is easier to find a possibility for cultural development if more basic needs of Maslow’s hierarchy are satisfied, but without support from above, enthusiasts in most cases are capable of creating no more than linguistic ghettos.

Another popular trend in the literature concerns the potential benefits of using mother tongues in education (Volker 2015; Stoop 2017; DeGraff et al 2022; and many others). Throughout the world, people receive education in a language other than their family language in about 40 percent of cases (Walter, Benson 2012: 282), but as we saw above, in many cases societies are ready to tolerate this discomfort if their languages do not help to invest efforts in a “better future”.

Conclusion

Language diversity of the “New World” is affected by languages brought to it by colonizers everywhere but to different degrees. Many communities that have not managed to get official status for their languages actively shift to other languages, and in many cases, officialization is not a panacea either: it can provide a framework for language maintenance but must be accompanied by active usage in public and socioeconomic spheres to give people stable motivation to strengthen their (and their children’s) language skills.

More concretely, the language situations considered above can be roughly divided into three groups:

- 1) indigenous languages have not managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere and gradually fall out of use: Fiji, Palau, Northern Mariana Islands, Northwest Territories, and Choctaw Reservation;
- 2) indigenous languages have not managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere but their loss is hampered by the harsh socioeconomic conditions of life: Papua New Guinea, Haiti, and Ecuador;
- 3) indigenous languages have managed to take a perceptible niche in the public sphere that to somewhat extent helps to stabilize the situation: New Zealand, Hawaii, and Vanuatu.

It seems that for the moment the “New World” lacks a possible fourth scenario in which indigenous languages reclaim space for active spreading, like in Basque Country or Kazakhstan, but let us continue to keep an eye on this area.

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Functional Multilingualism in the Northern Kazakhstan: A Comparative Study (2017–2022)

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Abstract

This study examines language use, language preferences and self-reported multilingual practices among young residents of the Aqmola region between 2017 and 2022. The questionnaire was conducted among 60 residents of the Aqmola region aged from 15 to 25 years to see how they use Kazakh, Russian and English languages. The data were collected through a questionnaire survey, analyzed using SPSS and interpreted through quantitative comparative analysis. The findings suggest multilingual tendencies among the respondents, where Kazakh, Russian and English are used in different communicative and educational contexts, while some participants additionally reported the use of the other heritage or ethnic languages. Moreover, the study indicates that multilingualism in Kazakhstan has not been researched in relation to specific regions, especially in linguistically diverse areas like the Aqmola region.

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Introduction

Multilingualism is a prevalent and dynamic phenomenon that shapes societies in profound ways. The Aqmola region in northern Kazakhstan represents a linguistically diverse sociolinguistic environment shaped by historical bilingualism and contemporary multilingual policies. According to the 2021 census data from the Bureau of National Statistics, the region had a population of 723 289, comprising various ethnic groups: Kazakhs (436 984), Russians (210 769), Uzbeks (1 457), Ukrainians (40 563), Uighurs (346), Tatars (13 707), and Germans (30 121). The 2021 annual People Census revealed that only 459 730 respondents (63.5%) out of 723 289 reported using the Kazakh language in their daily lives, while 263,559 people (36.4%) stated that they do not use the state language (Bureau of National Statistics, 2022). The Aqmola region is home to a diverse array of ethnic groups, including Kazakhs, Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Uighurs, Tatars, and Germans. This diversity is reflected in the variety of languages spoken, showcasing the multicultural structure of the Aqmola region.

Historically, Kazakhstan's ties to the Soviet Union shaped its language policy, with Russian mandated as the official language. Even post-independence, Russian has retained its prominence in academia, science, business, politics, mass media, and education. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan endeavored to reinstate Kazakh as the state language while preserving the use of Russian. This bilingual approach reflected the country's evolving linguistic landscape. Recognizing the imperative of global integration, Kazakhstan's educational system now promotes English proficiency across all institutions to enhance adaptability and competitiveness internationally. Legally, Kazakh is designated as the official language in public administration, yet the use of Russian is accommodated, ensuring equitable language implementation. Data from the Bureau of National Statistics (2022) underscores the widespread use of Kazakh among the population, alongside Russian.

Additionally, various ethnic groups in Kazakhstan continue to speak their native languages, contributing to the country's linguistic diversity. The law on languages, 1997 supports the languages of other ethnicities. With one official language—Kazakh and the Russian language that is equally used in the government and official bodies (Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1995)—and English as the dominant foreign language (Trilingual education in Kazakhstan 2017), Kazakhstan presents an intriguing context for exploring how multiple languages coexist, interact, and influence social, cultural, and political life.

This study aims to fill this gap by providing analysis of the linguistic situation in the Aqmola region in the northern part of Kazakhstan. Specifically, it seeks to

understand the dynamics in language preferences of the young residents, language policy awareness and their self-reported language preferences in Kazakh, Russian and English, which will assist researchers in understanding how language policy developed in the Aqmola region between 2017 and 2022 based on speakers' reports on their language proficiency in three languages. By examining these aspects, the study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the practical and ideological dimensions of trilingualism in a multilingual Aqmola region.

The scope of this study is confined to the three mainly languages of Kazakhstan, Kazakh as the state language, Russian as officially used language and English as a foreign language. While the focus is on Kazakhstan, particularly the Aqmola region, the findings have broader implications for other multilingual contexts and contribute to the global discourse on language policy issues and sociolinguistics too.

Research questions guiding this study include: (1) What changes occurred in the language preferences of the residents in the Aqmola region between 2017 and 2022? (2) What languages do respondents identified as their "native" or first language? (3) What is the resident's attitude toward learning foreign languages? (4) What is the level of awareness of the young residents regarding the trilingual language policy in the country? (5) How do the residents evaluate their language proficiencies in three main languages, Kazakh, Russian and English, as well as other languages? By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide insights into the language situation in the Aqmola region.

The findings contribute to the current discussion on multilingualism across the country that will be of the interest to the scholars and will promote research on multilingualism in various regions of the country, which is an underresearched field of study. Moreover, this research may possibly offer practical implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders in fostering a more inclusive and multilingual environment.

Conceptualizing multilingualism

It is now understood that bilingual speakers use different languages for various purposes, in different contexts, and with varying levels of proficiency to interact with others, according to Wei (2020). This functional perspective is relevant in the context of Kazakhstan, where Kazakh, Russian and English have different communicative and social roles. In the Aqmola region, Kazakh primarily functions as the state and identity language, Russian remains widely used in everyday and professional communication, while English is mainly associated with education, academic mobility and global integration.

Based on Hoffmann (2001), trilingualism can be seen as an extension of bilingualism. It shares several features with both multilingualism and bilingualism, while also maintaining its own distinct characteristic. In Kazakhstan, trilingualism is formed by language policy and by historical and sociocultural factors rooted in the post-Soviet linguistic environment. Rather than equal proficiency across three languages, multilingual practices in Kazakhstan show functional language distribution

depending on social context and communicative situations. This pattern is especially evident in the Aqmola region, where bilingualism is the norm and the vast majority of the population comfortably use both Kazakh and Russian. The introduction of English as a third language in schools and universities adds another layer to this multilingual environment and reflects sociolinguistic changes in contemporary Kazakhstan.

Grosjean (2010) defines multilingual individuals as people who use two or more languages in everyday life. Auer&Wei (2007) further emphasize that multilingual competence involves flexible language use across different communicative contexts and domains. They are supported by studying at school in their native language or learning it freely at the Assemblies of People of Kazakhstan in each city of the country (Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995).

One more important issue that relates to the current research is the study of multilingualism from a sociolinguistic perspective focusing on language use, language attitudes, and language practices within a specific social and regional context. Sociolinguistics aims to explore how language changes in different social contexts and seeks to provide explanations for these variations (Tagliamonte, 2006). Since multilingualism in Kazakhstan reflects both language policy and everyday communication practices, a quantitative sociolinguistic approach was employed to explore self-reported language use and proficiency among young residents of the Aqmola region.

Language Policy and Functional Multilingualism in Kazakhstan

The Language Policy Program (LPP) supports Kazakh and Russian languages and is embedded in Kazakhstan's Constitution via the Language Law. This law establishes the legal framework for language use in the Republic, designating Kazakh as the state language and Russian as a language equally used in government and state departments (Article 8, 16; Language Law, 1997).

In 2006, state policy began focusing on trilingualism (Kazakh, Russian, and English), first mentioned by Former President Nazarbayev. His 2007 address proposed phased implementation of this initiative. Educational reforms, including the “State Program of Functioning and Development of Languages for 2011–2020”, aimed to harmonize language policy, strengthening national unity while preserving ethnic languages (Nazarbayev, 2007).

President Tokayev has emphasized cultural and linguistic diversity, educational equality, and quality. His addresses in 2019 and 2020 highlighted the importance of supporting all ethnic groups’ cultural and linguistic development, systematic measures for educational equality, and the need for new approaches in science and education, including internships for Kazakh scholars. (Tokayev, 2019; Tokayev, 2020) In 2021, Tokayev reiterated the trilingual policy, emphasizing the distinct roles of Kazakh and Russian. He portrayed mastery of Kazakh as a patriotic duty and highlighted the advantages of Russian proficiency, as it is one of the six official UN languages (Tokayev, 2021). In 2022, he stressed the importance of the English language in education for global progress in science and technology (Tokayev, 2022).

Previous research has shown that multilingual education in Kazakhstan expanded significantly through state educational reform and trilingual education initiatives. Aubakirova et al. (2019) highlight significant progress in multilingualism through the “State Program of Functioning and Development of Languages for 2011–2020”, executed in three stages. The first stage (2011–2013) focused on strengthening the legal and methodological framework. The second stage (2014–2016) introduced new technologies and methods to promote the state language while preserving linguistic diversity. The final stage (2017–2020) maintained other languages and enhanced monitoring of the state language’s demand and quality. The program aimed for 95% proficiency in Kazakh, 90% in Russian, and 20% in English. This initiative boosted Kazakh language usage, transforming the educational system with a multilingual curriculum in schools and universities. Experimental schools like Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Bilim Innovation Lyceums pioneered this model since 2007–2008, integrating STEM subjects into immersive instruction in Kazakh, Russian, and English. Sagyndykova et al. (2017) further revealed the expansion of multilingual education in Higher Education Institutions, with 42 institutions offering classes in Kazakh, Russian, and English between 2012 and 2016. The number of multilingual students increased notably during this period. Additionally, 17 universities began training practitioners in English for teaching STEM subjects, reflecting the growing importance of English proficiency and its role in fostering global citizenship among the population.

Smagulova (2008) in her research about the LP influence on language situation found out that the Kazakh language was gaining social prestige. A growing number of people saw the state language as an essential language for the future. This was most evident in reports about the preferred language of education for children, with most respondents expressing a desire to educate their children (or grandchildren) in Kazakh. They believed that proficiency in Kazakh could enhance their children's (or grandchildren's) economic prospects. However, despite their interest in Kazakh, respondents did not wish to abandon Russian, which offers access to broader social, educational, economic, and informational resources. Additionally, there was a rising interest in English, viewed as a highly valuable skill. The demand for English was high, and proficiency and usage were increasing. Thus, the results of the research claim that the dominant public ideology in Kazakhstan is multilingualism, with the majority of respondents recognizing the need for proficiency in Kazakh, Russian, and English. A recent research done by Koptleuova et al. (2023) also made a good contribution in the field of multilingualism of Kazakhstan. The study of the language dynamics in the Republic of Kazakhstan indicates that trilingualism, composed of Kazakh, Russian, and English, is the most theoretically and practically viable functional model. The development and establishment of this trilingualism, involving these three languages, represents a new and emerging form of multilingualism in Kazakhstan. This phenomenon is becoming increasingly prevalent and warrants an investigation into the societal demand for such multilingualism. Trilingualism entails the simultaneous (parallel or mixed) use of three languages across various domains, serving as an

integrated mode of communication. The utilization of Kazakh, Russian, and English by Kazakhs in different aspects of life is referred to as Kazakh-Russian-English trilingualism. Another study by Koptleuova et al. (2023) examined the language situation in the healthcare and oil sectors of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The findings revealed that respondents were interested in expanding the use of the Kazakh language due to the low number of employees proficient in it. Additionally, there was a noted shortage of professional medical literature in Kazakh, as most specialists are trained in Russian. When it comes to the English language, there was a low figure of English users in the healthcare system of Kazakhstan. As for the oil sector the study indicated that the dominance of either Kazakh or Russian languages varies according to the communicative context. English is seldom used in the spontaneous interactions of oil workers; however, it assumes a primary role in the composition of business documents of international significance (Koptleuova et al., 2023). Both Smagulova (2008) and Koptleuova et al. (2023) conducted evidence-based research results that significantly contribute to the understanding of multilingualism in the context of Kazakhstan. Their findings reflect the LP impact on language situation and its future prospects and offer insights into the emergence of multilingual language practices in a country.

Despite the growing body of research on multilingualism in Kazakhstan, regional sociolinguistic studies examining everyday language use and self-reported multilingual practices remain limited. In particular, the Aqmola region represents an important case for understanding how multilingualism develops within a historically bilingual and ethnically diverse environment.

Methodology

Research Design

This work employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design within the sociolinguistic research tradition. The design shows language preferences, language policy awareness, and self-reports on language proficiency among the Aqmola residents over a five-year period (2017–2022).

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire survey, administered in two independent phases: in 2017 and in 2022. The total sample consists of 60 respondents, with 30 participants surveyed in each year. The respondents in 2017 and 2022 were not the same individuals, allowing us to conduct a comparative analysis of regional language developments during a 5-year period in one region.

The research design is descriptive and comparative. It is descriptive in documenting language choices, native language identification, foreign language learning, language policy awareness, and language proficiency. It is comparative in examining differences between the two data collection points (2017 and 2022) across age category - 15–25 years.

The study is grounded in quantitative sociolinguistics and draws conceptually on Auer & Wei's (2007) model of the multilingual individual, which allows multilingual competence to be examined through functional language use and self-reported proficiency. Language proficiency was operationalized through self-assessment across

four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in Kazakh, Russian, and English, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The quantitative design enables systematic comparison across age groups, languages, and time periods, providing a reliable overview of emerging trends in multilingualism in the Aqmola region

Procedure, participants selection and data analysis

The first stage of the procedure of the research was the data collection by conducting the paper-based questionnaires in two phases: in 2017 and again in 2022. In total, 60 participants residents of the Aqmola region completed the questionnaire on paper, 30 respondents in 2017 and 30 respondents in 2022, with the option to choose the questionnaire in their preferred language. The respondents in 2017 were different from respondents in 2022. Participants were provided with printed questionnaires, which they completed manually. The completed surveys were then collected by the researchers and manually entered into a digital spreadsheet/database for analysis (Table 1).

The survey consisted of 20 questions in total. It included open-ended questions to gather information about respondents' gender, age and social status, one closed-ended question to assess their awareness of the language policy, and 12 Likert-scale questions aimed at evaluating their self-reported proficiency in Kazakh, Russian, and English. In order to establish validity and reliability, a pilot test was conducted with a small sample of participants in 2017.

Most of the respondents are schoolchildren and students. We consider that the data received can give answers to the research questions since it is a 5-year period during which Kazakhstan experienced the changes in the education sphere and language legislation and as for the global world it has experienced the COVID 19 and the rapid technological changes.

The next stage was the data analysis through IBM SPSS Statistics software. Due to the relatively small size, the study employed descriptive statistical analysis rather than inferential statistical testing.

Table 1 - Percentage of respondents by age category

Age group	percentage of respondents	
	2017	2022
from 15 to 25 years old	30/100%	30/100%

Results and findings

Language preferences of the residents in the Aqmola region in 2017 and 2022

The respondents were offered questionnaires in Kazakh, Russian, and English. From 2017 to 2022, the preference for the Kazakh and Russian languages increased (see Table 2). The selection of English questionnaires showed a decline from 27 % in 2017 to 15% in 2022. Overall, the preference for Kazakh questionnaires rose from 40%

(2017) to 46% (2022).

Table 2 - Language Choice of the Questionnaire

Language choice of the questionnaire	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
The survey in Kazakh	40%	46%
The survey in Russian	33%	39%
The survey in English	27%	15%
Total:	100%	100%

Native language

As for the native language for respondents, in 2022, 79% of the respondents noted that the Kazakh language is their mother tongue in comparison with 2017, where 73% pointed out the Kazakh language as their native one. The Russian language is native for 9 % native in 2022, compared to 21% in 2017. The Tatar language was mentioned as native by 3 % in 2022. Uzbek was indicated as a native language only in 2017 by 3% of respondents. In 2022, 3% of respondents indicated the Ingush language as their native language.

According to the results of the survey in 2022, there appeared a new category of respondents, those who indicated two native languages - Kazakh and Russian (3% of respondents), Russian and Karachay (3% of respondents). Accordingly, 3% of respondents identify themselves as bilingual. In 2017, this phenomenon was not found (see Table 3).

Table 3 - Respondents' native language

Native language	Age group 15 - 25 years	
	2017	2022
Kazakh	73%	79%
Russian	21%	9%
Tatar	3%	3%
Uzbek	3%	-
Ingush	-	3%
Russian, Karachay languages	-	3%
Kazakh, Russian	-	3%
Total:	100%	100%

Foreign language learning

Another aspect confirming the trend of trilingualism is the factor of learning foreign languages. There is an increasing number of foreign languages learnt. In 2017, the respondents indicated they were learning English, Arabic, Greek, Kazakh, Chinese, Latin, German, Russian, and French. In 2022, respondents additionally indicated Turkish and Finnish. There was an increase in learning only English and no other foreign languages from 41% to 43%. The dominance of English as a foreign language,

among other languages, is also clearly traced. In 2017, 64% of respondents reported studying English, compared to 72% in 2022. (Table 4).

