

War of Words: Language Policy in Post Independence Kazakhstan.

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the era post-Independence to the modern day. The policy of bi-lingualism with a state language and language of inter-ethnic communication has been pursued since the break up of the Soviet Union in an attempt to include Russified nationalities in the nation-building of Kazakhstan. I compare Kazakhstan's policy with two other models of state language policy, Ireland and Norway. Both Ireland and Norway have built up their state or indigenous languages in their nation building process, but the languages have lost out to the imported language of their former occupants, English and Danish. Many experts in the field are predicting that Russian will become the dominant language in Kazakhstan, but I hope to show that while this may be possible, it may also be possible for Kazakh to dominate given the right conditions. The impact of possible language planning will also be examined and outlined. My research is based on the findings of scholars such as Dave, Laitin, Brill Olcott, Kolstoe and Lanadau in their published and private work. I will also draw heavily on census figures of all three countries and show through social experiments how census figures have distorted the reality of the state which national languages find themselves in.

Introduction

This paper aims to take a closer look at the language situations in Ireland and Norway and to demonstrate the relevance of these particular language situations to independent Kazakhstan's language situation. The main body of this research is based on my own experiences which have combined my Irish/Gaeltacht roots with my studies of Russian, leading me to live in Kazakhstan and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) for over 5 years before finally travelling to Norway on a government scholarship to investigate the language situation there. The paper is not intended to be a stand alone scholarly work, but rather an invitation for the broadening of the debate on the issues raised. All of the opinions offered here are of course those of the author and I maintain full responsibility for them.

Political nationalism and linguistic nationalism normally go hand in hand, but not always. Some countries can often have very strong political nationalism, but very weak linguistic nationalism and this can be seen in many of the newly independent states emerging in the 20th Century. Almost all over the world we can find a multitude of languages and/or linguistic varieties of the same basic language, each of which may be elevated to a status as standard language for a given geographical or political unit. The choice of one particular language or dialect is therefore always made at the

expense of other, potential candidates. The choice, then, is *interest-driven*, and—by definition—political.

Nationalism is one of the least precise and most abused terms bandied about in social sciences, often one is left with the impression that it may refer to all kinds of things, and hence refers to nothing in particular. A convenient and generally accepted definition, however, is that nationalism is a political program according to which a certain culturally and ethnically delineated group, called the *nation*, must acquire a political entity of its own, often, but not necessarily, its own *state*. Precisely which characteristics or criterion that set this cultural group apart from other groups may vary. In earlier centuries religion usually played a prominent, even decisive role, but as secularisation set in and religious identities became less salient in the modern world, *language* acquired increasing importance.

My aim is not to examine the nation-building process taking place in Kazakhstan or elsewhere, but to take a closer look at how language planning and policy are being implemented there and to show some of the interesting parallels from Ireland and Norway, and their relevance to Kazakhstan. The language issue has been used with great effect as a political lever or weapon for mobilising large sections of the population on behalf of the nationalist cause all over the world.

Language planning is defined by Wardhaugh¹ as an attempt to deliberately interfere with a language or one of its varieties; it is human intervention into natural processes of language change, diffusion or erosion. The planning focus may be either on the status of the language or on changing the condition of that language or both, as they are not mutually exclusive.

The motivation behind language planning and policy is quite often unclear. One reason frequently given is that the population has a better command of one of the languages, but people can choose to promote a language of which they have either little or no knowledge. Or they may be interested in *leaving the impression* that this is what they are doing while simultaneously, and often unbeknownst to themselves, undermining the standardisation program they ostensibly are backing. This somewhat lengthy excursion into the language policy of Ireland and Norway serves a purpose and leads up to the central question of this paper: Will Kazakhstan follow the example of Irish-Norwegian language policy?

Ireland:

The most recent census in 2002 put the number of Irish (*Gaeilge*) speakers at almost 1.5 million in the Republic of Ireland,² which would seem to put Irish in a very strong position. However, this figure does not differentiate between native speakers; those who use it as their primary language, and those who speak a *cupla focail* or couple of words, such as greetings and other civilities. It would be most naïve to accept this figure without some further investigation.

A more realistic, if somewhat less optimistic figure, was arrived at by Reg Hindley³, who reduced the number of speakers illegible for count, by redefining the borders of the Gaeltacht, determining who used the language everyday as their primary language. He also used these figures to declare that the language was dying.

Hindley's figures are also those which were taken into account by the UN Red Book on Endangered Languages, which lists Irish as a language in serious danger of becoming extinct. Strangely, few in Ireland seem phased by this, putting it down to the fact that these negative figures were compiled by non-Irish scholars, who were thought to lack intimate knowledge of the situation. In a separate investigation, using Hindley's figures for native Irish speakers, it was found that there were in fact more native speakers of Russian in Ireland than there were of Irish.⁴

Jim McCloskey, one of the more optimistic voices on the current state of the Irish language, uses figures based on competent L2 speakers, and claims Irish is in a much healthier state, with several hundred thousand speakers. He makes the case that Irish is not moribund.

