Chapter 4: 
On the Likelihood of Language Conflict in Kazakhstan

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Introduction
The last century was marked by innumerable language conflicts based on the pursuit of native language rights and new identities. Hindi versus Urdu, Serbian versus Croatian, Spanish versus Catalan, French versus Arabic, English versus Spanish, French versus English, Russian versus the national languages of the former USSR: these are just a few examples of such conflicts. These situations display broad similarities, but they differ in the degree of conflict. Some of them are more latent in character whilst others are open, even violent, confrontations.

In Kazakhstan the existence of conflict between Kazakh and Russian cannot be denied, but today the language issue in the republic is not ‘the burning problem’ (Fierman 1997) that it used to be in the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. Several stabilising factors have reduced the risk of this conflict becoming a major social distraction. A sociological study conducted by the Kazakhstan Parliament’s Information and Analytical Centre indicates that interethnic relationships have improved. According to the results of the survey carried out among respondents of different nationalities who were asked to rank the main social problems, the ranking of interethnic problems moved down from 5th position in 1994 to 13th position in 1996 (Sadovskaya 2001).

Potential sources of conflict
Languages in contact easily become languages in conflict (Edwards 1994:89), yet it is not actual language contact or language diversity that generates conflict. Language conflict is a result of ideologies that determine the goals of society through its conception of itself (Even-Zohar 1986). When languages are incorporated in identity definition, state or ethnic, when languages become tools of political manipulation in securing and maintaining power, when - in other words - symbolic values of languages are employed, the languages involved enter into a state of conflict. Fundamentally, the conflict over language policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan is not just about languages, it is an ethnic and social conflict in which the languages have become implicated in a number of different ways.

First of all, the Kazakh and Russian languages have become highly politicised as both languages were involved in defining the new state. When Kazakhstan declared its independence, the new government was faced with a political dilemma of identification. On the one hand, it was a newly independent state trying to assert itself as a nation with Kazakh as its sole national language. The strong monolingual ideology was needed to build a new nation/state, to reverse decades of language shift and to unite ethnic Kazakhs who were divided into two groups, Russophones and Kazakhophones. On the other hand, the fact that

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17The conflict between Kazakh and Russian is longstanding and goes back to Tsarist Russia. This chapter analyses only the current situation in Kazakhstan.
Kazakhstan was historically and actually a bilingual and multiethnic country, together with the necessity to maintain good relations with Russia and retain the loyalty of the ethnic Russians and other minorities living in Kazakhstan, encouraged the acceptance of a bilingual ideology. Moreover, a bilingual ideology was to some extent motivated by the need to comply with European linguistic rights requirements in order to be perceived as a democratic state by international organisations and by western countries.

This ideological contradiction was resolved by defining the new state as a homeland of Kazakhs and a bi-ethnic society. Societal bilingualism, with Kazakh, though, given a higher status than Russian, was declared the desired outcome of the language policy. While the current 1995 Constitution (Republic of Kazakhstan 1995) defines Kazakh as the sole state language, there are two official languages – Russian and Kazakh. All languages, Kazakh, Russian and minority languages, are declared to be ‘under protection of the government’ (Republic of Kazakhstan 1995, Article 7). Each person has the right to use his or her own native language and culture, and to choose a language for communication, child rearing, education and creative activities (Republic of Kazakhstan 1995, Article 19).

Secondly, nationalism requires action to ensure Kazakh its symbolic role in defining the new Kazakh identity and rights. Despite Russian having been elevated from a language of interethnic communication in the 1989 Law on Languages (Republic of Kazakhstan 1989) and the 1993 Constitution (Republic of Kazakhstan 1993) to an official language in the 1995 Constitution (Republic of Kazakhstan 1995), the Kazakh elite and the government firmly insist on Kazakh being the sole state language. The aim of this legislation is to improve the status of Kazakh in relation to Russian on the basis that Kazakh has for too long been treated as a minority language in its own titular republic. The Kazakh approach to the question of language rights in the light of this ideology has been to press for rights for their native community (including language rights), rather than individual rights. The territorial principle has been supreme: Kazakhstan is a land of Kazakhs who speak the Kazakh language. This ideology has strong social support from ethnic Kazakhs, both Russophones and Kazakhophones. The survey results show that significantly more Kazakhs than Slavs believe that their ethnicity should have privileges during the employment recruitment process (27.2% versus 8.8%), university admissions (19.2% versus 8.6%), promotion at work (19.7% versus 8.6%), elections for positions of authority (33.5% versus 9.9%), distribution of land (26.9% versus 5.4%) and the privatisation process (19.2% versus 5.3%) (Malinin et al. 2001).

