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## The “Ugly Duckling” Phenomenon: Language Choice in a Bilingual Kazakh Family (to the Problem Statement)

Eleonora D. Suleimenova, Zhanseit K. Tuimebaev  
and Malika V. Aimagambetova\*

*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
Almaty, Republic of Kazakhstan*

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**Abstract.** Early Kazakh-Russian bilingualism in Kazakhstan originates from bilingual parents, is formed wherever both languages function. Parents, integrating a child into society, expect his involvement in the family’s linguistic behavior. However, the phenomenon of the “Ugly Duckling” is sometimes observed when the child does not follow family language practices. It is presented partially structured language biographies of four bilingual children with an unexpected choice of Kazakh or Russian as the dominant language. Language biographies were obtained through a specifically overt observation of the child’s language development. Informants sought to make the language preferences of three children the same with the family, in one case to change it radically. Three cases of child’s preference for the Russian language were observed in families with the stable dominant Kazakh language. A rare case of changing of dominant language and formation of Kazakh-Russian-English multilingualism is described. All cases of child breaking the family language tradition have not received a single explanation, but have revealed a number of positional issues requiring interdisciplinary analysis on the domains of language dominance of bilingual children and the factors determining the language development of a bilingual child. The latter in the first three cases include factors unaccounted for by the informants: communication in computer games, video hosting, TV programs, emotional impact of language contacts with adults, influence of diglossia, children’s language conflicts, etc.

**Keywords:** child bilingualism, dominant language, Kazakh, Russian.

Research area: theory and history of culture, art (cultural studies).

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## Феномен «гадкого утенка»: выбор языка в билингвальной казахской семье (к постановке проблемы)

Э.Д. Сулейменова, Ж.К. Туймебаев,  
М.М. Аймагамбетова

Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби  
Республика Казахстан, Алматы

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**Аннотация.** Раннее казахско-русское двуязычие в Казахстане зарождается от двуязычных родителей, формируется везде, где функционируют оба языка. Родители, интегрируя ребенка в общество, ожидают причастности его к семейному языковому поведению.

Однако иногда происходит феномен «гадкого утенка», когда ребенок не следует семейной языковой практике.

Представлены частично структурированные языковые биографии четырех детей-билингвов с неожиданным выбором казахского или русского языка как доминирующего. Языковые биографии получены с помощью особого включенного наблюдения за языковым развитием ребенка.

Информанты стремились сделать языковые предпочтения трех детей одинаковыми с семьей, в одном – кардинально его изменить. Три случая предпочтения ребенком русского языка наблюдались в семьях со стабильным доминирующим казахским языком. Описан редкий случай смены доминирующего языка и формирования казахско-русско-английского многоязычия.

Все случаи разрыва ребенком семейной языковой традиции не получили единственного объяснения, но выявили ряд постановочных вопросов, требующих междисциплинарного анализа по сферам доминирования языка детей-билингвов и факторам, определяющим языковое развитие ребенка-билингва. К последним в первых трех случаях относятся неучтенные информантами факторы: общение в компьютерных играх, видеохостинг, телепередачи, эмоциональное воздействие языковых контактов со взрослыми, влияние диглоссии, детские языковые конфликты и др.

**Ключевые слова:** детское двуязычие, доминирующий язык, казахский язык, русский язык.

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*Multilingualism often begins in the family and depends upon it for encouragement if not protection.*

*J. Fishman*

## Introduction

Kazakhstan is a country where the vast majority of Kazakhs find themselves in the conditions of a family natural bilingualism since childhood. A child, getting into the classic situation of alternating use of the Kazakh and Russian languages by others, has to learn to distinguish and use them. But, naturally, the bilingualism of Kazakh children is not uniform: firstly, it can be characterized by a functional preponderance of one of the two interacting languages; secondly, within the family and the child's immediate environment, the bilingualism is not always represented by the sequence of mastering Kazakh first, then Russian (rarely – vice versa); thirdly, the child's language allocation is found to be not always directly determined by the characteristics of family bilingual behavior, but also by adults' attitudes toward languages.

