

**LANGUAGE AND ETHNICITY IN KYRGYZSTAN: A CASE STUDY OF THE
RUSSIFIED KYRGYZ IN BISHKEK**

by

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Submitted to
Central European University
Nationalism Studies Program

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2017

Abstract

The current research investigates the phenomenon of the correlation between ethnicity and language in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The nationalizing political rhetoric of newly emerged Kyrgyz Republic is based on the revival of Kyrgyz culture and traditions. Language has become an essential element of the nation-building ideology. However, due to Russification process in the Soviet Union, there is a part of ethnically Kyrgyz citizens that only speak Russian. They become a target group of prejudices and stereotypes for political nationalists and broader society. Using qualitative in-depth interviews with Russified Kyrgyz in Bishkek, the research shows how individuals conceptualize their ethnic self-identification with language repertoire and how boundary construction and maintenance between Russified and Non-Russified Kyrgyz population occurs. The research findings show that ethnic identity construction of Russified Kyrgyz is based on the subjective perception of “Kyrgyzness” rather than objective criteria, where pragmatic as well as symbolic meanings shape language repertoire of the people.

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, professor Anton Pelinka, for encouragement and support throughout the whole process of the production of this thesis. His expert advices and valuable guidance helped me to overcome all challenges on my way. Also I thank all the professors of Nationalism Studies Department, especially Szabolcs Pogonyi and Luca Varadi who helped me to develop my initial ideas for this thesis.

Also, I would like to acknowledge Ainura Esengulova for her assistance in the fieldwork. Without access to her social network, this research would not have been possible.

I am thankful to my family and friends, especially, Valentin who supported and believed in me throughout the academic year.

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Introduction

“In the minds of monolingual Kyrgyz, the words “Kyrgyz” and “Kirgiz” are interpreted in two conceptual terms correlated with two linguistic and cultural types of people. The word “Kyrgyz” is intended to emphasize the individuality and identity of the “true” Kyrgyz, while the linguistic and cultural type “Kirgiz” is associated, as a rule, with a linguistically different personality for whom the Russian language has practically become native, and the surrounding world is perceived and evaluated through the prism of Russian culture.”¹

The language issue in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has become a topic of political and social debates not only of decision-makers but also among the broader population. The Sovietization and Russification processes of local people played a decisive role in the creation of two distinct categories as Russified and “pure Kyrgyz”. The phenomenon has evolved into the central theme for nationalistic arguments against “Kirgiz” population by right wings politicians. Their linguistic repertoire (speaking Russian) is perceived as a marker of denial to be “real Kyrgyz”, denial to value their cultural heritage and thus being stigmatized in the society. In the light of this research project, I will be investigating the correlation of ethnicity and language, ethnic identification with reference to language repertoire. Since the topic has grown into a highly politicized issue and many public figures target Russified Kyrgyz² population and push them to switch their language repertoire. Still, there is a group of urbanized people who do not give up speaking Russian and continue to preserve their language practice.

The research questions of the study are the following:

- How is the ethnic identity of Russified Kyrgyz shaped by their language repertoire?

¹ Mamedov, George. *The Russian Word in Kyrgyzstan*. p. 20

² In this research, a definition “Russified Kyrgyz” is referred to ethnically Kyrgyz whose mother tongue is Russian

- What are the processes that motivate ethnic boundary construction between Russified and non-Russified Kyrgyz?
- Why have Russified Kyrgyz not shifted their language repertoires?

Overall, I am intended to investigate the phenomenon of ethnic identification language repertoire of people in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. In order to answer the research questions, I have conducted in-depth interviews with Russified Kyrgyz individuals in Bishkek. Bishkek is the capital of the country and most ethnically diverse city where both Russian and Kyrgyz languages are widely spoken in public and private spheres compared to other places in Kyrgyzstan where Kyrgyz is the dominant language of communication. Moreover, I have interviewed experts in order to understand issues and challenges that relate to Russian vs. Kyrgyz language rhetoric in today's Kyrgyzstan. Before proceeding to the theoretical framework, I would like to briefly describe the historical background and the rationale of the study.

Brief historical background

After the dissolution of Soviet Union, Central Asian states found themselves unprepared for new conditions of independence and sovereignty economically, politically and socially. Compared to the European context, where nation-states were created from the nationalistic movements, where national sentiments were developed before the actual emergence of the states, the Central Asian experience drastically differs from traditional nation-states creation. Therefore there was a need to build national ideology from scratch in order to achieve stability in the region. Each state established its own ideology mostly dependent on the political elite and a leader who came to power.³

The region was very diverse in ethnic compositions, where a revival of cultural pre-Soviet heritage with titular nations emerged at the beginning of 1990's. In the case of

³ Massansalvador, Francesc Serra. *The process of Nation Building in Central Asia and its Relationship to Russia's Regional Influence*.

Kyrgyzstan, there were more than 90 ethnic groups who were living in the territory for the decades. The first president Askar Akayev “emphasized democracy as a means for eradicating ethno-nationalistic views and often used the term “mezhdunarodnoe soglasie” (international accord).”⁴ He tried to find a balance between the ethnic revival of Kyrgyz people and maintaining social stability regarding ethnic differences. However, there were a lot of challenges to unite people under an umbrella of state ideology. Despite the ethnolinguistic diversity, there were tribalism, regionalism (between south and north) and also the division between Russified urban “Kirgiz” and more rural Kyrgyz-speaking population. The advantages of being Russified in the Soviet period, which mainly means assimilating into Russian culture and speaking the Russian language as the mother tongue, undoubtedly related not only voluntary or process going by itself, but also to have access to educational, professional and public spheres and to have benefited from it.⁵

Pragmatic reasons pushed Kyrgyz population to learn Russian and develop bilingualism, where the Russian language was used in public sphere and Kyrgyz was spoken in private life. In some cases, the Russian language completely replaced Kyrgyz for ethnically Kyrgyz population, especially in the capital Bishkek. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, highly assimilated Kyrgyz people found themselves in a disadvantaged position in newly emerged nationalizing state. The ultra-national mood among the political elite and the masses created ethnocentric slogans, which were promoted in 1990’s. Therefore the gap between Russified and non-Russified Kyrgyz became even more evident. Active language politics of promotion of the local language started in the period of “korenizatsia”⁶ in 1989, and continued to develop in a newly emerged state. But political

⁴ Marat, Erica. *National Ideology and State-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*. p.31

⁵ Ramet, Pedro. *Migration and nationality policy in Soviet Central Asia*.

