








The Role of Native Languages in Identity Preservation Among Turkic Minorities in Kazakhstan

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Abstract

Kazakhstan is a multilingual country and home to many languages, including several Turkic ones in varying degrees of danger and vulnerability. The sociolinguistic problems associated with preserving and reviving these languages are significant due to complex historical, cultural, and political factors. The purpose of this article is to analyze these problems by studying the sociolinguistic status of endangered and vulnerable Turkic languages in Kazakhstan, such as Kumyk, Balkar, Gagauyz, Sakha (Yakuts), Crimean Tatar, Nogai, Khakas, Tuvans, Karachay and others, against the background of the dominant bilingual context of the country – Kazakh and Russian. The study adopted a socio-linguistic and qualitative research design to collect data of the Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, in relation to the issue of language extinction. Primary data was collected through questionnaire and semi structured interviews from a sample

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of 27 speakers from various Turkic-speaking nationalities. The findings reveal a complex interplay of cultural practices, linguistic usage, and ethnic identities among the Turkic peoples in Kazakhstan. These ethnic groups are facing challenges to preserve their traditions and languages due to factors such as assimilation, migration, and the dominance of the Russian language. The study provides valuable insights into the sociolinguistic dynamics of Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, and highlight the urgent need for greater support for the preservation and promotion of vulnerable and critically endangered languages, as well as the cultural heritage associated with them. The study recommends a more inclusive language policy that recognizes and supports the linguistic rights of Turkic-speaking minorities in Kazakhstan

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Keywords: Turkic languages, sociolinguistics, language preservation, language policy, assimilation, survey, interview.

Introduction

As per the 2021 population census, Kazakhstan is a home to numerous ethnic groups including smaller Turkic communities such as the Kumyks, Balkars, Gagauyzs, Sakha (Yakuts), Crimean Tatars, Nogais, Khakas, Tuvans, Karachays, and others. These groups make up a small percentage of the population but play an important role in the country's cultural and linguistic diversity (Khazanov, 1995). The native languages of these minorities are increasingly used in family and informal contexts. They contribute to the rich cultural mosaic of the nation. However, despite their rich cultural traditions, due to the dominance of Kazakh as the state language and Russian as the lingua franca, many of these ethnic groups face challenges, and their languages at the verge of decline and even extinction (Zharkynbekova et al., 2015).

The preservation and use of these minority languages in Kazakhstan is the high level of bilingualism, with Russian and Kazakh often preferred over native tongues (Dobrushina and Moroz (2021) While Kazakhstan promotes multilingualism, with programs aimed at fostering the state language (Kazakh), Russian continues to dominate as the language of communication, particularly in urban areas (Fierman, 2006; Schatz, 2000). Owing to the multilingual environment, their survival is further complicated by socio-economic and political pressures that promote assimilation with dominant Russian and Kazakh language groups, which are more commonly spoken in official and public spheres, particularly resulting in language shift among younger generations, who increasingly adopt Russian as their primary language, even within minority communities (Zhamirova et al., 2025). The problem's severity is understood to see the decrease in the level of transmission of Turkic minority languages from generation to generation, loss of linguistic competence among the younger generation, and a gradual transition to bilingualism or monolingualism in Russian or Kazakh (Abasilov & Kapalbek, 2024; Abdullayev, 2023).

Another factor contributing to the decline of Turkic minority languages is the lack of institutional support. While there are some cultural programs aimed at preserving minority languages, the resources allocated to these efforts are often insufficient. Schools that offer instruction in minority languages are limited, and there is a general lack of media and literature in these languages, making it difficult for younger generations to maintain proficiency (Suleimenova et al., 2018). Furthermore, globalization and the pervasive influence of digital media in Russian and Kazakh exacerbate the marginalization of these smaller languages (Tlepbergen et al., 2025).

The Balkar community, in particular, though small in size within Kazakhstan, faces similar challenges in maintaining its language. Despite its rich cultural significance, the Balkar language is increasingly confined to familial and informal settings. Younger generations, like those in other Turkic minority groups, often prefer Russian or Kazakh for educational and professional activities, as these languages dominate public life in Kazakhstan. This linguistic shift contributes to the gradual decline of the Balkar language in formal settings, reflecting a broader trend observed among other Turkic minorities in the region (Smagulova, 2008). In addition, globalization, migration, and urbanization are exacerbating the decline of the Balkar language, as its speakers are increasingly moving to larger cities, where linguistic diversity is often suppressed in favor of socio-economic integration (Koryakov & Mazurova, 2024).

Sociolinguistic research is the domain that safeguards the use of these native languages to understand the challenges and potential solutions for maintaining linguistic diversity (Zharkynbekova et al., 2025). The Kazakh language itself, despite being the state language, has undergone significant sociolinguistic changes, mainly due to the dominance of the Russian language in the Soviet era, which continues to influence its modern use, especially in cities and official institutions. Despite challenges, there are ongoing efforts to safeguard and revitalize Turkic minority languages in Kazakhstan. Cultural organizations and community leaders play a crucial role in this process, organizing language classes, cultural events, and media

production in minority languages. The Uighur community, for example, has established several cultural centers that promote the Uighur language and traditions, helping to foster a sense of identity among younger generations (Kamalov, 2021).

Studies have advocated for a stronger role of education in language preservation. Schools are expected to play a central role by offering bilingual or multilingual education programs that include minority languages as part of the curriculum (Smagulova, 2008). This approach has been successful in other countries with similar linguistic diversity, where minority languages are integrated into the formal education system alongside dominant languages. Government initiatives have also been introduced, although these efforts are often focused on promoting the Kazakh language. However, Kazakhstan's Constitution (Article 7) guarantees the right to use native languages, and there are legal frameworks in place to protect linguistic diversity (Ayupova, 1998). While these laws provide a foundation, more targeted policies and resources are needed to ensure the survival of smaller languages (Smagulova, 2006).