## Theoretical framework

The conceptual foundations of the study are connected with the belief that linguistic ideology, together with the management and practice of using the inherited language, can have a decisive influence on the existence of languages in the family (Spolsky, 2004). Such an ideologically defining and clearly grasped by the Kazakhstani society was a signal about the failure of the most important function of the Kazakh language – to be a means of communication and consolidation of generations that has arisen and persists among some Kazakhs. This situation developed gradually, under the influence of the priorities of the Soviet language policy, with the active spread of the Russian language and changes in the language attitudes of older generations.

It is no coincidence that V.I. Belikov and L.P. Krysin, speaking about "all possible promotion and expansion of functional capabilities of the language commonly understood for the whole state", note: "The center was not interested in the fate of other languages, and the level of their support depended on the republican and local authorities. The achievement of universal national-Russian bilingualism, which has become a standard slogan since the 1970s, was aimed at <...> rapid ideological unification

within the framework of the then proclaimed new historical community – the Soviet people" (Belikov, Krysin, 2001). Confirmation of the paramount importance of linguistic ideology together with various social, demographic, psychological and emotional conditions for achieving the necessary degree of multilingualism in the family can be found in numerous, including experimental, works (Karpova, Ringblom, Zabrodskaia, 2019).

The continuity and succession of the Kazakh language transmission in the recent past has been complicated by ideological, social, cultural, informational and other upheavals, accompanied by language shifts and even the aggravation of language conflicts, or so-called generation discontinuities (Suleimenova, Akberdi, Koishibayeva, 2016). Of course, such upheavals can directly affect the choice of language preferences within the same family, since the attitude towards the Kazakh and Russian languages in society and specifically in a bilingual family today continues to be distributed on a wide scale from negative and toxic to approving and welcoming.

The Kazakhstani society strives to restore the Kazakh language competence in its entirety. To do this in the existing diversity of Kazakh-Russian bilingualism is undoubtedly a difficult task that does not have a single solution. Now, the main thing has been achieved – the society has actively accepted the task of spreading the Kazakh language in all spheres of its use and enthusiastically participates in this process, primarily in its family.

Conceptually serious for understanding the ongoing processes of the development of bilingualism of the child is also a language shift. The circumstances, conditions and reasons for its occurrence or overcoming among the Kazakhs at one time were alarming and seemed insurmountable. Today we can talk about the ongoing language shift reversing (Suleimenova, 2011). It is directly related to public sentiment and the changes that follow. We can confidently assert that the Kazakh language is out of the risk zone, and much has been done in this regard by the bilingual family.

S.V. Kirilenko's idea that the impact of diglossia may be the trigger of language shift

seems fruitful for studying the processes in bilingual children (Kirilenko, 2023). The possibility of such an influence has not been purposefully tested in this work, but its probability is confirmed by our observations. The next stage of studying the phenomenon of the "Ugly Duckling" will be precisely related to the influence of the functional distribution of two languages on the formation of the dominant language of a bilingual child, contrary to family tradition.

A qualitative review of theoretical and practical issues of children's (early) bilingualism contains the work of Sh. Hoffman, in which a special place is given to the problem of language choice by children in a multilingual society. Sh. Hoffman emphasizes that the circumstances of a child's language acquisition (simultaneous or sequential) do not fit perfectly into any descriptive category. At the same time, says Sh. Hoffman, it is necessary to take into account the general cognitive development of the child, his social environment, interaction with adults and children, since they form the resulting language competence and affect the conscious or unconscious choice of language, i.e. preference for one and rejection of the other (Hoffman, 2014).

The main emphasis in Kazakhstan studies on children's bilingualism is also on identifying factors, conditions and mechanisms that influence the choice of language, promotion and preservation of one of the languages. In this regard, recent works devoted to the study of bilingualism involving the Kazakh language are of interest (Amanov, Gagarina, 2022; Ahn and Smagulova, 2019; Smagulova, 2014; Smagulova 2017; Smagulova, 2016; Smagulova, 2019).