⁶ Political and cultural campaign of the Soviet power on the national question in the 20s and early 30s, designed to smooth out the contradictions between the central government and the non-Russian population of the USSR.

rhetoric related to the Kyrgyz language, which was imposed by the elite faced a lot of practical challenges among population due to heterogeneity in the society on the one hand, and weak actual institutionalization on the other.

After 25 years of independence, still, there is misunderstanding and clear division among Kyrgyz citizens between titular nation and ethnic minorities. However, Russified Kyrgyz population faces a lot of prejudices and stereotypes because of lack of proficiency in the Kyrgyz language. They are perceived as “being not pure Kyrgyz” or “mankurts”⁷. The debate of language policies and implementation of Kyrgyz language in all spheres of life is still an ongoing process, which mostly targets Russified Kyrgyz population. According to official statistics, the language issue does not seem so problematic with Kyrgyz population. Kyrgyz comprises 71% of the whole population. The same amount of respondents constitutes Kyrgyz as their mother tongue. This might make one think that all Kyrgyz population speaks their ethnic language, however as Commercio (2010) argues people in Kyrgyzstan tend to name the language of their ethnic group, despite real usage and practice in everyday life. The language issue becomes evident in public talks, political debates and changes in laws because of the dominant role of the Russian language among the population, especially among Bishkek residents.⁸

Rationale of the study

There is an enormous amount of works, which examine the minority issues and ethnic self-identification, the creation of symbolic boundaries between the core and other nations within the states and majority-minority relations in general. However, there is a lack of study that examines ethnic identity and boundary creation within one ethnic group, where under certain conditions the ethnic group falls apart into two distinct categories (Russified and non-

⁷ People who lost the cultural, historical or linguistic heritage of their ancestors

⁸ Michele E. Commercio. *Russian Minority Politics in Post-Soviet Latvia and Kyrgyzstan: The Transformative Power of Informal Network*

Russified Kyrgyz population). Within the current project, I am going to fill the gap in the study of ethnic identification and the language as a marker of identity. In order to illustrate the phenomenon of ethnic identity by Russified Kyrgyz population, the empirical evidence of the research will show the complexity of the ethnic identification and the boundary-maintenance of Russified ethnically Kyrgyz people and the construction of ethnic identity in relation to their language repertoire. They are legitimately categorized as the representatives of the titular nation in independent Kyrgyzstan, but not fully integrated into the new context and alienated themselves from their co-ethnics.

The study will be a valuable contribution to the areas of ethnic identity construction in the Post-Soviet Central Asian region and the role of language in defining ethnic identity. Also, I will fill the gap in the literature where ethnicity and ethnic group are taken as a homogeneous unit and show how linguistic differences shape boundary construction among co-ethnics.

In the light of the study, I will firstly introduce a theoretical framework based on Barth's concept of boundary-making, Laitin's theory on language repertoire in multicultural states and Padilla's arguments on the correlation between ethnic identity and language. In the second chapter, the brief historical background of the Soviet period in the Central Asia will be described. In the third part of the thesis, I will focus on nationalizing discourse of independent Kyrgyzstan with special references to language policies from 1990's. In the fourth and fifth parts, the methodology and analysis of empirical research will be discussed.

Chapter 1. Theoretical consideration of ethnicity and language

In the following chapter, I will examine the theoretical consideration of language and ethnicity. Firstly, I will introduce the main approaches to the concept of ethnicity in social science and will conceptualize the term and propose working definition in the current study. Secondly, I will go into the interplay between ethnic identity and language repertoire, where language becomes not only a tool for communication, but also has its symbolic meaning for an ethnic group. Thirdly, I will explore the studies on ethnicity and ethnic identification in social and socio-psychological fields.

1.1. The concepts of ethnicity, ethnic group, and boundary making

Nowadays ethnicity is one of the main concepts that are frequently used by theorists, politicians and mass media. It serves as a starting point for understanding the social organization, individual identity, and groupness. In social science, ethnicity has been studied in a variety of ways, and scholars operationalize and conceptualize the term depending on context. In the classical Marxist perspective and modernist view, ethnicity is supposed to vanish due to industrialization and modernization processes.⁹ However, it still remains an important category and an identity marker in modern states. Therefore, the question, which became a concern of many social and political scientists, is still relevant in the contemporary world. *What constitutes ethnicity?* Despite the simplicity of the question, the answer seems to be much more complicated and ambiguous. In sociology and anthropology, the conception and understanding of ethnicity and ethnic affiliation have been studied for decades starting from primordialist perspective to more constructionist, and instrumentalist approaches.¹⁰

The primordialist school of thoughts had developed the dominant approach before the 1970's. (Hertz, 1963; Shils, 1957) According to the approach, ethnicity is perceived to be ascribed identity that is given by birth. Primordialists tend to view ethnic affiliation is a static

⁹ Yang, Philip Q. *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*.

¹⁰ Ibid

and unchangeable, which depends on common ancestry, language, race and customs.¹¹ However, this theoretical perspective was highly criticized because of inability to explain changes in ethnic identity, ethnic groups and to provide the essential aspect of political and historical interrelation. In contrast to primordialism, the constructionist and instrumentalist approaches emerged. First and foremost, the concept of ethnicity is seen as a socially constructed phenomenon. In this respect, constructionist perspective leaves the space for flexibility of ethnic affiliation and identification. “Ethnicity is not the thing”¹², but rather dynamic in nature. It is created an identity that can be changed and reconstructed over time depending on the social environment. There are internal (negotiation and maintenance of ethnic group identity by individuals) and external (outgroup categorization, political and economic processes) features that shape ethnic affiliation, where redrawing boundaries between ethnic groups becomes a consequence of changing of these features.¹³ According to instrumentalist scholars, in order to maintain power and have access to resources, elite imposes it. (Baha, 1990; Cohen, 1969; Nagel, 1994) However, this conception can be criticized in a way that it lacks to explain the individuals' sense of belonging that not always coincides with institutional categories created by a political elite.