In this context, the term ‘development’ used in legislative documents means both language revival and language spread. Kazakhstan legislation on languages is aimed at supporting the growth of Kazakh and increasing its vitality. It provides Kazakh with the right to be used in communicative domains and functions where predominantly Russian has been used before. This measure - ensuring the development of integrative and instrumental motivations for learning Kazakh - is a necessary step to reverse the decades of language shift among urban Kazakhs, and of course, to spread Kazakh among non-Kazakhs. More Kazakh-medium schools and Kazakh-medium university departments should be available, Kazakh as a subject must be taught in Russian-medium schools, and Kazakh must be used in government, in official publications and in the media. This policy implies a constant battle for more, which in turn, makes Russophones very uncomfortable, for they believe that the spread of Kazakh will decrease the functioning domains of Russian, will lower the status of Russian and will threaten their language usage. This insecurity is another source of conflict.

Thirdly, all the changes identified above in the state and language policy are especially sensitive because they imply lowering the status of Russians and ‘weakening the bonds of the Soviet people’ (Fierman 1997). In other words, they require reconsideration of Russian identity. Masanov (2002) observes:
Quite naturally, for the great majority of Kazakhs, Kazakhstan is their homeland, while Russians are five times less likely to describe the country in this manner, despite the fact that three-quarters of them were born here. Among Russian respondents, the situation is fundamentally different. For the absolute majority of Russians, their homeland is the entire Soviet Union or the place of birth – and in a far lesser degree Kazakhstan.

Russians find it difficult to accept that they are now national minorities as their presence in Central Asia was part of a classic ‘civilisation mission’ (Kuzio 2002). Fear of cultural assimilation and insecurity about the future of their language create a source of potential conflict. Russian political groups - for example Lad - are demanding equal status for both languages, and 29.5% of Russians (compared to just 2.1% of Kazakhs) believe that it is necessary to enact a law giving Russian the status of a state language so as to stabilise relations between the nationalities (Sadovskaya 2001). Like any emotional constructs, insecurity is hard to deal with; the psychological and socio-cultural adaptation of Russians in the new states is going to be a difficult and time-consuming process (Streltsova 2001).

Finally, the languages are interconnected in the power struggle in society. Language policy in Kazakhstan like almost everywhere is motivated by efforts to secure their own interests by the Kazakh elite. Cooper argues that ‘In the struggle to promote interests one uses whatever ammunition is at hand’ (1996:183) and languages often are the most readily and easily available instrument in this struggle to create a new elite and to attain political control.

Despite such deep-rooted politicised conflict between Kazakh and Russian, Kazakhstan is not likely to become an arena of violent ethnic confrontation in the foreseeable future. A poll conducted in 1998 revealed that 50% of those surveyed regarded interethnic relations as peaceful, 30% as friendly, 15% as not always friendly, and fewer than 2% as tense (Malinin 2001). Several factors contributed to stabilisation of the language conflict in Kazakhstan.

Stabilising factors

Achieving compromise between language ideology and ethnic policy

The current language legislation is the outcome of a compromise between two contradicting ideologies, monolingualism and bilingualism. It is aimed not only at strengthening Kazakh, but also at maintaining Russian as well as the minority languages.

When in 1993 the first Constitution of Kazakhstan declared Kazakh to be the state language and Russian to be the language of interethnic communication (adapting this division from the 1989 Law on Languages of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic), the language issue became a topic of heated debate between Russian and Kazakh nationalists. It triggered confrontation in Parliament and in society at large. Under pressure from Russians and other Russophones, including ethnic Kazakhs, the 1995 Constitution elevated the status of Russian to that of an official language, although the text of the document is obscure: ‘In state organisations and in local government bodies, Russian is officially used on an equal footing with Kazakh’ (Republic of Kazakhstan 1995, Article 7).

Satisfying the linguistic claims of Russians and other Russophone residents of the republic was a necessary political step in order to prevent interethnic conflict in society. Granting Russian status equal to that of Kazakh, as an official language, became an indicator of political equality – a crucial condition for integration of Russians in the state. Here I agree with Safran that ‘the extent to which speakers of minority languages identify themselves with the larger community (or the state) in which they reside is heavily dependent on the degree of legitimation their language is accorded’ (2001:88).