Table 4 - Studying foreign languages

Participants' responses	Age group 15 - 25 years	
	2017	2022
No, I do not study	3%	3%
Yes, I study English	64%	72%
Yes , I study English and German	9%	-
Yes, I study Kazakh, English, French	3%	-
Yes, I study English and Arabic	6%	-
Yes, I study English and Chinese	3%	-
Yes, I study Latin, French and English	3%	-
Yes, I study English and Russian	3%	9%
Yes, I study Chinese	3%	-
Yes, I study English and Greek	3%	-
Yes, I study Chinese	-	3%
Yes, I study English and Turkish	-	3%
Yes, I study Finnish and Ukrainian	-	3%
Yes, I study English, French, German, Turkish and Chinese	-	3%

Awareness of Trilingual Language Policy

In order to define participants' awareness of LP programs in the country, the respondents were asked if they were aware of or familiar with the Trilingual Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The data comparison revealed that in 2017, 97% of respondents were aware of the concept, as well as in 2022. **Comparative data analysis is presented in Table 5.**

Table 5 - Trilingual Concept Awareness of the Republic of Kazakhstan by respondents

The level of knowledge of the Concept	Age group 15 - 25 years	
	2017	2022
Yes, they know the concept of trilingualism of the Republic of Kazakhstan	97%	97%
No, they don't know the concept of trilingualism of the Republic of Kazakhstan	3%	-
Didn't give any response	-	3%
Total:	100%	100%

Self- reported language proficiency of the residents in Kazakh, Russian and English languages

Kazakh Language Proficiency

Respondents reported on their proficiency in Kazakh, Russian, and English for

speaking, reading, listening, and writing based on CEFR levels: ‘not proficient’, ‘very poor’, ‘low’, ‘satisfactory’, ‘good’, and ‘excellent’. There were not those who do not speak Kazakh either in 2017 or in 2022. Those with ‘hardly speaking’ proficiency decreased from 9% (2017) to 6% (2022), and ‘poor’ proficiency indicated no one in 2017 and 3 % in 2022. Respondents rating their speaking as ‘very well’ increased from 27% and 43% in 2022 (Table A1). An increase is observed in reading, with ‘well’ and ‘satisfactory’ proficiency rising from 36% to 43% and from 6% to 15%. By the same criterion, the total number for all levels of self-assessment ‘well’ proficiency level has grown in all language categories (A1-A4).

Russian language proficiency

For Russian, the first three levels of proficiency (‘not proficient’, ‘very poor’, and ‘poor’) were not noted by the respondents in either year. In 2022, 6% of respondents rated their speaking as ‘satisfactory’. Those rating their speaking as ‘excellent’ decreased from 82% in 2017 to 76% in 2022 (Table A5). Reading proficiency showed a slight increase in ‘good’ proficiency from 12% to 15% and a decrease in ‘excellent’ from 88% to 85% (Table A6). Writing proficiency in Russian displayed a decline, with ‘well’ proficiency dropping from 30% to 24% and increase in ‘excellent’ from 67% to 73% (Table A7). Listening proficiency showed an increase in ‘well’ from 12% to 15% and a decrease in ‘excellent’ from 88% to 85% (Table A8).

English language proficiency

The English-speaking skills of respondents showed changes from 2017 to 2022 (Table A9). ‘Well’ decreased from 46% to 30%, while ‘excellent proficiency’ is stable 15% for both years. Positive changes were notable with ‘satisfactory’ increasing from 30% to 49%. For reading proficiency ‘well’ and ‘excellent’, which increased from 24% in 2017 to 43% in 2022 (Table A10). Regarding writing proficiency, in the first age category, ‘well’ proficiency increased from 37% in 2017 to 55% in 2022, while ‘excellent writing skills’ decreased from 33% to 6% (Table A11). In listening skills in English, positive changes were noted in the first age category, with ‘well’ proficiency rising from 37% in 2017 to 46% in 2022 (see Table A12).

Discussion

The study examined changes in language use, language preferences, and self-reported multilingual practices among young residents of the Aqmola region between 2017 and 2022. Drawing on Auer&Wei’s (2007) concept of multilingual competence and a sociolinguistic approach to functional language use, the findings suggest shifts in the multilingual landscape of the region.

The first research question was to identify respondents’ language preferences and native language. The results show an increase in the use of the Kazakh language. Additionally, the preference for English questionnaires declined among respondents aged 15-25. The second research question indicates the proportion of respondents identifying Kazakh as their native language has risen relative to Russian, with a small

but notable number identifying as bilinguals, indicating two native languages (e.g., Russian-Karachai and Kazakh-Russian).

Among foreign languages, English remains the most popular among the respondents. The next research question was related to studying foreign languages. It may reflect some tendencies for trilingualism in the region, is that the popularity of the English language is increasing among the residents. The concept of trilingualism is well-known among the residents of the Aqmola region. However, our data indicate a slight decline in awareness regarding the promotion of multilingualism and the Trilingual Concept from 2017 to 2022. This suggests a need for continued and perhaps enhanced efforts to promote the policy and its benefits to the public.

Participants' self-reports regarding their proficiency in the Kazakh language have grown in all language modes (speaking, reading, writing, and listening). In contrast, the reported proficiency in Russian remains high, with zero or near-zero percentages for lower proficiency levels in all linguistic aspects. Self-reported English proficiency data show variability with no clear trajectory of growth or decline across the years. Young respondents predominantly rate their proficiency as 'satisfactory', 'good', or 'excellent' in both 2017 and 2022, with minimal percentages indicating lower proficiency levels. An increase in Kazakh literacy was observed, with improved correct spelling of words. Russian literacy decreased while, English spelling literacy improved.

A comparative analysis of respondents' self-reports highlights the widespread use of Kazakh and Russian, while English is predominantly associated with learning. The Aqmola region is becoming multilingual, evidenced by the appearance of bilinguals who identify with two native languages. The findings also align with previous studies on multilingualism conducted by Smagulova (2008) and Koptleuova et al. (2023) indicating that the trend of trilingualism has been taking place in Kazakhstan. However, as we see, the trilingualism continues to expand within educational contexts. The trilingualism as numerous authors cited, exists due to studying the third language (Anastassiou et al., 2017). The case of trilingualism in the Aqmola region is more inclined to be either bilingual, growing up speaking two languages or even multilingual depending on their mother tongue and start learning English at school (Cenoz, 2005; Jessner, 2006).

In conclusion, the findings suggest that multilingualism in the Aqmola region is characterized by the coexistence of functional Kazakh-Russian bilingualism alongside emerging educational and symbolic roles of English.

Both cohorts of respondents belong to the same age category; however, minor differences in educational background between the surveyed groups should be considered when interpreting the comparative results. In addition, the study relied on self-reported language proficiency rather than objective language testing, which may influence the interpretation of participants' language abilities.

Abbreviations

LPP – Language Planning Policy

CEFR - Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

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Appendix A

Table A1 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of speaking skills in the Kazakh language

Level of proficiency I am able to speak Kazakh...	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in speaking Kazakh	-	-
I am hardly proficient in speaking Kazakh	9%	6%
My proficiency in speaking Kazakh is poor	-	3%
My speaking proficiency in Kazakh is satisfactory	27%	24%
I can speak very well	27%	43%
My proficiency in speaking Kazakh is excellent	37%	24%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A2 - Respondents' self- reports on level of reading skills in the Kazakh language.

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 - 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in reading Kazakh	-	-
My reading skills in Kazakh are very poor	-	-
My reading skills in Kazakh are poor	6%	3%
My reading skills in Kazakh are satisfactory	6%	15%
I can read in Kazakh well	36%	43%
My reading skill in Kazakh is excellent	52%	39%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A3 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of writing skills in the Kazakh language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in writing Kazakh	-	-
My writing skills in Kazakh are very poor	3%	6%
My writing skills in Kazakh are poor	-	6%
My writing skills in Kazakh are satisfactory	9%	9%
I can write in Kazakh well	46%	55%
My writing skills in Kazakh are excellent	42%	24%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A4 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of their listening skills in the Kazakh language.

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in listening Kazakh	-	-
My listening skills in Kazakh are very poor	3%	3%
My listening skills in Kazakh are poor	-	6%
My listening skills in Kazakh are satisfactory	12%	3%
I can listen in Kazakh well	24%	39%
My listening skills in Kazakh are excellent	61%	49%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A5 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of their speaking skills in the Russian language.

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in speaking Russian	-	-
My speaking skills in Russian are very poor	-	-
My speaking skills in Russian are poor	-	-
My speaking skills in Russian are satisfactory	-	6%
I can speak Russian well	18%	18%
My speaking skills in Russian are excellent	82%	76%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A6 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of their reading skills in the Russian language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in reading Russian	-	-
My reading skills in Russian are very poor	-	-
My reading skills in Russian are poor	-	-
My reading skills in Russian are satisfactory	-	-
I can read in Russian well	12%	15%
My reading skills in Russian are excellent	88%	85%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A7 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of their writing skills in the Russian language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in writing Russian	-	-
My writing skills in Russian are very poor	-	-
My writing skills in Russian are poor	-	-
My writing skills in Russian are satisfactory	3%	3%
I can write in Russian well	30%	24%
My writing skills in Russian are excellent	67%	73%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A8 - Respondents' self- reports of the level of their listening skills in the Russian language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in listening Russian	-	-
My listening skills in Russian are very poor	-	-
My listening skills in Russian are poor	-	-
My listening skills in Russian are satisfactory	-	-
I can listen in Russian well	12%	15%
My listening skills in Russian are excellent	88%	85%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A9 - Respondents' self- reports on the level of their speaking skills in the English language.

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in speaking English	-	3%
My speaking skills in English are very poor	-	-
My speaking skills in English are poor	9%	3%
My speaking skills in English are satisfactory	30%	49%
I can speak English well	46%	30%
My speaking skills in English are excellent	15%	15%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A10 - Respondents' self-reports on the level of their reading skills in the English language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in reading English	-	-
My reading skills in English are very poor	-	3%
My reading skills in English are poor	3%	-
My reading skills in English are satisfactory	33%	12%
I can read in English well	24%	43%
My reading skills in English are excellent	40%	42%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A11 - Respondents' self-reports on the level of their writing skills in the English language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in writing English	-	-
My writing skills in English are very poor	6%	-
My writing skills in English are poor	3%	3%
My writing skills in English are satisfactory	21%	36%
I can write in English well	37%	55%
My writing skills in English are excellent	33%	6%
Total:	100%	100%

Table A12 - Respondents' self-reports on the level of their listening skills in the English language

Level of proficiency	Age group 15 – 25 years	
	2017	2022
I am not proficient in listening English	-	-
My listening skills in English are very poor	3%	3%
My listening skills in English are poor	-	3%
My listening skills in English are satisfactory	33%	24%
I can listen in English well	37%	46%
My listening skills in English are excellent	27%	24%
Total:	100%	100%

Appendix B

Table B - Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	Age group 15 - 25 years	
	2017	2022
<i>Male</i>	48%	50%
<i>Female</i>	52%	50%
Total:	100%	100%

ARTICLE

Open Access

Professional agency and emotional climate in bilingual preschool

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Abstract

This study investigates teacher agency in preschool bilingual education, focusing on the ways in which educators deal with linguistic, cultural, and relational dynamics in Finnish–Russian early childhood contexts. Drawing on educators’ reflections, the findings show that professional agency extends beyond curriculum delivery to include identity work, creative self-expression, and the cultivation of an affective environment that supports children’s linguistic, socio-emotional, and cultural development. Interviewed members of the staff highlight the significance of their native language and cultural experience as foundations for transmitting knowledge and values, while also recognizing the need for professional development to deepen their understanding of bilingual acquisition processes. The study further demonstrates that bilingual education is shaped by the emotional climate, relational atmosphere, and affective atmosphere of preschools, where cooperation with parents, collegial support, and child–teacher bonds play decisive roles. At the same time, educators face challenges such as heavy workloads, limited resources, and difficulties in engaging parents, which reveal a tension between the ideal of collaborative bilingualism and the realities of everyday practice. The research aligns with global perspectives on flexible bilingual strategies—such as the “one teacher–one language” approach and translanguaging—and underscores the importance of systemic support, professional development, and inclusive policies. The findings suggest that effective bilingual education requires not only linguistic expertise but also emotional commitment, cultural sensitivity, and empathetic collaboration across teachers, parents, and institutions..

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Introduction

Bilingual education in early childhood has gained increasing attention as societies grapple with linguistic diversity, migration, and the preservation of minority languages. In preschool contexts, the task of supporting bilingual development extends beyond the teaching of vocabulary and grammar: it involves cultivating an affective environment and an emotional climate in which children, teachers, and families feel supported, valued, and connected.

In the full immersion model, 70–100% of the day's activities are conducted in the target language. This method emphasizes communication through which both models and specific words should be learned. In partial immersion, approximately 50% of the day is spent in the child's second language, and the remaining time is spent in their native language. This approach allows for a balanced introduction to both languages. The two-way immersion model brings together children from different language groups, allowing them to learn from each other while developing skills in both languages. Finally, the language can be taught in specially organized classes. The multicultural environment of a bilingual kindergarten promotes tolerance for the behavioral peculiarities of children and adults from different ethnic backgrounds and understanding of cultural differences, enriching the experience acquired by children, especially when a friendly, emotionally supportive atmosphere prevails in the group. Emotional contact encourages the use of all languages. The family language policy has become much better known to the preschool teachers.

Insights from broader research on professional agency can be fruitfully extended to the field of bilingual education, reminding us that teacher agency is not only an analytical construct but also a lived experience. It involves the daily struggles, commitments, and creative choices teachers make when working in settings where language is both a pedagogical goal and the medium of practice. Recognizing how this agency is exercised, constrained, and supported becomes especially important in contexts such as bilingual day care, where teachers' decisions directly shape children's opportunities to learn, to belong, and to feel at home in more than one language.

The present study is dedicated to the peculiarities of pedagogical activities in a bilingual preschool institution where Finnish and Russian languages are used, based on interviews with the staff of this institution. Parents and educators jointly support and develop bilingualism. Parents, many of whom are also bilingual, in kindergarten and at home are not always able to control and regulate their own speech (cf. Haque & Le Lièvre 2019; 2024). Meanwhile, children actively engage in dialogues in their language of interest, and when necessary, educators switch to the child's stronger language to establish contact and ensure comfortable information perception and later, they return to another language to facilitate gradual acquisition of the second language. Therefore, educators use various methods to create a stable base for language acquisition (Protassova & Silkin 2025).

Since kindergarten does not strictly require the exclusive use of either Finnish or Russian, teachers tend to make use of translingual method (cf. Balodis et al. 2024; Olğun-Baytaş et al. 2023; Palviainen et al. 2016). Different educators apply different approaches, considering experience, the child's language, and learning goals. Some

educators adhere to the principle of complete understanding even with complex formulation, while others believe that initial stages can include adaptation and intuitive situation understanding, and formal language acquisition will come later. Full immersion in Finnish, especially in the school preparation process, helps Russian-speaking children develop skills without constant dependence on translation (Protassova & Silkin 2024).

The research questions are: How do teachers, children, and parents co-construct bilingual learning in preschool contexts, and what roles and interactions shape this process? In what ways does the affective climate of bilingual preschools influence children's motivation, socio-emotional development, and teachers' professional commitment? How do educators balance different bilingual teaching strategies in response to children's individual needs and institutional goals? What barriers and opportunities shape collaboration between educators and parents in fostering bilingualism, and how can educators engage parents in low-commitment yet meaningful ways? How do teachers' native languages and cultural experiences function as resources for transmitting values and knowledge in bilingual preschool education? How do systemic factors—such as leadership, policy, and institutional support—affect teacher agency, collaboration, and the creation of an inclusive socio-emotional setting in bilingual preschools?

Theoretical Background

It is widely recognized that bilingual education contributes to the development of emotional intelligence, as children learn to understand and interpret social cues in more than one language (Axelrod 2014). This dual exposure fosters empathy and enhances communication skills, helping children navigate intercultural interactions with sensitivity. Bilingual environments not only promote linguistic competence but also nurture emotional awareness, enabling children to interpret feelings and intentions across linguistic boundaries. However, research suggests that while bilingual children often excel in recognizing emotions in diverse contexts, their emotional expression may develop more slowly compared to monolingual peers (Cha & Goldenberg 2015; MacLeod & Demers 2023; Bukhalenkova et al. 2022).

Educators frequently observe that bilingual settings cultivate tolerance and cultural understanding, preparing children for both academic and social success (Ertanir et al. 2021; Ren et al. 2016). Within such environments, emotional support and genuine care are crucial for positive outcomes. When evaluating the effectiveness of bilingual kindergartens, scholars stress the importance of considering not only language immersion and curriculum design but also the emotional climate of the learning space, teacher qualifications, and the school's ability to create a safe, inclusive, and engaging atmosphere (Benz 2017; Pinter 2011; Thompson 1999).

The bilingual context often poses challenges—limited resources, varying language proficiency levels, and complex communication with parents—but these challenges also reveal the institution's strength and adaptability (Fu & Weng 2023; Mazzanti & Cardozo-Gaibisso 2022). Successful educators remain aware of the latest research developments and actively engage in reflection and professional growth

(Beauchamp 2014; Suphasri & Chinokul 2021; De Ruyter & Koleargue 2010). Reflection allows teachers to connect emotional experience with pedagogical practice, reinforcing the moral and social dimensions of teaching.

Karimi et al. (2025) highlight the significance of teacher emotions as a vital component of both personal and professional development in language education. Emotions shape teachers' self-perception, interactions, and agency, influencing how they support children's emotional and linguistic growth. A key insight from their work is that emotions—whether expressed through surface acting, deep acting, or genuine engagement—can serve as indicators of teachers' beliefs and goals, shaping classroom atmosphere and relationships. Porter et al. (2022) further demonstrate how teachers' professional agency is intertwined with strong emotions such as care, curiosity, cooperation, and challenge, all of which influence motivation and pedagogical decision-making. Similarly, Rodrigo-Ruiz (2016) shows that teacher emotions directly affect students' emotional competence, motivation, and social behavior, emphasizing that emotional regulation and the ability to discern appropriate emotional expression are essential skills for educators.

Levine Brown et al. (2022) examine how preschool teachers perform emotional labor in interactions with children, families, and colleagues, finding that both surface and deep emotional acting are integral to relationship-building and classroom harmony. Their findings highlight that emotional management is not merely performative but a core aspect of early childhood education that shapes relational intimacy and trust. Emotional dynamics are thus central to maintaining a supportive classroom environment.

Emotional and reflective practices intersect with cognitive and social dimensions of learning. Suphasri & Chinokul (2021) point out that reflective practice, supported by digital tools and collaboration, enhances teachers' ability to interpret and respond to children's emotions. In bilingual classrooms, this awareness extends to how children's feelings are mediated through two linguistic systems. Sampson & Yoshida (2020) demonstrate that learners' emotions evolve dynamically and relationally, shaped by contextual and interpersonal factors. Similarly, Leung (2019) shows that bilingual children use translanguaging not only to communicate but also to express feelings through visual and linguistic means—drawing, gestures, and hybrid language use become vehicles for emotional expression.