The importance of self-identification and perception of oneself belonging to an ethnic group is a crucial component of understanding how individuals shape ethnicity. Max Weber is one of the theorists who started to deconstruct the concepts of ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic group. He argues that ethnic group is based on not only objective criteria (language, phenotype, religion or territory), but at the same time depends on a belief of ethnic actors belonging to one ethnic group. Weber asserts that belief in common ancestry, shared memories and the sense of “ethnic honor” creates ethnic groupism and serves for creating a

¹¹ Hutchinson, John and Smith, Anthony. *Ethnicity*

¹² Jenkins, Richard. *Rethinking ethnicity*. p. 115

¹³ Yang, Philip Q. *Ethnic Studies: Issues and Approaches*

political community.¹⁴ Therefore, ethnicity is based on subjective perception. Nonetheless, its artificially organized roots do not hinder the sense of ethnic identification of individuals, which became an important attribution for the creation of a political community. These are “political memories, a persistent attachment to old cult-communities, the continuing strength of kinship ties and other groups (shared by old and new communities), and other enduring relationships with a continuing emotional basis”¹⁵.

Following by Weberian proposition, Frederick Barth became a classical theorist on ethnicity, who strongly advocated for the self-ascriptive aspect of ethnic affiliation. In other words, individuals' affiliation is derived from the subjective categorization of self and others. Bartian conception of ethnicity and his constructionist instrumentalist approach give rise to reconstructing the anthropological perspective on ethnicity. According to the classical school of anthropology, theorists tended to put emphasis on the connection between ethnic categories, culture and language, that have to coincide. Barth (1969) points out “this ideal type definition is not so far removed in content from the traditional proposition that a race = a culture = a language and that a society = a unit which rejects or discriminates against others”¹⁶. However, Barth suggests a new approach and argues for a critical focus on boundary maintenance among the groups rather than “cultural stuff that it encloses.”¹⁷ As culture has a tendency to change, adjust and transform over a period, there is no possibility to orientate culture as the marker of ethnic differentiation.

Jenkins' book (1997) on ethnicity was inspired and closely interconnects with the Barthian approach to ethnicity. However, the author expands the concept and explore more complex picture of ethnic identification in everyday life. Jenkins puts emphasis on the

¹⁴ Jackson, Maurice. *An analysis of Max Weber's theory of ethnicity*

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ Barth, Fredrik. *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference.* p.11

¹⁷ *ibid* p. 79

process of socialization during which categorization between us and them emerges. The author distinguishes between a nominal and a virtual understanding of ethnic, where nominal is a name of the category (Kyrgyz, Russian, etc.), whereas the virtualities of identification give meaning to the everyday experience of actors. It simply means, “the name stays the same - X, even though the experience of being an X changes dramatically.”¹⁸ Comparing to Barthian theory, Jenkins argues that “cultural stuff” (like language and religion) does not have to be disregarded by social scientists, because it can have a much greater personal impact for group differentiation.

Brubaker (2010) in his influential essay “Ethnicity without group” argues for a critical approach to the concept of ethnicity. He fairly states that usually social scientists tend to take an ethnic group, which in modern times is highly politicized, for granted and view the conflicts and event through the prism of “substantial things-in-the-world”. However, it should be bare in mind that “we should certainly try to *account* for the ways in which—and conditions under which—this practice of reification, this powerful crystallization of group feeling, can work.”¹⁹ Brubaker asserts “thinking of ethnicity, race, and nation not in terms of substantial groups or entities but in terms of *practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events.*”²⁰

Concluding this section on the definition of ethnicity, I propose the following definition for the current project: *first and foremost, ethnicity as a belief in oneself belonging to a particular distinct ethnic group, where members share common culture, customs, and*

¹⁸ Jenkins, Richard. *Rethinking ethnicity*. p. 167

¹⁹ Brubaker, Rogers. *Ethnicity without group*, p. 167

²⁰ *ibid*

language. Second, co-ethnics perceive and recognize one to be a member of their “imagined community”²¹.

1.2. Ethnicity and language repertoire

Having defined what is meant by ethnicity in the contemporary academic debate, I will now move on to discuss the important aspect of the connection between an ethno-national identity and language in the modern democratic state. Many classical theorists on nationalism emphasize a common language of a state as a crucial component of national identity. Ernest Gellner states, “nationalism is primarily a principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent”²², where a national unit is mostly defined by language. Political scientist, Coakley (2012) in his book “Nationalism, ethnicity and the state” argues that “membership in a linguistic community appears to be translated into membership of an ethnic or national community.”²³ He also differentiates four types of linguistic communities in states. The first is when nation contains several language communities (Switzerland, China). The second is when language community contains several nations (The United Kingdom). The third type represents when nationhood and language community coincide (Estonia, Latvia). And finally, the fourth and uncommon one is a phenomenon where nation links to an ancestral language for symbolic purpose but speak a metropolitan language (Wales and Basque Country). Despite the types of correlation between nation and state, language is a key element for people’s sense of belonging and identity.²⁴

Language does not only plays a pivotal role in practical use and opportunities, but at the same time it has symbolic meaning and becomes a marker for defining national or ethnic membership. In the same vain, Kimlicka and Grin (2003) argue that there are two main

²¹ Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*

²² Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. p. 1

²³ Coakley, John. *Nationalism, Ethnicity and the State: Making and Breaking Nations*. p. 27

²⁴ *ibid*

discourses, how scholars view language in a state. The first and simplified way is to treat language as a tool for communication, which has only instrumental value. However, authors criticize that perspective and advocates for other aspects as nation-state loyalties, cultural heritage, and identities. “Language disputes are never just disputes over language.”²⁵ Therefore in multilingual societies, language related issues potentially might lead to conflicts and division among a population.