### **Statement of the problem**

Under the guidance of the authors of this article, the laboratory "Sociolinguistics, theory and practice of translation" of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University conducts research on the vitality of the languages of Kazakhstan, the linguistic and ethnic identity of bilinguals, sociolinguistic variables of the language shift and the language shift reversing of bilinguals, the relationship of social and linguistic prestige, the features of language transmission between

and within generations in the conditions of mass and long-term bilingualism, the sides and stages of the formation of language preferences of bilingual children, etc.

It is known that the second language is formed on the basis of the first language, and the bilingual's success in the second language depends on the level of its development, because cognitive processes originate and develop in the first language. Why is it possible to change the language in favor of the second language or choose it as the dominant language even at the early stages of bilingualism formation? How are language attitudes, language choice and language transmission realized within bilingual generations and between bilingual generations? The changed attitude of people around to the Kazakh language seemed to create a favorable environment for the child in which he should intuitively obey the rules of language choice existing in the family and begin to form the same type of Kazakh-Russian bilingualism that is accepted in the family. Is this always the case? Do all the children in the family obey this aspiration?

J.A. Fishman defined language choice preferences by the dependence on such factors as topic, situation, spheres of language use, role relations, configuration of domination spheres, and others. (Fishman, 1965). We will add to this a variety of social factors, the assessment by others and self-assessment of language behavior, emotional support and other conditions affecting the emergence and development of children's or full-fledged adult bilingualism.

With regard to the topic outlined in the article, such a combination of patterns comes to the fore: the peculiarities of family bilingualism, the preferential choice and the formed dominant use of Kazakh or Russian by family members, depending on the topic, place and spheres of communication; stereotypical language preferences that have developed in the family, etc.

How does a child, being the element of family Kazakh-Russian natural bilingualism, dispose of these complex factors, because some of them turn out to be significant for him, and others are insignificant? Why in a

similar bilingual family situation does one child prefer to use Kazakh more and the other – Russian, thereby determining the dominance of this language in his own emerging bilingualism?

It is precisely such interesting cases, which stand out the general linguistic behavior peculiar to the family, that have become the **purpose** of our work. In other words, the focus was on children who made an unusual and unexpected choice in favor of the dominance of either the Kazakh or Russian language. A tentative attempt was made to immerse into the context of arguments and generalized maternal observations of the linguistic biographies of their bilingual children.

### Methods

The research material was the partially structured language biographies of four bilingual children (two girls and two boys) who made an unexpected (not meeting the linguistic traditions of the family) choice of Kazakh or Russian as the dominant language for bilingual families.

The requirements for the material selected for consideration were narrowed down. In particular, the following restrictions have been introduced in the selection of bilingual families of informants: a) ethnic identification (a bilingual family must be Kazakh); b) residence of bilingual families in the city (it is known that with the intensity of language processes in cities, the overwhelming number of urban Kazakh families are bilingual); c) approximately close in nature (in terms of skill level, areas of use, etc.) bilingualism of families with a clear dominance of either Kazakh or Russian; d) the age of parents from 35 to 45 years (this generation of Kazakhstanis grew up in the conditions of sharply changed language priorities, purposeful overcoming of the failure of the Kazakh language transmission between generations, conscious efforts to create its continuity and succession); e) the mother of a bilingual child should have a higher humanitarian (linguistic) education, etc..

In order to get closer to the **methodology of involved observation** and to obtain a sufficiently qualified and accurate description of

the bilingual child's linguistic biography, the most biased informants were used – mother linguists who closely observed and interpreted the child's language preferences during the child's life, and also tried to guide the line of his linguistic progress. In other words, the deviation from the classical involved observation is that the informants tried to influence the language career of the child.

The informants were assigned to observe and describe the language behavior of their child from the moment when the child's unexpected (uncommon for the rest of the family) choice of the dominant language became apparent.