These differing opinions and figures are arrived at due to the lack of an accurate means of measuring the number of native speakers of Irish. This problem, especially with census figures, is often caused by those who mean well, but who are either confused by the vague nature of census questions, or who deliberately exaggerate their language abilities for their own personal reasons, such as national pride. The state's attempt at a more accurate census question on language, introduced in 1996, has actually added to the confusion. Regardless of all of the varying facts and figures currently available on Irish, one must accept that the language, as a native one, is certainly in decline.

To demonstrate the inaccuracies of the census figures, an experiment was conducted on the national police force, or the Garda Síochána. After teachers, police were the professionals with the highest

number of Irish speakers. Over a series of two weeks, I asked 100 Dublin Gardaí⁵ for directions in Irish and the results that followed made for some interesting reading.

Answered in Irish, and gave directions	5%
Answered in Irish, but could not help any further	2%
Did not recognise the language	93%
Total	100%

The first major setback for Irish was the Great Famine which claimed over a million lives and led to almost another million leaving Ireland.⁶ This tragedy affected both urban and rural areas and decimated the ranks of native Irish speakers, particularly monoglots, not to mention the severe psychological damage suffered by an entire nation.

The word for English in Irish is *bearla* and this actually means literary language and refers to the language of the Irish bards of yore⁷, who composed epic verse for their patrons. Therefore Irish speakers viewed English as the written language, the language of knowledge, education, wealth, progress and power and it is no surprise that Irish language policy took the path it did when generations later, these perceptions, and the people governed by them, formed a national language policy for independent Ireland.

Irish was actually given a certain amount of autonomy in Ireland while it was under British control, with Irish being permitted to be taught in schools. This of course does not reflect on the perceptions most Irish people had about their native language, as they increasingly came to see English as a language key that could open the door of opportunity for them, and Irish as a backward peasant tongue.

English in Ireland in linguistic terms is the H (higher) variety of language and Irish the L (lower) variety. A H variety usually enjoys power and prestige while the L lacks these qualities. In Ireland the H variety was originally taught in a formal setting, e.g. classrooms, and the L variety learned, e.g. at home. This concept has now been turned on its head and directly contradicts the constitutional status of Irish as Irish had reverted to being a H but lacking power and prestige.

Much of the damage in the Irish language revival must be attributed to the state's policy on language when Ireland first achieved independence. Through the hard work of Irish language revivalists, Irish had gained ground before the 1916 Easter Rising but the state's policy did not build on the foundation. Ardent nationalists began to readjust their thinking on Irish as they attained more political autonomy, and with it cemented the formation of a national identity. Daniel O'Connell, one of the heroes of the Irish nationalist cause, actually called for the people of Ireland to abandon their native language in favour of English for the sake of progress.

In Ireland there is much confusion surrounding identity, but there seems to be general agreement that the national language of Irish is one of the key defining characteristics of "*Irishness*". The *Irish people* have been referred to as indigenous or autochthonous⁸ by various groups with nationalist sentiment but neither of these terms sits well when one considers the countless invasions of Ireland through the ages by Celts, Vikings, Normans, Catholic missionaries, British colonizers and so on.

The Irish language was simply bereft of adequate leaders in its time of need; the years following independence, the most intense phase of nation building in independent Ireland. The civil service resisted the implementation of Irish as the official working language, insisting that this could only be done when the population at large had been educated in Irish in the school systems. The numbers of native speakers dropped steadily from here on and has never recovered.

The state has been the main anglicizing force in the Gaeltacht⁹ by providing services in English without a suitable Irish equivalent, using English as the language for state jobs and by providing grants and infrastructure conducive to movement of English speakers to Irish areas. The state's attempt at industrialisation of the Gaeltacht in the seventies was a disaster, which led to large numbers of Anglophones moving into Irish speaking areas and putting pressure on Irish speakers to use English for trade. The markets created by these industries were also English speaking and required Irish speakers to speak, read and write English.

The lack of economic development has led to the Gaeltacht becoming an isolated and economically depressed fishbowl from which people wish to escape. Irish speaking parents who want their children to have any sort of quality life and a good career are forced to send their children to English speaking universities outside the Gaeltacht, often never to return. Those who wish to have a Western European/modern lifestyle have no choice but to leave and come in contact with English.

The decreasing numbers of Irish speakers leads to a decline in of media readily available in Irish. This has been combated slightly in recent years with the creation of TG4, an Irish language TV station.

Attempts were made by various governments to promote the use of Irish in schools up until the 1940s. A u-turn in policy took place in the 1950s, due to claims by the national teacher's union that using Irish as the medium of instruction with children who did not speak Irish as a first language, was damaging to their education.¹⁰ Nationalisation of education in the 1960s led to further closures of Irish medium schools, particularly in the Gaeltacht.

