

LANGUAGE MODERNIZATION IN KAZAKH: TERMINOLOGY ISSUES

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Abstract

Current globalization processes, technological updates and advancements in various fields of society leave different traces in languages. These changes are most noticeable in lexicon. One of the most important types of lexical changes is borrowings. To purify language from external influx a lot of substitutes have been introduced recently in the Kazakh language. This research aims to explore to what extent these new substitute words are understood by its speakers. Students participated in the study were asked to read short text from Kazakh Mass Media which included new substitutes for the previously existing borrowed words. They were asked to mark the words which they do not understand and suggest their possible meanings. The results demonstrate difficulties in understanding the new substitutes for the borrowed words.

Keywords: Borrowings, terms, neologisms, internationalisms

Introduction

It is a natural phenomenon that languages change, develop, update their vocabulary, and undergo semantic changes. Languages, first of all, as means of communication are influenced by different changes in society. In recent times a lot of these alternations are caused by globalization processes which inevitably leave their traces in lexicon. Different aspects are discussed in the respective studies dedicated to new terms and words appearing as a result of special planning activities, and those appearing as a result of the work of individuals: interpreters, translators, etc. A subject for other investigations is a problem of ‘acceptability’ of the word, and successfulness of the word, in particular, whether the terms suggested by the agencies are used by the targeted audience. The history of terminology demonstrates different examples of ‘success’ cases of planned terminology changes, as well as, the cases of failure. Studies of factors which affect acceptability, factors responsible for using and not using the newly introduced terms bring practical implications for planning agencies. Another focus is whether there is a concern for the preferences of the targeted audience; and even more, in particular, “how compromises are reached between opposing views and interests” (Fishman, 1974). Although the golden recipe does not exist a lot of investigations are dedicated to find out more about a “good term” causing a range of studies to be engaged in critiques and assessment of newly appearing words. As Antia summarizes, the overall goal of critiques and appraisals of terminology projects is “to use discourse related to work on terminology as basis for reconstructing the theory underlying practice.” (2000). Current terminological explorations in Kazakh can be characterized as being mostly involved not in the fields outlined before, but discussing different issues regarding updating and modernization of its vocabulary: to purify language from external influx many substitutes have been introduced recently in the Kazakh language. According to the data of a representative of the Kazakhstani Terminology committee, since 1992 about 2500 new terms have been introduced in Kazakh, during 2000-2008 the 8 571 terms approved by the Terminology committee caused problems in translating practices. In general, during 1992-2008 189 000 words and word collocations were approved, including 155 000 professional

terms (31 volumes of the Kazakh-Russian and Russian-Kazakh dictionaries have been issued) (as cited in Amirkhamzin, n.d.).

Research questions

The current study poses the following research questions: What is the overall comprehension of modern Kazakh, mostly the language of Mass Media, by Kazakhs including those whose first language is Kazakh? In particular, are there any words in modern Kazakh that the Kazakhs including those whose first language is Kazakh do not understand? What are those words?

Data

The first set of data was collected from Internet lexicographical sources (Kazakh, Russian, and English), Mass Media texts and Internet sources to find particular words which have been borrowed and nativised in Kazakh, the other data were received from experimental tests to check comprehension of modern written Kazakh (written excerpts from Mass Media texts, bank contract of deposit)

Method

Two experimental tests have been conducted to collect data for the language comprehension in 2013 at one of the local universities. The participants of the first experimental test were 15 students of a local university whose first language is Kazakh. They all finished Kazakh schools, and by the time of the experiment they all had taken, and few were taking Business Kazakh course. So, the first test targeted at respondents with Kazakh as their first language. Participants were asked to read the texts written in Kazakh: two short newspaper texts and a bank contract of deposit.

The participants of the second test were 40 students with different language educational background: some finished Kazakh while the others Russian schools. The participants of this group were instructed to read the same two short texts from Kazakh Mass Media texts.

The students of both groups were asked to find out the words which are difficult to understand and suggest possible meaning from the context. The texts but not the lists of words were given to students intentionally so that they could construct meaning of unfamiliar words from the context.

Background

Preliminary data received from lexicographical and other sources have been analyzed to identify substitutes, and to generally observe the processes associated with nativisation of the borrowed words. The data demonstrate that the words which have been nativised recently in Kazakh are mostly the words of Russian etymology and internationalisms. It should be mentioned that internationalisms as well as a number of other types of borrowings enter Kazakh through Russian, the latter plays intermediate role in this process; this can be explained by the lack or insufficient direct language contacts between English and Kazakh. The following words have been constructed in the language with the help of internal lexis: *әуежай* (cf: English and Russian *airport* and *аэропорт*), *бағдарлама* (cf: *program* and *программа*), *қолтырауын* (cf: *crocodile*, *крокодил*), *иегер* (cf: *laureate* and *лауреат*), *керік* (cf: *giraffe* and *жираф*), *дәрумен* (cf: *vitamin* and *витамин*), *жедел саты* (cf: *lift* and *лифт*), *кредит*, *несие* (cf: *credit* and *кредит*), *салым* (cf: *deposit* and *депозит*), *жаһандану*, *ғаламдану*, *жаһандастыру* (cf: *globalization* and *глобализация*), the calqued *ғаламтор* (cf: *Internet* and *Интернет*), and *аяқ добы* (cf: *football* and *футбол*). Attempts to replace internationalisms are taken by language planners in many other languages as well. Zuckermann discussing camouflaged influence of English on a number of languages provided

examples of borrowings “nativised” in Modern Standard Chinese: *basketball* (an example of a calque introducing a new compound), *radar*, *laser*, *neon*, *vitamin*, *hacker*, and *Internet*. The Icelandic calqued *electricity*, formed a phonosemantic match for AIDS, and “rejuvenated” an old word to replace *computer* (Zuckermann, 2003; Sapir and Zuckermann, 2008). “Nativization” of the borrowed vocabulary is usually connected with language planners’ activities to purify language from external lexis.