Research on teacher agency further underscores its crucial role in shaping emotional and linguistic environments (Cong-Lem 2024; Emans et al. 2025). Teacher agency is a socially embedded process expressed through collaboration, reflection, and identity work. In bilingual preschools, agency is exercised through relational care, curriculum design, and culturally responsive teaching practices that integrate emotion with language learning. Teachers often act as mediators between institutional demands, parental expectations, and the emotional well-being of children. This emotional and pedagogical flexibility supports the creation of a warm, trusting, and culturally sensitive atmosphere.

In addition to emotional and professional dimensions, bilingualism also influences cognitive outcomes. Studies have shown that bilingual children may

outperform monolingual peers in executive function tasks requiring problem-solving, switching attention, and multitasking—although findings are mixed (Bar & Shaul 2021; Celedón-Pattichis & Turner 2012; Krause et al. 2023). More consistently, bilingual exposure enriches cultural awareness and emotional openness, fostering sensitivity and adaptability in social interactions (Korecky-Kröll et al. 2024; Kwakkel et al. 2021; Lipner et al. 2021, 2024).

Recognizing emotions specific to each culture becomes more intuitive for children raised in multilingual, multicultural environments (Möller et al. 2022; Protassova 2021). For example, Finnish adults who attended bilingual preschools report that they are able to “read” Russian emotional expressions with ease, having grown up interpreting facial and vocal cues across two cultures. This early exposure helps them feel comfortable in diverse environments where multiple emotional and linguistic codes coexist naturally.

Finally, studies such as Sisson (2023) show how emotionally responsive pedagogy can transform the learning experience for children affected by migration. When teachers recognize children’s emotions and cultural repertoires as valid sources of knowledge, they co-construct learning environments that are emotionally supportive, inclusive, and empowering. Thus, the emotional atmosphere in bilingual preschool education is not merely a background condition but a dynamic and constitutive element of children’s development—linking emotional intelligence, intercultural understanding, and linguistic growth into a cohesive educational experience.

Materials and Methods

The study adopts an ethnographic approach, drawing on observation, interpretation, semi-structured interviews, discourse and thematic analysis (Mukherji & Albon 2010). The research gathered insights from 18 staff members in a Finnish-Russian bilingual preschool in spring 2023, identifying key teaching beliefs and strategies and analysis of daily interactions among the staff members, parents, and children. The methodology of conducting separate interviews with each participant, allowing for open dialogue and thematic analysis, is integral to addressing the research questions about adults’ recognition of children’s language use, the emergence of language constellations in various contexts, and staff’s understanding of their role in a multilingual world. By organizing subgroups based on goals, language, age, and abilities, and coordinating through weekly planning and pedagogical meetings, educators exercise teacher agency, which is crucial in managing the complexities of bilingual preschool education. By continuously participating in professional development, educators can enhance their understanding of the educational process, incorporating results from individual and collective reflection obtained during interviews. This approach enables a nuanced exploration of how adults perceive and adapt to the dynamic linguistic environment, reflecting their agency in fostering effective bilingual practices. Through these methodological strategies, the research aims to illuminate the interconnectedness of teacher agency and the broader objectives

of bilingual education in preschool settings. The excerpts from the interviews are given in italics.

Results

Professional Agency

The profession presents both challenges and rewards. While educators derive joy and fulfillment from working with children, they face difficulties related to team interactions, bureaucratic demands, complex relationships with parents, and physical exertion. A supportive workplace atmosphere and collaboration with like-minded colleagues are crucial for successful and comfortable work. Despite the benefits, educators face challenges, such as communication issues with colleagues and parents, who often hold high expectations and concerns for their children. Additional obstacles include limited resources, staff shortages, and administrative burdens, which can complicate planning and daily activities. Nonetheless, educators value the positive atmosphere, the support from their colleagues, and the chance to improvise, seeing their work as a meaningful contribution to the children's development. The results show that educators emphasize the importance of teaching in the native language and utilizing their own cultural heritage to effectively convey knowledge and values. They see this work as a form of creative self-expression and find joy in interactions with children from whom they receive positive feedback and support. Educators focus on communication and interaction, supporting mutual understanding. Emotional connections with educators and parents play a significant role in forming children's interest in studying and using languages. The importance of conducting all events in both Russian and Finnish for children and parents is repeatedly emphasized.

Nevertheless, educators face a number of difficulties, among which communication challenges with colleagues and parents stand out. Work requires tolerance skills, the ability to listen and accept diverse opinions, and the ability to negotiate in conditions of disagreements. In communication with parents, tense moments sometimes arise due to their high expectations and anxieties about children. Educators also note that children's anxiety is often transmitted from adults, complicating work with them. Among physical and administrative challenges faced by educators are lack of resources and staff, and limited time for planning. These factors sometimes complicate the organization of classes and events. Older educators find it physically difficult to cope with the load, and the lack of substitute workers further expands their responsibilities.

(Ex. 1) Active communication with children naturally immerses them in the language environment. Emotional contact encourages the use of all languages:

EO: I consider myself a native speaker of Russian, and my main task is to provide Finnish children with a positive image of a person who embodies Russian culture, while supporting the native language of Russian-speaking children. I achieve this through daily interactions and implementing educational plans using various methods. These plans are based on our framework, which aligns with municipal and state preschool education plans.

The educator EO's orientation highlights an important dual role: on the one hand, she positions herself as a bearer of Russian linguistic and cultural identity, and on the other, she assumes responsibility for aligning her pedagogical practice with institutional frameworks. This articulation illustrates how professional agency in bilingual settings is simultaneously grounded in personal identity and institutional expectations. Equally significant is the emotional dimension of her self-description. By framing her task as providing children with a positive image of a person who embodies Russian culture, she underscores the affective side of teaching. Identity work here is not only about transmitting linguistic knowledge but also about shaping attitudes, feelings of belonging, and intercultural openness. The daily interactions she mentions serve as both pedagogical tools and relational practices that foster trust and warmth, making the learning of language and culture a lived, meaningful experience for the children. Thus, the statement captures a balance between formalized planning and the deeply human aspect of bilingual education: the educator's professional actions are inseparable from her emotional presence and the image she conveys through her personhood:

(Ex. 2) Various methods are employed to enhance language skills, including reading aloud, watching cartoons, engaging in physical activities, and involving parents in the language development process. Immersion in Finnish tasks, without reliance on translation, promotes better language perception:

FN: *I love children; they give me positive energy. I assist my colleagues, focusing on children's well-being and comfort. Education should be multifaceted, using crafts, physical education, and various methods.*

The educator FN's reflection foregrounds the affective foundations of her professional practice. By stating "I love children; they give me positive energy," she situates emotional reciprocity at the center of her work. This highlights the relational character of teacher agency, where professional motivation and resilience are sustained not only by institutional demands but also by the joy and vitality that emerge from interactions with children. Her emphasis on supporting colleagues and prioritizing children's well-being and comfort illustrates a holistic orientation that extends beyond instructional goals to encompass the socio-emotional environment of early education. This commitment reflects a broader understanding of education as care, where pedagogical responsibility is interwoven with empathy and collaboration. Her call for multifaceted education—incorporating crafts, physical activity, and varied methods—underscores the importance of engaging children through diverse modes of learning. Here, pedagogical creativity aligns with an emotional commitment to nurturing the whole child. Together, these elements demonstrate how professional agency in early childhood education is enacted not only through planned curricula but also through the emotional energy, collegial solidarity, and imaginative practices that teachers bring to their daily work.

(Ex. 3) The educator SK's statement reflects a holistic vision of bilingual development, where linguistic skills are cultivated alongside cultural enrichment and affective engagement:

SK: *Overall development includes supporting interest in both Finnish and Russian, reading in the native language, teaching language distinction, and encouraging quick language switching. We enrich everyday language necessary for school, using music, poetry, and rhymes.*

By emphasizing support for both Finnish and Russian, SK highlights the dual responsibility of fostering continuity in the child's heritage language while also preparing them for participation in the majority language environment. This dual orientation situates bilingualism not as a problem to be managed, but as a resource to be cultivated. Her focus on teaching language distinction and encouraging quick language switching demonstrates awareness of the cognitive and communicative strategies that bilingual children must develop. These practices are framed not only as technical competencies but also as essential tools for building confidence in managing multilingual spaces. Equally significant is the affective dimension: the use of music, poetry, and rhymes reveals how emotional resonance and aesthetic experience enrich everyday language learning. These creative methods do more than expand vocabulary; they nurture joy, rhythm, and a sense of belonging, making linguistic development deeply connected to children's lived experiences. In this way, SK's perspective shows how professional agency in bilingual education intertwines systematic language support with emotionally engaging practices, ensuring that the process of becoming bilingual is not only cognitively effective but also personally meaningful.

(Ex. 4) EG's statement underscores the importance of shared cultural practices—such as celebrations, performances, and media consumption—as powerful vehicles for bilingual development:

EG: *Regular celebrations and shows can be performed in one language or the other, alternating between the two, or incorporating both languages during the performance. Watching programs together where there is dancing or singing can also be beneficial.*

By noting that events can be conducted in one language, alternated between the two, or blended within a single performance, she highlights the flexible and dynamic ways in which bilingualism can be fostered in communal settings. Such practices normalize multilingual expression, framing it as part of everyday life rather than as a compartmentalized activity. The reference to watching programs together with dancing or singing points to the affective and social dimensions of language learning. These activities create joy, foster group cohesion, and provide opportunities for embodied participation, where children experience language through movement, rhythm, and shared enjoyment. In this way, the emotional resonance of music and performance amplifies the pedagogical impact, making linguistic development inseparable from positive affect and collective experience. EG's perspective illustrates how professional agency in bilingual education extends beyond classroom instruction to the orchestration of cultural and communal experiences. By integrating celebration, art, and entertainment into language learning, educators not only support linguistic competence but also cultivate a sense of belonging and pride in both languages:

(Ex. 5) DI's reflection emphasizes the central role of inclusivity in bilingual education:

DI: *Since our kindergarten is bilingual, communication should be clear for both Finnish and Russian speakers, ensuring Russians do not feel forgotten and Finns do not feel pressured to understand everything. Translating during events is ideal, ensuring comfort for both sides. Music, dances, scenes, and theatrical performances should be more prevalent in kindergarten celebrations. Tea parties with parents, inviting them to the group, allow for conversations and help parents get to know each other better, understanding family dynamics and children's behavior.*

By noting the importance of making communication accessible to both Finnish and Russian speakers, DI highlights the ethical dimension of bilingual practice: ensuring that no group feels marginalized or overburdened. The call for translation during events is particularly significant, as it frames bilingualism not only as a pedagogical issue but also as a matter of emotional comfort and social belonging. Her emphasis on music, dances, scenes, and theatrical performances situates celebrations as key sites where linguistic and cultural identities are enacted. These practices provide affective resonance, allowing children to experience bilingualism as joyful, physically rich, and creative. They also function as collective rituals that strengthen group cohesion and affirm cultural diversity. DI's mention of tea parties with parents expands the scope of professional agency beyond the classroom to family and community engagement. Such practices acknowledge that children's bilingual development is embedded within family dynamics, and that teachers play a mediating role in fostering mutual understanding between families. These informal gatherings not only facilitate dialogue but also humanize the educational process, strengthening trust and emotional bonds between educators and parents. DI's perspective illustrates how bilingual education can be grounded in principles of inclusivity, cultural expression, and community connection, where professional practices are inseparable from relational and emotional care.

Some educators focus on the gradual integration of Russian, using songs and small performances to make the learning process enjoyable and accessible. This approach reflects an understanding of how music and creative activities can break down language barriers, making the process of acquiring a second language less intimidating and more engaging for children.

(Ex. 6) SK's reflection demonstrates a strong sense of professional responsibility and intentionality, emphasizing that all activities must be grounded in clear pedagogical reasoning. This aligns with research on teacher agency as a process of thoughtful planning and justification of practice:

SK: *We work in all areas, planning activities to develop important skills. Everything done should be justified: why, what for, and how. I prepare extensively, using online resources, especially for language and math lessons. Mathematics is taught primarily in Finnish due to the lack of Finnish-speaking educators, ensuring children first learn in their native language before introducing Russian.*

SK's extensive preparation, particularly the use of online resources, illustrates both dedication and adaptability in responding to the demands of bilingual education. At the same time, the choice to prioritize Finnish in mathematics teaching—while ensuring children consolidate their native language first—reveals the tensions teachers

face in balancing linguistic and curricular goals. This decision-making reflects not only practical constraints (e.g., the shortage of Finnish-speaking educators) but also an affective commitment to safeguarding children's linguistic identities while supporting their academic development. The commentary highlights the relational atmosphere underpinning SK's work: careful planning and adaptation serve not just cognitive outcomes but also the emotional climate of learning, helping children feel secure and valued as bilingual learners.

(Ex. 7) IO's method involves a clear schedule of daily activities, with specific days dedicated to reading, crafts, singing, and physical education:

IO: *We have a schedule for daily activities, reading on Mondays, crafts on Tuesdays, singing on Wednesdays, and physical education on Thursdays. Activities are divided by language groups, focusing on strengthening the weaker language.*

By dividing activities into language groups and focusing on strengthening the weaker language, IO ensures that both Finnish and Russian are given equal attention. This structured approach reflects the importance of planning and consistency in bilingual education, allowing children to develop their skills in both languages systematically.

Educators adopt different philosophies regarding language teaching, some advocating for starting communication in the child's native language before transitioning to the target language, while others support foreign language learning even with less-than-native proficiency. The consensus is that understanding the essence of communication is paramount, with details refined subsequently. The bilingual environment of the kindergarten fosters gradual and harmonious language mastery, supporting both familial and societal languages, thereby enhancing language skills and strengthening social ties within an emotionally and culturally enriched setting. The educators' reflections collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of professional agency in bilingual early childhood education. While each voice emphasizes different priorities, taken together they reveal how pedagogical action is inseparable from cultural positioning, emotional investment, and community engagement. By extending bilingual practices into celebrations and parent gatherings, educators highlight the community dimension of professional agency. Teachers do more than deliver curricula: they embody culture, cultivate joy, sustain emotional connections, and mediate between families, institutions, and communities. Their practices demonstrate that bilingual education is never purely technical; it is deeply human, requiring the weaving together of professional skill, emotional presence, and cultural sensitivity.

Working with Families

Regarding the development of bilingualism, the primary objective is to create conditions conducive to the native language's growth, enriching children's knowledge and speech. Tea parties with parents serve as relational bridges, deepening mutual understanding of children's lives and strengthening the educator–parent partnership. Across these accounts, professional agency in bilingual early education emerges as a complex interplay of identity, care, creativity, cultural expression, and inclusivity. Collaboration with immigrant parents, particularly those from Russian-speaking

backgrounds, is crucial, emphasizing the importance of Finnish in the child's life and advocating for balanced bilingualism.

(Ex. 8, 9) Both BA and JK highlight significant challenges in achieving ideal collaboration.

BA notes that many parents seem disengaged, focusing only on basic logistical concerns (e.g., whether their child ate or drank) and avoiding deeper involvement in their child's educational or linguistic development due to their busy work lives. This lack of engagement undermines the collaborative efforts needed to support bilingualism. Additionally, BA points to broader difficulties in team dynamics among educators, which may further complicate communication and coordination with families:

BA: Working with parents has become difficult. Parents have lost interest in collaborative efforts, focusing only on mundane inquiries such as whether their child ate or drank. They have very basic expectations from the kindergarten, preferring not to be disturbed since everyone is working. Working with children remains easy, but integrating into a team and finding like-minded colleagues is challenging, especially when opinions about the group differ. It's frustrating when established adult groups are split, leading to a new environment where both children and adults miss each other. In an ideal team, differing opinions are discussed, such as whether to bring live branches, and people should compromise instead of adhering to a single viewpoint. I have principles I cannot compromise on, such as not allowing the construction of weapons or military games, although sports shooting at targets might be acceptable.

JK adds another layer to these challenges, describing parents as anxious and overly concerned about their children's development, often influenced by external factors such as the global situation. This anxiety can create tension in parent-teacher relationships, making it harder to foster a positive and cooperative atmosphere. While JK acknowledges the importance of reassuring parents and addressing their concerns, the emotional toll of managing these interactions can strain the educator's ability to focus on bilingualism initiatives:

JK: The hardest part of the job is dealing with parents. Children are wonderful, positive, and smart, but anxious parents sometimes make me wonder if I should suggest psychological help either for them or myself due to their high anxiety levels. The global situation affects everyone, leading to concerns about children's sleep, speech, and friendships, which can be transferred to the children. It's challenging to reassure parents about normal child development and explain that experiences like sitting in a puddle are part of growth.

The contradiction arises from the gap between the idealized vision of parental collaboration and the practical difficulties educators face in engaging parents. While the goal is to involve parents in fostering bilingualism through joint activities, clubs, and natural play situations, the reality is that many parents are either disengaged (as BA describes) or overly anxious and difficult to work with (as JK describes). These challenges hinder the ability to create the supportive, collaborative environment needed for balanced bilingualism. Family preferences significantly influence language development, with educational institutions serving to support these choices. Effective

bilingualism development involves creating natural play situations, utilizing visual aids, and encouraging parental involvement in clubs and joint activities.

(Ex. 10, 11) UT primarily uses Russian in their interactions with children, supported by games and toys to make the learning process interactive and engaging:

UT: *I primarily use Russian, with support from games and toys. Working with a large number of children, we adhere to plans and inform parents.*

UT also emphasizes the importance of adhering to plans and keeping parents informed, reinforcing the idea that collaboration and communication with families are essential for successful bilingual education.

TY highlights the importance of engaging children through play, books, music, and other interactive activities:

TY: *To develop bilingualism, play, engage, read books, and music lessons are very helpful. Good relationships with parents are crucial, as they inquire and show interest, creating mutual love and contact.*

TY also stresses the significance of building good relationships with parents, suggesting that parental involvement and interest create a positive feedback loop that enhances children's bilingual development. This aligns with the broader theme of collaboration between educators and families as a cornerstone of bilingual education.

Bilingual education is inherently tied to the principles of inclusive education, as it seeks to accommodate diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Teachers' strategies, such as using play, visual aids, and group activities, ensure that all children, regardless of their language proficiency, can participate and succeed. The division of responsibilities between Finnish-speaking and Russian-speaking staff further promotes inclusivity by addressing the needs of children from different linguistic backgrounds. Inclusive education also involves engaging parents, as TY and UT emphasize, to create a supportive and collaborative environment that values diversity and promotes equity.