Worse came when the Language Freedom Movement (LMF) claimed¹¹ that use of Irish as a matriculation subject in secondary school was hindering students from passing their exams, and as a result, the requirement to pass Irish at Intermediate Certificate level was dropped in 1973. The politicians who forced through this change claimed it would help the teaching of Irish if the compulsory element was removed. The result was a predictable disaster. By 1980 the proportion of Leaving Certificate candidates, taking the higher level paper in Irish, fell from one half to one quarter. The proportion who failed Irish altogether, or who didn't bother to sit the exam, rose from 5.5% to 20.3%.

MacCartney noted that with “declining levels of competence in Irish among the English-speaking population, Irish-speakers [became] ever more marginalised in Irish society. That could only have re-enforced the belief that Irish was useless & [encouraged] Irish-speakers to abandon their language in favour of English.”¹² The standard of Irish being taught, and the grades being achieved by those tested, has continued to decline as have the number of Irish medium schools.

A policy of linguistic assimilation in favour of Irish has never been pursued by the Irish state and this has led to a linguistic pluralism where the languages should co-exist freely. As a result of this, many Irish linguists have been eagerly encouraging the state to promote bilingualism. However in doing so, they give no clear definition of what bilingualism should mean in the Irish context, and how it can be achieved. Should the two languages be used equally and should people have an equal knowledge of both? Or should Irish children continue to learn Irish at school, leaving their Irish in the classroom when they finish? Should Irish be given special protection by the government?

Bilingualism has often been confused with the concept of *diglossia*, whereby the two languages show clear functional separation, such as English for trade, and Irish in the home. Bilingualism in contrast, is quite an unstable situation, where one section of the population is usually composed of monoglots, and the minority composed of polyglots. Without widespread bilingualism the monoglots gradually take over, as in Ireland, where no one needs to be able to speak Irish to communicate with other Irish people.¹³

This otherness sees Irish speakers marginalised and this has been reflected in the state's attitude toward the teaching of the Irish language. The ability to speak Irish well, then, has become something of an oddity in modern Ireland and this has simply contributed to the misconception that aptitude in more than one language is a strange or unusual talent reserved only for those who are "good with languages." This *otherness* of identity of Irish speakers has marginalised them within Irish society. Irish is associated with rural areas, poverty, famine, social, economic and cultural backwardness, traditional music, traditional dance and the traditional rural way of life.

The norms of social behaviour in Ireland also further marginalise Irish. Irish usage is governed not by language domain, but by networks; that is to say, to whom Irish is being spoken. Research has shown that if even one English speaker joins a large group of Irish speakers, those speaking Irish will revert to English. Speakers of Irish command little respect among non-Irish speakers¹⁴, who immediately see Irish speakers as outsiders or others, and make Irish speakers feel embarrassed or awkward.

It should be pointed out that some Irish speakers have done little to ingratiate themselves with English speakers, or Irish speakers of lesser ability, by taking a lofty, snobbish and elitist manner when it comes to language. As one native speaking friend pointed out, the language belongs to all the people, not just those who can speak it.

Irish has the status of being the national and first official language of Ireland and this is enshrined in Article 8 of the Irish constitution. Earlier this year, the debate began on whether Irish should be an official working language of the EU. This question raised many issues in Ireland, especially when people were reminded that this option had been refused by the Lynch government in 1973. While it remains to be seen what the people of Ireland will decide on the status of Irish in the EU, the debate may be successful in persuading the government to rethink how they approach the language question. Some see the use of Irish in the EU as a continuation of the fossilisation of Irish in a

useless “*officialese*” and the creation of jobs, which lack vibrancy and put nothing back into the local Irish speaking community, more of which, everyday users do not need and do not want.

The challenge for Irish speakers is not on an international (or even national) level, but in the simple day to day usage of their chosen language. As we have seen, status planning is not always paired with corpus planning. Quite simply put, bilingualism is not working. Irish is a minority language in Ireland no matter which figures one chooses to use; it is not offered enough protection or funding by the state. In fact the state’s inability to choose a clear policy of either linguistic assimilation or linguistic pluralism, with special measures to protect Irish, has led to major Anglicisation of Irish speaking areas by the state, consolidation of English as the primary language outside these areas, and in turn, a steady decrease in the numbers of fluent Irish speakers.

Irish as a language taught in Ireland’s schools seems set to last for many years, but Irish as a living language, a language passed from parents to their children, is another matter. It may well be too late to do anything to save the language in this sense and a great deal of responsibility lies with the government in ensuring its survival or extinction.