All material for analysis was provided by bilingual informants-mothers, by education and professional activity qualified specialists in Kazakh and English philology, university teachers:

FR 1 (Family of Respondents) – Candidate of Philological Sciences, associate professor, specialist in general theory of language, graduated from school with the Kazakh language of instruction and university with a degree in Kazakh Philology.

FR 2 – Candidate of Philological Sciences, associate professor, specialist in applied linguistics, studied at a school with the Kazakh language of instruction, graduated from the university with a degree in Kazakh Philology.

FR 3 – PhD, professor, specialist in English philology, studied at a school with the Russian language of instruction, graduated from the Russian department of the University with a degree in Foreign / English Philology.

FR 4 – PhD, professor, specialist in testing the Kazakh language proficiency, studied at a school with the Kazakh language of instruction, graduated from the Kazakh department with a degree in Linguistics.

### Discussion

The dominant language of a bilingual child was established without theoretical delving into the specifics of such a variation criterion as the degree of proficiency in Kazakh and Russian, and is entirely based on the evidence of the informant and, less often, the child himself.

*The child's choice of the dominant language in the family FR 1.*

Kazakh is the dominant language of all members of this bilingual family. A two-parent family, cohabitation with grandparents, five children. Only one child's language preferences are formed with great difficulties and psychological problems.

FR 1: “Son of five years. He spoke Kazakh with his parents, grandparents, and four older sisters. From an early age, he watched the television channel “*Balapan*” [*Chick*] in Kazakh. Until the age of five, there was a stringent prohibition on using a mobile phone, from the age of five it was allowed to watch YouTube channels for an hour. After 2–3 months, the boy stopped speaking. After two more weeks, the son spoke only Russian. He even stopped using Kazakh addresses to parents, grandparents, sisters (*әже, ата, ана, әнке*) [grandmother, grandfather, mother, sister]. He started answering in Russian the questions asked in Kazakh.

In September, the son began studying in the *kindergarten* of a school with the Kazakh language of instruction. He was silent again for 2–3 months. Then at school he started to use small phrases in Kazakh without including words from Russian.

At home, he speaks exclusively in Russian.

I admit we were worried and sought support from doctors and psychologists, who reassured us that our son is fine and has no speech impairment.”

The child has experienced severe emotional stress twice in a short period of time, first due to the use of a non-native language in the Russian-language children's YouTube channels, and the second time due to instruction in the Kazakh language.

The first inhibitory reaction led to silence and a complete switch to Russian. The second reaction of silence was already familiar to him, although the pause was the same in duration as the first one. Then the child intuitively, but quite wisely decided to make a decisive division of languages by spheres of use: *Kazakh* – at school, and *Russian* – at home, despite the fact that the entire home environment mainly used Kazakh.

It is interesting that the child independently chose school as a place where the Kazakh

language should be used, and made Russian, which is not dominant in the family, the “home” language.

It should be noted that the stress experienced led to a temporary failure of communicative activity, expressed in silence, but did not cause a delay or other disorder of speech development.

FR 1: “Gradually, with focused support from adults and sisters, my son began to participate little by little in Kazakh language conversations at home and over time he began to use Kazakh more.

The child even began to make remarks to others, *why do you address me in Russian*. He tries not to mix words of the Kazakh and Russian languages, clearly knowing the boundaries of languages.

There were no similar problems with the four older children.

The family believed that since we all speak Kazakh, the children would speak their native language, and it would be their main one. The situation with my son was unexpected for us. Now we believe that both languages are developing in his mind. I see that he clearly distinguishes between the Kazakh and Russian languages and does not mix them in speech. Sometimes I check him for knowledge of one or another word in Russian, the child answers correctly, without thinking at all.”

Currently, the child, with the support of the whole family and the organization of a reasonable language regime, successfully overcomes language difficulties and develops communication skills in both languages.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that the child, clearly separating and not mixing both languages in speech communication, follows the path of formation of coordinate bilingualism, rare in the environment of mass natural bilingualism, with the functional use of Kazakh as the language of instruction and communication at school.