The objective of this study is to explore the sociolinguistic dynamics surrounding the safeguarding and use of native languages among minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. It aims to analyze the factors contributing to language decline and the efforts, both institutional and community-driven, to preserve these languages (Akhmetova et al., 2025). The study also seeks to provide insights into the broader implications of language policies on minority language preservation. The rationale behind this study is that native languages among minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan are facing sociolinguistic challenges which have put their survival and preservation at risk. Therefore, it is essential to highlight the role of educational, cultural, and policy initiatives in supporting or hindering the revitalization and continued use of these minority languages.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted a sociolinguistic research framework to analyze patterns of language shift, bilingualism, and language maintenance among Turkic minorities in Kazakhstan. Sociolinguistic research has the potential to examine the dynamics of language use by identifying the factors that either contribute to or hinder the preservation of these languages (Bodó et al., 2022; Hernández-Campoy, 2014). Additionally, sociolinguistic research can inform policy development by providing evidence-based recommendations for language planning and education. For example, studies by Smagulova (2008) and Fierman (2006) have highlighted the importance of family and community support in language maintenance, as well as the role of education and media in shaping language preferences. Likewise, a better understanding of how digital media influences language use among young people leads to the creation of minority-language content online, helping to increase the visibility and utility of these languages in the modern world.

One of the key figures in modern sociolinguistics, an American linguist, Ronald Wardhaugh, characterizes sociolinguistics as the study of “language in its social context” (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). This definition emphasizes that sociolinguists focus not solely on the language itself or its internal structures, but rather on how individuals from diverse societies utilize language. As noted by Holmes and Hazen (2013) and Holmes (2013), “Without understanding the social factors affecting language use, including social status and identity, we cannot fully appreciate the complexities of language”. In contrast to generative linguistics, as presented by Chomsky (2011), sociolinguistics addresses not only the idealized native speaker but also real individuals who may deviate from normative language use, making errors and blending different linguistic styles.

Hence, in order to study the sociolinguistic dynamics that can assist in safeguarding native languages of the minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan (Dave, 1996; Heller et al., 2024) and to assess the sociolinguistic challenges leading to language decline it is essential to study all such factors that influence the language use, including various characteristics of speakers such as age, gender, education level, cultural background, and profession, as well as the specifics of the speaking act. It is premised that sociolinguistic research can play a pivotal role in this process, offering insights into the factors influencing language use and informing strategies to preserve linguistic diversity in Kazakhstan. It is also believed that sociolinguistic studies inform the broader discourse on minority language preservation globally.

Literature Review

Safeguarding Native Languages of Minor Turkic Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan

The safeguarding and use of native languages among minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan is a complex issue that requires both community-driven and institutional efforts. It is also a topic of growing interest in sociolinguistic research (Holmes, 2013; Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Besides, Kazakhstan's unique historical and sociopolitical context, with its multi-ethnic population and linguistic diversity, provides an ideal case for studying language shift, preservation, and the influence of national language policies (Terlibayeva & Menlibekova, 2021). While there are challenges, particularly in terms of language

shift and lack of resources, there is also potential for revitalization through education, cultural initiatives, and targeted language policies. One of the most prominent themes in studying the safeguarding measures of extinct languages is the phenomenon of language shift, where minority groups increasingly adopt dominant languages, leading to a decline in the use of their native tongue (Grenoble, 2024). Fierman (2006) explores this trend in Kazakhstan, focusing on the dominance of Russian and, to a lesser extent, Kazakh in both public and private spheres. He argues that the historical prevalence of Russian during the Soviet period, combined with its ongoing importance in education, business, and media, has contributed to the marginalization of smaller Turkic languages, which are often restricted to informal, familial use (Boeschoten, 2021).

In her study on language policies in Kazakhstan, Smagulova (2008) discusses how the country's post-Soviet linguistic landscape continues to favor bilingualism in Kazakh and Russian. The study also observed that among the younger generations of Turkic minorities, especially in urban areas, the use of native languages has dramatically decreased, and children often grow up speaking Russian or Kazakh as their first languages. This shift away from native languages is further exacerbated by limited access to education in these languages, particularly in the case of smaller ethnic groups like the Uighurs and Tatars. Similarly, Suleimenova et al. (2018) highlight the institutional and structural barriers to language maintenance among Turkic minorities. Her research points to the lack of comprehensive educational programs and media in minority languages, leading to their gradual erosion. Even though Kazakhstan's constitution guarantees linguistic rights, in practice, the resources available for minority language education are scarce. It is stressed that this imbalance contributes to the decline of linguistic diversity in the country.

Role of Education in Language Preservation

Several scholars emphasize the crucial role of education in preserving minority languages (Dave, 1996; Dobrushina & Moroz, 2021; Kamalov, 2021; Koryakov & Mazurova, 2024; Smagulova, 2006). According to Kamalov (2021), education systems that incorporate native language instruction can significantly influence language maintenance among minority communities. His study on Uighur language preservation in Kazakhstan reveals that schools offering instruction in Uighur are key to keeping the language alive, even though these schools are limited in number and resources. The study also notes that cultural centers associated with minority groups provide extracurricular language courses, which help bridge the gap left by the formal education system. Studies like (Karimova, 2022; Mirkhayev, 2024; Slavina et al., 2016; Wigglesworth-Baker, 2016) also support the idea that educational initiatives are vital for minority language preservation. They argue for the integration of bilingual or multilingual education programs that balance the teaching of Kazakh, Russian, and minority languages. These studies also recommended borrowing the multilingual education models from other multilingual nations so that their programs can help maintain linguistic diversity while also promote national integration. However, they note that in Kazakhstan, implementing these programs on a wide scale would require substantial political will and resources.