Norway:

Another example of a country with strong political nationalism combined with weak linguistic nationalism is Norway. Norway has several official languages which include Bokmål, Nynorsk, Saami (the language of the indigenous Saami or Laps of the North of Norway, Finland and Sweden) and Sign Language. My argument focuses on the struggle between Bokmål and Nynorsk. The jury is still out for some as to whether these are in fact two separate languages or two varieties of the same language, as in the cases of Hindi and Urdu, or Serbo-Croat.

When after four centuries of Danish rule, the Norwegians managed to achieve political independence in 1814, they found themselves with a variety of Danish and local dialects, but no national language. In the nineteenth century attempts were made to develop a national language and two of these have had a lasting effect. Knud Knudsen (1812-95), a school teacher, modified and “*norwegianised*” the Danish spoken by the upper-class in the urban centres of Norway, to Norwegian spelling rules and pronunciation which became known as *Riksmål* “state language.” Since 1928 this has been known as Bokmål “book language.”

The other attempt of note was that of Ivar Aasen (1813-96) who developed a language based on the dialects of Western and Central Norway known as *Landsmal* “language of the country” which is

now known as Nynorsk: “new Norwegian”. His research was conducted over a four year period in the 1840’s, and became the blueprint for Norwegian dialectology. Using this material and aided by methods developed by internationally known linguists of the day such as Rasmus Rask and Jacob Grimm, he developed a standard written norm for modern Norwegian presented in a grammar and dictionary in 1864 and 1873 respectively.

During the twentieth century, various attempts were made by successive governments to unite the two languages. The attempt to amalgamate the languages in a common Norwegian (*Samnorsk*) was abandoned, permanently or temporarily, in the 1960s, though spelling changes to both languages (Nynorsk 1917 and 1938 and Bokmål 1907 and 1917), seem to have brought the two languages closer in similarity.¹⁵ Some Norwegians maintain that Nynorsk is archaic, backward and awkward, due to its origins in Western and Central rural dialects. Consequently, *they* choose the more “civilised” Bokmål, while defenders of Nynorsk claim it is more Norwegian in spirit than Bokmål, and that Bokmål, with its Danish origins, can never become a fully Norwegian language.

Part of the problem in understanding the difference between the two forms is that neither of them are essentially spoken languages, but rather, each serves as a blueprint or framework which allows Norwegians to choose a standard written variety, with which they feel an affinity to how they speak. Asking someone in Oslo whether they are speaking Bokmål or Nynorsk, as I discovered to my embarrassment, is more often than not a question without an answer. It is only in writing that the languages differ to a significant degree.¹⁶ This has been the main attraction for proponents of Nynorsk, as it allows dialects to be written as they are spoken, thus portraying itself as a language full of freedom. One supporter of Nynorsk¹⁷ demonstrated how the word “possible” could be spelt twelve different ways in Nynorsk, depending on your dialect, and this helped me to understand a central part of the problem for the non-Nynorsk user in learning it; the language lacks unity.

Nynorsk, as a movement, has lacked unity politically and linguistically since its foundation. Ivar Aasen’s language was not the only attempt at creating a Landsmal and it can now be presumed that Aasen, from a rural farming background, was politically motivated in creating his language. Aasen made a point of using the Western and Central dialects, which were mainly rural areas, as the basis for his standard form, and his decision to do so excluded a large number of potential users, mainly

from the urban elite. The reason for this choice was simple: he was aiming for linguistic autonomy from Danish to coincide with the political autonomy of Norway from Denmark.¹⁸ Simultaneously this created a distinct identity for the language as that of the rural way of life.

Nynorsk and Bokmål both exist today in several sub varieties; some traditional such as Aasen's original version of Nynorsk, some radical. This lack of unity in usage, particularly by the Nynorsk side, has been problematic in creating a modern standardised form, as some choose to use a more traditional version of Nynorsk in an attempt to assert their identity. The freedom of choice afforded to users of both Nynorsk and Bokmål has also done much to undermine the attempts of supporters of Nynorsk to have a unified political linguistic movement.

Of Norway's 435 municipalities, 117 have chosen to use Nynorsk, 165 Bokmål, and the rest remain neutral. Neutrality in the majority of cases means that Bokmål is the prevalent language. This is the case in most major cities like Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim. Citizens are entitled to receive correspondence in their chosen standard form and parents in any community are free to choose the language of instruction for their children's schooling.

Nynorsk also has a thriving theatre and publishing house producing quality works of prose and poetry as well as numerous newspapers, magazines and journals. In 1969 the Primary School Act required all text books for use in primary schools to be available in Nynorsk and Bokmål before being published. This was followed up with second act five years later, putting the same obligation on those wishing to publish text books for use in secondary schools. Since the 1980s parliament has been required to produce a report on the usage of Nynorsk and Bokmål biennially.