*The child's choice of the dominant language in the family FR 2.*

Kazakh is the dominant language of all members of this bilingual family. A two-parent family, four family members, two children.

Only one child, with seemingly full-fledged transmission of the Kazakh language from his parents and older sister, demonstrated a break in the Kazakh language tradition, expressed in preference for the Russian language.

A ten-year-old girl is growing up in a two-parent family, she has an older sister.

FR 2: "Unexpectedly for everyone, the youngest daughter began to prefer the Russian language and maintained this language choice in the Kazakh kindergarten. Often the girl heard: *"Сенің орысша сөйлегенің дұрыс, қазақшаңды ешкім түсінбейді!"* [You speak Russian well, but no one understands your Kazakh!]. The kindergarten teacher complained: "Her language is neither Russian nor Kazakh! It's hard to work with her!"

At school with the Kazakh language of instruction, the language behavior of the child gradually began to change. Kazakh language forms have become more diverse, words of abstract meaning have begun to appear in speech. However, often the meaning of such words require my clarification.

My daughter is now a 5th grade student. I still strive to overcome the dominance of the Russian language and its preferred choice in conversations. I notice that she starts any story in Russian, switches with effort from Russian to Kazakh, understands math tasks with great difficulty, words with a chain of agglutinative affixes, especially final ones, often pronounces and writes incorrectly, she makes statements in speech that are almost a literal translation from Russian *"Мына өзен терең, оған кірме"* [Deep lake, do not enter it] instead of the correct *"Терең өзен, оған түспе"* [Deep lake, do not swim in it]. There are many clichés and standard expressions in her Kazakh and Russian.

Any relaxation in the use of the Kazakh language and switching to Russian is often accompanied by the phrase: *"At least so!"*

She switches from language to language unconsciously, and she is unable to control her choice of language."

We have a curious example of the formation and preservation, despite the efforts of the family, of the so-called subordinative bilingualism with the preferred use of the Russian

language, which has a profound interfering effect on the semantics and grammar of the Kazakh language.

The child's mastering of the Russian language, as shown in her linguistic biography, was carried out intuitively, grammatical constructions in it are primary and affect the generated structures in the Kazakh language. Obviously, the sequence of the child's mastering of languages – first and predominantly Russian, then Kazakh – was not noticed in the family. This is only an assumption, but, as we can see, the first (in terms of time of mastering) dominant Russian language "deeply germinated" in the child's language practice.

Constant monitoring of the child's use of the Kazakh language, of course, the family hopes, will lead to the desired result. However, judging by the examples given in Kazakh, it will be a long and complex process, since the Russian language competence of the child is stronger and deeper.

#### *The child's choice of the dominant language in the family FR 3.*

Russian was the dominant language in this bilingual family. A single-parent family, one child. Currently, two family members prefer different languages. The child, under the influence of conscious and purposeful efforts of the mother, demonstrates the rupture of the Russian linguistic tradition in the family and the transition to the dominance of the Kazakh language.

The only son who grew up in a single-parent family is now 17 years old. He speaks three languages, but, in his opinion, Kazakh has now become the dominant language.

FR 3: "My son spoke early in Russian, but in his early speech there were also rare Kazakh words *ата, ана, ал, кел, мынау не* [grandfather, grandmother, take, come, what is it]. Gradually, there were more Kazakh words and expressions: *"далаға пойдем", "тамақ не буду", "сен почему отырсың мына жерде"* [let's go outside, I won't eat, why are you sitting here], etc. I think it happened under the influence of communication with his great-grandmother and great-grandfather, who spoke Kazakh.

In general, the Russian language remained dominant for a long time.”

Kazakh inclusions in the early Russian speech of the child, which FR 3 cites, are naturally related to what the child hears from others and with age restrictions in the use of language resources.

The above excerpt of the language biography describes a common situation of the appearance of natural mixed bilingualism, in which the linguistic facts of one language uncontrollably penetrate into another. Obviously, this is how the peculiarities of the child’s subordinative bilingualism manifested themselves at this early stage.