Another significant theme in this domain is the role of cultural and community initiatives in safeguarding minority languages. Smagulova (2006) explores how grassroots efforts by ethnic communities themselves are often the most effective means of language preservation. Her research on the Uighur community in Kazakhstan highlights how local cultural centers, religious institutions, and family networks contribute to maintaining language use across generations. These community-led efforts are especially critical in environments where institutional support is lacking. Cultural events, festivals, and media produced in minority languages help promote their use in everyday life. Suleimenova et al. (2018) point out that although there is some government funding for cultural projects, much of the work in promoting minority languages happens at the community level. Language revival efforts, including the creation of Uighur-language media outlets and the organization of language competitions, foster a sense of pride and identity within the community.

National Language Policies and Multilingualism

Most recent studies on the issue of preservation of the native languages of minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan highlight the complex interplay of factors that influence language maintenance, from education to community efforts and national policies (Abasilov & Kapalbek, 2024; Abdullayev, 2023; Tlepbergen et al., 2025; Zharkynbekova et al., 2025). These studies have analyzed significant challenges, particularly in the face of the language shift towards Russian and Kazakh, as well as opportunities for revitalization through targeted policies, educational reforms, and community-driven initiatives. Additionally, sociolinguistic research has provided valuable insights into these processes, not only for Kazakhstan but for other multilingual nations facing similar issues (Heller et al., 2024; Holmes, 2013).

Studies on Kazakhstan's national language policies have also examined the tension between promoting Kazakh as the state language and protecting minority languages (Satybayeva et al., 2025; Tlepbergen et al., 2023). The country's constitution explicitly recognizes the right to use native languages, but Fierman (2006) and Smagulova (2008) both note that in practice, language policies tend to prioritize the promotion of Kazakh and Russian. While multilingualism is officially encouraged, minority languages are often

overlooked in policy implementation. However, there are signs of progress. [Kamalov \(2021\)](#) reports that the government has recently shown greater interest in supporting minority languages through cultural grants and the promotion of linguistic diversity in media. These initiatives, though limited, suggest a growing awareness of the need to balance national language policies with the preservation of minority languages.

The challenges faced by Turkic minorities in Kazakhstan are not unique. Sociolinguistic studies on language preservation globally offer useful comparisons ([Zhalelova et al., 2022](#)). [Fishman \(1991\)](#), a key figure in the field of language revitalization, argues that minority language preservation requires sustained effort across multiple domains, including education, media, and family life. His model of "Reversing Language Shift" (RLS) has been applied to various minority language contexts worldwide and offers a useful framework for Kazakhstan's Turkic minorities. [Crystal \(2002\)](#) also emphasizes the importance of intergenerational transmission in maintaining linguistic vitality. His research shows that without the active use of a language at home and in community settings, language revitalization efforts are unlikely to succeed ([Dana et al., 2025](#)). In Kazakhstan, this highlights the need for policies and community initiatives that support the everyday use of Turkic minority languages.

Methodology

Research design

The study adopted a socio-linguistic approach ([Hernández-Campoy, 2014](#)), guided by a qualitative research design to gather comprehensive data on the safeguarding and use of native languages among minor Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The study draws upon linguistic, cultural, and social aspects of contemporary Turkic languages in relation to the issue of language extinction. It also relies on official statistics pertaining to Turkic languages in Kazakhstan, as well as findings from ongoing secondary research. Descriptive scientific methods are also applied involving including classification, statistical analysis, and general analysis.

Sampling

The sample comprised 27 speakers from various Turkic-speaking nationalities, including Kumyks, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Nogais, Khakas, Tuvans, and Karachays. These speakers were community leaders, educators, and speakers of the native languages. Each of these speakers was interviewed, and their audio recordings were transcribed for analysis and identification of themes.

Data Collection instruments

The data collection method mainly comprised a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the participants of the study. The questionnaire comprised 27 categorical questions encompassing five factors, including demographic information about the participants like gender age, education, residential status, along with reasons for relocation or migration, language status, religion, and culture. The questions were developed indigenously, focusing on the current use of endangered languages and their role in communication platforms such as mass media and everyday life. the survey also collected data on language use patterns, attitudes towards their native languages, and perceptions of language preservation efforts. The survey questions underwent testing and validation by experts during the testing process.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including community leaders, educators, and speakers of the native languages. The focus was to gain a deeper understanding of individual experiences, challenges faced in language use, and local initiatives for language preservation. Ethical guidelines were followed during the interview process, ensuring that participants gave their informed consent and that their responses were recorded accurately. Additionally, observation of participants in social events, cultural activities and language courses also helped in understanding the actual use of language in social contexts. Besides the primary data, official statistics related to language use, educational programs, and demographic data were collected from government sources to provide a contextual framework for the findings.

Data Analysis

The Interview transcripts were manually coded to decipher recurring themes, attitudes, and narratives regarding language use and preservation. Techniques such as coding and content analysis were utilized to systematically categorize responses and derive meaningful insights. To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, a triangulation approach was adopted, integrating data from surveys, interviews, and official statistics. This multi-faceted analysis provided a holistic understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics at play within minor Turkic ethnic groups.