All of this would seem to put Nynorsk in a relatively strong position, but this is not so. Much has been made of the Norwegian model of democracy, particularly in reference to language choice, but it is exactly this democratic freedom which is so strongly influencing the language struggle, and the decline of Nynorsk. Norway's official languages are protected by law, but little has been done to enforce sanctions of any consequence on those who choose to break the language laws. For example, the NRK (Norwegian Broadcasting Council) is obliged by parliament to broadcast at least 25% Nynorsk, but this level has never been reached, and the level has often been between 15 and 20% without any repercussions.

No census has been taken in Norway to estimate numbers of Nynorsk users versus Bokmål, but it is clear that Nynorsk is a language under threat and in decline. 15% of all children are taught Nynorsk as their first written variety and it would be realistic to estimate the number of users, if we chart the decline from the zenith of 30% reached in the 1940s, at about 10-12% today, which is roughly somewhat less than half a million people.

Bokmål has now cemented its position as the language of the towns and cities. Nynorsk is in use in various regions as the first official language, but it has failed to conquer any major urban centre. Bergen is a Bokmål dominated city and at the same time a regional centre serving a large Nynorsk area. This is most evident in Bergen, a city located well within the traditional Nynorsk stronghold, where Bokmål is the language of local authorities and administration. It has also been shown through social experiments and surveys that most Nynorsk children will become Bokmål users if they move to large cities or towns. This failure to conquer urban centres sums up the Norwegian language struggle in a nutshell.¹⁹

Nynorsk is still seen as the language of rural and agricultural communities, and a hindrance to those who wish to leave those communities; communities which suffer from a lack of economic and social development. Nynorsk is a symbol of regional pride and identity in its core areas and it would not be correct if I omitted that dialects in Norway are afforded much more respect than in other Scandinavian countries, and Nynorsk is used by all walks of life. It is increasingly becoming a symbol of national pride as Norway resists the mounting pressure to join the EU and its cultural melting pot, a step some would see as a potential threat to the loss of Norwegian identity.

Proponents of Nynorsk, such as Noregs Mallag, soldier on particularly through their youth section,²⁰ but they are losing ground. The topic of the day on my most recent trip to Norway was whether or not the Nynorsk exam should be obligatory for secondary school and the general feeling in the media and on the streets is that a large part of the youth population are in favour of removing Nynorsk from the curriculum.²¹

Following the Second World War, Nynorsk has continued to lose ground to Bokmål, and Bokmål is now in the much stronger position. Proponents of Bokmål claim that it conforms more closely to standard colloquial Norwegian, while “true” nationalists still insist on Nynorsk. Today Bokmål is the language of the national press as well as the majority of books (the medium of instruction for most schoolchildren), while official documents still employ both varieties and children must learn to use both. The search for a compromise goes on, but it is unlikely that Norwegians will easily agree on one variety to the exclusion of the other.

Kazakhstan:

Of the fifteen states, which made up the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was the most multiethnic and had been hailed as a “planet of a hundred nationalities” by the Soviet propaganda machine. It was the only Soviet successor state where the titular nationality did not constitute a clear majority²² upon achieving independence.²³ In the period following independence, the population’s make up has become more strongly Kazakh, and this has been attributed to the outpour of non-Kazakh groups from the country combined with the return of the Kazakh diasporas from abroad. President Nazerbayev has portrayed Kazakhstan as a melting pot of peoples, languages and cultures and insists that Kazakhstan is a Eurasian state, home to Slavic and other ethnic groups.

However the rising Kazakh population majority in the country seems to confirm the concept of Kazakhstan as a homeland of autochthonous Kazakhs. The ongoing emigration of non-Kazakhs and the sharp increase in Kazakh representation in state bureaucracy, government and most state-controlled sectors and enterprises, have strengthened nationalising trends.

The demographic preponderance of Russian speakers in Kazakhstan led to Kazakhs becoming the most linguistically and culturally Russified of all Central Asian ethnic groups.²⁴ The destruction of the nomadic way of life and elimination of the Kazakh language elite by various Soviet purges, severed Kazakhs from their traditional culture and heritage. New Kazakhs raised in the Soviet system had little choice but to learn Russian.

By the 1980s, many Soviet scholars began to draw attention to the high degree of native language loss among Kazakhs. Census data for 1989 shows that 98.5% of Kazakhs indicated Kazakh as their native/mother tongue.²⁵ This data was misleading, as respondents answered based on which

language they saw as connected to their ethnic group. In contrast, less than 1% of Russians in Kazakhstan claimed ability in Kazakh, the lowest level of proficiency in the titular language of any Soviet republic. The disparity between the figures and the actual language situation led to the general acceptance at least that there was a serious problem.

The debate on a suitable language law began in the Soviet period and can be said to have finished in 1995 when Kazakh was claimed the sole state language. Russian has the status of a language of “inter-ethnic communication.” The language law, and the subsequent language policy due to interpretations of the law, made most non-Kazakhs, particularly European²⁶ nationalities uneasy because of their lack of proficiency. It also unsettled the Russified Kazakh elite who had little or no knowledge of their native language. Their ethnicity at least offered them some cover from non-Kazakhs, but this did not prevent attacks from their ethnic kin who accused some of being *mankurts*.²⁷ This, seemingly, paved the way for Kazakh nationalists and national revivalists to begin a policy of linguistic assimilation.