For detailed information about language legislation in Kazakhstan see Fierman (1998) and Masanov (2002).
The results of the 1998 poll referred to above indicate that most citizens see the government’s balanced ethnic policy as one of the main factors contributing to the stability of interethnic relations. Shortcomings in the interethnic policy are attributed to misinterpretation and distortion of political decisions by local governments. Thus 43% of Kazakhs and 12% of Slavs believe that national policy is ‘balanced and actively contributes to interethnic accord’, whilst 38% of Kazakhs and 59% of Slavs believe that ‘everything said is correct [i.e. everything proclaimed by central government is right], but in the regions things are done differently.’ Meanwhile, only 2% of Kazakhs and 13% of Slavs state that ‘there are conscious efforts to support one ethnic group and exclude the other’ (Malinin 2001:68).

**Improved attitudes towards acquisition of Kazakh**

Implementation of the national language policy requires the acquisition of Kazakh by certain groups of people and one of the major language policy objectives is the creation of conditions conducive for acquisition of Kazakh language to certain minimum standards. Achieving this goal has been quite problematic and potentially dangerous due to the number of people that have had to be taught and their attitude towards Kazakh. Slavic people coming to Kazakhstan found it undesirable or even unimaginable that they should learn Kazakh, and among the Russians there were powerful stereotypes regarding their civilisation and racial superiority (Masanov 2002; Nauruzbayeva 2003). Not surprisingly, therefore, according to the 1989 census only 0.8% of Russians were fluent in Kazakh. This negative attitude towards learning and speaking Kazakh had spread among urban ethnic Kazakhs as well; up to 40% of Kazakhs did not speak Kazakh and made no attempts to learn the language. This was the heritage that the Kazakhstan government had to overcome in its language acquisition planning.

The 1995-1996 survey conducted by Masanov (2002) showed that attitudes toward studying Kazakh had changed. According to his results, the majority of the population had by this time become tolerant of the idea of studying both Kazakh and Russian:

Nearly the same number of Kazakhs as Russians favour compulsory instruction by Kazakhs of Russian19. Two-thirds as many Russians as Kazakhs are in favour of the study of Kazakh by Russians. Again, two-thirds as many Russians as Kazakhs favour the study of Kazakh by state servants.

Improved attitudes are a key factor in determining the likelihood of conflict, since ‘trends and conflicts are concerned not with facts, but attitudes’ (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999:96).

**Limited objectives of language planning**

In the beginning, when it was idealistically believed and stated that language reversal could be achieved in a short period of time, the main concern was to teach Kazakh to adults. However, very soon it became clear that forcing the process of transfer to Kazakh created more problems than it was solving. One of the major negative consequences of this hurried language policy was the mass emigration of the non-Kazakh population, mainly the young and well-educated. Later, the focus of language acquisition planning shifted from adults to children. The new model of state language developments requires different levels of competence in Kazakh from different age groups. The first group, born before 1995, is expected to learn Kazakh to a minimum level just to ensure the creation of an environment of state language use that would be conducive for acquisition of Kazakh by the younger generation, everyone born after 1995. This latter group is expected to be functionally bilingual (Kuzhabekova 2003).

Nevertheless, a gradual but sure switch to Kazakh is taking place in the state and local government bodies which are the prime objects of the planning effort manifested by Article 2 of the 1997 Law on Languages  

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19By this, Masanov appears to mean that Kazakhs and Russians are equally in favour of Kazakhs teaching Russian as a compulsory subject in Kazakh-medium schools.
According to the latest government requirements, government structures should be switching to all Kazakh by 2008 which implies that all civil servants will have to master Kazakh by that time. Even so, learning of Kazakh is not obligatory; it is encouraged. Government organisations make Kazakh language classes available free of charge to help adults to learn it. There are also various material and moral incentives to stimulate interest in acquiring the language such as benefits for specialists who already know or who successfully learn Kazakh.

Currently, there is no list of government positions that require knowledge of Kazakh. However, for many positions, applicants are expected to speak the language since the Law on Languages and the Constitution obliges officials to respond to citizens’ enquiries in the language of the original request. Interestingly, there are significantly different expectations for ethnic Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs regarding learning of the state language. Kazakhs are expected to know their native language sufficiently well to be able to perform duties in it, and there is also growing social pressure to use Kazakh for everyday communication. A survey conducted by Arenov and Kalmykov (1998) shows that both Russians and Kazakhs have difficulties because of their lack of knowledge of Kazakh. Moreover, 1.5 times more Kazakhs report that they experience difficulties because of their lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language than do Russians. This finding allows us to state that language planning at the grassroots level is aimed at ethnic Kazakhs; other nationalities experience much less pressure or even none to change their language behaviour. The focus of language acquisition planning efforts on ethnic Kazakhs and the relatively mild policy regarding language requirements for other groups in society lessen the chances of conflict on the part of the non-Kazakh population whilst ethnic Kazakhs are not likely to protest about having to use Kazakh because of their strong ethnic solidarity.