For a linguist, Pierre Bourdieu language always correlates with access to power. Bourdieu argues that language is not only a part of cultural capital but also can be transformed into a tool for maintaining power by the elite. According to the scholar, in a modern state, an official language “is bound up with the state”²⁶ and monopolizes most of the spheres in public life as education, political and public institutions and etc. Therefore linguistic habitus²⁷ of an individual provide access to such spheres. In the same vein, Brubaker (2015) claims that differing linguistic repertoires in modern states contribute to nowadays inequality and subordination of some people. Addition to externally driven forms of inequality as discrimination, stigmatization and social closure, it also has self-enforcing dynamic. “Opportunities – not just for education and employment but also, even more fundamentally, for the formation of broad and strong social ties and full participation in a broad spectrum of collective activities – are systematically limited for those who lack proficiency in the prevailing language.”²⁸ At the same time, it also creates the inequality of languages themselves “raising the economic, political, and social value of some and devalue others.”²⁹

²⁵ Kimlicka, Will and Grin, Francois. *Assessing the Politics of Diversity in Transitional Countries*. p. 11

²⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Language and Symbolic Power*. p. 45

²⁷ Habitus is a set of dispositions acquired through one’s inculcation into any social milieu.

²⁸ Brubaker, Rogers. *Grounds for Difference*. p. 33

²⁹ *ibid* p. 34

David D. Laitin explores another significant aspect of language repertoire in a modern, multiethnic state. He provides extensive analysis of contemporary nation-states and its cultural underpinning. Talking about national identity, he argues that language is one of the most salient dimensions for national membership. Among other attributes of an individual's identity, unlike race or religion, language repertoire can be simply changed because of pragmatic reasons and does not necessary require giving up one's cultural identity or ancestral language. In this case, there are three main motives to push people to change their linguistic repertoires: economic payoffs, in-group status, and out-group acceptance. Economic payoffs simply relate to economic benefits and advantages to speak one or another language. In order to use all opportunities of social mobility, parents tend to choose the language, which maximizes child's economic gains in the future. The second reason for changing language repertoire is based on the social stigma of in-group members. For instance, when in-group members police their co-members for not speaking their native language, it could threaten non-speakers and push them to switch their language repertoire. And lastly, out-group acceptance is an important factor for people to speak the majority language in order to be accepted and more assimilated into the community.³⁰

As it was mentioned above, language repertoire of an individual is closely connected to other aspects of loyalty and identity. In many cases, the world's ethnic groups associate themselves with their ethnic language. Speaking one language gives people not only ability to communicate with each other, but moreover to manifest their ethnic loyalty and ethnic pride. Therefore in contemporary states, language topics are highly politicized in order to mobilize citizens and create nationhood. But looking on the other side of the coin, from a micro perspective, *in what way does language shape an ethnic identity of an individual?*

³⁰ Laitin, David D. *Nations, States, and Violence*.

Before unpacking this complex question, let me begin from other additional factors influencing how individuals index their ethnic identity through language. Carmen Fought (2007) in her book “Language and ethnicity” brings the findings of empirical studies, which shows the great influence of gender, age, class, and religion on ethnic identifications of individuals. However, there are some other aspects that vary from particular situations and context. Another aspect, which was explained in detail by Fought, is local and extra-local orientation. In other words, “whether a speaker has strong ties to the local community, or instead is oriented toward contacts and future outside the community.”³¹ Many sociologists and sociolinguists support this proposition and argue that speaking an ethnic language or giving it up is closely correlated with the orientation of an individual. (Jenkins, 1997; Mesthrie, 2011; Hickey, 2013) William Labov (1972) was the first, which empirically proved this correlation. According to his classical investigation, Labov explored that among the young generation of the islands, the one of Native American and Portuguese descent was more likely to use special words associated with their cultural heritage compared to one of English descent. Thus Labov asserts that these words signalize the desire to be closer to their ethnic communities.³²

Above all of these variables, there could be a much more complex picture of a particular community – for instance, historical context, political and economic processes and even sexual orientation.³³

Joshua A. Fishman (2010) edited the book “Handbook of language and ethnic identity”, where he collected articles of the scholars on the topic from different perspectives starting from economics to sociolinguistics and history. The volume of the book illustrates disciplinary variations on the ethnicity and language relations. In the light of current research,

³¹ Fought, Carmen. *Language and Ethnicity*. p. 22

³² Labov, William. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*.

³³ Fought, Carmen. *Language and Ethnicity*.

Amado M. Padilla and Karmela Liebkind proposed psychological and socio-psychological approaches to ethnicity and language, where they use a micro-level approach for the analysis. Padilla (1999) asserts on an individual level primary socialization plays a crucial role in ethnic identity, where language becomes not only a tool, but at the same time distinct feature of one's ethnic group. "Language gives meaning to an ethnic group because it connects the present with the past through its oral traditions, literary forms, music, history, and customs."³⁴ Padilla provides three main aspects of language; first and foremost language is a main medium of socialization. Second, language creates the distinction between speakers and non-speakers, whereas it effectively establishes boundaries between in-group and out-group. "Language per se does not create a separation, but it often sharpens the distinction between ethnic groups."³⁵ Third, language signalizes an individual the status of the group it has in the society. When a particular language is given low status in the society, speakers of this language learn that their group is not valued in general.³⁶

In contrast to Padilla, Liebkind suggests that ethnic identity and ethnic language do not have to be reciprocally connected, despite the dominant view, that language has symbolic value for ethnic attachment. In other words, language attitudes and usage could be shifted without changes in ethnic identity. The author brings an example of Ireland, where a rapid shift from Irish to English took place because of socioeconomic advantages. However, the Irish population still has an unfavorable attitude toward the language they speak, and more positively treat the language of their ethnic group. Therefore "language use and language proficiency should not be confused with linguistic identity."³⁷

This section has attempted to provide the theoretical framework for the correlation between ethnic identity and language. Summarizing previously explored theories I would like

³⁴ Padilla, Amado M. *Psychology*. p. 116

³⁵ *ibid*, p. 117

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ Liebkind, Karmela. *Social Psychology*. p. 144

to mention key aspects of academic claims. First, language is a highly politicized aspect of a nation-building process in a multiethnic state. Second, language repertoire of an individual is depended on 1) pragmatic reasons (social and economic benefits); 2) a symbolic meaning attached to ethnic language in order to differentiate one's ethnic group from another. Third, shifting language repertoires does not automatically means giving up an ethnic identity of an individual.