However, the outward migration of Slavs and Germans did much to establish a stable ethnic situation, while those who remained acted as a buffer for ethnic conflict, particularly linguistically Russified groups, such as the Koreans. The economy slowly stabilised thanks to expert manoeuvring by President Nazerbayev in the energy sector and strong control of the political reigns of power.

The President is no longer greatly interested in the language issue. The introduction of proficiency tests or the proposed introduction of Kazakh as mandatory, for certain positions in the state administration, have both been rejected. The presidency and the chair of both houses of parliament require the incumbent to be fluent in Kazakh,²⁸ but a requirement that state officials learn Kazakh within ten years has now been dropped. The law which requires 50% of all media broadcasting to be in Kazakh has also been weakly enforced with most channels broadcasting in Kazakh at non-prime time slots, though this is set to change this year. The state has also made the stipulation that school books be made available in Kazakh if they wish to be published.

International firms, and others dealing with the state apparatus, are required to make all documentation available in Kazakh. This has led to the creation of a large number of jobs, which some would see as unnecessary, but which will promote use of Kazakh in the work place and as a language of bureaucracy.

The official government line on the mass migration of non-Kazakhs has been deemed to be economically and not politically motivated.²⁹ Whether this is true or not, the flow of people seems to have stabilised somewhat. Although Kazakhs now make up the majority of the population, their political clout seems to be running ahead of their demographic weight.

Current circumstances indicate that an ethnic nation-building process is underway, but it may simply be a smokescreen for transference to civic nation-building, which may become more acceptable at a point in the future. President Nazerbayev has made it clear that Kazakh has a central role to play in the creation of Kazakhstani patriotism, but Russian also has an important role to play. An article in the Kazakhstani social science journal *Saiasat* in 1996 noted that ‘today, it is the Russian language that creates the basis for the unity of all Kazakhstanis. It functions as a means of communication all over the republic and enables social interaction among all citizens in the country, across social, demographic, territorial and professional group boundaries.’³⁰

There has been little opposition to the state’s version of nation building, as most of the opposition groups concerned are badly organised, and those that are seem too extreme, e.g. Lad or Edinstvo, (Alash and others on the Kazakh side). Part of the reason for the lack of opposition can also be attributed to the respect President Nazerbayev commands among all ethnic groups. Most of all, those who do not speak Kazakh can get by without knowledge of Kazakh for the time being, while their children, regardless of whether they go to Russian or Kazakh medium schools, will have some knowledge of Kazakh in the (Kazakh) ethnically dominated Kazakhstan of tomorrow.

Attitudes among Kazakhs, particularly as only about 50% of Kazakhs speak their mother tongue fluently, recognise the need for Russian for stabilising Kazakhstan’s development. Russian is not only the language of Slavic groups, but of almost all non-Turkic minorities, who clearly will not be returning to their homelands en masse. Ethnic groups such as Koreans are clearly here to stay in Kazakhstan, and have been slowly laying foundations for their own cultural revivals.

State language policy in Kazakhstan, when taken at face value, has been successful so far. Kazakh is now recognised as the sole state language under the constitution. Kazakh's status has been greatly boosted and Kazakh usage has increased both among Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. This seems set to increase as Kazakhs hold sway in the population stakes. On the ground there is a serious gap between the long term goals of state language policy and their implementation. Many Kazakhs, particularly in cities, recognise the usefulness of being able to issue basic pleasantries in Kazakh, but will often switch back to Russian. The increase in non-Kazakh users of Kazakh must be attributed to the schools and military, where Kazakh is obligatory, but the standard of Kazakh taught here is poor, and once out of the army or classroom, most non-Kazakhs continue to use their own native tongue such as Russian

In conclusion, President Nazerbayev in 2000 claimed that the language issue had been solved in Kazakhstan.³¹ He went on to encourage Kazakhs to speak Kazakh with their children and reminded all citizens that it was their duty to learn the state language. Responsibility for advancing the cause of language has now been shifted to the intelligentsia, and all eyes will now be on the power struggles of the people of Kazakhstan to see what the outcome will be.

Conclusion:

The conclusions drawn here from the viewpoint of those backing Kazakh language revival are not necessarily the author's own personal opinions. They have also been made as compact as possible for the benefit of this paper. For a more in-depth understanding of language revival and nation-building the bibliography should be consulted.

In all three countries it would appear that state language policy have been too ambitious and at times lacked sincerity. The idea of linguistic assimilation should be a gradual one, and should begin with consolidation of those who use the language already. If the long term goal in Kazakhstan is to make Kazakh the real primary language of all ethnic groups within Kazakhstan, then they should first concentrate on Kazakhs. Once the majority of Kazakhs are using language freely it will come to play a dominant role in society. Then and only then can a case be made for assimilation.