Results

This study conducted a survey of endangered Turkic languages spoken by relevant ethnic minorities, to determine the causes of the decline in the number of users in each ethnic minority group and to assess the sociolinguistic challenges leading to such a decline, and to identify what strategies can be adopted to preserve linguistic diversity in Kazakhstan. The survey analyzed factors such as age, gender, education level, cultural background, and profession, as well as the characteristics of the speaking act itself. [Table 1](#) summarizes the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic distribution of respondents (n=27)

	N
Gender	
Male	15
Female	12
Age	
15-20 years	2
21 to 30 years	4
31 to 45 years	6
46 to 60 years	10
61 to 75 years	5
Residential status	
born in Kazakhstan	
Yes	27
No	0
Changed the residence?	
Yes	20
No	17
Family migrated to Kazakhstan	
Yes	25
No	2
If migrated , what was the reason	
• Repressed by Soviet regime	10
• Forced relocation during Word War II	11
• Voluntary migration	6
• Industrialization	1
Education	
No education	1
Up to High School	12
Graduation and above	14
Religion	
Muslims	24
Christians	2
Buddhists	1
Occupation	
Domestic roles (e.g., housewives and retirees)	10
Students	8
Professionals (e.g accountant, civil service, teaching, entrepreneurs, artists)	5
Unemployed	4

The gender distribution of participants reveals a balanced representation of male and female respondents, with 58.3% participants comprising male while 41.7% were female. This even distribution enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings, indicating that the research reflects a diverse range of perspectives on the issues at hand. The age of the participants varied significantly, ranging from 15 years to 75 years. This broad age spectrum contributes positively to the validity of the research analysis, as it corresponds well with the age parameters established in the survey questionnaire. By encompassing a wide array of ages, the study can capture a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and attitudes across different generations.

A categorical query was asked about reasons for resettlement. It was observed that all individuals surveyed were born in Kazakhstan. Notably, 79.2% of participants indicated that they had not changed their residence. This stability suggests a strong connection to their home regions and communities, providing important context for the findings. When examining the respondents' answers regarding their families' migration to Kazakhstan, the survey revealed that the resettlement period spans from 1937 to 1984. The motivations for these migrations varied, with significant factors including the repressions under Stalin, particularly during 1937-1938, deportations during World War II, and voluntary migrations to

develop the virgin lands in the Soviet era. Kazakhstan had served as a primary host country for various Turkic ethnic groups during the Soviet period which witnessed many political and militant activities like deportations during the collectivization period in the USSR (the 1930s), forced relocations during World War II, industrialization initiatives during the Second World War, and campaigns for the development of virgin lands in the 1950s and 1960s

Additionally, an analysis of participants' occupations revealed that a considerable portion was unemployed or engaged in domestic roles, including housewives and retirees. The second-largest group comprised students and schoolchildren, followed by individuals in various professions such as accounting, civil service, teaching, individual entrepreneurship, and the arts. Participants were also asked about their religious affiliation and the rituals they observed. The results showed that the Muslim population prevails among the respondents: the majority of respondents identified themselves as Islam. On the contrary, 2 people reported that they were Christians and 1 was a Buddhist. This distribution reflects the religious landscape of the Turkic-speaking peoples of Kazakhstan, where Islam is the predominant religion.

Another set of questions were related to the migration and the settlement of the Turkic-speaking nationalities. It was revealed that 28% of respondents reported having family members who had emigrated from Kazakhstan. The main countries to which these individuals migrated included Turkey, Russia, Germany, and the United States. In contrast, a substantial majority 72% of the migrants involved in the study-continued to reside in Kazakhstan, signifying the country's importance as a center for Turkic ethnic groups. The highest concentration of speakers of vulnerable and critically endangered Turkic languages is located in the Turkistan region, followed by the East Kazakhstan region and other provinces. This geographical distribution underscores the significance of these areas in preserving the linguistic heritage of minor Turkic ethnic groups.

The survey was attended by 8 different nationalities from 11 regions of Kazakhstan. Among the participants included 3-4 members from the ethnic communities like the Crimean Tatars, Tuvans, Karachais, Balkars, Sakhas, Kumyks, Nogais, and Khakas. The group comprised individuals from various geographical regions in Kazakhstan, including a Nogai from Aktau, a Balkar from Sharbakty village in Pavlodar, a Crimean Tatar from Almaty, and Karachay individuals from Astana and Turkestan. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive understanding of language use and cultural practices across different contexts. Table 2 summarizes the details about settlements of ethnic groups using endangered Turkic languages.

Table 2: Settlements of ethnic groups using endangered Turkic languages

Turkic-speaking nationalities	N
Kumyks	3
Balkars	3
Sakhas	4
Crimean Tatars,	4
Nogais	3
Khakas	3
Tuvans	3
Karachays	4
Emigrated from Kazakhstan	
Yes	7
No	20
Migrated countries	
Turkey	5
Russia	13
Germany	2
The United States	3
Others	4
Region settled	
Eastern Kazakhstan:	14
- Almaty Region:	4
- Western Kazakhstan:	1
Akmola Region:	4
- Turkistan Region:	2
- Jambyl Region:	1
Kostanay Region	1

The in-depth interviews were conducted with six representatives from specific ethnic groups, including Nogai, Balkar, Crimean Tatar, Karachay, and Kumyks. These interviews were structured with pre-prepared questions aimed at eliciting more detailed responses and gathering qualitative insights. Interestingly, only one of the participants, a Balkar, responded in Kazakh, while the others primarily

communicated in Russian. This finding underscores a significant trend among Turkic-speaking minorities in Kazakhstan, where Russian serves as the dominant language of communication. The Balkar participant, who spoke Kazakh, had married a Kazakh man and worked as a teacher of Kazakh language and literature, indicating a level of cultural assimilation.

The representative of the Nogai people expressed regret over the loss of his native language, saying that he no longer speaks it due to the lack of opportunities for its use in Kazakhstan. Conversely, in a ballad with mixed Kazakh-Balkarian ancestry, it is reported that he grew up speaking exclusively Kazakh, identifying himself more as a Kazakh than a Balkarian. The Karachay respondent shared that he often communicated in his native language with family members, but another Karachay participant lamented the absence of a relevant language environment in Astana, resorting to speaking Karachay only with his children when they visited the Karachay-Cherkes Republic. He noted the similarities between Kazakh and Karachay, indicating that while he could understand Kazakh, he primarily spoke Russian in his daily life.