1.3. Ethnicity in sociology and social-psychology

In sociological and socio-psychological perspective ethnic identity and self-identification became a huge area of study in the twentieth century. A growing interest in the field of psychology increased in American and European context due to multiethnic nature, where people still had strong ethnic identification. According to classical social identity theory, Tajfel (1972) proposed that an individual maintains self-identity based on his-her group membership. And an ethnic group is one of the basic categories of social life. However, if a group has low status in society, it leads to low self-esteem of an individual and vice versa.³⁸

Low-status or stigmatized groups vary from social and historical context, but in most cases, ethno-cultural minorities become target groups for stigmatization and stereotype. According to Padilla's investigation on the impact of stigma on Latinos in the US, he argues that in order to prevent negative attitude toward devalued individual "in their interactions with others, people often expose or hide certain beliefs, ideas, or behaviors in order to manipulate the perceptions that others hold of them."³⁹

Crocker and Quinn (2003) analyzed devalued and stigmatized persons and share the initial idea of contextually or situationally constructed settings, where targeted individuals

³⁸ Tajfel, Henry and Turner, John. *The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour*

³⁹ Sanders, Jimmy M. *Ethnic boundaries and Identity in Plural Societies*. p. 340

underperform in intellectual testing and also show a low level of self-esteem. The authors state, “the consequences of social stigma for self-esteem and performance on intellectual tests are not deeply internalized and immutable, but rather depend on features of the situation – sometimes very subtle features – that alter the meaning of that situation.”⁴⁰

Ethnic identity achievement or internalization seems to be a significant variable in ethnic identification. However, Parham (1989) argues that “achievement does not necessarily imply a high degree of ethnic involvement; one could presumably be clear about and confident of one's ethnicity without wanting to maintain one's ethnic language or customs.”⁴¹

An American psychologist, Jean S. Phinney was interested in measuring the level of an ethnic identity of individuals and tried to find main the components of it. In one of his review papers, he analyzed existing articles and empirical studies since 1972. Conceptually speaking, social psychologists tend to draw two major aspects of one's ethnic identity. The first one is the self-concept and subjective feelings and attitudes of an individual to belong to an ethnic group. The second component is presented by more objective cultural attributes such as language, religion, and knowledge of ethnic group history. In addition to self-identification with one's ethnic group, there could be positive and negative attitudes toward one's ethnic group. In the case of positive attitude, it could be seen in an ethnic pride, an ethnic honor and consequently in high emotional connection to the ethnic group. When a negative attitude is presented, it could be seen in “displeasure, dissatisfaction, and discontentment with one's ethnicity or a desire to hide one's cultural identity.”⁴²

One more aspect, which I would like to mention is a gender variable of ethnic

⁴⁰ Crocker, Jennifer & Quinn, Diane M. *Psychological Consequences of Devalued Identities*.p. 252

⁴¹ Parham, Thomas. *Cycles of psychological nigrescence*. p. 216

⁴² Phinney, Jean S. *Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research*. p. 503

identity. Gender aspect was not emphasized in the earliest empirical studies related to ethnicity. However, in recent researches, it is perceived to be an important element, which impacts ethnic self-identification. In a quantitative study of Kinket & Verkuyten (1997), where they measured the level of ethnic self-identification of Dutch and Turkish students (10-13) in the Netherlands, they found that boys were more likely to describe themselves in ethnic terms and have a stronger positive evaluation of their ethnic identity. The researchers explained the phenomenon that males concerned more about status and prestige related to their groups. However, different studies related to gender and ethnic identity have shown contrasting results. Some of them argue that males are more aware of an ethnic identity and have the stronger sense of belonging to an ethnic group. Other empirical studies show the opposite results or even reported indifference of gender on ethnic affiliation.⁴³

Most of the empirical studies on ethnic identity are qualitative ones, where scholars measured the level of an ethnic affiliation and developed indexes and variables for the interpretation. More recent researchers started to take more in-depth look at an ethnic identity. Especially in the case of second, third generation migrants where ethnic identification becomes an ambiguous and fluctuating phenomenon in the social world, social scientists examine a complex and in some cases controversial question from more phenomenological perspective.

⁴³ Kinket, Barbara & Verkuyten, Maykel. *Levels of Ethnic Self-identification and social context*.

Chapter 2. The Soviet Union Period in the Central Asia

The following part of this thesis moves on to describe the historical background of nowadays Kyrgyzstan. In order to understand the full complexity of language issues in post-Soviet past, the key elements of nationality policies with special reference to Russian and local languages during the Soviet period in the Central Asian region will be discussed.

2.1. Soviet national ideology

The period of the Soviet Union played a decisive role in creating a national identity of people in the Central Asian region. Before becoming a part of the USSR, there was no developed national ideology in the territory. Artificially created borders in 1920's between republics became the first step for the creation of national consciousness. The basic ground for creating five republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) was the essentialist idea of ethnic identification, which relates to ethnic language, culture, and customs. By the establishment of geographical boundaries among republics, the Soviet power created republics of titular nations, which further became independent states.⁴⁴

Ramet (1978) claimed that at the beginning of the Soviet policies in the Central Asia, the central government hoped to dilute ethnic marker of identity and weaken local nationalism. He also argues that Soviet agenda was presented by the triad – Sovietization, Russianization and Russification. The basic idea of Sovietization was based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine and development of modernization and urbanization process. During this time the Soviet leaders were developing infrastructures, increasing level of education and literacy among the local population. Russianization was characterized by internalization of Russian language and culture, and Russification was defined as “the process whereby non-Russians are transformed objectively and psychologically into Russians.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ibraeva, Zhibek. “*Soviet Nation-Making. Nationality Policy of the Formative Years of the Soviet Union and Subsequent Language Policy Development.*”

⁴⁵ Ramet, Pedro. *Migration and nationality policy in Soviet Central Asia*, p. 89

However, in contrast to Ramet, Pavlenko (2013) proposed alternative position and stated “it is key distortions involve the goals and impact of the reforms. The administration never aimed to turn everyone into Russian: Russification and Orthodox Slavs was encouraged but assimilation of non-Christian ethnics was undesirable and often forcefully prevented...”⁴⁶ This statement is partially true in the case of Central Asian republics, where language related policies and preferential treatment to the Russian language had more functional purposes rather than cultural ones.

From the time of Lenin to Brezhnev leadership the main agenda was to create a “Soviet person” or great proletariat in Central Asia. However, under Leninist nationality policies, cultural rights were granted to local ethnic groups. Lenin emphasized that all ethnic groups were granted the rights to preserve their culture, traditions, and language. The newly formed republics were also granted the greatest form of ethno-national autonomy. But in practice, the power was centralized in Moscow, and all political and economic decisions were made by Russian political elites in Kremlin.