One of the reasons for purification in Kazakh might be possible assumption or feeling that the language is too russified, despite the fact that many of the terms of wide usage coming from Russian are the words of English, Latin and other languages etymologies. It is interesting to note that no changes have been taken in Uzbek and Kyrgyz, for example, to replace such internationalisms as *lift* and *football* (cf: *lift* and *futbolchi* in Uzbek, *футбол* in Kyrgyz). The previous practices of terminology updates in Kazakh demonstrate different cases of whether the substitutes are in use now or not. Some terms which have been created before to replace Russian terms are claimed to be used now, such as: *балмұздақ* (Russian *мороженое*), *аялдама* (*остановка*), *тоңазытқыш* (*холодильник*), *мұздатқыш* (*морозильник*), *шаңсорғыш* (*пылесос*). Nevertheless, practice demonstrates, for example, that many nativized terms and new words approved tend to be used in written forms of Mass Media, while the spoken forms use both the Kazakh substitutes and the Russian equivalents as well, such as: the words *қағидат* and *пайыз* (cf: English and Russian *principle*, *percent* and *принцип*, *процент*). Some of the newly formed terms are used to refer to different notions, which cause troubles in communication: Kazakh *қол добы* is used to refer to *volleyball* and *handball* (cf: Russian *волейбол* and *гандбол*). In some cases the neologisms do not properly render the meaning of the borrowing: a new term *сыбайлас жемқорлық* was created to refer to *corruption* to replace Russian *коррупция*. Although the Kazakh equivalent is currently used in Mass Media, it conveys the meaning of “cooperative cupidity for bribes” which does not properly render the notion. Some other cases extend to productivity of introduced terms, when it is assumed that a substitute will be productive in forming collocations to develop a subsystem of related group of terms. For example, the Russian word *социология* (‘sociology’) was recently introduced as *әлеуметтану*, which, according to some opinions, completely corresponds to the respective notion. Nevertheless, the new term was not able to completely replace the borrowing, currently the two words (a new substitute and a Russian equivalent) are used for forming collocations: *кәсіпкерлік социологиясы/кәсіпкерлік әлеуметтануы*, *еңбек социологиясы/еңбек әлеуметтануы*, *басқару социологиясы/басқару әлеуметтануы*. (cf: Russian *социология предпринимателя*, *социология труда*, *социология управления*). This case can be compared with the earlier practice of an attempt to replace the Russian borrowing *революция* (‘revolution’). Two words *революция* and *төңкеріс* were suggested for translation in the Kazakh-Russian and Russian-Kazakh dictionary by К. Вектаев. *Революция* means breaks in the society, while the alternative *төңкеріс* is change in power; the substitute did not acquire semantic shift by getting additional meaning, and, moreover, it did not become productive for forming collocations, the Russian equivalent is widely used instead: *революция*, *төңкеріс* → *маржиналистік революция*, *революция мен эволюция*, *өнім революциясы*, *баға революциясы*.

Experimental tests

In the first test 6 students reported having no troubles in understanding the selected texts. 9 students reported different words difficult to understand, they included: *тарантар* (neologism, ‘sides’), *үдеріс* (neologism, ‘process’), *көшбасшы* (neologism, ‘leader’), *жарна* (neologism, ‘fee’), *еңсерілмейтін күш* (‘force majeure’), *өкілетті/ уәкілетті* (‘plenipotentiary’, ‘authorized’). The reported words are substitutes for internationalisms which have been coined recently and substitutes for Russian borrowings. In most cases students did not reconstruct the meanings of the words from the context.

In the second test the graduates of Kazakh language schools reported the following words to be difficult to understand (from the most frequent responses to the least): *жаһандану* ('globalization'), *үдеріс* ('process'), *балама* ('alternative'), *мүдде* ('interest'), *атқарушы* ('executant', 'performer'), *белсенділік* ('activeness'), *ауқымдылық* ('масштабность'), etc. The "unclear" words included new substitutes for internationalisms and some coinages of Russian terms. The respondents' comments indicate that they mostly were not successful in constructing the meanings from the context. As for the Kazakhs who finished Russian schools, the results of self-reported comprehension of the texts vary from 5-10 % up to 98 %. The results include the responses as "non-understandable" and "not clear" for the following words: *жаһандану* ('globalization'), *үдеріс* ('process'), *балама* ('alternative'), *мүдде* ('interest'), *белсенділік* ('activeness'), *тараптар* ('sides'), *құқықтық* (правовой), *ауқымды* (большой, масштабный), etc. A group of words indicated "not clear" included also the words which are not new in the language, for example: *белсенділік*, *ауқымды*. Only few responses suggested the meanings of the words from the context.

To sum up, the most common words reported "difficult to understand" were the internationalisms translated into Kazakh. The results have bigger variations in the group of the students educated in Russian, which ranged from some words reported "non-understandable" to overall poor comprehension of the texts.

Conclusion

There is a tendency in the modern Kazakh LP to translate internationalisms into Kazakh to purify the language from external lexis. As it was found translated internationalisms tend to cause undesirable effects: some of them are not understood by the Kazakh speakers, this consequently can cause communication problem. Additionally, substitutions offered may have undesirable changes in meaning, or the terms may appear not to be productive for forming collocations. Translated borrowings can cause even more problems to those Kazakhs whose first language is Russian.

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