FR 3: “The state language policy has become clearly aimed at the dissemination of the Kazakh language. The demands of society have changed. I began to make a lot of efforts to ensure that the Kazakh language entered his life as early and firmly as possible.”

Informant FR 3 just belongs to that generation of Kazakhs, part of which, for one reason or another, did not learn the Kazakh language and was unable to use it in the most important functional capacity – full-fledged transmission to their children.

Therefore, it is necessary to pay tribute to the responsibility of the FR 3 linguist, who firstly believed that the type of bilingualism that is being formed in a child can have negative consequences for his linguistic competence in both languages. Secondly, she undertook and persistently implemented thoughtful activities for the linguistic and intellectual development of her son for a decade and a half. We consider it possible to dwell on this in more detail.

FR 3: “Every evening I read children’s books aloud to my son being a preschooler at that time, alternating languages by day, despite my accent in the Kazakh language. So it can be considered that both languages have become present in his mind.

I quite deliberately gave my son to a Kazakh kindergarten. Fortunately, it was not a mixed kindergarten, which would have Russian and Kazakh groups. I think this is a very important moment for the formation of a child’s language skills.

We had a good fortune to have a regular Kazakh-language secondary school No. 65; there were 9 people in the primary classes, and the teacher strictly ensured that the children spoke Russian only during Russian language lessons. This requirement was due to the fact that most of the classmates, like my son, had a poor command of the Kazakh language at first.

I understood that I could not create a full-fledged Kazakh communication environment at home, so my son read books in Kazakh aloud and in person, and retold them to me in detail. I asked him about it, explaining that when he retells episodes, I understand oral speech better and learn Kazakh faster.

Since 6th grade my son started to read a lot in Russian too, he “invented” such a tactic for himself: he read books first in Russian, then in Kazakh. He compared and commented on the inaccuracies he noticed, rejoiced at every error he found. I used to buy a lot of dictionaries of the Kazakh language and habituated him to use them, so my son learned to look for answers to difficult questions on his own.

I did not let his language career out of my attention: in the 5th and 6th grades my son studied with a Kazakh language tutor and mastered the basic rules of grammar. This proved to be very successful, because soon the schools were switched to an updated program, that did not provide for a detailed study of morphology and syntax. Priority was given to any available events in the Kazakh language: film premieres, performances, debates at school and online.

He started to study English intensively from the 5th grade, first for two years individually, then with a native speaker. The teacher demanded mandatory daily viewing of Kazakhstani and international news, then talking about them in the classroom in English. This habit has formed and has become permanent: we discuss the news in English at breakfast. My son became a leader in the English discussion club.

Since the 8th grade, my son became interested in biology and chemistry, and then he started working in English and Russian in Coursera (the pandemic helped)”.

Summing up, we can say that everything that the FR 3 informant did for the development



of the child in three languages was systematic and consistent, she used a variety of forms and means of work and encouragement.

The FR 3 informant admits that she paid a lot of attention to making sure that the child clearly separates what language to speak, with whom and where.

If we apply to the language career of the son of the informant FR 3 the method of configurations of domination spheres of J. A. Fishman (Fishman, 1965), it turns out that the Kazakh language is significantly ahead of Russian and English in terms of the volume of functions, some sphere are occupied by three languages at once, but with different specific weights, the family sphere, which is more and traditionally focused on preserving and transmitting the native language, was radically reformatted by the informant FR 3. At the same time, there is an institutionalized sphere – this is a school, here the Kazakh language of the son of the informant FR 3 does not actually overlap with Russian.

Not only my son, but also his classmates speak Russian with the informant FR 3, instantly switching to Kazakh for conversations with each other. The informant constantly observes “a flying switching from Kazakh to Russian and vice versa”: at any language contact, he responds in the language of address.

In the case under consideration, the informant FR 3, giving priority to the Kazakh language, in a comprehensive and flexible manner promoted both the qualitative and quantitative development of the three languages in her son. It is also worth noting the absence of accent in Kazakh and Russian, which is mentioned by the informant FR 3, who also does not notice the interference influence of Kazakh on Russian, or vice versa.