The shift from traditional, structured preschool education (as seen in countries like Russia or Ukraine) to Finland's play-based, child-centered approach represents a broader trend in educational change. This transformation reflects a growing recognition of the importance of holistic development and the role of play in fostering language acquisition. Teachers adapt to this new philosophy, embody the process of educational change, as they reconcile their previous experiences with the demands of a new system. This change also reflects a paradigm shift in early childhood education, where the focus is on creating inclusive, flexible, and culturally responsive learning environments.

A recurring theme is the importance of parental involvement. Educators explicitly mention the need for good relationships with parents and keeping them informed. This aligns with the broader goal of creating a cohesive support system where educators and parents work together to foster bilingualism. When parents show interest and engage with the process, it reinforces the efforts made in the classroom and helps children see both languages as valuable and relevant in their lives. The statements collectively highlight how a cohesive team of educators, structured and flexible approaches, and collaboration with parents create the foundation for effective bilingual education. By dividing responsibilities based on language proficiency, introducing languages gradually, and using engaging activities like play, music, and storytelling, educators

can create an environment where children naturally develop skills in both languages. At the same time, maintaining open communication and strong relationships with parents ensures that these efforts are supported and reinforced outside the classroom.

Educational leadership is critical in fostering a cohesive team of educators and facilitating collaboration among Finnish-speaking and Russian-speaking staff. Leaders play a key role in promoting shared goals, providing professional development, and supporting teachers in implementing bilingual education strategies. For instance, the structured schedule and division of activities by language groups suggest the presence of strong leadership that ensures consistency and alignment with educational objectives. Effective leadership also fosters a culture of collaboration, where differing opinions are discussed and resolved to create a harmonious and productive team environment. This method not only supports cognitive and linguistic development but also nurtures creativity, social skills, and emotional well-being.

The observations also connect to broader theoretical frameworks, such as teacher-child-family-community interaction, teachers' culture, and inclusive education. For instance, observing how educators engage with children and families reveals the importance of building strong relationships to support language development. Across all these approaches, the common thread is the need for flexibility and gradual integration of the second language. Whether through play, music, structured schedules, or creative performances, educators adapt their methods based on the children's language proficiency levels, ensuring that learning remains accessible and enjoyable. The division of responsibilities between Finnish-speaking and Russian-speaking staff further supports this flexibility, allowing each educator to contribute their linguistic strengths to the team effort. Teachers perceive this work as an opportunity for creative self-expression, sincerely enjoy interacting with children, receiving positive feedback and support from them.

Discussion and Conclusions

The current study shows that teacher agency in preschool bilingual education involves understanding the roles and interactions between teachers, children, and parents, focusing on how each party influences language learning. Cooperation between educators and parents plays a crucial role in maintaining bilingualism. The study punctuates the importance of educators' native language and cultural experience, which serves as the foundation for imparting knowledge and values to children. The results also indicate that adults perceive their work as a form of creative self-expression and find inspiration in interacting with children. This explains the significance of the emotional climate and the affective environment in which teaching and learning take place, shaping not only language outcomes but also teachers' motivation and children's socio-emotional development.

Teachers face challenges while working in bilingual spaces and must balance different language teaching strategies, such as the "one teacher—one language" approach and translanguaging, to effectively support children's language acquisition. This coincides with the findings of Schwartz (2018) and colleagues, which illuminate the importance of creating language-conducive contexts and employing flexible

language practices, accentuating the need for professional development to align teachers' beliefs with their practices. In these aspects, the findings of our research align with global experiences. Flexible language strategies are employed, taking into account the individual characteristics of children and the goals set by the educational team. The socio-emotional setting of the preschool plays a key role here: the relational atmosphere between teachers and children fosters trust, curiosity, and motivation, even though not every child achieves equally high levels of proficiency.

The emotional bond between adults and children contributes to the formation of stable motivation to learn both languages. This affective climate—marked by warmth, encouragement, and playfulness—supports children's resilience in navigating the demands of bilingualism. At the same time, teachers must manage difficulties in communication with parents and colleagues, lack of resources, high workload, and physical exhaustion. Educators nevertheless emphasize the significance of their mission and value the creative freedom, team support, and positive moments of interaction with children. These experiences strengthen their professional motivation and commitment to the profession (cf. Zosh et al. 2022).

Educators in bilingual preschool institutions also stress the special significance of working in their native language and the richness of their cultural experience, which help effectively transmit knowledge and values to children. Yet, they acknowledge that intuition and experience cannot fully replace systematic knowledge of bilingual development. A broader societal literacy about language could help bridge this gap. For example, introducing linguistics as a separate school subject might provide the general population with more accurate knowledge about language acquisition, similarities and differences between languages, and the relationship between language and culture (cf. Dahlberg & Moss 2008). Such knowledge is essential for fostering an informed and inclusive emotional tone in discussions about bilingualism at the societal level.

Despite the difficulties, educators value the positive affective environment of their workplace, the support of colleagues, and inspiring moments of cooperation with children. They also highlight the importance of creative freedom and improvisation, which thrive in an atmosphere of mutual understanding within the team. Educators believe that their work requires sincere commitment and strive to make it as beneficial and positive as possible for children.

At the same time, the study underscores the challenges of collaboration with parents. While educators view parent–teacher cooperation as central to fostering bilingualism, they also describe barriers, such as limited parental availability, competing priorities, and occasional disengagement. Addressing these challenges requires sensitivity to parents' circumstances and the use of creative, low-commitment strategies—such as bilingual take-home activities, digital resources, or short workshops. By responding compassionately to parental concerns about children's sleep, speech, or friendships, educators can strengthen trust and create a more supportive relational atmosphere.

There is thus a subtle tension between the ideal of fostering bilingualism through close collaboration with parents and the reality of strained interactions. The affective

climate of these relationships is central: when positive, it enables parents to see themselves as partners in their children's bilingual development; when negative or absent, it undermines shared responsibility for language maintenance. Collaboration with parents, particularly those from immigrant Russian-speaking backgrounds, is vital for nurturing children's native language while promoting Finnish for balanced bilingualism.

Finally, the development of bilingualism in early childhood education is a multifaceted process that intersects with key theoretical frameworks, including teacher–child–family–community interaction, teachers' cultural and professional agency, language education policy, and inclusive education. By fostering collaboration, leveraging cultural and linguistic strengths, and implementing innovative strategies, educators create an affective environment where children can thrive linguistically, socially, and emotionally. At the same time, these efforts are shaped by broader systemic factors such as leadership, policy, and institutional support. Together, these elements contribute to a coherent framework for understanding and advancing bilingual education in diverse and dynamic contexts.

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Ethnocultural Components in Academic Discourse: Cognitive Activation of Personal Consciousness

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Abstract

The article examines ethnocultural components of academic discourse as a resource for activating cognitive processes and constructing personal meaning in the course of working with instructional texts. The aim of the study is to identify the discursive mechanisms through which ethnoculturally marked materials stimulate students' reflective and evaluative activity. The empirical corpus includes texts and tasks from a Grade 11 Russian language textbook used in Kazakhstani schools, as well as written responses produced by 24 students (Secondary School No. 18, Astana). Although the sample size is limited, the data provide insight into the mechanisms of cognitive activation. The methodology combines content analysis of instructional materials with qualitative thematic analysis of students' written reflections within a cognitive-discursive framework. The findings demonstrate the activation of three interrelated types of cognitive processes: associative, reflective, and evaluative. These processes are manifested through references to personal experience, intercultural comparisons, and value-based judgments. It is concluded that the ethnocultural component functions not merely as a representational element of instructional texts but also as a discursive trigger for the construction of personally meaningful understanding.

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Introduction

Contemporary academic discourse is increasingly conceptualized not as a neutral channel for knowledge transmission but as a space for the construction of meanings, identities, and values. In the context of multilingualism and cultural diversity in Kazakhstan, ethnocultural components of instructional materials acquire particular significance, functioning as mediators of intercultural interaction and personal meaning-making.

The modern educational environment is characterized by the integration of cultural and linguistic diversity, which underscores the need to investigate the mechanisms underlying the perception and interpretation of instructional texts containing ethnocultural elements. In this regard, the cognitive-discursive paradigm – emerging at the intersection of cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse theory – makes it possible to conceptualize language and text not merely as vehicles of information transfer but as instruments for shaping individual consciousness, personal experience, and cultural meaning.

An instructional text thus functions not only as a source of knowledge but also as a site of intercultural interaction, where cognitive mechanisms of meaning-making, emotional response, and personal reflection are activated. Through engagement with text, learners encounter diverse cultural worldviews, internalize both universal and nationally specific values, and develop the ability to interpret culturally marked meanings.

The relevance of the present study is further determined by the processes of globalization, integration, and migration, which intensify the importance of ethnocultural identity within educational systems. In the contemporary world, successful intercultural interaction largely depends on an individual's capacity to recognize, comprehend, and interpret culturally conditioned meanings, which is directly related to cognitive processes involved in text and discourse perception.

Ethnocultural knowledge is realized through a set of cultural components reflecting the values, traditions, symbols, stereotypes, and communicative norms of particular communities. These components contribute not only to the preservation of cultural identity but also to the development of cognitive flexibility, empathy, and tolerance.

Despite the growing interest in ethnocultural education, most studies focus primarily on the level of educational policy or general pedagogical principles. The present study seeks to address this gap by empirically demonstrating how ethnoculturally marked elements of academic discourse contribute to the cognitive activation of individual consciousness and the development of intercultural sensitivity in a multilingual educational environment.

The aim of the study is to analyze how ethnocultural components of academic discourse facilitate the cognitive activation of individual consciousness and the development of students' intercultural sensitivity.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- to determine the role of ethnocultural components in the structure of academic discourse in Kazakhstan;
- to examine the mechanisms of cognitive projection of individual meanings in the perception of culturally marked content;
- to describe the influence of ethnocultural components on the formation of individual cognitive identity and the development of reflective competence.

Research Questions:

- 1) Which ethnocultural components are represented in the analyzed instructional texts?
- 2) What types of cognitive activity are manifested in students' written responses?
- 3) In what ways do ethnocultural elements function as discursive triggers of personal meaning-making?

The scientific novelty of the article lies in the comprehensive conceptualization of ethnocultural components of academic discourse as a mechanism of cognitive activation in the formation of individual consciousness within the multicultural educational space of Kazakhstan.

The study proposes an original discursive framework that conceptualizes ethnocultural elements not as merely illustrative or content-based components of instructional material, but as instruments of cognitive activation influencing processes of meaning construction, reflection, and self-identification.

The research identifies specific mechanisms of cognitive activation (associative, value-interpretative, and identificational), which ensure the transition from the perception of ethnocultural content to the formation of personally meaningful interpretations.

Furthermore, the study substantiates the relationship between the ethnocultural markedness of instructional texts and the level of students' reflective activity, thereby expanding the understanding of the functions of academic discourse in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

The findings contribute to an expanded view of academic discourse as a space not only for knowledge transmission but also for the development of subjectivity through the incorporation of ethnocultural meanings into the cognitive structure of the individual.

Thus, the study advances the interdisciplinary field at the intersection of discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and culturally responsive pedagogy by offering a theoretically and methodologically grounded approach to integrating ethnocultural components into the educational process.

Methodology

The methodological framework of the present study is grounded in the cognitive-discursive approach, which integrates insights from cognitive linguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse theory. Within this framework, knowledge is conceptualized as the result of the interaction between language, cognition, and the individual's sociocultural experience. The application of the cognitive-discursive

paradigm enables an examination of how ethnocultural components of academic discourse activate students' cognitive and reflective processes.

To address the research objectives, both general scientific and linguistic methods were employed, including systematization and generalization, the descriptive method, content analysis, and modeling. Content analysis was applied to identify ethnocultural components in instructional texts and to determine their structural characteristics. Modeling was used to define the forms of integration of ethnocultural components into academic discourse. In particular, T. V. Poshtareva (2009) distinguishes five models for integrating the ethnocultural component into educational content: interdisciplinary, modular, mono-disciplinary, comprehensive, and supplementary. Each model presupposes a different degree of incorporation of cultural elements and a corresponding level of learners' cognitive engagement.

Research Methods:

1) Content analysis of instructional materials to identify ethnocultural elements and examine their structural organization;

2) Thematic analysis of students' written responses to determine types of cognitive activity and patterns of personal meaning-making;

3) Interpretative analysis within the cognitive-discursive framework aimed at identifying the mechanisms through which ethnocultural components are integrated into processes of individual text perception and interpretation.

The empirical basis of the study consisted of:

- ethnoculturally marked texts and tasks from a Grade 11 Russian language textbook;

- written responses produced by 24 students (Astana).

All participants provided informed voluntary consent for data processing, and the collected materials were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

Cognitive activation was operationalized through the frequency and qualitative characteristics of discursive markers reflecting personal and cultural meaning-making in relation to the instructional material.

Theoretical Foundations of the Study

In international educational scholarship, issues related to ethnocultural elements in education are primarily developed within the framework of multicultural education. This field emerged in the United States in the late twentieth century in response to increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in school populations and a sustained commitment to social justice in educational policy and practice.

Within this context, multicultural school culture is regarded as a significant value-forming resource that fosters acceptance of cultural diversity and promotes social cohesion (Alzubi, 2025; Gafur, 2022). One of the leading theorists in this domain is James A. Banks, the founder of the systematic study of multicultural education as an independent academic discipline. Banks elaborated the conceptual foundations of multicultural education, identifying its key dimensions, including the integration of cultural content into curricula, the enhancement of intercultural interaction, equity

pedagogy, empowering school culture and social structure, and prejudice reduction (Banks, 2010, 2016). These dimensions have been widely applied in both research and practice to design learning environments that acknowledge and incorporate students' cultural diversity.

A substantial contribution to culturally responsive pedagogy was also made by Geneva Gay, whose concept of culturally responsive teaching has become foundational in contemporary educational theory. According to Gay (2018), educational practices should not merely acknowledge students' cultural backgrounds but actively utilize them as pedagogical resources rather than treating them as obstacles. This approach aims to enhance academic achievement and social interaction by adapting instructional methods to learners' cultural contexts, a claim supported by extensive empirical research. Recent studies in multicultural and ethnocultural education further confirm the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogies in increasing student motivation, improving engagement, and fostering critical thinking skills and commitments to social justice.

Thus, international theory in ethnocultural education may be structured around two principal conceptual directions:

- the structural-theoretical conceptualization of multicultural education as a social and pedagogical reform (J. A. Banks);
- the pedagogical adaptation and practical implementation of culturally responsive approaches in teaching (G. Gay).

Both directions seek to establish an educational environment in which students' ethnocultural characteristics function as resources for enhanced educational outcomes rather than as peripheral variables.

The Context of the Kazakhstani Educational System

In recent years, the content of school education in Kazakhstan has undergone substantial transformation as part of broader modernization processes. Contemporary reforms emphasize the individualization of learning, the design of personalized educational trajectories, and the development of students' cognitive activity. Updated curricula prioritize the formation of a holistic personality-intellectually and spiritually developed, capable of critical thinking, cultural self-identification, and productive interaction in multilingual contexts (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2016).

In this context, instructional texts containing ethnocultural components are viewed as a potential resource for developing learners' cognitive and emotional-value readiness for intercultural dialogue.

A distinctive feature of Kazakhstan's educational environment is the coexistence of multiple languages of instruction, which creates unique conditions for intercultural socialization and the formation of a bilingual cognitive worldview. This approach contributes not only to the development of communicative competence but also to the preservation of cultural heritage and the strengthening of interethnic cohesion within a multicultural society.

Ethnocultural components – metaphors, symbols, values, culturally specific realia, and images/function as cognitive triggers that stimulate associative and

reflective thinking (Wierzbicka, 1996; van Dijk, 2008; Karasik, 2014; Kramsch, 1998). Their integration into academic discourse promotes not only the acquisition of new knowledge but also its correlation with learners' personal experience, thereby fostering individual meaning-making and enhancing personal engagement in the learning process.

Within the present study, ethnocultural components are conceptualized as representations of national identity manifested in the discourse of Russian language instruction. We distinguish two interrelated yet semantically autonomous layers: the national component of Kazakh identity and the ethnocultural component of Russian identity. Their coordinated functioning is particularly significant within the multilingual and multicultural educational environment of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The national component of Kazakh identity encompasses a system of value orientations, historical and cultural symbols, ethnomental representations, and culturally specific communicative models reflecting the Kazakh worldview. It is realized through references to national concepts, traditions, representations of native landscapes, cultural codes, and discourse patterns characteristic of Kazakh linguoculture. The inclusion of this component in Russian language instruction supports the preservation and actualization of learners' cultural self-identification, fosters stable positive ethnic self-esteem, and strengthens awareness of cultural belonging within intercultural dialogue.

The ethnocultural component of Russian identity, in turn, is represented by a system of concepts, values, and symbols embedded in Russian linguistic and literary tradition. Its acquisition through lexical units, texts of various genres, and discursive practices enables students to engage with an alternative cultural worldview, develop interpretative skills for culturally marked meanings, and cultivate intercultural competence. In this context, the Russian language is mastered not merely as a system of grammatical and lexical norms but as a carrier of cultural memory, historical experience, and national mentality. This duality amplifies the role of ethnocultural components, as they mediate meaning between distinct cultural codes. As a result, a bilingual and bicultural linguistic personality is formed, capable of conscious cultural choice, dialogue, and reflection (Karaulov, 2003).

Accordingly, the inclusion of the national component of Kazakh identity and the ethnocultural component of Russian identity in academic discourse is conceptualized as a methodologically grounded strategy aimed at fostering cognitive flexibility, cultural empathy, and stable personal identity. This perspective redefines the language of instruction as a space of intercultural interaction where not only linguistic skills but also axiological orientations are constructed.

Academic discourse in Kazakhstan possesses specific ethnolinguosocial characteristics shaped by state educational standards, language policy, and textbook content. It is characterized by the integration of cognitive, linguistic, and pedagogical approaches oriented toward deep comprehension and meaningful assimilation of instructional texts within a multicultural environment (Stepanenko et al., 2017). Instructional texts and tasks function as instruments of a learner-centered approach,

stimulating active meaning construction through analysis, generalization, interpretation, and practical application of knowledge. Tasks containing ethnocultural markers encourage reflection, critical thinking, and the development of a personalized approach to learning.