### Education

As might be expected, in their endeavours to encourage the acquisition of Kazakh, the government utilises the most accessible and effective tool: education. Overwhelmingly, this is delivered through state schools. The education system consists of Kazakh-medium and Russian-medium schools. (In addition, about 3.3% of schoolchildren attend minority language schools which use Uzbek, Uygur, Tajik, German and Tatar.) Parents have freedom to determine the language of their children’s education. The curriculum subjects in these schools are identical and it is only the medium which is different. Second languages - Kazakh in Russian-medium schools and Russian in Kazakh-medium schools - are taught as compulsory school subjects from grade one. The language curriculum is reciprocal which is another stabilising factor. In grade 6 of Russian-medium schools, for example, the Russian language as a subject and the Kazakh language as a subject are taught 3 hours a week each, and the same is true in Kazakh-medium schools. Moreover, school graduates have the choice of continuing their education in universities in Kazakhstan or of going to Russia to study there. Similarities in school curricula and agreements between the two countries make this possible.

These efforts to encourage acquisition of the Kazakh language are accompanied by ‘kazakhisation’ and promotion of the concept of an independent Kazakhstan in every possible way. New school textbooks are written in line with the new ideology and teachers are required to use Kazakhstani books (although of course many schools still use Russian and old Soviet texts alongside the new ones). For example, in mathematics textbooks, exercises contain Kazakh names alongside Russian names. The Russian language textbooks (e.g., for the 6th grade) extensively use excerpts from Kazakh authors writing in Russian or translated into Russian, and they also contain texts of ideological character about the motherland, interethnic unity, patriotism, and so on. A survey among senior pupils in high schools indicates the effectiveness of this approach in fostering positive attitudes towards Kazakh among Russian children and towards Russian among Kazakh children. Both groups showed positive feelings towards each other’s native languages, and both groups almost unanimously agreed that knowledge of both Kazakh and Russian is

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20 The law does not regulate language use in personal communication or in religious organisations.
necessary for their future (Isimbayeva 2003). These results are especially significant because they show that the younger generation perceive the Kazakh language to be a legitimate and functioning state language, knowledge of which can serve a useful function. Such beliefs are a necessary prerequisite for effective acquisition planning and also for preventing language-based conflicts.

**Traditions of Soviet language policy and public awareness**

A centralised language policy is nothing new for the people of Kazakhstan (or indeed for the people of the whole of the former Soviet Union). They had more than 85 years of experience of repeatedly replacing one centralised language policy for another: *korenizatsia* or vernacularisation (from 1917 to the 1930s), Russification (from the 1930s to the 1980s), and, finally, revitalisation (since 1989). Schlyter (2001), analysing language policies in Central Asia, notes, ‘the men and women in charge of current language laws and their implementation were brought up with this kind of language policy.’ I would add that it is not only those in charge of language policies but also the general masses at whom such policies are aimed who have become accustomed to the ideas that language policies exist, and that such policies are designed and controlled by central authorities. People may disagree with some points of a policy, but they are not going to challenge the existence of the policy itself.

One of the most notable facts about Kazakhstan is that the public, or at least the well educated, are well aware of the role of language and ethnic identity in social, cultural, and political life. This understanding of the need for an equilibrium between linguistic, role, and identity repertoires has helped to develop policies on ethnicity and language which are more or less even-handed. Despite resentment concerning some policy decisions (for instance, the disappointment felt by Kazakh nationalists about the speed of reforms, or the dissatisfaction of Russian nationalists about the status of the Russian language), people nevertheless understand that these decisions were conciliatory.

**Increased proportion of Kazakhs in general and urban population**

One of the key factors affecting the linguistic situation in Kazakhstan has always been demography. At the time when Kazakhstan achieved independence, the population of the country according to the 1989 Census was 16,986,000 people. Forty-four percent of the population were Kazakhs, 36% were Russians and 20% were of other nationalities.