FR 3: “I have always supported the dominance of Kazakh. Soon the Kazakh language environment began to clearly affect his mentality, worldview.

He speaks fluently on any topic, both in Kazakh and Russian. The child himself considers Kazakh to be dominant.

I always notice that my son feels comfortable in any language environment, but most organically in Kazakh.

I am inclined to believe that it was still reading that played the biggest role in his linguistic development.”

The linguistic biography presented by the informant FR 3 convinces of the possibility of cumulative influence on the language choice and development of the dominant language of a bilingual child. Currently, the child clearly knows what language he speaks, builds speech in three languages using only those phonetic, grammatical and lexical means that are inherent in this particular language. He is characterized by flexibility and the ability to easily change from language to language.

*The child's choice of the dominant language in the family FR 4.*

Kazakh is the dominant language of all members of this bilingual family. A two-parent family, four children. Only one child gave preference to the Russian language, resolutely rejecting the tradition of the predominant use of the Kazakh language existing in the family and striving to subordinate all family members to his linguistic behavior.

FR 4: “The dominant language in the bilingual family was and remains the Kazakh language. Adult family members, two older sisters and a younger brother mostly use the Kazakh language. Only the five-year-old daughter preferred the Russian language. Full age-appropriate Russian speech was formed by her by the age of three.

Now my daughter goes to a Kazakh kindergarten, but continues to speak and think in Russian. Somehow, in an incomprehensible way, my daughter subordinates everyone – both in kindergarten and at home, everyone imperceptibly switches to Russian.

Lately I have been trying to speak only Kazakh with her, but my daughter only answers in Russian. Recently, under strict control from our side, she began to say hello and goodbye in Kazakh. The articulation of complex sounds of the Kazakh language has not yet obeyed her. She speaks Kazakh with a strong accent.

She understands Russian phraseological units. I consider this to be evidence of a fairly high level of proficiency in the Russian language. Here the sisters are watching the cartoon

"Masha and the Bear" together in Russian. The elder sister asks in Kazakh: "Ол не: " *He надай духом*?" [What is it: "Don't lose courage"?]. The daughter explains in Russian with lightning speed: "Don't worry! He'll come back."

The FR 4 informant does not know how and why her third daughter began to prefer to use Russian rather than Kazakh. The existing norm of communication, when all family members, being bilinguals, used mainly one Kazakh language at home and established patterns of language behavior, was ignored by the child. She has broken out of a homogeneous communicative environment and, being a leader by nature, pulls everyone into communication in Russian.

The explanation for one child's choice of Russian may vary widely, but the FR 4 informant herself is not yet able to do so. Obviously, at this stage it is necessary to simply accept the linguistic choice of the Russian language dominance, made by a five-year-old girl, as a given, and try to understand how much the interruption of the tradition of the dominance of the Kazakh language in the family is important for her.

### Conclusion

The above examples of a child's unexpected choice of the dominant language in a bilingual family convince us that the determinants of this process are the broad linguistic context of his living environment, including the home language environment, which the child imitates or, on the contrary, seeks to escape from, social, emotional, psychological factors, the availability of resources of both languages (e.g., on the Internet), individual abilities to develop cognitive and conceptual competencies, the ability to control his or her own linguistic behavior, and others. Understanding the complexity of these processes also makes us think about the advantage of one of the two languages. What is it and how does the child realize it? How is the choice of language achieved and how does it become dominant?

The fundamental difference between the Kazakh-Russian bilingualism of children from the majority of cases often described in the literature (parents speak different languages, 'one person – one language' situation, both

languages are used *only* in the family, etc.), lies in the mass character of natural bilingualism in the country. Therefore, most Kazakh children from an early age are constantly immersed in the element of two family languages, regardless of where and how long they are at home, in kindergarten, visiting, school, on the Internet, playground, etc.