The Crimean Tatar interviewee conveyed that he had consistently spoken his native language at home with his parents while also being fluent in Russian due to its prevalence in society. The Kumyk participant mentioned that while he learned Kumyk as a child, he now primarily used Russian for communication within his family and educational settings. He only reverted to using Kumyk when engaging with relatives in Dagestan, indicating the language's diminished role in his everyday life. Another Nogai participant expressed a similar sentiment, revealing that he had completely forgotten his native language, unable to speak, write, or even comprehend it anymore due to the lack of a speaking community.

Such a comparative-historical method proved invaluable in uncovering historical facts and patterns in language development. It serves as a foundation for linguistic analysis and is complemented by various research methodologies and approaches. For instance, studying the morphemic structure of two- or more-syllable words necessitates comparative analysis across Turkic languages to ascertain their historical and semantic connections.

Vocabulary, semantics, and morphology of ethnic Turkic languages

The interview with the local representatives speaking ethnic languages revealed fascinating insights into the vocabulary, semantics, and morphology of various Turkic languages, particularly in the context of proverbs, sayings, and folk songs. This exploration highlights the commonalities and unique features present in the linguistic landscape of these languages. The proverbs were found to be sharing significant thematic elements that reflect the cultural values and moral teachings prevalent among Turkic-speaking populations. For instance, the proverb in the Karachay language, “Külme dostğa, keler başqa” echoes a sentiment found in the Kazakh saying “Күлме досқа, келер басқа” (Kulme dosqa, keler basqa), which translates to “Do not laugh at your friend's (brother's) failure, as the same thing might happen to you too”. Both expressions emphasize the importance of empathy and respect for others, particularly the elderly, highlighting a cultural value shared across Turkic societies: the need to treat the elderly with respect and dignity. This cross-linguistic resonance suggests that these values are deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of Turkic cultures.

Moreover, the participants shared that proverbs and sayings often utilize lexemes that denote kinship relationships, reinforcing the familial and communal values intrinsic to Turkic cultures. The kinship terms used across different Turkic languages demonstrate remarkable consistency. For instance, the words for “mother” (ана, ana), “son” (бала, bala), and “daughter” (қыз, qyz) exhibit similar phonetic structures across languages such as Kazakh, Karachay, Nogai, Kumyk, and Crimean Tatar. This consistency suggests a shared cultural understanding of familial roles and relationships, underscoring the importance of family ties in Turkic societies. The exploration of proverbs in the Turkic languages also reveals a wealth of shared wisdom and life lessons. For example, the Crimean Tatar proverb “Anasyna baqıp qyzyn al” translates to “Look at the mother first and then propose the daughter,” closely mirroring the Kazakh saying “Anasyn korip qyzyn al” (Only after evaluating the mother (of a girl) marry the girl). Both sayings reflect the cultural significance of familial assessment in marital decisions, highlighting the broader themes of wisdom, foresight, and respect for family lineage. The consistency of the vocabulary used in these proverbs, such as “ana” for mother and “al” for take, emphasizes the shared linguistic heritage of Turkic languages. The verb “baq” (to look or see) retains its meaning across languages, showcasing the stability of certain core vocabulary elements.

The imperative form of the proverb “Kulme” (Do not laugh) is conveyed through the negative suffix “me,” which is a common feature in Turkic languages. These languages utilize various suffixes to indicate negation, including “ma,” “me,” “ba,” “be,” “pa,” and “pe.” This morphological aspect underscores the shared linguistic heritage among Turkic languages while also illustrating how cultural values are encoded in language. A closer examination of the morphological structures within these proverbs reveals additional layers of complexity. The terms “dostğa” and “başqa,” appearing in the dative case, for example, illustrate a shared grammatical framework among Turkic languages. The dative case is formed using the suffix “-qa,” which is a common feature in Turkic grammar. This pattern is further evidenced by the declension forms

using suffixes such as “qa,” “ke,” “ga,” and “ge,” prevalent in the Kazakh language. The term “bas” in Kazakh is represented as “başka” in Karachay, demonstrating another aspect of morphological similarity. The phonetic variation also highlights a linguistic phenomenon referred to as the “sh-s change,” where the sounds “sh” and “s” undergo transformation based on their phonetic environment. Linguist V.A (1935) noted that such sound transitions are a common characteristic of Turkic languages, indicating shared phonological processes across these languages. The systematic nature of these changes reflects a deeper linguistic unity among the Turkic peoples, fostering a sense of interconnectedness through their language (Ariskina & Pulov, 2020; Tsakhirmaa, 2019; Yarmukhamed, 2024; Yeskeldiyeva & Tazhibayeva, 2015).

The participants from various ethnic groups were also asked how they express greetings and common phrases such as “Hello!”, “How are you?”, and “Thank you” in their native languages. The responses highlighted both similarities and differences among the Turkic languages. For instance, in the Kazakh language, “Hello!” is expressed as “Сәлеметсіз бе!” (Salemetsiz be!), while the phrase “How are you?” is conveyed as “Қалыңыз қалай?” (Khalingiz qalay?). The word for “Thank you!” is “Рақмет!” (Rakhmet!). In the Karachay language, greetings take the form of “Салам алейкум!” (Salam Aleikum!) followed by “Кюн ахшы болсун!” (Kiun akhshy bolsun!), which translates to “May your day be good!” The inquiry “How are you?” translates to “Қылайса?” (Qalaisa?) and “Халинг (халигиз) қылайды?” ((Khaling (khalidi) khalidi?). The farewell is expressed with “Сау бол!” ((Sai bol!). The Kumyk language also uses “Ассаламалейкум!” (Assalamaleikum!) as a greeting. “How are you?” is articulated as “Нечексен?” (Necheksen?), and the goodbye phrase remains “Сау бол!” (Sau bol!). In Crimean Tatar, the greeting is “Селамалейкум!” (Selamaleikum!), and “How are you?” can be stated as “Нас яшайсыз?” (Nas yashaisiz?) or “Яшайшыныз нас?” (Yashaisiniz nas?). The farewell is given as “Сағо!” (Sagho!). For the Balkar language, the greeting “Күніңіз жақшы болын!” (Kuningiz jakhshy bolin!) expresses a wish for a good day, and “How are you?” is simplified to “Қалайса?” (Qalaisa?). A common farewell is “Сау бол! Көп жаша!” (Sau bol! Kop jasha!), meaning “Goodbye! Live long!”.