The cognitive-discursive approach underlying this study conceptualizes language as a socially and historically conditioned mediator of cultural meanings. Academic discourse is understood as an interactive space in which knowledge is constructed through learners' interpretative practices (Fairclough, 1992; Gee, 2011; van Dijk, 2008). Ethnocultural education is therefore interpreted not as the promotion of a single national identity, but as the development of the capacity to relate one's own cultural experience to diverse cultural representations encountered in instructional texts.

Within the present study, cognitive activation is operationalized through observable discursive markers, including:

- references to personal experience;
- evaluative statements;
- cultural associations;
- reflective comments.

This approach enables the empirical identification of learners' engagement and cognitive activity without reliance on experimental procedures. Interaction with ethnoculturally marked texts activates cognitive mechanisms of situational modeling, fosters reflective thinking, and develops the ability to interpret cultural meanings within a sociocultural context, thereby ensuring personally meaningful knowledge acquisition.

Results

The purpose of the analysis was to determine how ethnocultural components embedded in instructional texts activate students' cognitive processes within academic discourse. The study examined texts and tasks from a Grade 11 Russian language textbook used in schools with Russian as the language of instruction. This textbook performs an integrative function within the system of secondary language education: it consolidates and systematizes previously acquired knowledge and presents genre and thematic diversity, thereby enabling an investigation of how different text types influence learners' individual cognitive projections (Agmanova & Rubas, 2022). Ethnocultural components in academic discourse are implemented through learner-centered tasks aimed at activating students' cognitive, affective, and reflective engagement. Within a discourse structure oriented toward the integration of ethnocultural elements, particular significance is attributed to task types designed to stimulate the personal-meaning sphere of learners. Drawing on Poshtareva's classification, we conceptualize these activities as instruments for developing interpretative, value-based, and communicative competence in the process of studying Russian both as an academic subject and as a language of instruction.

1. Expression of Subjective Opinion: Interpretation and Personal Positioning

This type of task is oriented toward developing the learner's individual stance and stimulates reflection as well as the correlation of textual content with personal and

cultural experience. Questions such as “Why is the steppe called the motherland?” or “What does the phrase ‘From a beautiful shard of ancient amphorae...’ signify?” encourage the identification of implicit meanings, cultural connotations, and symbolic references (Sabitova & Beysembaev, 2019, p. 230).

Within the framework of this study, such tasks contribute to the activation of the national component of Kazakh identity (e.g., the image of the steppe as an archetypal space associated with historical memory and collective destiny) while simultaneously fostering reflection on the ethnocultural component of Russian identity through the interpretation of cultural allusions, historical reminiscences, and literary traditions. The formation of subjective opinion thus becomes not merely a speech practice but a mechanism of cultural self-identification.

2. Argumentation of One’s Position: Development of Critical Thinking

Analytical and discussion-based tasks (e.g., the analysis of a poem by Mukhtar Shakhnov accompanied by the question “Do you agree with the poet’s viewpoint?”) aim to develop skills of reasoned expression and critical textual interpretation (Sabitova & Beysembaev, 2019, p. 227). In the context of bilingual education, such tasks perform a dual function. On the one hand, they enhance communicative competence in Russian; on the other, they foster awareness of the value foundations underlying one’s own cultural position. Learners not only interpret literary texts but also correlate the ideas expressed therein with national traditions, historical experience, and personal beliefs. Argumentation thus functions as an instrument for developing intercultural awareness and civic maturity.

3. Emotional and affective Engagement with Literary Texts

Engagement with literary fragments (e.g., the monologue performed by Tatyana Doronina in the film *The Elder Sister* or Dmitry Samoylov’s poem *Finale*) activates the emotional-value sphere of the individual.

Emotional response is conceptualized here as a crucial component of cognitive processing. Through empathy, aesthetic perception, and affective involvement, learners achieve deeper comprehension of cultural codes. The inclusion of such tasks fosters cultural sensitivity, the ability to recognize nationally marked imagery, and the development of empathetic engagement with another cultural tradition. This is particularly significant in the context of dialogue between Kazakh and Russian cultures, where emotional engagement with literary discourse serves as a bridge for intercultural understanding.

4. Modeling New Communicative Situations: Creative Transformation

Creative and project-based tasks (e.g., “Model strategies for preserving historical heritage”) are oriented toward transferring acquired meanings into new communicative contexts. Such activities promote productive communicative competence, creative thinking, and social responsibility. Learners not only reproduce culturally significant information but reinterpret it within a contemporary sociocultural framework, proposing their own solutions and strategies. Within our conceptualization, modeling represents the highest level of engagement with ethnocultural components, as it

presupposes their conscious reconstruction and integration into the learner's individual value system.

Overall, these task types ensure a gradual progression from interpretation and personal response to reasoned argumentation and creative transformation. Their systematic implementation in Russian language instruction enables the integration of the national component of Kazakh identity and the ethnocultural component of Russian identity into academic discourse, thereby fostering a bilingual and culturally reflective linguistic personality.

Types of Cognitive Activation Identified

1. Associative Activation

Analysis of students' responses demonstrated that ethnocultural elements stimulate associative connections between textual content and personal or family experience. For example, when interpreting a painting depicting the steppe and a young woman, students wrote:

"The steppe is called the motherland because for the Kazakh people it symbolizes life, roots, and strength." "The painting shows a girl and the steppe because it symbolizes the connection of a Kazakh woman with nature and her native land."

These responses illustrate the formation of associative chains linking instructional material to everyday cultural practices and reveal an awareness of the historical and cultural significance of natural and social phenomena.

2. Reflective Activation

Numerous written responses contained metacognitive comments in which students reconsidered their own understandings of tradition, identity, and social norms. For example, in analyzing Doronina's monologue, students observed:

"The monologue made a strong emotional impression on me because it expresses the pain of a woman sacrificing herself for her family, which resonates with traditional values of respect for elders and responsibility for loved ones." "The lyrical hero reflects on his life, remembering the past and accepting the inevitability of the end – this reflects a philosophical attitude toward fate characteristic of a culture that values resilience and patience."

These examples indicate that ethnoculturally oriented tasks activate processes of self-reflection, enabling learners to reinterpret both personal and collective cultural experience.

3. Evaluative Activation

Students' responses also contained explicit value judgments involving comparison of cultural phenomena and the articulation of personal positions. This confirms the effectiveness of open-ended tasks focused on interpretation rather than mere reproduction of information. For example:

"The shards of ancient amphorae symbolize a connection with the great cultures of the past, through which one can perceive the worldview of the Kazakh people." "The hero who survived the war preserved his humanity and dignity, reflecting the collective memory of the people about tragic historical events."

Such responses demonstrate the transition from textual comprehension to value-based interpretation and cultural positioning.

Discussion

The analysis of instructional texts suggests that the formation of ethnocultural knowledge correlates with the six cognitive levels identified in Bloom's taxonomy (Table 1. Levels of Cognitive Activity and Expected Learner Responses).

Table 1 - Levels of Cognitive Activity and Expected Learner Responses

Level	Specific Learner Actions	Expected Responses and Observable Manifestations
Knowledge	Demonstrates familiarity with informational content presented in textbooks	Reproduces facts and concepts; recognizes ethnocultural realia; provides definitions; demonstrates primary understanding of terminology
Comprehension	Understands texts related to cultural realia and characters; establishes connections with personal experience	Interprets images and symbols; relates content to personal life experience; demonstrates interest and personal engagement
Application	Applies ethnocultural knowledge in real-life contexts	Provides examples from contemporary sociocultural practice; employs ethnocultural arguments in speech; demonstrates transfer of knowledge to new situations
Analysis	Selects linguistic means appropriate for intercultural communication; recognizes implicit meanings	Identifies symbolism and cultural codes; explains the author's position; uncovers implicit meanings; compares different cultural contexts
Synthesis	Identifies similarities and differences across cultures	Formulates generalizations; produces original interpretations; models new communicative situations; integrates ethnocultural knowledge into a coherent system
Evaluation	Assesses the significance of ethnocultural knowledge within contemporary communicative environments	Justifies personal positions; articulates value-based judgments; demonstrates the formation of cultural identity; engages in reflective evaluation

The aim of the analysis was to identify how ethnocultural components in educational texts activate students' cognitive processes within the learning discourse. The study focused on texts and tasks from a Russian language textbook for Grade 11 students in schools with Russian-medium instruction. This textbook serves a consolidating and integrative function in the school language education system, consolidating and systematizing previously acquired knowledge, while providing genre and thematic diversity, which allows for examining the impact of different text types on students' individual cognitive projections.

Ethnocultural components in the academic discourse are implemented through learner-centered tasks designed to activate cognitive, emotional-affective, and reflective activities. The main types of such tasks include:

These tasks aim to develop the learner's individual perspective and stimulate reflection by linking the text to personal and cultural experiences. For example, questions such as "Why is the steppe called the motherland?" or "What does the phrase 'Over the beautiful shard of ancient amphorae...' mean?" encourage uncovering hidden meanings, cultural connotations, and symbolic significance. In the context of this study, such tasks activate the national component of Kazakh identity (e.g., the steppe as an archetypal space associated with historical memory and the collective destiny of the people) while simultaneously fostering comprehension of the ethnocultural component of Russian identity through interpretation of cultural allusions, historical reminiscences, and artistic traditions. Forming a subjective opinion thus functions not merely as a linguistic exercise but as a mechanism of cultural self-identification.

Argumentation of one's position – developing critical thinking and the ability to substantiate a viewpoint. Analytical-discursive tasks (e.g., analyzing a poem by M. Shakhanov with the question "Do you agree with the poet's opinion?") are aimed at cultivating skills for reasoned expression and critical interpretation of texts (Sabitova & Beysembaev, 2019, p. 227). In a bilingual education context, these tasks serve a dual function: they develop Russian language proficiency while fostering awareness of the cultural and value-based foundations of the learner's own perspective. Learners not only interpret literary texts but also relate expressed ideas to national traditions, historical experience, and personal beliefs. Argumentation thus becomes a tool for fostering intercultural and civic maturity.

Emotional-affective engagement with literary texts – understanding imagery and emotional impact. Engagement with literary excerpts (e.g., T. Doronina's monologue in the film *Older Sister*, D. Samoylov's poem *Finale*) activates the emotional-value sphere of the learner (Sabitova & Beysembaev, 2019). Emotional responses to texts are considered a critical component of cognitive processing: through empathy and aesthetic perception, learners develop a deeper understanding of cultural codes. Including such tasks in instruction fosters cultural sensitivity, recognition of nationally marked imagery, and empathetic engagement with other cultural traditions. This is especially important in the dialogue between Kazakh and Russian cultures, where emotional engagement with literary expression serves as a bridge for intercultural understanding.

Modeling new communicative situations – transformation and extension of the original text. Creative and project-based tasks (e.g., "Design strategies for preserving historical heritage") encourage the transfer of acquired knowledge to new communicative contexts (Sabitova & Beysembaev, 2019, p. 235). This activity develops productive language competence, creative thinking, and social responsibility. Learners not only reproduce culturally significant information but also reinterpret it within a contemporary sociocultural framework, proposing their own solutions and strategies. Modeling represents the highest level of interaction with ethnocultural

components, as it involves conscious reconstruction and integration into the learner's personal value system.

Thus, these task types enable a progressive development from text interpretation and personal response to reasoned argumentation and creative transformation. Their systematic use in Russian language instruction integrates the national component of Kazakh identity and the ethnocultural component of Russian identity into the academic discourse, shaping bilingual, culturally reflective individuals.

Analysis of student responses demonstrated three primary types of cognitive activation:

1) Associative activation – linking cultural images to personal and familial experience (59%). For example, students interpreting a painting of the steppe noted:

“The steppe is called the motherland because it symbolizes life, roots, and strength for the Kazakh people.” “The painting shows a girl and the steppe, symbolizing the connection between Kazakh women, nature, and the homeland.”

These responses illustrate associative chains between the material and everyday cultural practices, as well as recognition of the historical and cultural significance of natural and social phenomena.

2) Reflective activation – reconsidering one's own relationship to cultural phenomena and their value-based reassessment (26%). Examples include:

“The monologue left a strong emotional impression as it conveys a woman's suffering and sacrifice for her family, reflecting traditional values of respect for elders and responsibility for loved ones.” “The lyrical hero reflects on life, remembering the past and accepting the inevitability of the end – a philosophical attitude toward fate typical of a culture valuing resilience and patience.”

Ethnocultural tasks thus activate self-reflection, allowing students to analyze personal and collective cultural experiences.

3) Evaluative activation – forming a personal position and value judgments regarding norms, values, and traditions presented in the text (15%). For instance:

- *“Fragments of ancient amphorae symbolize a connection to the great cultures of the past and provide insight into Kazakh worldviews.”*

- *“The hero who survived war retained humanity and dignity, reflecting the collective memory of tragic historical events.”*

Analysis indicates that ethnocultural knowledge formation corresponds to six levels of cognitive objectives based on Bloom's taxonomy (see Table 1). The progression reflects increasing complexity, from knowledge reproduction to critical evaluation and personal meaning-making.

For the purpose of theoretical generalization and structuring of the identified interrelations, it seems necessary to present the process of ethnocultural cognitive activation in the form of a conceptual framework.

The ECAM conceptual framework demonstrates the process through which ethnocultural texts activate cognitive and identificational mechanisms, ultimately fostering reflective activity and personal meaning.

The conceptual framework consists of four levels, including independent variables, mediators, and dependent variables (Figure 1 - Conceptual framework of Ethnocultural Cognitive Activation):

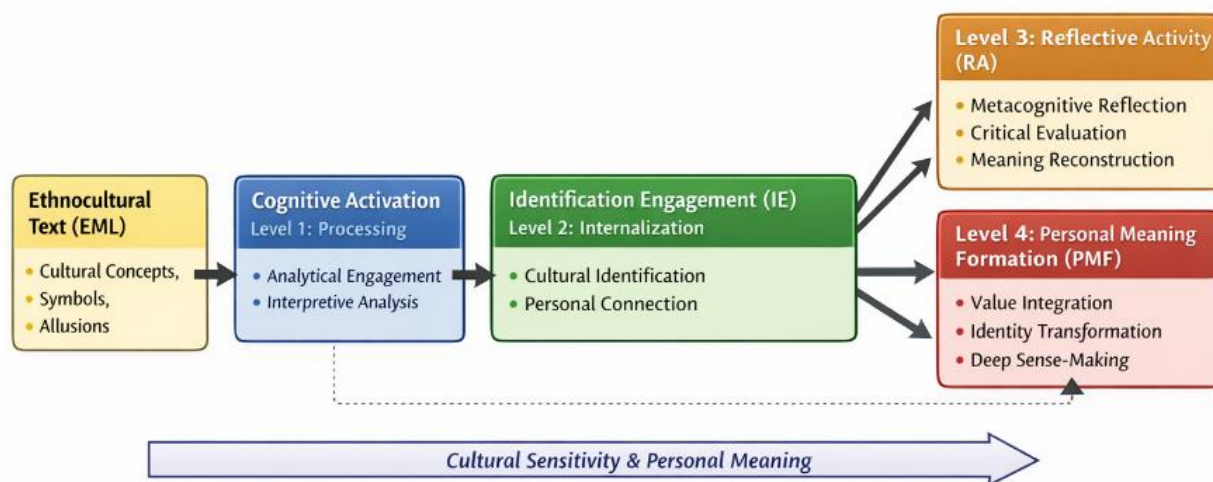


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Ethnocultural Cognitive Activation

Ethnocultural Markedness of the Text (EML) – the degree of cultural concepts, symbols, and allusions in the material; serves as the input stimulus.

Level 1: Cognitive Activation (CA) – analytical processing and interpretive analysis; first mediator linking EML to subsequent levels.

Level 2: Identification Engagement (IE) – cultural identification and personal engagement; second mediator enhancing the effect of CA on reflective and personal outcomes.

Level 3: Reflective Activity (RA) – metacognitive reflection, critical evaluation, and reconstruction of meaning; dependent variable reflecting meaningful learner interaction with cultural content.

Level 4: Personal Meaning Formation (PMF) – integration of values, identity transformation, and deep meaning-making; dependent variable representing the final result of cognitive and identificational engagement.

The process may be conceptualized as a sequential pathway from ethnocultural markedness (EML) to cognitive activation (CA), followed by identification engagement (IE), and culminating in reflective activity (RA) and personal meaning formation (PMF).

Conclusion

Ethnocultural components in academic discourse play a pivotal role in shaping students' individual consciousness, activating cognitive, emotional, and value-based mechanisms (Ufimtseva, Tarasov, 2009). Purposeful integration of these components fosters intercultural competence, empathy, and self-identification within multilingual and multicultural educational contexts.

Applying the cognitive-discursive approach, grounded in the interaction of language, thought, and culture, allows for designing learning materials that promote not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of learners as carriers of cultural meaning (Rubas et al., 2022). Ethnocultural content in education supports learners' pride in their cultural heritage, providing a foundation for constructive interethnic interaction.

The study demonstrates that the mere presence of ethnocultural content does not guarantee cognitive activation. Critical factors include the nature of tasks and the opportunity to relate texts to personal experience. Open-ended, interpretive tasks that link content to personal experience generate the highest cognitive engagement. Ethnocultural elements function as discursive triggers, stimulating associative, reflective, and evaluative cognitive activity.

The research highlights a sequential process for developing ethnocultural knowledge:

- mastery and interpretation of ethnocultural content;
- analysis and comprehension of cultural phenomena and figures;
- linking content to personal life and cultural experience;
- application of knowledge in real communicative contexts;
- selection of appropriate linguistic means for intercultural communication;
- interpretation of implicit meanings;
- comparison of cultural similarities and differences;
- evaluation of the significance of ethnocultural knowledge in contemporary communication.

Tasks emphasizing emotional-affective engagement with literary texts are especially significant, fostering cultural identity, deep personal reflection, and understanding of the importance of culture and historical context. Ethnocultural components thus fulfill both cognitive and worldview functions, supporting the development of learners capable of conscious intercultural interaction, critical reflection, and personal meaning-making.

These findings expand empirical understanding of ethnocultural education at the micro-discursive level and underscore the importance of task design. Future research directions include expanding the sample, analyzing long-term effects of ethnoculturally oriented instruction, and integrating digital technologies to enhance intercultural competence.