In 1926 Kazakhs accounted for more than two thirds of the population of the republic. However during Collectivisation in the 1930s, over 1,000,000 people died from famine as a result of the destruction of the traditional nomad economy. A large part of the population left the country, fleeing from the Soviets and famine. In the 1990s one-fifth of the total Kazakh population lived outside Kazakhstan, in Uzbekistan, China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Turkey, India and other countries. From the 1940s to the 1970s, when the Kazakh population had still not yet reached the level of 1926, huge immigrations of Russians and Ukrainians, up to 325,000 a year, made Kazakhs a minority in their own country. By 1959 Kazakhs represented only 30% of the total population.

Establishment of a dominant Russian-speaking class in urban areas, which were the only centres of higher education, industry, wealth, political power, and culture, significantly sped up the re-linguification process of urban Kazakhs. In 1989 Kazakhs represented 27% of the urban population while Slavic groups - Russians, Ukrainians and Belorussians - represented the urban majority even in primarily Kazakh regions in the south and the west of the country.

Today, however, the demographic situation is different. Since 1989 due to mass emigration of Russians, Germans, and other nationalities, the population has decreased by more than 2 million people, about 10%. In 1999 the total population of Kazakhstan was 14,953,126; Kazakhs represented 53%, Russians 30% and
other nationalities 17% of the total population. The Kazakh share of the country’s population increased partly because of a higher birth rate among Kazakhs and also because of immigration of ethnic Kazakhs from other countries. Since 1991, 42,300 families or more than 183,000 ethnic Kazakh individuals have been repatriated to Kazakhstan. The urbanisation of Kazakhs and the relocation of the capital to the north of the country also played an important role in the redistribution of the Kazakh population. In particular, there has been an increase in the proportion of ethnic Kazakhs in cities and in the northern parts of the republic where Kazakhs traditionally have been in the minority. Currently the proportion of Kazakhs is significantly greater among the younger generation. This allows us predict that the demographic situation is going to be very different twenty years from now.

Demographic changes act as stabilising factors in two ways. Firstly, the increased proportion of Kazakhs in general and in the urban population in particular has removed the sense of insecurity on the part of ethnic Kazakhs who for a long time were a minority in their own land and who feared language assimilation and loss of autonomy. Secondly, the fact that many Russians have left the country – rather than consolidating their efforts against the government and its new policies – has become one of the major components of political stability in Kazakhstan (Masanov 2002; Sadovskaya 2001). Only 10% of those Russians who have decided to stay in the country indicate that they have participated in actions aimed at defending their national interests. Even among this sub-group the majority have limited their activities to participation in debates and arguments, and only 0.9% have admitted using some sort of force (Malinin 2001).

Vitality of Russian and its social importance

Russian is important as an official language, as the language of education, science and the mass media, as a lingua franca and, of course, as the native and dominant language of ethnic Russians and Russophones. The 1999 census revealed that 74.8% of ethnic Kazakhs know Russian and only 25.2% of them claimed to be monolingual Kazakh speakers (Smailov 2001). At the same time only 7.7% of Russians claimed to know Kazakh (Arenov and Kalmykov 1998). Russian is viewed as reliable linguistic capital, possession of which provides access to wider information, cultural and economic spheres. It also ensures empowerment and upward social mobility. Today Russian remains a prevalent language in all domains. In fact, oralmans (repatriated Kazakhs, especially those from Mongolia and China) have a lot of difficulty adjusting because of their lack of knowledge of Russian.

Russian is clearly dominant as the language of day-to-day government activity. Among government employees, 75% use Russian and 25% use Kazakh (Nysanbayeva 2000). As a rule, official documents are written and edited in Russian and then translated into Kazakh. Parliamentary debates are usually in Russian. On rare occasions a Kazakh speaking member of parliament will choose to speak in Kazakh; when that happens all those members who do not speak it have to use headphones and listen to an interpreter.

Russian is important in education. 75% of preschools are Russian-medium and 44% of the total population of school children go to Russian schools. In 2000, Russian was the language of instruction for 68% of students in universities (Republic of Kazakhstan 2001).

Russian is the main language of the media. Broadcasting in Russian is more profitable since it attracts more viewers and listeners and consequently more advertisers. Consequently, the private broadcasting companies comply with the requirement stipulated in Article 18 of the 1997 Law on Languages (Republic of Kazakhstan 1997) - that the number of hours of programmes in other languages should not exceed the time devoted to programmes in the state language - by broadcasting in Kazakh during off-peak hours when there are relatively few viewers and listeners (Kuzhabekova 2003).