As a rule, a bilingual family has already made a choice before the birth of a child – preference is given to either Kazakh or Russian. In other words, families are characterized by a clear dominance of either Kazakh or Russian in general linguistic behavior. All children are comfortable and organic with their choice of the family's dominant language. Only one child suddenly turns out to be an "Ugly Duckling" and "breaks out" from the general picture of family bilingualism, not subordinating his linguistic behavior to the generally accepted one.

In such cases, it is up to the parents to choose which language to support: the dominant language of the family or the dominant language of the child. In the cases that we have considered, parents consciously make a choice in favor of the Kazakh language. The common and main motive for regulating the language preferences of the child, which guided all informants, was their desire to strengthen his Kazakh language competence, expand the functional load and the scope of application of the Kazakh language. Thus, the informants FR 1, FR 2, FR 4 tried to align the language behavior of the child, making it the same for all family members, and the informant FR 3 tried to radically change it.

The four diverse cases of one child breaking the family language tradition give a lot of food for thought, but do not provide any single explanation for the facts described, which, of course, require more careful consideration.

The psychological conflict experienced by the child twice during the successive change of the language environment (Kazakh → Russian → Kazakh), described by the FR 1, was expressed in anxious interruptions of the child's communicative activity in both languages. In this episode, an impact had the underestimated by the informant FR 1 influence of the Internet resources, especially game content in Russian.

Here arises a natural desire to compare the educational opportunities of the Kazakh and Russian Internet spaces and recognize that Internet resources in the Kazakh language do not yet fully satisfy the cognitive needs of a bilingual child. The uncontrolled invasion of the Russian language subculture, which turned out to be accessible and interesting, into the speech development of the child at the crossroads of two languages left its mark for him. We can also talk about the "speech trauma" he received, which manifested in two-month silence.

Two cases of unexpected choice of the Russian language by the child as the dominant one are interesting. Both cases were observed in bilingual families with a stable dominant Kazakh language. The confident preponderance of Russian language competence in both bilingual children (FR 2 and FR 4) persists, despite the efforts of all family members. On the part of both mothers-linguists, there is no sufficient explanation for the 'failure' of both family language behavior and the transmission of the 'inherited' Kazakh language. It is possible that unaccounted-for factors of socialization also interfered in this process, including the degree and significance of the impact of Russian-language television and the Internet.

The successful formation of a full-fledged coordinative Kazakh-Russian-English multilingualism was not connected, contrary to usual expectations, with the mother's language (FR 3). The child's language career was determined by the activity and competent use of various methods and means of language teaching by the FR 3 informant. The child's predisposition to languages is not the least of the factors (FR 3).

The raised in the article question *why* children of the same family, being in the same environment of natural family bilingualism with

the dominance of either Kazakh or Russian, choose another language, remains largely open.

Four language biographies collected under the conditions of involved observation demonstrated that not only habitual patterns but also other patterns come into play here, shaping language preferences against stereotypical family traditions.

This important range includes computer games, communication with peers outdoors, not time-limited viewing of television programs, YouTube and TikTok, insufficient in terms of duration and impressionability language contacts with adults, unnoticed children's language conflicts, sensitivity of emotional support for language development, etc.

Other important questions also arise. Does the order of his birth or the number of children in the family affect the child's choice of language? Does the child transfer his/her ability to use language tools to other, non-family, socio-cultural contexts? Does the dominant language always 'interfere' with the second language (interference of language skills, avoidance of the rules of one language in another, restrictions on the use of facts of "language deficit" in the second language, overgeneralization, etc.)? What language strategy should parents use to achieve the desired result?

Each of the issues is worthy of separate and independent consideration. Undoubtedly, a special interdisciplinary analysis of the areas of language dominance of bilingual children is needed to complete the picture. It can be carried out, for example, in terms of code-switching theory, communicative strategies, mastering the rules of socialization, diversity of language practices in conditions of bilingualism, which, we hope, will bring us closer to the secrets of cases of unexpected choice of the dominant language by a bilingual child.

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