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ARTICLE

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An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Study of Bilingualism in Kazakhstan: Research Traditions and New Directions

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Abstract

In the context of a new globalizing world, bilingualism and multilingualism are no longer the exception but are becoming the norm for most of the world's population. In the context of modern global relationships, which are increasingly complex and fragile, languages have emerged as a significant means of enhancing these relationships. The advent of modern transportation networks has rendered geographical boundaries largely obsolete, thereby facilitating the mobility of individuals across national borders. This phenomenon has given rise to new opportunities in the domains of labor and education, thereby reinforcing the role of language as a tool for facilitating integration into a different socio-cultural context. These global processes pose new challenges for scholars in theoretically understanding bilingualism and multilingualism, as well as shifting the focus of research toward an applied approach. The present article offers a comprehensive overview of research domains in Kazakhstan that are centered on bilingualism. In consideration of the article's structure, the current review is oriented towards an examination of the predominant trends in bilingualism within the context of Kazakhstani scholarship, without asserting an exhaustive nature of the subject. In the future, this topic requires more in-depth study.

The article employs a comprehensive descriptive approach, a continuous sample, keyword analysis, and definitional and comparative analysis. The research sources encompass scientific publications, regulatory and strategic documents, lexicographic sources, educational and methodological literature. The analysis revealed that further development of bilingualism and multilingualism research requires strengthening the experimental base, expanding corpus data, and incorporating methods from neuroscience and other natural sciences.

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Introduction

In the contemporary era, characterized by the integration and digitalization of societies, the boundaries between cultures are becoming increasingly fluid, thereby strengthening international, intercultural and interlingual contacts. In the era of globalization, bilingualism and multilingualism are no longer the exception but the norm for the majority of the world's population. Consequently, the study of bilingualism and multilingualism, along with the linguistic and cultural processes that accompany them, is becoming increasingly relevant and necessary. The dissolution of borders and the enhancement of freedom of movement have led to the emergence of new opportunities in the domains of labor and education, thereby reinforcing the role of language as a means of integration into new environments. The ability to communicate in a variety of languages is a prerequisite for accessing education and employment opportunities that are both prestigious and highly paid. The impact of this phenomenon is twofold: firstly, it enhances an individual's competitiveness in the global job market; secondly, it broadens the spectrum of career opportunities available to them. Consequently, this dynamic environment fosters the capacity for employment within transnational corporations and the implementation of international projects.

In Kazakhstan, the rapid development of foreign and domestic tourism (according to the Department of Tourism, over 1.14 million tourists visited Almaty alone in the first six months of 2025, which is 6.5% more than the previous year (gov.kz, 2025) has created a need for specialists capable of intercultural communication, using communication strategies that avoid cultural misunderstandings, and adequately interpreting language tools in multilingualism. In the present day, multilingualism is emerging as a significant strategic guideline within the context of Kazakhstani education. The reform of the education system, particularly the transition to trilingual education, the introduction of integrated subject-language training programs, dual-degree master's and doctoral programs, multilingual study groups and updated curricula, has led to the formulation of and the search for solutions to issues related to comprehensive analysis of bilingualism.

Materials and methods

The present article attempts to review the academic schools and research areas of bilingualism and multilingualism in Kazakhstan, as well as the planned prospects for interdisciplinary research within the context of the current language policy.

In order to provide a comprehensive overview of the scholar's research interests, it is essential to define the terms and concepts that are central to the discussion of the bilingualism process. The methodological basis of the study is a comprehensive descriptive approach and interpretive analysis, including a continuous sample, keyword analysis, and elements of definitional, comparative, and semantic analysis. The sources and materials for the study include academic publications (monographs, research and methodological articles, experimental studies, author's abstracts and dissertations); regulatory and strategic documents; lexicographic sources (industry-specific terminological dictionaries, bilingual terminological dictionaries, and encyclopedias); and educational publications (reference books, teaching aids, and

textbooks). The definitional analysis enabled a comparison and interpretation of the meanings of terms across various sources. This article is confined to a selection of works primarily in the philological and pedagogical fields.

Results and discussion

A number of studies have viewed bilingualism and multilingualism in contrast to monolingualism, which has been used as the standard definition and characteristic features of bilingualism/multilingualism. This approach, according to scholars, often leads to a “distorted,” “fragmented,” and “irregular” view of bilingualism (Bhatia, 2017).

The contrast and contradictory understanding of bilingualism has received increased research attention, which, as noted by A.A. Zalevskaya, has resulted in the publication of a substantial number of articles and monographs (Zalevskaya, 2009). Such an ambiguous understanding of bilingualism and the question of its advantages and/or disadvantages is entirely justified and explainable. In the scientific and pedagogical tradition of the first third of the 20th century, bilingualism (primarily in children) was viewed as a risk or problem associated with speech delay, small vocabulary, and underdevelopment of the language system. However, even within the scientific community, up until the seminal work of E. Peel and W. Lambert, “The relation of bilingualism to intelligence” (E. Peel and W. Lambert, 1962), which demonstrated the advantage of bilinguals in the flexibility of thinking, there was criticism of bilingual education.

Subsequent studies (Bain, 1974) significantly supplemented the theoretical concept of Peel and Lambert on the preferential cognitive development of bilinguals in terms of verbal and non-verbal indicators (Ben-Zeev, 1977).

In the context of Kazakhstani scholarship, the interest of researchers in the issues of bilingualism and multilingualism is driven by the linguistic and geopolitical situation, as well as by Soviet and post-Soviet language ideologies.

Bilingualism in Kazakhstan affects all layers of Kazakh society, which experienced profound upheavals in the 20th century, impacting the functioning of Kazakh, Russian, and other languages. For a considerable duration, extending up until the early decades of the 21st century, Russian functioned as the language of authority and ideology, science and education, economics, medicine, and the service sector. Considering the sociolinguistic and ideological preconditions for the emergence and development of bilingualism in Kazakhstan, as well as the related statements in the media by politicians and public figures about the role and place of the Kazakh and Russian languages, Russification, and Kazakhization, it is evident that the undeniable advantage of natural bilingualism in Kazakhstan lies in its cognitive aspect. Natural bilingualism provides significant advantages for bilinguals, related to cognitive processes and brain function, effective neural networks for performing attention and switching tasks, and the acquisition of a third and subsequent languages. In the field of mental health research, experts are engaged in discourse concerning the implications of bilingualism on cognitive function. The prevailing opinion among these specialists

is that bilingualism engenders a phenomenon referred to as a “safety margin” in the brain, which is attributed to the adaptation of the brain to prolonged stress. This adaptation, it is posited, facilitates enhanced ability to cope with potential brain damage.

A detailed analysis of works by Kazakhstani scholars has been undertaken, with a focus on the factors that have influenced Kazakhstan’s ethical and linguistic landscape, as well as the shift from one language to another under the new language policy. This process assumes particular relevance in the context of the new state language policy. The analysis of the literature allowed us to outline the scope of research attention, which focuses on the following: bilingualism, state language and language policy (Khasanov, 1976; Suleimenova et al. 2008; Abasilov & Asanbaeva, 2015; Smagulova, 2008; Fazylzhanova & Piyazbayeva, 2024; bilingualism and linguistic contactology (Karlinsky, 1990; Shaibakova et al. 2020; Pak, 2012; Son, 1999; Kasymova, 1995, functional interaction of languages, choice of language of education, acquisition of a second language and educational bilingualism (Kopylenko, 1988; Karlinsky, 2001; Isaev, 1990; Ayapova, 2021; Altynbekova, 1989; Agmanova, 2010; Zharkynbekova & Chernyavskaya, 2022; children’s bilingualism (Aldabergenova, 1999; Vinnitskaya, 1999; Zhakupova, 2024; Shayakhmetova, 2004; bilingualism as a way of adaptation to different situations in multilingual and multicultural societies, development and education of tolerance, choice of language in bilingual political communication (Akhatova, 2006; Ibrayeva, 2010).

One of the first scholars to turn to the scientific sociolinguistic substantiation of the problem of bilingualism in Kazakhstan was the renowned scientist B. Khasanov. In his seminal work “Languages of the Peoples of Kazakhstan and Their Interaction” (Khasanov, 1976), he provided a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan during the Soviet period, with a particular focus on the role of the Russian language as a means of interethnic communication. B. Khasanov defines three parameters for characterizing the linguistic situation: 1) the number of functional units, which differ greatly in their spheres of application, 2) the linguistic nature of the functioning languages (types and forms of bilingualism and multilingualism existing in the republic, 3) the degree of prevalence of languages by the number of speakers and the volume of functions performed. B. Khasanov identified 126 functioning types of bilingualism (Khasanov, 1992).

The classification of bilingualism through the theory of language contacts is presented in the works of the linguist A. Karlinsky. According to the theoretical concept of the scientist, in the process of bilingualism, in addition to the widely studied phenomenon of interference, languages also experience intercalation, in which the inclusion of words from the second language into speech in the first language is observed, or vice versa, creating mixed speech and influencing the norms of the first (native) language (Shaibakova et al. 2020). A. Karlinsky proposes to distinguish between inventory intercalation (the insertion of individual words of the second language into speech in the first language and can manifest itself in the form of nomenclatural and redundant intercalation) and phrasal intercalation (the insertion of whole phrasal segments from the second language into the first language). Phrasal

intercalation can manifest itself in the form of binary insertions, speech crookedness, epenthesis, quotations, which brings intercalation closer to code-switching. The theory of language contacts of A. Karlinsky found its continuation in the works of Kazakh scientists studying the processes of minority languages (Pak, 2012; Son, 1999).

The analysis demonstrated that in Kazakh studies, the process of interference is described more comprehensively and with greater detail compared to the processes of intercalation and interstation. Conversely, in modern Kazakh as a first language and in Russian, which functions as a first language, such manifestations are prevalent (Ibrayeva & Nabiyeva, 2019).

The starting point for a fundamental analysis of the sociolinguistics of bilingualism is the work of E. Suleimenova and her scientific school. The monograph “The Language Situation and Language Planning in Kazakhstan” presents a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the linguistic situation of contemporary Kazakhstan, exploring the characteristics and types of bilingualism within the context of the republic’s multilingual and multiethnic composition, and delving into the legal status of the Kazakh and Russian languages (Suleimenova & Smagulova, 2005). The substantiation of the bilingual nature of the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan and the prerequisites for its formation was continued in the important infrastructural work “Languages of the Peoples of Kazakhstan: A Sociolinguistic Handbook”, which records the number, composition, and functional domains of the republic’s languages (Suleimenova et al. 2007). A sociolinguistic description of bilingualism in the republic in the context of the concepts of “state language”, “language choice”, and “languages of education” is presented in the works of scientists (“Dynamics of the language situation in Kazakhstan” (Suleimenova et al. 2010)., “Choice of language and correlations of language transmission” (Suleimenova et al. 2017), carried out within the framework of fundamental scientific projects. Bilingualism is a key dominant feature of Kazakhstan’s political communication, clearly manifested in the speech behavior of politicians. The evolution of the speech behavior of the linguistic personality of a politician in Kazakhstan depends on such important components as gender, age, level of education, profession, degree of proficiency in Kazakh and Russian, language preferences, and prestige of the language. (Ibrayeva, 2010).

The works of Kazakhstani sociolinguist Zh. Smagulova are devoted to a systemic analysis of language choice and linguistic attitudes. The scholar answers the question of how the republics current language policy influences citizens’ attitudes toward the Kazakh and Russian languages, and how these processes are reflected in the actual choice and use of language in various spheres of language use (in the family, education). Authors Zh. Smagulova and D. Madiyeva, based on an analysis of eventonyms in the Russian-language newspaper “Almaty aqshamy” conclude that in a context of multilingualism, violations of the purist norms of the standard Russian language are becoming the new norm, and Russian is ceasing to be the sole dominant code of the public and official domain (Smagulova & Madiyeva, 2021).

A promising area of research is to address the status of the Russian language in the context of Kazakh-Russian bilingualism, including issues of functional strength,

the dynamics of prestige and attitudes towards language, and changes in the speech behavior of different social groups. Today, there is an active discussion in the scientific community; numerous terms are used to describe this phenomenon: pluricentricity, polyvariability, multinational language, local variant, local version, etc. (Suleimenova et al. 2021). In this regard, researchers propose “Kazakhstani Russian” (Alisharieva A., et al. 2017), a national variant of a multinational language (Zhuravleva, 2007), the Russian language is undergoing a process of regionalization and is increasingly distancing itself from its mainland invariant (Shaibakova, 2016) and is experiencing turbulent, rapid diversification processes (Suleimenova et al. 2021). Since the focus of this article is limited to a review of the literature on bilingualism and multilingualism in Kazakhstan, a promising discussion for future research could be the issue of the status and functional content of languages in a bilingual society.

Accordingly, the goals and objectives of sociolinguistic research on bilingualism influence the metalanguage and the choice of analysis methods. For instance, the key and system-forming term “bilingualism” in the “Dictionary of Sociolinguistic Terms” is understood as the proficiency/use of two/several languages by an individual or society (Suleimenova et al. 2020). We consider it necessary to note that the “Dictionary of Sociolinguistic Terms” edited by E. Suleimenova is the first specialized dictionary in sociolinguistics in the post-Soviet space (the first edition of the dictionary was in 2002). In this article, we refer to the 2nd edition of this dictionary (2020). The dictionary has been reprinted several times and has great scientific and practical value. When compiling the dictionary's entries, the authors took into account the experience of domestic and international sociolinguistics and, crucially, the specific linguistic, demographic, and geopolitical situation in Kazakhstan. All of this is reflected in the proposed definitions and the selection of lexicographic material. The dictionary's terms are provided in both Kazakh and Russian, significantly expanding its user base and facilitating the search for translations. Regarding the definition and content of the term “bilingualism” the authors propose distinguishing the following types: individual bilingualism – knowledge and use of two languages by members of a particular ethnic group; and mass bilingualism – knowledge and use of two languages by the majority of an ethnic group (Suleimenova et al. 2020). The phenomenon of mass bilingualism in Kazakhstan, as is well documented, emerged during the Soviet era (by analogy with the Soviet term “national-Russian bilingualism”). In contrast, Russian was utilised across all major domains of public life, whereas Kazakh remained confined to specific areas, including every day and family communication, fiction, journalism, and cultural activities, all within a narrow national framework (Zhanpeisova, 2006). One type of bilingualism is known as natural bilingualism, which is defined as the knowledge and use of two languages as a result of direct interaction between native speakers of these languages (Suleimenova et al. 2020). Natural bilingualism is defined as the acquisition of language through socialization, whereby the study of a foreign language (in artificial or academic bilingualism) is a means of adaptation (Chernichkina, 2007).

Sociolinguistics is interdisciplinary in nature, so it's only natural that its terminology is based on sociological terms and concepts, which are clarified and supplemented with linguistic content in dictionary entries.

In Kazakhstan, natural bilingualism is widespread, where Russian is acquired spontaneously, in the natural context of the speech environment. Most Kazakhs became natural bilinguals because they lived in a bilingual environment during the Soviet era and did not specifically study Russian. This type of bilingualism, according to B. Khasanov, is a socially natural and necessary phenomenon (Khasanov, 1989). Natural bilingualism most often begins to develop in childhood. This early exposure is associated with immersion in a communicative environment, where both languages are part of daily practices. Here, the functional distribution of languages is important, where one language is the family language, while the other is realized in the micro-society (kindergarten, street, school). Natural bilingualism in children is characterized by a high level of automaticity in speech processing in both languages. In Kazakh families (usually urban ones), characteristics of natural bilingualism include the early, parallel acquisition of Russian and Kazakh and active code-switching. A comprehensive analysis of children's natural bilingualism (based on children's speech) is presented in the research of psycholinguist A. Shayakhmet, who combines sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and ontolinguistic approaches to the study of children's bilingualism. Childhood bilingualism in Kazakhstan is not just the parallel existence of two languages in children's speech, but also a vital necessity, since the main factor leading to the acquisition of a second language – both Kazakh and Russian – is inevitable socialization, an obligatory part of which is linguistic socialization, accompanied by a complex of psycholinguistic factors (Shayakhmet, 2014).

It is logical to contrast natural bilingualism with artificial bilingualism – the knowledge and use of two languages as a result of deliberate and specially created conditions for learning a second language (Suleimenova et al. 2020).

In light of ongoing educational reforms, the problems of educational bilingualism are constantly the focus of research by linguists, methodologists, educators, and psychologists. Today, the reform of the transition to trilingual education is generating considerable interest both in Kazakhstan and abroad. A number of foreign studies propose a comparison of modern school education with education during the Soviet period in Kazakhstan (Shovkovich & Khukhuni, 2020), and also discuss the problems of changing the structure, content, and technology of instruction in the context of multilingual education (Ryagin & Ismagambetova, 2017).

The linguistic situation in Soviet schools dictated the conditions for the formation of bilingual schools. As is well known, during the Soviet period, universities and pedagogical institutes of the Kazakh SSR trained teachers of philology with the qualification “Teacher of Russian Language and Literature in a National Schools”. Today, the Soviet term “national school” has been replaced by the phrases “school with a non-Russian language of instruction” and “school with a non-Kazakh language of instruction”. National and regional higher education institutions across the country train specialists in Kazakh language and literature for schools with non-Kazakh as the language of instruction, and Russian language and literature for schools with non-Russian as the language of instruction. At the same time, the demands of the modern labor market have influenced the emergence of new teaching professions with

knowledge of English. For example, the oldest pedagogical university, Abai KazNPU, trains foreign language teachers in the specialization “Uyghur Language and Literature – English”.

In addressing the significant matter of the role and functions of the English language within the educational system of Kazakhstan, it is imperative to acknowledge the pioneering contributions of R. Nurtazina. Prior to the transition to multilingual education during the Soviet era, R. Nurtazina, a renowned teacher, methodologist and linguist, was among the first to implement multilingualism in practice. As E. Suleimenova states in her book “Essays on Linguists”, R. Nurtazina addressed the issues of multilingualism as far back as the 1970s of the last century, overcoming organisational and methodological difficulties, and providing students of Kazakh schools with the opportunity to master English along with Kazakh and Russian (Suleimenova, 2020). R. Nurtazina largely foresaw the future of Kazakhstan's multilingual education and, as the director of School No. 12 in Almaty, she achieved the introduction of in-depth study of the English language; subjects such as history, physics, and mathematics began to be taught in English. R. Nurtazina, as one of the authors and developers of the “Concept of the Kazakh General Education School”, openly raised issues of expanding the spheres of the Kazakh language, revealed the problems of ignoring examples of folk pedagogy and literature of the Turkic peoples, and the residual principle of financing education.