Through analyzing the communication habits of these ethnic groups on social media platforms, it was observed that family chats exist where users actively converse in their native languages. However, many respondents indicated that they often resort to using Russian for communication on family and cultural social media pages. In summary, the analysis of the phrases in the native languages illustrates both the distinct linguistic traits of each group and their cultural interconnections, while their social media usage highlights the influence of a dominant language in digital communication.

Folk songs and poetry of ethnic Turkic languages

The emotional depth of Turkic cultures is also evident in folk songs and poetry. In the field of folklore, for instance, respondents talked about the types of literature they were familiar with, such as fairy tales, legends, myths, and historical poems. Many participants said that they knew folk legends, lullabies, and mythical tales. One of the striking examples was the legend of Koroglu, which is considered the common cultural heritage of all Turkic peoples. This epic tells about the struggle of the main character, Rushen Ali, and his father, Khoja Yusuf, with the tyrant Bolu Bey. Koroglu, the famous poet of the 16th century, devoted his life to helping those in need and opposing injustice. This narrative of Koroglu reflects a broader theme prevalent in Turkic epic poetry, showcasing heroism and the challenges faced by these communities throughout history. These epic tales serve not only as entertainment but also as crucial repositories of cultural memory and identity among Turkic peoples. They embody the shared experiences and values that unite various ethnic groups within the Turkic world. (Balabekova et al., 2019).

A poignant example of folklore is found in the Crimean poem that expresses a deep connection to the homeland: “Guzel Kırım / Alushtadan esken eller / Yuzume urdu / Balalyqtan osken erler / Koziashym tiushti.” Translated, this conveys a sense of nostalgia and longing for one’s roots, capturing the beauty of Crimea and the emotional impact of childhood memories. In this folk legend, the toponyms “Crimea” and “Alushta” are significant, as Alushta is a notable resort town on the southern coast of Crimea. The use of “Guzel” (beautiful) resonates with earlier mentions of beauty in Turkic literature, suggesting a continuity of thematic elements across time and space. The historical context of the word “Guzel,” used in the works of Korkyt Ata, further emphasizes its longstanding cultural significance. This word has retained its original meaning over centuries, reflecting a common thread in Turkic literature that celebrates beauty in both nature and human experience.

Despite the richness of their folklore, nearly half of the participants in the survey indicated that they did not know any literary works in their native languages. It became evident that ethnic groups such as the Crimean Tatars, Karachays, Nogais, and Khakas primarily utilized their languages within familial contexts. In contrast, groups like the Tuvan, Sakha, and Kumyk reported limited knowledge of their literary heritage, often citing lullabies and folk tales learned in childhood, primarily before formal education began.

Traditions and customs

In the course of conducting a questionnaire survey, participants were asked about the preservation of

national traditions and customs of the Kazakh people that they uphold in their daily lives. Many respondents indicated that they follow customs closely aligned with their ethnic traditions, particularly concerning wedding ceremonies, with fewer respondents mentioned religious customs. These traditions involve significant rituals, such as the farewell of a daughter from her parental home, symbolizing her transition into the role of a wife in her new family. This practice is particularly observed by the Crimean Tatars, who are traditionally recognized as a group closely related to the Kazakhs. They share many similarities in cultural practices, especially those surrounding marriage.

The Balkars are another ethnic group that aligns closely with Kazakh customs in terms of wedding traditions. For instance, they also have unique elements in their family customs, such as presenting gifts to the new bride and celebrating important milestones in a child's life, like their first steps. These shared practices highlight the cultural interconnections among Turkic peoples in the region, reflecting a blend of traditions that enrich their identities. Nearly all respondents acknowledged participating in Nauryz, a prominent tradition among Turkic peoples that marks the arrival of spring and the New Year. This holiday is celebrated on the vernal equinox, symbolizing renewal, abundance, and the unity of families and communities. The origins of Nauryz are deeply rooted in the history of the Turkic peoples, tied to narratives of survival and rebirth. These findings underscore the importance of cultural practices in fostering community identity among these Turkic ethnic groups despite the challenges they face regarding language maintenance.

Language and Media sources

It was revealed in the study that a significant number of speakers of the sampled ethnic groups reside in the Eastern Kazakhstan region, highlighting the area's crucial role in the cultural and linguistic landscape of these ethnic groups. The data reveals that 96% of these ethnic group members speak Russian. When they were queried about the scope and usage of their native languages, only a few reported using their languages beyond family communication. The majority indicated that they rarely used their native languages or did not speak them at all. Those who did engage with their native languages acknowledged frequently incorporating Russian vocabulary into their speech. As a result, the analysis indicates that only a small segment of participants actively spoke their native languages, primarily using them for communication within family settings.

In response to inquiries about proficiency in other languages, most respondents identified Russian, Kazakh, and English as languages they could communicate in. This multilingual ability reflects the sociolinguistic landscape of Kazakhstan, where Russian serves as a lingua franca alongside the state language, Kazakh. When asked about the availability of media resources – such as newspapers, magazines, books, and television programs in their native languages, all participants confirmed the absence of such resources. This finding highlights the lack of social support for the Turkic languages spoken by ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan. Overall, the media presence in these languages is significantly limited. While a few publications exist, such as the Kumyk-language newspaper “Eldash” in Daghestan and two Nogai-language newspapers “Shoy Tavysy” (Voice of the Desert) and “Nogai Davysy” (Nogai Voice) as well as the Karachay-Balkar language magazine “Mingi Tau,” they remain relatively few. In Crimea, the Crimean Tatar language is represented by the “Avdet” newspaper and “Arzy” and “Khasivet” magazines, along with the “Millet” television program. Table 3 and Table 4 present the scenario of language and media sources in Kazakhstan, hinting at both multilingual and multimedia landscape.