2.2. Migration processes

During seven decades of the Soviet period, the ethnic composition of the Central Asian territory became much more diverse and heterogeneous. Firstly, it happened due to the creation of borders between republics in the region. A lot of people found themselves belonging to national minorities in the newly established territory. Consequently, there was the hugest minority in the southern part of Kyrgyz territory, neighboring with Uzbek territory, which consisted about 13% of the whole population. Secondly, with the few waves of forced migration of Russian population and then before and during World War 2, the resettlement of ethnic minorities like Tatars, Greeks, Jews, Kurds, Koreans, Germans etc.

⁴⁶ Pavlenko, Aneta. *Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Successor States*. p . 265

from Russian territory to Central Asian region, Kyrgyzstan became much more diverse and the proportion of ethnic Kyrgyz constituted 52%.⁴⁷

Most of the Slavs appeared in Kyrgyzstan due to Soviet development programs. Many workers, engineers, scientists and artists of Slavic origin were dispatched to Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asia in order to work at the newly emerged factories and enterprises and to develop Kyrgyz and Central Asian science, education and art. They mostly settled in the capital city, nowadays Bishkek and in the area of Issik-Kul region. On the one hand the primary purpose of the migration policy was to develop infrastructure and region in general, and on the other hand to diversify the ethnic composition of the Central Asia. According to the statistical data of 1926, Russians and Ukrainians made up 11.7% and 6.4% of the population of the republic. Ten years later, in 1936, their proportions reached 20.8% and 9.4% correspondingly.⁴⁸

Despite Slavic ethnic groups, there were few ways of forced migration initiated by Stalin in 1930's. Kurds, Armenians, Korean, German, Ingush, Chechens, Balkars, Kalmyks, Turks-Meskhetians and Crimean Tatars – all of them were forced to leave their original places of living in the Far East, Northern Caucasia, Baltic republics and Crimea and resettled in Central Asia.⁴⁹(See more detailed demographic picture in table 1)

⁴⁷ Kelner, Courtney. *Social Reproduction in Transition: Kyrgyzstani Language Policies and Higher Education*.

⁴⁸ Chotaeva, Cholpon. *Multiculturalism of Bishkek city. Ethnicity and language in Soviet and Post-Soviet times*

⁴⁹ Peyrouse, Sebastien. *The Russian minority in Central Asia: migration, politics and language*.

Table 1. Ethnic composition of Kyrgyz territory from 1989 to 2013

Ethnic group	Census 1989		Census 1999		Census 2009		Census 2013	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Kyrgyz	2,229,663	52,4	3,128,147	64,9	3,804,788	71,0	4,099,433	72,3
Uzbeks	550,096	12,9	664,950	13,8	768,405	14,3	816,219	14,4
Russians	915,558	21,5	603,201	12,5	419,583	7,8	375,438	6,6
Dungans	36,928	0,9	51,766	1,1	58,409	1,1	62,966	1,1
Uygurs	36,779	0,9	46,944	1,0	48,543	0,9	51,389	0,9
Tajiks	33,518	0,8	42,636	0,9	46,105	0,9	49,046	0,8
Turks	21,294	0,5	33,327	0,7	39,133	0,7	40,443	0,7
Kazakhs	37,318	0,9	42,657	0,9	33,198	0,6	33,368	0,5
Tatars	70,068	1,6	45,438	0,9	31,424	0,6	28,334	0,5
Ukrainians	108,027	2,5	50,442	1,0	21,924	0,4	15,527	0,2
Koreans	18,355	0,4	19,784	0,4	17,299	0,3	16,753	0,2
Azeris	15,775	0,4	14,014	0,3	17,267	0,3	18,516	0,3
Kurds	14,262	0,3	11,620	0,2	13,171	0,3	-	-
German	101,309	2,4	21,471	0,4	9,487	0,2	8,645	0,1
Chechens	2,873	0,1	2,612	0,1	1,825	0,0	1,737	0,0
Belorussians	9,187	0,2	3,208	0,1	1,394	0,0	1,070	0,0
Jews	6,005	0,1	1,571	0,0	604	0,0	501	0,0
Others	49,740	1,2	50,770	1,1	43,400	0,8	39,577	0,6
Total	4,257,755		4,822,938		5,362,793		5,663,133	

2.3. Language policies

During the period of Soviet time, language was one of the key aspects of national politics. Despite changing discourses of language politics, the huge differences between officially ideological component and practical implementation was evident in the case of the Soviet rule in the Central Asia.

Arutunova (2012) published a detailed historical analysis of language policies in the Soviet Union. The basic for language policies was introduced in Lenin's work and his approach to preserving cultural rights of ingenious ethnic groups as well as ethnic minorities in the Central Asian region. From 1920 up to 1930 Soviet language politics was characterized by linguistic pluralism developed by Linin. In one of his academic articles, Lenin stated "We, of course, stand for every Russian citizen to have an opportunity to learn the great Russian

language. We do not want only one thing: the element of compulsion.”⁵⁰ At that time two main postulates were introduced: 1) the absence of one official language; 2) education in all local languages and promotion of multilingualism. It was presented in USSR Constitution in 1924, where there was no any amendment on one official language.⁵¹

At the same time, local languages of the Central Asian republics were developed a lot. Historically, the Turkic languages of Central Asia, including Kyrgyz, were written in the Arabic script. In 1924, a modified Arabic script was introduced for Kyrgyz. In 1927, the Kyrgyz language switched from Arabic to Latin. In 1941, the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted for Kyrgyz. While the first reform was linguistically justified, the second reform undermined the influence of Islam in Central Asia. Although the adoption of Latin helped to eliminate illiteracy in Central Asia during the second reform, the third reform cut Central Asia from the growing political and cultural influence of Turkey paving the way for further russification.⁵²

Despite official rhetoric to grant Russian and local languages in the Central Asia more or less equal rights, *de facto* Russian became a dominant language in all political and public domains. Non-Russian speakers started to give preferences to study in the Russian language because of economic and social benefits. Also due to Slavic nationalities immigration into Central Asia region, where they possess dominant positions in all spheres of life, the Russian language spread among the population and became a sign of intelligence. At that time the phenomenon of bilingualism appeared among ethnically Kyrgyz population. For Bishkek residents, where ethnic Kyrgyz population was a minority⁵³, the Russian language replaced Kyrgyz in most cases. From 1959 to 1989, Kyrgyz was not taught in secondary schools of

⁵⁰ Arutunova, Maria. *Language politics and status of Russian language in USSR and Post-Soviet space*, p. 16

⁵¹ Chotaeva, Cholpon. *Multiculturalism of Bishkek city. Ethnicity and language in Soviet and Post-Soviet times*.