In all educational organizations, regardless of the form of ownership, students are provided with knowledge of Kazakh as the state language, as well as the study of Russian and one of the foreign languages in accordance with the state compulsory standard of the corresponding level of education (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023). The teaching of a foreign language in the context of artificial or educational bilingualism has again acquired its relevance with the transition of the entire education system to trilingual education. The idea of multilingual education in Kazakhstan was first voiced in 2004, and the phased implementation of the “Trinity of Languages” project began in 2007 (Natsional’naia akademiia obrazovaniia imeni I. Altynsarina, 2022). Educational bilingualism as a specific type of bilingualism, requiring the development of a methodological concept, is widely considered by Kazakhstani scientists in an interdisciplinary aspect: in contrastive linguistics, linguodidactics, comparative linguistics, and language teaching methodology (Beisenbaeva, 1994; Suleimenova, 1992; Kunanbaeva, 2005; Bain, 1974; Karlinskii, 1972; Isaev, 1989). In bilingual education, language acts as a tool for acquiring new knowledge, familiarization, and the content of education is distinguished by a combination of subject and language components in all links of the educational process (Chubukova, 2008).

Consequently, an integrative approach combining methodologies from associated disciplines (e.g. sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive science, language teaching methodology) is recommended when studying bilingualism. Furthermore, it is imperative to draw distinctions between the particulars of the study. The field of sociolinguistics offers an explanation as to why and for what purpose a bilingual individual chooses a language, while psycholinguistics provides an explanation as to

how a bilingual individual switches or mixes languages. While the field of sociolinguistics identifies language prestige, attitudes towards language, linguistic norms, and common usage as causes, psycholinguistics focuses on the speech mechanisms that regulate bilingualism as a cognitive phenomenon.

The innovative nature of psycholinguistics has had a significant impact on its metalinguistic framework. The conceptual and terminological basis of psycholinguistics consists of terms and concepts from various sciences, including linguistics itself, psychology, sociology, cognitive neuroscience, medicine, physiology, speech therapy, pedagogy, special education and rehabilitation, etc. (Ibrayeva et al. 2023) serves to confirm the multipolarity of modern linguistics and its various directions.

The study of bilingualism in Kazakhstani psycholinguistics is associated with speech behavior, speech production and perception, the study of the integrative network between two language systems, and the competition of languages in information processing. The following areas of research are of particular interest:

- the acquisition of first, second and third languages by children and adults (Shayakhmet, 2014; Akberdi, 2005),

- the understanding and acquisition of different types of texts in a third (foreign) language by bilinguals, and psycholinguistic principles for developing reading literacy (Kurmanbek, 2021; Ibrayeva & Kenzhebekkyzy, 2023).

A scientific field that is in its infancy in Kazakhstani science is the neurolinguistics of bilingualism, as well as neurolinguistics in general. It is important to acknowledge the medical dimension of the investigation into the relationship between language and the brain, which is predominantly linked to various pathologies and diseases of the human central nervous system. In contrast, in Kazakhstan, there is a compelling need to shift the focus from the analysis of the brain function of a patient to that of a healthy individual. This approach enables the identification of characteristics related to ontogenesis, language abilities, language choice, code switching, and language processing, among other aspects.

In 2024, the Brain Institute was established at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (official opening in 2026), where fundamental and applied brain research is conducted. It is important to acknowledge that neuroscience represents a relatively recent area of research in Kazakhstan. Previously, scientific research related to brain issues was conducted in the republic at clinical research institutes. The Brain Institute, under the leadership of Professor A. Kustubaeva, the project's initiator, was established within the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at the university's Department of Biophysics, Biomedicine, and Neuroscience. For the first time in Kazakhstan, this interdisciplinary center has begun conducting integrative research into the functioning of the brain, involving scientists from various fields. "The Brain Institute can become a conglomerate uniting the natural, humanitarian, and exact sciences. Fundamental brain research, such as the study of the neural mechanisms of emotional-cognitive functions and consciousness, will attract global international scientific foundations to finance scientific projects. Scientific research conducted by the Brain Institute will help

optimize rationality and efficiency in thinking, advance the development of brain-computer interfaces, optimize the processes of cognitive development and emotional state, correct deviant development, prevent the deterioration of cognitive functions with aging, etc.” (Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 2023). Within the framework of the work of this institute, an interdisciplinary neurolinguistic study of trilingualism is being carried out for the first time, uniting linguists and neuroscience specialists (Zhaksylykkyzy, ed al. 2025). The object of the scientists’ research is the process of acquisition of English (a third) language by Kazakh-Russian and Russian-Kazakh bilinguals.

Conclusion

The review demonstrated that research on bilingualism and multilingualism in Kazakhstan is developing in line with contemporary global scientific trends and draws on the extensive experience of domestic scientific schools. Bilingualism in Kazakhstan is not only a socio-historical phenomenon but also an important tool for educational, scientific, and cultural modernization. Reforming the education system and transitioning to trilingual education require a comprehensive analysis of the principles of multilingual education. The review demonstrates that successful acquisition of a first, second, or third/foreign language is associated with a whole range of sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic methodological factors. Therefore, language learning methods should be interdisciplinary, combining tools from various disciplines.

An analysis of current trends confirms that further development of bilingualism and multilingualism research requires strengthening the experimental base, expanding corpus data, and incorporating methods from neuroscience and other natural sciences. The importance of multilingualism in modern Kazakhstan is determined not only by the needs of the labor market and education, but also by the role of multilingualism in strengthening intercultural dialogue, interethnic harmony, and the formation of a multilingual and transcultural personality.

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ARTICLE

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Lexical Motivation and Metalinguistic Awareness in Children's Speech: A Cross-Linguistic Study of Bilingual and Monolingual Minds

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Abstract

This paper explores motivational reflection as a linguistic and cognitive process in children's speech, grounding the research in three interconnected approaches: psycholinguistic, motivational, and comparative. The aim of the study is to examine motivational reflection and identify both universal and language-specific patterns of its manifestation in monolingual and bilingual children. The study is based on a controlled psycholinguistic experiment and employs a motivational-comparative analytical framework to examine children's interpretation of motivated lexical units in Russian and Kazakh. The empirical corpus consists of metalinguistic responses produced by monolingual and bilingual children aged 5–6, 7–8, and 9–10. To organize the data, motivational passports were created, recording parameters such as the internal structure of words, types of lexical and structural motivation, motivation models, and features reflecting children's conceptualization of lexical meaning. The study primarily focuses on comparing motivational reflection between monolingual and bilingual speakers, with particular attention to age-related development and language dominance patterns. Special emphasis was placed on spontaneous word creation, seen as evidence of deeper cognitive and linguistic processes. Results show that monolinguals generally have higher levels of MR, while bilinguals display more creativity and variability in vocabulary understanding, often bridging gaps through diverse associative strategies. The study advances research on children's speech development and may be applied to teaching Russian and Kazakh in both monolingual and bilingual educational settings.

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Introduction

Over the past decades, the study of children’s language awareness, especially that of bilingual children, has become a priority area in ontolinguistics and psycholinguistics. In the multicultural context of modern Research into the linguistic and cognitive abilities of children growing up in a bilingual environment is particularly relevant in Kazakhstan’s society. This study aims to examine the phenomenon of motivational reflection (MR) as a cognitive mechanism that enables the conscious correlation of a word’s sound form and meaning, understanding of its internal form, and the use of this knowledge in productive speech activity. The aim of this study is to analyze MR as a linguistic-cognitive operational mechanism and to identify the universal and specific features of its manifestation in monolingual and bilingual children.

The study drew on two major theories: 1) Blinova’s (1984) theory of lexical motivation, first presented in the textbook *The Phenomenon of Word Motivation: A Lexicological Aspect* and further developed in the monograph *Motivology and Its Aspects* (Blinova, 2007). Blinova conceptualizes the motivated word as a unit of the lexical-semantic level of the language, characterized by systemic, semantic, and formal features. 2) *The concept of comparative motivology* (Blinova, 1994; Zhakupova, 2009), and the concept of MR developed within this theory (Gridina, 2002; Gridina & Kolyasnikova, 2005; Zhakupova et al., 2024a; Zhakupova et al., 2024b), according to which MR is viewed as “a special form of metalinguistic thinking associated with the awareness (understanding) of the internal form of a word (identification of the motivation of a name)” (Gridina, 2002, p. 20).

The comparative-motivational approach, based on the principles of anthropocentrism, systematicity, and synchrony (Zhakupova, 2009, pp. 63–73), involves analyzing motivated language units from the perspective of the speaker’s awareness at a particular point in time. A word may appear motivated, half-motivated (lexically or structurally), or non-motivated when it becomes the object of metalinguistic reflection (Blinova, 2007, pp. 79–80). For a researcher in lexical

motivation, it is essential that a native speaker correlate a lexical unit by sound and meaning on the basis of their formal-semantic similarity, relying on both everyday linguistic intuition and acquired linguistic knowledge (Blinova, 2007, p. 49).

The key notions used in describing a motivated word include the internal form of the word (IFW), motivational form and motivational meaning, lexical and structural motivators, motivational and nominative features, as well as the types of motivation (phonetic, morphological, and semantic). Lexical processes associated with the dynamics of motivation are also considered, including remotivation, demotivation, and lexicalization (Blinova, 2007, p. 25). While adult native speakers generally have no difficulty understanding motivated vocabulary, studies of children's metalinguistic awareness have shown that not all children are able to identify even the most evident motivational connections between words. This hinders the processes of understanding, interpreting, and explaining meanings, which in turn affects a child's reading literacy and academic performance

Over the past 20–25 years, numerous studies have examined the ontogenesis of language ability, the development of linguistic reflection, and the role of language play in the formation of children's cognitive and speech skills (Doherty, 2014; Jessner, 2006; Jiang, 2007; Tseytlin, 2017; Yelisseyeva, 2014). A number of scholars pay particular attention to metalinguistic abilities as a fundamental element in the development of speech and communicative competence (Dobrova, 2018; Unarova et al., 2019). Contemporary approaches also focus on the mechanisms of metalinguistic activity (Gvozdev, 2007; Hofer & Jessner, 2022; Tulviste, 1991), one of which is “motivational reflection – a universal property of human metalinguistic thinking that determines the orientation of consciousness toward the explainability of the connection between the sound form and meaning” (Zhakupova & Balmagambetova, 2022, p. 80).

In the English-language linguistic tradition, the term “*motivational reflection*” is not used; it corresponds to the broader concept of *metalinguistic awareness*, understood as an individual's ability to reflect consciously on language (Aitchison, 2003; Ben-Zeev, 1977; Bialystok, 1986, 1988; Cromdal, 1999; Cummins, 1978).

In Russian linguistics, the concept of MR describes the strategies by which children comprehend language during its acquisition. Thus, Gridina views MR as a mental dominant of a child's linguistic consciousness, relying on the onomasiological approach and analyzing data from a monolingual (Russian-speaking) child environment (Gridina, 2002, 2015; Gridina & Kolyasnikova, 2005). Kolyasnikova examines MR as a key component of linguistic ontogenesis, drawing on meta-statements from children aged 2 to 7 (Kolyasnikova, 2002, 2004, 2005) and on materials from dictionaries, diary notes, and personal observations. A significant contribution to the methodology for studying MR was made by Garganeyeva, whose “Motivational Dictionary of Children's Speech” documents the linguistic judgments of children aged 1–11 obtained during a psycholinguistic experiment (Garganeyeva, 2007).

In Kazakhstani linguistics, children's speech remains insufficiently explored. The existing research has focused primarily on the impact of early bilingualism on

intellectual development and the formation of a bilingual personality, as well as on issues of interference (Shayakhmet, 2015, 2016), bilingual education in Kazakhstan's schools and language socialization (Smagulova, 2019). Studies of children's speech have largely addressed the syntax of Kazakh, the acquisition of verbal morphology (Akinina et al., 2015) and word-creation. However, the metalinguistic aspects of children's language development – particularly motivational reflection – have not yet been examined in Kazakhstan, either in monolingual or bilingual contexts.

The conceptual novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive comparative-motivational approach to analyzing MR. It encompasses a study of the metalinguistic consciousness of bilingual and monolingual children aged 5–10, the identification of universal and specific features of MR across monolingual and bilingual environments, and the development of algorithms designed to stimulate conscious vocabulary acquisition through motivational reflection.

Materials and methods of research

The material for this study consisted of children's meta-statements recorded during a specially organized psycholinguistic experiment. Given the specific language situation in the northern regions of Kazakhstan, four experimental groups were formed, each comprising 36 participants (144 children in total). The respondents were grouped based on parental questionnaire data, taking into account language dominance (Kazakh/Russian), the language of instruction at school, and the language of everyday communication both within and outside the family:

- Group 1 – monolingual respondents fluent in Kazakh (RMK) who attend preschool and primary school classes with Kazakh as the language of instruction in Kokshetau and the Akmola region.
- Group 2 – bilingual respondents with Kazakh as their dominant language (RBK). Russian is acquired at a conversational level, while Kazakh remains the language of everyday communication.
- Group 3 – monolingual respondents who speak only Russian (RMR); Kazakh is studied as a school subject.
- Group 4 – bilingual respondents with Russian as their dominant language (RBR); Kazakh is understood but not used in everyday speech.

Each group was divided into three age subgroups: 5–6 years, 7–8 years, and 9–10 years (12 respondents per subgroup), allowing for a differentiated analysis of the age-related dynamics of motivational reflection.

The methodological basis of the study relies on three complementary approaches: psycholinguistic, motivational, and comparative.

Psycholinguistic approach

To record and analyze MR, a comprehensive psycholinguistic experiment (PLE) methodology was developed, enabling the registration of metastatements – evidence of the respondents' metalinguistic awareness. The experiment was conducted in three stages:

1. Free Associative Experiment (FAE) – designed to identify the nature of associative thinking and the structure of respondents' lexicon without externally limiting the scope of their responses.
2. The directed associative experiment (DAE) was based on a series of targeted questions: *Who? What? Which? Where is it found? What does it look like?* etc., encouraging respondents to engage in a deeper semantic analysis of stimulus words. The DAE made it possible to document how children formulate definitions, justify their answers, and draw on their life experience. According to Dobrova, such experiment provides the researcher with “a lot of useful information not only about what the child knows regarding the meaning of a given word, but also about the respondent's picture of the world” (Dobrova, 2018, p. 13).
3. The Linguistic Stage (LS) was aimed at identifying manifestations of MR in children's interpretation of the internal form of the word and the connections between its sound form and meaning. For example, when children from the RBK group were asked: “*Nege toqyldaq dep atalğan?*” (Why is the woodpecker called that?), the following responses were given: “*tūmsyǵı ūshkir*” (‘its beak is sharp’), “*tūmsyǵı ötkir, qysqa*” (‘its beak is sharp and short’), “*tūmsyǵı ūzyn*” (‘its beak is long’); “*aǵaşty tesedi*” (‘it pecks through the tree’), “*aǵaşty şūqyp, toqyldatatype jatyr*” (‘it pecks the tree and makes a knocking sound’), “*aǵaşty sindyrady*” (‘it breaks the tree’), “*aǵaştardy jep jatyr*” (‘it feeds on wood’). When children from the RBR group were asked: “*Pochemu podsolnukh tak nazyvayetsya?*” (‘Why is the sunflower called that?’), the following responses were given: “*rastyot na solntse, pokhozh na solntse*” (‘it grows in the sun, it looks like the sun’), “*pokhozh na solntse*” (‘looks like the sun’), “*rastyot v polye, rastyot pod solntsem*” (‘it grows in the field, grows under the sun’), “*rastyot pod solntsem*” (‘grows under the sun’), “*pokhozh na solnyshko*” (‘looks like a little sun’), “*pokhozh na solntse, kogda ne vyspel*” (‘looks like the sun when it is not ripe yet’), “*zhyoltyy, pokhozh na solntse*” (‘yellow, looks like the sun’). Stimulus words were classified according to their degree of motivation into: motivated (e.g., Kazakh: *ayazata, qaraqat* (frost, blackcurrant)); Russian: *skoriy poyezd* (fast train), half-motivated (e.g., Kazakh: *ushaq* (plane); Russian *karapuz* (toddler)); non-motivated (e.g., Kazakh *tereze* (window); Russian *zont* (umbrella)). All metastatements were systematized according to the presence of lexical and/or structural motivators, as well as by the type of motivation (phonetic, morphological, or semantic). For each word, a motivational passport was created that incorporated the full range of children's interpretations.

Motivological approach

The key instrument of motivological analysis is the motivational passport of a word – an analytical model that reflects the evidence of a child's metalinguistic

consciousness. Each passport includes information about the internal form of the word (IFW) and its types, the motivational form (MF) – a segment of the sound shell that determines motivation; the motivational meaning (MM), i.e., the meaning perceived by the speaker and associated with the MF; lexical and structural motivators; the type of motivation (phonetic, morphological, semantic); motivational, nominative, and classificatory features. Motivational Passport for the Russian word RYABINA (*rowan berry*):

“*ryabaya*” (‘speckled’) (3), “*ryabit*” (‘it flickers’), “*ryabit v glazakh*” (‘it makes your eyes flicker’) (3), “*krasniy tsvet*” (‘red color’), “*krasniy*” (‘red’) (2), “*potomu chto yarkaya*” (‘because it’s bright’) (2), “*ryzhaya*” (‘ginger-colored’) (1), “*ot togo chto yeyo kushayut ryabchiki*” (‘because hazel hens eat it’) (1).

MF: RYAB/ina

IFW₁ <

MM: ‘<a plant> of a speckled (Rus. *ryaboy*) <color>’

LM₁: ryaboy

SM₁: kalINA, malINA (En. *arrowwood*, *raspberry*)

MF: RYAB/ina

IFW₂ <

MM: ‘<a plant that> flickers (Rus. *ryabit*)’

LM₂: ryabit’

SM₂: SM₁

MF: RYAB/ina

IFW₃ <

MM: ‘<a plant that> hazel hens (Rus. *ryabchiki*) <feed on>’

LM₃: ryabchik

SM₃: SM₂: SM₁

IFW_{1,2,3} non-lexicalized, non-metaphorical, having variants.

MS: ryaboy, ryabit’, ryabchik (NS: a tree with orange-red fruit)

Type of motivation: morphological.