Table 3: Language sources

Language spoken	%age
Russian	96%
Native language	4%
Language proficiency	
Russian	92%
Kazakh	4%
English	4%

Table 4: Media sources

Media sources	Type	Name
Kumyk-language	Newspaper	Eldash
Nogai-language	Newspaper	Shoy Tavysy; Nogai Davysy
Karachay-Balkar language	Magazine	Mingi Tau
Crimean Tatar language	Newspaper	Avdet
	Magazine	Arzy; Khasivet
	Television program	Millet

Additionally, in 1990, the situation of Turkic languages in Central Asia was significantly influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of several republics, including

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. With independence, these nations sought to promote their national languages as symbols of identity, establishing them as official languages and enacting laws to protect their use in government and education (Somzhurek et al., 2018). Despite these efforts, the dominance of the Russian language persisted, especially in urban areas, where bilingualism was common. This created a challenge for the revitalization of Turkic languages, as younger generations often preferred Russian for its perceived economic advantages. Additionally, some minority Turkic languages faced endangerment due to socio-economic pressures and a lack of institutional support. Culturally, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw a renaissance in Turkic heritage, with a focus on literature and arts in national languages. While there was a strong push for language preservation, the complexities of urbanization, globalization, and shifting language preferences posed ongoing challenges for the future of Turkic languages in the region.

Migration and relocation of ethnic Turkic groups

One of the key themes in the ethnic Turkic literature is the repressive policy of the erstwhile USSR, especially during the Stalinist repressions of 1937–1938, when a significant number of people were deported or imprisoned in the GULAG. Kozhanov (2022) discovers that, during this period, hundreds of thousands of people were sent to remote regions of the Soviet Union, such as Siberia and Kazakhstan, leading to significant demographic changes in these areas. These measures were aimed at eliminating political opposition and “enemies of the people.” The mass deportations during World War II and Stalin’s atrocities have attracted the attention of many studies (Bloch & Schuster, 2005; Çaşu, 2024; Friedman, 2009; Naboka et al., 2023; Sagramoso, 2020; Zamira et al., 2021). Friedman (2009) explores in detail the forced relocation of ethnic groups, such as Chechens, Ingush, and Crimean Tatars, who were accused of collaborating with German forces. These peoples were forcibly resettled in Central Asia and Siberia, which had significant social and cultural consequences. In addition, the Virgin Lands campaign during the postwar period became an important aspect of voluntary migration in the USSR. In his work, Sagramoso (2020) highlights this process, starting in 1954, when thousands of people voluntarily went to Kazakhstan and Siberia to participate in agricultural projects. The Virgin Lands program not only contributed to the development of agriculture but also played a crucial role in integrating the population into new socio-economic conditions.

According to historical accounts found in Chinese records, the Turks faced a catastrophic event in ancient times where they suffered great losses at the hands of their enemies, with only one child surviving the genocide. This child endured severe trauma, having his limbs mutilated. In a miraculous turn of events, the Great Grey Wolf, or Bozkurt, came to his rescue, nurturing him back to health and guiding him to safety. The wolf played a pivotal role in the child’s life, and together, they eventually birthed twelve sons, who became the ancestors of the Turkic tribes. These sons, as legends tell, went on to capture women from the Kao Chang or Turfan regions, and as their numbers grew, they sought to escape the limitations of their homeland, known as Ergenekon. To facilitate their departure, they melted the Temirtau bridge and journeyed back to Iktasia. This exodus coincided with the equinox, leading the Turks to celebrate this day as a “new day,” marking the beginning of their new year. The significance of Nauryz as a “new day” is echoed in ancient Uyghur Turkic texts, which reference similar celebrations.

Discussion

The findings from the survey and interviews reveal a complex interplay of cultural practices, linguistic usage, and ethnic identities among the Turkic peoples in Kazakhstan. The preservation of traditions and languages among these communities is facing significant challenges due to factors such as assimilation, migration, and the dominance of the Russian language. The insights gathered emphasize the need for targeted efforts to support the maintenance of vulnerable languages and to celebrate the rich cultural heritage that these ethnic groups embody. The study also reveals that preservation of Turkic languages in Russia and other countries of the world has been subjected to a variety of historical factors that had both a positive and negative impact on the linguistic situation (Sarekenova et al., 2025). The history of the Turkic peoples was full of political changes, wars, migrations, and the formation of new states. Each change in power often affected the language situation. For example, during the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Russification policies were implemented that reduced the use of local languages in official institutions and education, which led to a decrease in the number of native speakers of Turkic languages and a decrease in their status (Kozhanov, 2022). However, in the 20th century, movements for national identity and linguistic preservation arose among the Turkic peoples, which contributed to a revival of interest in native languages (Friedman, 2009).