A redefining of language policy in all three countries is needed. Is the aim linguistic assimilation or linguistic pluralism in Kazakhstan? Is the goal to introduce Kazakh as a language of bureaucracy or as a spoken language of the Kazakh people?

As we have seen in all three countries, once the independent state has stabilised politically and economically, and in the case of Kazakhstan, ethnically, interest from the state in language planning eases off and the onus is shifted to the people of the state. When the individuals make the choice, one language is often chosen at the expense of the other. The factors governing language choice, particularly in Kazakhstan, are something I hope to look at in future research.

Estimating the status and numbers of speakers of any particular language, particularly when completing a census, is very rarely an exact science. Direct and precise questions on language should be asked at census time, and I have my own suggestions on how this can be done, but each country must formulate questions specific to their own circumstances. If an accurate language policy is to be formulated then this issue must be addressed so that those responsible for language planning will have the most reliable information available. UNESCO has given guidelines for estimating the endangerment of language and these guidelines would also be appropriate for those who wish to formulate a successful and just language policy. These are:

- 1) Intergenerational language transmission
- 2) Absolute number of speakers
- 3) Proportion of speakers in the total population
- 4) Trends in existing language domains
- 5) Response to new domains and media
- 6) Materials for language education and literacy
- 7) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies, including official status and use
- 8) Community members attitudes towards their own language
- 9) Amount and quality of documentation

UNESCO does not offer a definition of what people's linguistic human rights are, which is unfortunate. The lack of democracy in Kazakhstan may actually force people to use a language rather than choose it, and this may work in favour or against the Kazakh language revival.

Once language laws have been made and a language policy has been begun, they must be followed through diligently and rigorously. More often than not, languages have suffered as a result of contradictory educational policies, feeble enforcement of language laws and state usage of the languages in question in state bureaucracy, administration and state enterprises.

Kazakh should be maintained in its traditional strongholds in the south of Kazakhstan, but these areas should be simultaneously developed economically and socially; if they are not, they may become “fishbowls” from which Kazakh people wish to escape.

Nynorsk and Irish have not managed to conquer any urban centre and this has been critical in their decline. The continued use of the languages in isolated rural areas has been a worrying trend. Seosamh Mac Grionna once said that the rebirth of the Irish language would not happen in the Gaeltacht, but in the streets of Belfast, and this is a telling statement for all three languages. Language use can be maintained, in a somewhat artificial way in these areas, but if language revival is to be a success then it must be taken to the cities.

While it might be too early to say that the rebirth of Kazakh is happening on the streets of Almaty, Kazakh is clearly growing in stature in the cities of Kazakhstan and the number of Kazakhs arriving from the countryside is increasing all the time. There is a risk that they may be swallowed up in Russophone cities like Almaty but the government has had a clear role to play in the urban fight of the Kazakh language. The relocation of the capital to Astana in the Russian dominated north, has also meant the relocation of state bureaucracy en masse, and with it, all of those Kazakh users working for the state departments, ministries, enterprises and so on.

The state has created opportunities for Kazakh speakers in all cities by the insistence on Kazakh as the official language. If they persist with this then cities like Atyrau, Aktau, Uralsk, Aktobe and even Astana, may become Kazakh language dominated cities. In the future, oblasts of administration may be given the choice of choosing their language, as in Norway, and this might provide a more stable and realistic situation for both Russian and Kazakh. A decentralisation of government may also cause Kazakh to spread through the country.

As we saw with all three minority languages (Irish, Nynorsk and Kazakh), there is often a dearth of educational resources. The link between nationalism and languages is so much to the fore in minority languages that most literature has a tendency to be based on the traditional way of life, national heroes, etc. and this has caused a backlash among youth, who do not wish to be reminded of bygone days or that they have failed their forefathers by having a poor command of their native tongue. There is much work to be done in addressing the apolitical attitudes of youth in all three countries.

Media usage of Kazakh should increase in quality. As we have seen in Ireland, the lack of good media will only deter people from using their native language. However quality programming in TV,³² radio and other media has had very positive results.

Minority languages need to be modernised, and this will come at a price, if they are to survive for the long term. Kazakh is a young language in terms of literary history, but little is being done to make it possible to use Kazakh by all walks of life. This is essential if people are to choose Kazakh as a language of instruction in school, language of the workplace and so on. Languages evolve and borrow from other languages and fear of loan words often comes from traditionalists or nationalists whose ideologies will only see the language go backwards in terms of development.

Stereotypes of identity associated with the languages are obstacles to be overcome. The identities people choose often contradict the identities offered by their national language, so state language policy, and language revival, must ensure free usage and identity of language as people choose it. In all three countries national identity is being redefined in the context of a global community. More and more emphasis is being placed on state creation of a civic identity (e.g. Kazakhstani) which transcends nationality, race or ethnicity.