Particular attention was given to the method for identifying the MF and MM. For example, when analyzing the word SNEZHINKA (‘*snowflake*’), children actualized only the left part of the word (*snezh*/), correlating it with the word *sneg* (‘snow’), whereas the formative component *-inka* was not interpreted (potentially, SNEZHINKA belongs to a chain of one-structural formations such as l’dINKA ‘a piece of ice’, krupINKA ‘a grain’, yet no such motivational-structural associations were found in the children’s metalinguistic data). The following motivational meanings (MMs) were suggested: “*sdelana iz snega*” (‘made of snow’), “*pokhozha na sneg*” (‘looks like snow’), “*svyazana so snegom*” (‘related to snow’), “*belaya kak sneg*” (‘white as snow’). As a result, the following four IFWs were identified:

MF: SNEZH/inka

IFW₁ <

MM: ‘<made of> snow (Rus. *sneg*)’

MF: SNEZH/inka

IFW₂<

MM: '<related to> snow (Rus. *sneg*)'

MF: SNEZH/inka

IFW₃<

MM: '<looks like> snow (Rus. *sneg*)'

MF: SNEZH/inka

IFW₄<

MM: '<as white as> snow (Rus. *sneg*)'

Comparative approach

The comparative analysis was conducted in two directions: by respondents' age and by language dominance (Russian/Kazakh). The developed methodology of motivational-comparative analysis (MCA) involves comparing the structural and semantic characteristics of words in order to identify common and specific features in monolingual and bilingual children's understanding of motivated vocabulary. MCA was carried out in stages, following a specially designed program that includes a sequence of specific tasks (MCA of words by i-m; MCA of the IFW and its types; MCA of the types of motivation). Thus, the MCA enabled the identification of age-related and language-related dynamics in the formation of MR, which represents the main empirical contribution of this study.

Results and discussion

During the PLE, a corpus of 4,500 children's metastatements was collected, reflecting their comprehension of motivated, half-motivated, and non-motivated vocabulary. The experiment involved children from three age groups (5–6, 7–8, 9–10 years) and two types of language environments – monolingual (RMR) and bilingual (RBR). The number of language units presented for comprehension was 24 for the 5-6 age group, 29 for the 7-8 age group, and 37 for the 9-10 age group, totaling 90 language units. On average, each word elicited 8-12 metastatements.

To assess the degree of word motivation, a Motivation Scale (Zhakupova et al., 2024a) was developed, based on the principle of frequency, which measures the proportion of motivating interpretations relative to the total number of words interpreted. Each word was assigned a motivation index (tentatively designated i-m) depending on the number of motivational interpretations provided. Four levels of i-m were distinguished:

- Zero i-m – less than 10% (none of the respondents gave a motivating explanation of the word; therefore, the word is classified as non-motivated (Nm: n – not, m – motivated);
- Low i-m – 10%–39% of the respondents gave a motivating explanation of the word; the word has a low degree of motivation (Lm – low motivation);

- Medium i-m – 40%–60% of the respondents provided a motivating interpretation of the word; the word has a medium degree of motivation (Mm – medium level of motivation);
- High i-m – more than 70% of the respondents provided a motivating interpretation of the word; the word is characterized by a high degree of motivation (Hm – high motivation).

This classification provides insight into the research model of children's linguistic-cognitive (linguistic-creative) experience in language acquisition and cognition, as it allows for the ranking of MR levels: a higher number of words with medium or high motivation indices corresponds to a higher level of MR in children, whereas a greater number of words with zero or low motivation indices indicates a lower level of MR. The developed Motivation Scale (i-m) complements existing models for assessing metalinguistic awareness by providing a novel quantitative tool for measuring the degree of word motivation in children's perception. This approach is currently unparalleled in international research, which is largely dominated by qualitative descriptions (Ben-Zeev, 1977). Our results suggest that such a quantitative scale can serve as an effective instrument for diagnosing the level of metalinguistic competence in children across different language groups.

The results of a motivational-comparative analysis of vocabulary based on i-m have been obtained from the perspective of its comprehension by bilingual and monolingual children.

Table 1 – Distribution of words by i-m index (in %)

Index of motivation	5-6 years old		7-8 years old		9-10 years old	
	RMR	RBR	RMR	RBR	RMR	RBR
Hm	10 (42%)	0	19 (65%)	10 (35%)	31 (84%)	7 (20%)
Mm	10 (42%)	4 (17%)	6 (21%)	9 (30%)	4 (11%)	19 (51%)
Lm	4 (17%)	14 (58%)	4 (14%)	10 (35%)	2 (5%)	9 (24%)
Nm	0	6 (25%)	0	0	0	2 (5 %)

As shown in the table, in a group of children 5-6 years old, from the RMR perspective, all words are classified as motivated, with varying indices: an equal number of words with Hm and Mm, 4 words with Lm, and no words with Nm. From the RBR perspective, there are no words with Hm, the largest number of words have Lm (14), and 6 words have Nm. In the 7–8 age group, all words are motivated from both monolingual and bilingual perspectives, with no words classified as Nm. Notably, from the RMR perspective, 65% of words have Hm and 4 words have Lm, whereas from the RBR perspective, words are distributed almost evenly across indices. In the 9–10 age group, Hm words dominate (84%), compared with 65% and 42% in the 7–8 and 5–6 monolingual groups, respectively, indicating a doubling of Hm words. Consequently, the number of Lm words decreases significantly. In the RBR group,

changes are also observed compared with younger age groups: the proportion of Mm words increases substantially (54%) compared with 30% at 7–8 years and 17% at 5–6 years, while Lm words decrease (58% → 35% → 24%). Interestingly, in the 9–10-year-old RBR group, the proportion of Hm words decreases compared with the 7–8-year-old RBR group (35% → 16%).

Statistical data show that the process of comprehending motivated vocabulary in bilinguals exhibits positive age-related dynamics; however, compared to the monolingual group, there is a quantitative lag (cf. the proportion of words with high i-m: RMR – 84%, RBR – 20%). The experimental data confirmed Bialystok's (1986) findings that the level of *metalinguistic awareness* increases with age, although the progress of monolinguals and bilinguals differs in nature. Monolinguals show a steady increase in the proportion of words with a high motivation index (Hm), reaching 84% by ages 9–10, whereas bilinguals show growth primarily in words with a medium motivation (Mm), indicating the gradual formation of a conscious vocabulary.

The results indicate that the level of MR increases with age in both groups, but the progression is more pronounced among monolinguals: Hm = 42% (5–6 years) → 65% (7–8 years) → 84% (9–10 years). Among bilinguals, the proportion of Hm does not exceed 35% and declines to 20% in the oldest group, while the number of moderately motivated explanations rises (Mm = 51% at 9–10 years). This pattern confirms the gradual development of an active Russian vocabulary in bilinguals and reflects a more complex trajectory of their metalinguistic development (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990).

A quantitative analysis of words using the i-m indicator allows the creation of a database of motivated and non-motivated words in the analyzed RMR and RBR groups and reveals a clear trend: a tendency for linguistic signs to be perceived as motivated by mono- and bilingual children. The analysis leads to the following conclusion: in the RMR group, words with Hm predominate and no words with Nm are present; in the RBR group, words with Mm and Lm outnumber those with Hm, and words with Nm are present. These findings provide a general picture of children's MR, which is more developed in monolinguals than in bilinguals. However, they do not provide information about the quality of MR or its specific characteristics in monolingual versus bilingual children.

An important outcome of the study was the compilation of a motivational passport for each word, based on PLE data. A total of 90 motivational passports were created, enabling an MCA of IFW and its types, motivators, characteristics, and types of motivation, with respect to comprehension by bilingual and monolingual children. Analysis of the corpus of children's metastatements revealed both universal and language-specific features of MR in monolingual and bilingual children:

Universal features of MR. All children demonstrated typified patterns of motivating explanations grounded in associative links, confirming a shared mechanism of vocabulary perception that relies on relating words to the “world of objects” and to the child's personal experience. According to the experimental data, motivating interpretations make up more than 70% of responses in both bilingual and monolingual

groups. Metastatements are often constructed according to the patterns: “it comes from the word...” or “it is related to the word...” (for example, Kazakh: AQŞA QAR (white and fluffy snow) – “qarmen baylanıstı” (related to ‘snow’), BURABAY – “bay sözimen baylanıstı (related to the word ‘rich’); Russian: ZVEZDOCHYOT – “related to the word ‘star’”, MOROZHENOYE – “comes from the word ‘freeze’”), which indicates the children’s ability to identify a meaningful segment of a word without relying on its interpretation. In both groups, there is a tendency towards weakening of motivational connections and a partial loss of the word’s ability to actualize lexical motivation.

The universal features of MR established in the study (typified by motivating explanations, reliance on visual and sensory features, and a direct correlation of words with the “world of things”) align with the general patterns of metalinguistic awareness identified in a number of international studies (Bialystok, 1986, 1988; Cromdal, 1999). A consistent tendency is observed: regardless of their linguistic environment, children tend to establish semantic connections between the form and meaning of words, confirming the anthropocentric nature of linguistic perception (Aitchison, 2003). In Western linguistics, MR correlates with the concept of metalinguistic awareness, which includes the ability to consciously analyze the structure of a word, its morphemes, and its meaning (Bialystok, 1988). Our results show that monolinguals develop metalinguistic awareness more quickly, while bilinguals demonstrate a more complex but less uniform system of word perception, which requires additional support in the educational environment. However, our research has identified several features that have not been described in previous international studies. For example, we observed a gradual weakening of motivational connections in younger children, suggesting the emergence of a “non-motivated” layer of vocabulary in their mental lexicon. This process has received little attention in Western linguistic research, where the primary focus is on the cognitive mechanisms of word comprehension (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990) rather than on the dynamics of lexical motivation.

Specific features of the MR of monolinguals. Monolingual respondents across all age groups provide more accurate and unambiguous interpretations of IFW, rarely expressing doubt or hypothetical reasoning. This group is characterized by the emergence of a single “correct” motivation, commonly shared by the majority of participants. The age dynamics shows a considerable increase in the proportion of words with a high motivation index (Hm): 42% (5–6 years) → 65% (7–8 years) → 84% (9–10 years). For example, five out of twelve children aged 5–6, when explaining the Russian set phrase MOLOCHNIYE ZUBY (milk teeth), gave such motivational interpretations as “comes from the word ‘milk’,” “made of milk,” “consist of milk” (4 responses), and “white teeth – white milk” (1 responses). Eight children aged 7–8 interpreted the internal form of verb LAIKAT’ (to give a like), currently “fashionable” in the Russian language, as “to put a like” (3), “a like,” “likes,” and “from the word ‘like’” (5 responses). When interpreting the Russian verb SLEDIT’ (to trace), ten out of twelve monolinguals aged 9–10 offered motivating explanations, correlating it with

various words and expressions: “to look for a trace” (5 responses), “a trace” (Rus. sled) (3), and “to follow with your eyes” (Rus. smotret' vsled) (1 responses).

Overall, the results of the experiment showed that monolingual children demonstrate a higher level of MR, which is particularly evident in the age-related dynamics. This result is quite natural, since with age the child's acquisition of language as a “system of codes” (Luria, 1979, pp. 25 – 26) becomes more fully developed. Mastery of the lexical structure of the language, awareness of speech and its arbitrariness, as well as the ability to select appropriate linguistic means, are generally achieved by the end of preschool age and become well established by the end of elementary school. The development of language ability – defined as the capacity to use language “within the system of rules accepted in a given language for expressing thoughts” (Ushakova, 1996, p. 28) – also plays a crucial role. RMR representatives demonstrate the ability to provide more accurate motivational interpretations, a stronger command of the system of linguistic signs, and a more nuanced understanding of the nature of their native language. The more precise and unambiguous comprehension of the internal form of words demonstrated by monolingual children is consistent with Gridina's conclusion regarding the greater stability of MR in a monolingual environment (Gridina, 2002, 2015; Gridina & Kolyasnikova, 2005).

Specific features of MR in bilinguals. Bilingual children more frequently provide non-motivated interpretations and “I don't know” responses, especially in the younger groups (Nm = 25% at the age of 5–6). The results of the experiment showed that a considerable number of bilinguals across all age groups experienced difficulties in interpreting words due to not knowing the word or not understanding its meaning (for example, such Russian words as MAYATNIK (pendulum), CHERNOSLIV (prune), PODKIDYSH (foundling), YEGOZA (a fidgety child), GORIZONT (horizon), etc.).

There is also evidence of polymotivation – a multiplicity of interpretations of the IFW – along with a high degree of creativity in the explanations. The MR of bilingual children is marked by fragmentation, iconicity of the named object, and a broad range of associations. Among 7-8-year-old bilinguals, the proportion of words with medium motivation (Mm) reaches 30%, which is connected to the diversity of associative strategies they employ. This aligns with Sullivan et al's (2018) observation that bilinguals more often rely on non-standard interpretations and construct their own motivational models.

A distinctive feature of the MR of bilingual children aged 9–10 is the way they explain Russian words, where illogical motivational connections emerge between items that are neither semantically nor structurally related (a “paradoxical” internal form of the word). The reasons for this may include insufficient knowledge of the correct spelling of Russian words, as well as the respondent's attempt to associate the target word with the lexical units of the Kazakh language. For example, for the Russian word KARAPUZ (a toddler), children produced interpretations such as: “Ya slyshu puzo” (Rus. puzo – En. belly); “kara – karma”; “kara – korotkiy” (Rus. korotkiy – En. short) (2); “kora na dereviah i puziko” (bark on trees and a belly, Rus. kora – En. bark) (1); “malen'kiy rebyonok, kotoriy pukhlen'kiy, or it is from the Kazakh word ‘qara’”

(a small chubby child or from the Kazakh word qara – black) (1). It is evident that the mistaken association of KARAPUZ with KARA – ‘korotkiy’ (short) results from the child’s incorrect assumption about the spelling of KOROTKIY, which they believed to be written as KAROTKIY. The link between KARA and KARMA is based solely on phonetic similarity, while the association with the Kazakh word QARA (‘black’) is also sound-based, with no further explanation provided. Such interlingual interference, not described in Blinova’s theory but mentioned in the works on interlingual awareness (Cromdal, 1999), represents an important area for further research.

There were also described the word-creation abilities of children from monolingual and bilingual environments. Examples of word creation found in the metastatements of 5–6-year-old monolingual respondents include the following Russian formations: PYLESOSKA – a blended contamination of pyl’ (dust) + soska (pacifier)’; UMNASHKA (umnica) – the addition of the diminutive-affectionate suffix -yashk- to the root umnica (a clever person); DVUKHDOMOVIY (two-house/two-building) – a combination of words built on the analogy with ‘dvukhetazhniy’ (two-storey); MYAUKA (meower) – naming an animal through root clipping; TANTSEVAYU (a playful re-formation of tantsevat’ - ‘to dance’); ULYBOCHNIY, from ulybka (‘smile’) – a child’s occasional adjective derived from the noun.

In the course of our research and experimental work, we concluded that children conceptualize words in very different ways: some explain the meaning of a word quickly and effortlessly, some refuse to answer at all, while others, not wanting to “disappoint” the adult asking the question, begin to invent and fantasize. In doing so, they play with words, engaging their imagination and creativity. There were instances in which respondents produced words that, from an adult’s perspective, sounded “incorrect.” However, as scholars note, children do not produce “incorrect words”; rather, they play with language, linking objects, word forms, and meanings in a childlike manner. Chukovsky (1963) famously described these processes in his book “*From Two to Five*”: children are capable of creating new (their own) words – for example, mazelin instead of vaselin, tseplya instead of petlya, kusarik instead of sukharik, peskovator instead of ekskavator, and so on. The attempt to interpret a word often leads to wordplay. A child perceives an object in terms of what can be done with it, hence the tendency to name it by “bringing it into motion”: not lopatka (spade) but kopatka (“a digging thing,” because one digs with it; from Russian kopat’ – ‘to dig’); not molotok (hammer) but kolotok (“a knocking instrument,” from kolotit’ – ‘to hit/knock’); not yazyk (tongue) but lizyk (“a licking thing,” because one licks with it; from lizat’ – ‘to lick’).

The identified word-creation units demonstrate that children not only understand the internal form of words, but also actively use word-formation mechanisms (suffixation, contamination, analogy). The predominance of creative occasionalisms among bilinguals may indicate flexibility and variability in thinking, which is consistent with research data on the cognitive advantages of bilingualism (Sullivan et al., 2018).

Observations of word-creation processes (pylesoska, umnyashka, ulybochniy) support Chukovsky's view of children's language play as a natural mechanism of cognition (Chukovsky, 1963). The results indicate that monolinguals exhibit higher MR, whereas bilinguals demonstrate greater creativity and variability in their vocabulary understanding, often compensating for knowledge gaps through diverse associative strategies.

Conclusion

Our study was the first in Kazakhstan to implement a comprehensive approach to examining the motivational reflection of bilingual and monolingual children. The empirical and informational base of comparative motivology has been substantially broadened by incorporating metastatements from children across three age groups (5–6, 7–8, and 9–10 years) who speak one or two languages. In addition, the conceptual and terminological apparatus of the metalanguage of comparative motivology has been enriched through the introduction of terms such as motivating/non-motivating interpretation, motivation index and others. The study identified both universal and specific features of motivational reflection in monolingual and bilingual children. Regardless of language status, children tend to interpret words by establishing connections between their form and meaning, relying on associative links and personal experience. At the same time, monolingual children demonstrate a higher level of motivational reflection, manifested in the accuracy and stability of motivating interpretations, whereas bilingual children are characterized by greater variability of interpretations, polymotivation, cross-linguistic associations, and higher creativity. Of particular interest is the observed tendency toward the gradual weakening of motivational links and the emergence of a layer of lexicon with a non-transparent internal form in children's linguistic consciousness. The findings contribute to a better understanding of word interpretation mechanisms in mono- and bilingual contexts and confirm the relationship between motivational reflection and the development of children's metalinguistic awareness. Naturally, the reliability of these conclusions needs further verification through additional research using a larger empirical dataset.

The results of the study are important for the development of cognitive linguistics, which examines the relationship between language and cognition, and communicative linguistics, which focuses on the correct use of language in various communicative situations. They will contribute to research on children's word-creation, language ability, and language acquisition strategies (particularly the lexical system) in ontogenesis, and will also be useful for educators developing methods for teaching children languages, literacy, speech development, and verbal skills. The conducted study has wide-ranging prospects, including expanding the age range of participants, adapting the methodology for other languages, and developing digital platforms to support motivational learning.

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