The study also examined the cultural heritage and educational significance of the Turkic ethnic languages. A study of proverbs and folk songs within the Turkic linguistic tradition highlights their role as vessels of cultural heritage. Ethnographers have noted that proverbs are not mere phrases; they encapsulate histories, ideas, and aspirations that are woven into the fabric of daily life (Tuimebayev, 2024). Historical dictionaries serve as repositories of this rich cultural tapestry, documenting the educational and cultural advancements of Turkic peoples over centuries. In conclusion, the analysis of literary fragments,

proverbs, and folk songs within Turkic languages reveals profound insights into shared cultural values, linguistic structures, and emotional narratives. The examination of kinship terms, proverbs, and the morphological features of these languages underscores the interconnectedness of Turkic peoples and their rich cultural heritage. Through these linguistic expressions, we gain a deeper understanding of the collective wisdom, values, and emotional landscapes that define the Turkic-speaking world, highlighting the enduring significance of language as a reflection of cultural identity. The insights gleaned from this analysis not only enrich our understanding of Turkic languages but also illuminate the timeless themes of empathy, respect, and the cherished bonds of family that resonate across these diverse yet interconnected cultures.

The Soviet language policy, within the framework of which there were programs for the study of the languages of the peoples of the USSR, provided some opportunity for the preservation of Turkic languages in the educational system. But after the collapse of the USSR, these programs lost their support. In recent decades, interest in the study of Turkic languages has increased, but without state support and active policy, their preservation remains under threat. Besides, economic factors also played an important role. With the transition to a market economy and mass migration to cities, many Turkic peoples are facing linguistic changes: Russian is becoming the language of communication in urban conditions, which leads to a reduction in the use of native languages. The younger generation considers Russian language proficiency necessary for success, which also leads to a reduction in the use of Turkic languages.

Globalization has also had a significant impact on the preservation of Turkic languages. Under the influence of media and Internet technologies, there is an increase in the popularity of English and other international languages, which negatively affects the preservation of Turkic languages. Nevertheless, globalization opens up new opportunities for the dissemination of information about Turkic languages and cultures, contributing to their popularization and support at the international level. Literature and art, being important factors in the preservation of languages, also contribute to this cause. The Turkic languages have a rich literary heritage; literature, folklore, and traditional arts help to maintain interest in them. Modern authors, by creating new cultural content in Turkic languages, contribute to their revival and popularization.

The study concludes that the preservation of Turkic languages is a complex process, depending on a variety of historical, social, economic, and cultural factors. In order to effectively preserve these languages, it is necessary to take into account their historical heritage and create conditions for their active use in society.

Conclusion

This research work has provided a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic and cultural similarities and differences among various Turkic ethnic groups through the examination of proverbs, phrases, and social communication practices in their native languages. To further explore the characteristics of the vulnerable and critically endangered Turkic languages spoken by these ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan, a lexical-semantic and grammatical analysis was performed. This involved quoting excerpts from literary works in their respective languages. The comparative-historical method was employed as a rigorous approach to understand the evolution and interrelationships among Turkic languages, fulfilling the fundamental requirements for etymological research.

Several key findings emerged from the study. First, the study revealed significant linguistic similarities in vocabulary, semantics, and morphology among the Turkic languages. Proverbs shared across different languages often conveyed common themes, such as respect for elders and family values. For instance, the comparable proverbs found in Kazakh and Karachay languages highlight a shared cultural ethos regarding the treatment of the elderly, underscoring a collective emphasis on respect and humility that permeates Turkic cultures. Second, the cultural heritage of the ethnic groups was highlighted through examples of proverbs and sayings, which are not only linguistic artifacts but also reflections of the historical and cultural experiences of the ethnic groups. They encapsulate the wisdom, values, and communal identities of the people. The analysis of proverbs from different Turkic languages showed that these expressions are rooted in a shared cultural heritage, reinforcing the interconnectedness of Turkic peoples despite geographical and dialectal differences.

Third, the study also identified common lexical forms across the Turkic languages, such as terms denoting kinship relationships. Words like “mother” and “daughter” exhibited similar phonetic and semantic structures, emphasizing a familial connection that is central to all Turkic societies. This suggests a strong linguistic bond that transcends individual languages and dialects, pointing to a common linguistic ancestry. Fourth, there were also examples of the language usage on social media. The findings indicated that while members of these ethnic groups actively engage in their native languages within family and cultural contexts, there is a pronounced tendency to use Russian as the primary language of communication on social media platforms. This trend reflects the influence of globalization and the practical need for a common language in diverse social environments. Despite the shift toward Russian, the maintenance of native languages in family chats and cultural discussions underscores the importance of linguistic identity

among these communities.

Fifth, several cultural expressions of these ethnic languages were still found in poetry and songs. The analysis of poems and songs revealed a deep emotional connection to the homeland and cultural identity. Many pieces reflected themes of nostalgia and longing for the homeland, which are prevalent in the oral traditions of the Balkar and other Turkic peoples. The recurring use of culturally significant terms, such as “Alan” in Balkar folklore, illustrates how language serves as a vessel for cultural memory and identity. Sixth, the study also highlighted the sociolinguistic dynamics at play within Turkic ethnic groups. While there is a strong commitment to preserving native languages, external influences, particularly from dominant languages like Russian, shape communication patterns. This dynamic raises questions about language preservation and the role of education and media in sustaining linguistic diversity.

The analysis concludes with recommendations for a more inclusive language policy that recognizes and supports the linguistic rights of Turkic-speaking minorities in Kazakhstan, offering a community-based approach to language revival that involves both local and state support. This study provides valuable insights into the sociolinguistic dynamics of Turkic ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. The findings highlight the urgent need for greater support for the preservation and promotion of vulnerable and critically endangered languages, as well as the cultural heritage associated with them. Addressing these issues is essential for ensuring the survival of these languages and the identities of the communities that speak them.

In conclusion, this research highlights the richness of linguistic and cultural ties among Turkic ethnic groups. The similarities in proverbs, kinship terms, and literary expressions illustrate a shared heritage that is vital for the cultural identity of these communities. As these groups navigate the complexities of modern communication, the challenge remains to balance the preservation of their native languages with the practical realities of living in a multilingual society. Continued efforts in cultural education and advocacy for linguistic rights will be essential in maintaining the vibrancy of Turkic languages and cultures for future generations.

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