In conclusion, to plan an entire country's language policy based on the nation, an imagined community, or governed by nationalism is flawed and leaves language policy with no firm root in reality and can only lead to minority language decline. Language planning will most certainly be the domain of nationalists and politicians in the nearest future in Kazakhstan, but language revival need not be solely their domain. Nazerbayev may have hit the nail on the head when he put the onus of language revival on the people in 2000. Language revival should not come from the top down as we have seen in Ireland, but from the bottom up and it will be the people, whether they knowingly accept responsibility for it or not, who decide the fate of the Kazakh language.

Endnotes:

¹ Wardhaugh, Ronald (2002) *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Fourth Edition. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. P 353

² This paper will not attempt to deal with Irish in the North of Ireland, and all opinions and data are based on the current linguistic situation in the Republic of Ireland.

³ Reg Hindley "the Death of the Irish Language"

⁴ Red Star Research Project: Provision of Services for Russian Speakers in Ireland 2003
professional property of the author

⁵ Garda Experiment conducted by Red Star in 2003, professional property of the author

⁶ This is an interesting parallel with the situation in Kazakhstan during the 20s and 30s when the ethnic Kazakh population was decimated by famine as a result of bad harvests, forced collectivisation and settlement of nomads.

⁷ Author's private correspondence with Ros Mac Thoim in March 2004.

⁸ Greek = literally sprung from the land

⁹ Irish speaking area, but also Gaeltacht, English speaking area where the state has also ensured that English is the primary language.

¹⁰ In 1957/58 there were 232 all-Irish and Irish medium primary schools in the state, outside designated Gaeltacht areas; by 1969/70 this had fallen to 43. Post-primary Irish-medium schools fell from 81 in 1957/58 to 15 in 1980/81.

¹¹ For more on the LFM see "The Celtic Revolution" by Peter Berresford Ellis (1985) p123

¹² R. A. MacCartney "A Plan to save the Irish Language by creating a New Town in the Gaeltacht"
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/r.a.mccartney/>

¹³ The last Irish monoglots died out in the 1960s

¹⁴ It is noted that attitudes to Irish speakers in the North of Ireland differ significantly and Irish speakers are respected in working class catholic areas.

¹⁵ An attempt was made to reverse this convergence with a spelling change to Bokmål in 1981

¹⁶ Author's interviews with students at the University of Oslo, 2004

¹⁷ Author's interviews with Noregs Mallag employees in Oslo, 2004

¹⁸ Peter Trudgill "Norwegian as a Normal Language" taken from the paper available on
www.sprakrad.no

¹⁹ Prof. Lars S. Vikor "Nynorsk in Norway" taken from the paper available on
www.sprakrad.no/nynor.htm and reasserted by Prof. Vikor in an interview with the author in Oslo, Norway, May 2004

²⁰ The youth wing of Noregs Mallag, with 1,400 members under 26, is politically active campaigning against Microsoft and Dagsbladet, though this is in opposition to the majority of its members. Field Research, Oslo, Norway, 2004

²¹ I surveyed a group of 20 students from the University of Oslo and asked them whether Nynorsk should be an obligatory subject in non Nynorsk areas and 18 answered that it should not be taught in non-Nynorsk areas, with several students claiming that it was a difficult and pointless language for modern Norwegians. Field Research, Norway, May 2004

²² 1989 Census showed that Kazakhs made up 40.1 percent of the entire population.

²³ On the 16th of December 1991, Kazakhstan became the last Soviet Republic to declare independence from the crumbling remains of the Soviet Union.

²⁴ Bhavna Dave "Minorities and Participation in Public Life in Kazakhstan" for the Commission on Human Rights

²⁵ The term used in census questions was the Russian "*rodnoi iazyk*"

²⁶ European in this context and the broadest sense of the term is given to mean Slavs, Germans and other ethnicities.

²⁷ *Mankurt* is a term which alludes to sense of rootless-ness and cultural amnesia, and is taken from the novel "The Day Lasts Longer Than a Hundred Years" by Chingiz Aitmatov, and refers to a mythical character who could not remember his past.

²⁸ Many have questioned the current President's Kazakh proficiency

²⁹ Author's interview with Mr. Erlan Idrissov, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the UK in 2004

³⁰ Berik Abdygaliev, 'Iazykovaia politika v Kazakhstane: sostoianie i perspektivy', *Saiasat*, 1996, no 5 (12), pp. 31-38, on p. 37.

³¹ Available on <http://eurasia.org/ru/2000/>

³² This refers to the Irish TV station TG4 which has had huge success in attracting viewers who do not necessarily have a good command of Irish. A particular coup was the decision to show rugby, a game associated with English traditionally, on TG4 with Irish commentary.

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