⁵² Ibraeva, Zhibek. “*Soviet Nation-Making. Nationality Policy of the Formative Years of the Soviet Union and Subsequent Language Policy Development*.”

⁵³ According to the 1959 census, Kyrgyz formed 40.5% of the population in the republic, 13.3% among urban residents and 10.4% in Bishkek city

Kyrgyzstan. As a result, 42% of Kyrgyz pupils did not study Kyrgyz at schools and could speak Kyrgyz during informal communication only. The status of the Russian language was officially established in 1961, in the official Communist Party meeting where the Russian language became “a language of multiethnic communication” in the Soviet Union space and remained its status until the collapse of the USSR.⁵⁴

In the recently public work by Paige Brewer (2015), he investigated the politics of language in Kazakhstan, where Russian and local Kazakh languages and its positions have changed from the Soviet period to present days. In general, the language situation in Kazakhstan and other Central Asia states was very similar. Brewer’s analysis mostly focuses on the political rhetoric of Kazakh government and states that indigenous languages in the territory of the Central Asia were associated with “rural, static and stereotypically “backward” realm of the society” during Soviet imperialism.⁵⁵

Nowadays many scholars claim that Soviet language politics was characterized by forced Russification and suppression of the cultural heritage of the Central Asian region. But it is important to note, that for the centralized government there was a practical and functional advantage to make Russian language as an instrument for unifying diverse population of Soviet space. Nonetheless, language was not only a means of communication, but also a basis for thinking and existence of a person as an individual. Therefore changing the individuals’ linguistic repertoire was virtually equivalent to the transformation of his/her identity.

⁵⁴ Kondrateva, Daria. *The Shift in Kyrgyzstan's national identity formation: from Civic inclusion to Kyrgyz-Centered Narratives*.

⁵⁵ Brewer, Paige. *The mankurt remembers: the politics of language in Kazakhstan*. p. 39

Chapter 3. Nationalizing Kyrgyzstan

The following chapter will describe the nation-building process in Kyrgyzstan from 1991, when Kyrgyzstan gained independence. The development of nationalizing policies of Kyrgyz Republic and its multicultural approach will be analyzed with the help of Brubaker's theoretical perspective of "nationalizing states", and the recent changes in the language policies and practices will be presented.

3.1. Nationalism and ethnicity

One of the influential works, explaining the process of nationalism in Post-Soviet space, and particularly in Eurasia is Brubaker's theory of «nationalizing states». He argues that there is much more focus in the literature on nationalism as «polity-seeking nationalist movements»⁵⁶ rather than on the processes of nationalization of existing policies. The context of historical development and conditions of post-communist countries cannot be explained by classical approaches of nationalism and require another theoretical framework. Brubaker explains these states as "conceived by their dominant elites as nation-states, as the states of and for particular nations, yet as "incomplete" or "unrealized" nation-states, as insufficiently national in a variety of senses."⁵⁷ However, classical modernist perspective on nationalism develops the idea of nation-states based on the perception of a nation as citizenry living in a territorially and institutionally framed state. There is an idealized assumption that all citizens identify themselves with a state and perceive each other belonging together. But the problem with it is an ignorance of ethnicity and its importance for national building process. Ethnic identity is not taken into account as one of the important components of the nationalization process. Moreover, as civic identity is perceived to be national and superior over ethnic (sub-national) identity, the neglect of ethnicity is problematic in analyzing the process of national building in new states in the Post-Soviet period, where the ethno-cultural characteristic is one

⁵⁶ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalizing States in Old «New Europe» and the New*, p. 412

⁵⁷ *ibid*, p. 412

of the main features of existing polity. Undoubtedly, there are a lot of differences and variations among nation-building process in Post-Communist states. However, Brubaker claims that there are five main elements, that can be found in all states: 1) the idea of “core nation” or nationality⁵⁸ understood in ethno-cultural terms and does not include non-titular nationalities and ethnic minorities; 2) state is perceived to be *of* and *for* titular nation; 3) the belief about a core nation as being in a weak conditions; 4) to take state decisions and actions in order to straighten culture, traditions and economic welfare and political hegemony of a titular nation and preserve; 5) all these actions are justified because of previous oppression to a core nation.⁵⁹ All of these dimensions were taking place at the very beginning of nation building process of Kyrgyzstan. One of the instances of such actions became a land law adopted in 1991, which legally constitute the land and natural resources of Kyrgyzstan as the wealth of ethnic Kyrgyz.⁶⁰ This law became a first attempt to give priority to the titular nation over other ethnic minorities. However, the notion of nationalizing state cannot be taken without taking into account the specific nature of each successor state. The internal dynamics of political, economic and cultural processes are much more complicated and therefore cannot be a universal explanation for the whole structure of nationalizing projects in different contexts.

After the era of Soviet rule, there were two main factors, which impact the future development of the national ideology of successor states. On the one hand, the distinct system of institutionalized multi-nationality created the very ethnic-based classifications of people in the republics. Even in the latest period of Soviet rule, the core nations have already existed in the particular territory and had a preferential treatment. On the other hand, the

⁵⁸ «Nationality» was invented term in Soviet union, which became a synonym for ethnicity and ethnic groups in Soviet space

⁵⁹ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States*.