The number of books, brochures and other materials published in Russian significantly outnumbers those in Kazakh. Out of 1301 titles published in the country in 1999, 867 (66.6%) were in Russian. Russian is also
dominant in the printed media. 433 newspapers (81.9% of the national total in terms of circulation) and 168 journals (75.8% in circulation terms) are published in the Russian language (Smailov 2002a, 2002b).

Languages do not exist independently of the people, families and communities that use them. For languages to survive and thrive, they must be integrated into the lives of their speakers. They must also be reflected in the community institutions that the languages are related to, their schools, libraries and so on. In Kazakhstan, Russian speakers – unlike Kazakh speakers - have access to all of these facilities. This gives us reason to believe that Russian speakers should have little reason to feel resentment and thus there should be no reason for conflict.

Weak language-identity ties
Language shift and a perceived threat to the vitality of Kazakh could easily have fuelled a sense of trauma, triggering a rise in anti-Russian sentiment among Kazakhs and propelling the tide of linguistic nationalism, as happened in Ukraine. However, this has not occurred in Kazakhstan, as Nauruzbayeva (2003) observes. She concludes that the Kazakhs’ ambivalence about the government’s proposed language revival efforts and their tolerance of Russian occur because the Russian language has been positively associated with higher social status, rather than with cultural assimilation. There has been no perceived threat to the cultural identity of ethnic Kazakhs through the use of Russian. The results of the Census clearly show that the sense of national identity is very strong among the Kazakhs; despite the fact that from 25% to 40% of all Kazakhs do not speak Kazakh (Fierman 1997; Masanov 2002), 99.4% of ethnic Kazakhs consider Kazakh to be their native language (Smailov 2001).

Several attempts to strengthen the weak connection between ethnicity and language among Kazakhs have failed. The Kazakh nationalist movement, for example, proposed that there should be punishment for those who fail to acquire the native language; however, this has not been included in any official documents (Fierman 1998).

Thus, weak language-identity ties as well as a mild policy on the ethnicity-language relationship have contributed to stabilisation of language conflict in Kazakhstan.

Ethno-cultural factors
According to the findings of research in ethnolinguistic identity (Giles & Johnson 1981, cited by Ellis 1994), members of an in-group may or may not adopt positive linguistic distinctiveness strategies when communicating with members of an out-group. Speakers evaluate the situation and decide whether to adopt status or solidarity behaviours, and person-centred or group-centred strategies. In situations where people choose solidarity with their own in-group, linguistic divergence from the out-group is likely, while in situations where they are more concerned with status and are person-centred, convergence is likely. Adopting one or another strategy by members of an in-group can either reduce or escalate language conflict.

Unfortunately, there are no studies of interethnic communication strategies by Kazakhs and Russians, but my own observations lead me to conclude that Kazakhs in their communication with other nationalities consistently opt for convergence strategies. Usually, a whole group of ethnic Kazakhs will switch to Russian if just one non-Kazakh joins the group. This kind of language behaviour reduces the chances of language conflict. Poll results demonstrate that interethnic confrontations in everyday communication are isolated events; this indirectly supports my observations (Malinin 2001).

Other factors that reduce the likelihood of language and interethnic conflict in Kazakhstan have been identified by specialists in Central Asia studies. Kushabekova (2003), for example, believes that a culture of
interethnic tolerance, the relative secularism of society and the geopolitical location - which places Kazakhstan in an important buffer position between Europe and Asia – have created a situation which has little potential for interethnic conflict. Modernization – ‘a process of transformation of a heterogeneous society with various forms of languages and cultures into a homogeneous one with more standard forms of institutions’ (Lee 2003:247) - helps to eliminate parochial ethnic discrimination and reduce tension. Yet another factor is the weak ethnic stratification of society. Ethnic conflicts intensify if different ethnicities hold different socio-economic positions in society. However, in Kazakhstan society is stratified not on the basis of nationality but on grounds of residence, i.e. rural versus urban (Lee 2003). To all of the above mentioned factors we should add economic growth and political stability in Kazakhstan which more than any other non-sociolinguistic factors contribute to stability in the country.

Conclusion
This chapter has tried to show that at the moment the likelihood of language conflict in Kazakhstan is weak, but it is impossible to predict whether language problems will trigger confrontation in the future. The possibility of conflict cannot be ruled out altogether for there are too many political and social factors that can easily destroy the delicate balance which has been described here.

References