⁶⁰ Kim, Maya. *Redefining National Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

centralized rule in political and economic spheres and the process of Russification led to russofone ethnic minorities and Russified urban Kyrgyz population.⁶¹

According to Nogoibaeva (2012), there is an ongoing crisis of identity in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of Soviet Union. The population is divided along ethnic, tribal and regional lines. For instance, only 55% of the population identifies itself as Kyrgyz citizens. It means that the rest has another identificational marker such as ethnicity, tribal identity or a representative of “south” and “north”.⁶²

The first president Askar Akayev mostly defined the path of Kyrgyz national ideology. Comparing to other Central Asian leaders, he was the representative of academia, and was new to politics. From the very beginning, Akayev developed liberal values and made independent Kyrgyzstan as the most welcoming country for ethnic minorities. The national concept that was proposed «Kyrgyzstan is Our Common Home» became an official slogan for a coexistence of titular nation and ethnic minorities.⁶³ However, it was not able to prevent ethnic tensions in the society. The cruel rivalries of ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz population in 1990's and then ethnic conflict in 2010 in the southern part of the country show the complexity and misunderstanding among nationalities in the state. Due to ethnic revival and sentiments among Kyrgyz population, the emigration of Slavic nationalities (Russian, Ukrainians, Germans, Belorussians, Jews) started just right after gaining independence. Most of the minorities were living in the urban area and were representatives of professional spheres, therefore the loss of such people led to a great challenge for sustainable development for the newly emerged state. Therefore Akayev made the series of actions in favor of ethnic minorities.⁶⁴ Firstly, the Assembly of People of Kyrgyzstan was initiated and gave an

⁶¹ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States*.

⁶² Nogoibaeva, Cholpon. *Transitional period and problems of nation-building in Kyrgyzstan*.

⁶³ Marat, Erica. *Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism*.

⁶⁴ Marat, Erica. *National Ideology and State-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

opportunity for ethnic groups to discuss their concerns. Also, the cultural centers for ethnic minorities were formed in order to preserve the culture and traditions of ethnic minorities. At the beginning of nation-building process, Kyrgyzstan was constituted to adopt multicultural politics and cultural pluralism.

3.2. Multiculturalism in Kyrgyzstan in 1990's

Due to the historical development of modern states, mostly all the nowadays states are multinational in its nature and to different extent heterogeneous in an ethnic composition. The Central Asian region after the dissolution of Soviet Union became a great example of multiethnic states. According to Kymlicka's approach of multiculturalism, «a country which contains more than one nation is not a nation-state, but a multinational state, and the smallest cultures form a nation minorities.»⁶⁵ In this perspective, a nation is understood to be a historical community sharing a distinct language and culture. But the problem with the congruence of a nation and ethno-cultural community is the hugest challenge for Post-Communist states, especially the Central Asian region. Citizens of these states did not view themselves as a single community, but in order to form this kind of loyalty and identification of people to form a nation, the specific policies and ideology should be developed. In the case of Kyrgyzstan and its multiethnic nature, there was an attempt to build a civic nationalism with the emphasis of ethnic minority groups as important and integral part of the society. Zero option citizenship policy was adopted, which automatically made all residents who were living in the territory of newly emerged state equal citizens, despite their ethnic, religious, linguistic belonging. Also, the Kyrgyz language became a state language, whereas the Russian language was given the status of official language. It was guaranteed no discrimination on the basis of not speaking the Kyrgyz language.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Kimlicka, Will. *Multicultural Citizenship: a Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. p. 13

⁶⁶ Kim, Maya. *Redefining National Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

The civic ideology of nationalization was transmitted from the Soviet ideology of ethnic inclusion and pluralism. But the integration of ethnic minorities was challenged by the Soviet development of institutionalized incongruence of nationhood and nationality, where ethnic minorities were opposed to assimilation. Moreover such kind of ideological principles could not satisfy the need of the titular nation and the popular mood.⁶⁷

At the beginning of 1990's ethnic Kyrgyz were in an unprivileged position in the transition to market economy. In professional spheres, they were disadvantaged in comparison with Uzbeks, and in educational institutions in comparison with Slavs. Therefore the promotion and participation of Kyrgyz into different spheres of public sectors were supported by state projects. Akayev shifted from multicultural approach toward more ethnocentric one.⁶⁸

After the collapse of Communism in Central Asia, there was an urgent need to build national ideology for a sovereign state. The Soviet Union and Russian invaders were viewed as a threat to the indigenous population of Central Asia. All the countries started to appeal to pre-Soviet heritage as a basis for independent future of the states. Some of the scholars claim that it was not «nation-building» but rather «national revival».⁶⁹ The first president Akayev and political elite introduced the semi-legendary hero of Turkic origin, which is called Manas. The longest narrative epic was promoted through specially created committee. The symbolic meaning of the main ethical topics that was touched in the text were supposed to serve a unifying function and a moral guidance for differentiated social groups of people. There are seven main values that should be ideally associated with Kyrgyzstani citizens and became moral guidance for construct loyalty and civic-based patriotism of people:

⁶⁷ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States*.

⁶⁸ Marat, Erica. *Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism*.

⁶⁹ Kim, Maya. *Redefining National Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*. p. 30

- Unity and solidarity of the nation;
- International harmony, friendship, and cooperation;
- National dignity and patriotism;
- Prosperity and welfare through painstaking and tireless labor;
- Humanism, generosity, tolerance;
- Harmony with nature;
- Strengthening and protection of Kyrgyz statehood.⁷⁰

Despite the main themes of the narration had more universalistic character and did not mention superiority of titular nation, ethnic minorities did not associate themselves with this legendary hero.⁷¹

In 1995, the event was organized that celebrated the 1000-th Manas anniversary. This celebration became an important sign of glorifying the Manas image and importance for Kyrgyz people. This event was a successful act of uniting people, but interestingly, it was made in the period of first Kyrgyz national president elections. The next huge celebration was organized in the biggest city of southern part of Kyrgyzstan in 2000 just before the second president elections, which was called Osh 3000.⁷²

As Erica Marat (2008) argues one of the functions of such act, was Akayev's attempt to have an electorate in the southern part of the country, which felt subordinated to dominated northern Russified urban Kyrgyz population. Therefore, the primary purpose of such kind of events was not only to build national ideology of people but also and mainly to become a supportive tool for monopolizing and holding power of ruling elite at that time. Therefore it was not surprisingly that the national ideological framework could not satisfy and unify diverse, pluralistic society.

⁷⁰ Marat, Erica. *National Ideology and State-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

⁷¹ *ibid*

⁷² «Osh 3000» was the celebration of 3000 years of the city

3.3. The language question

From the very beginning of independence, the question of language policies became an issue of public debates. In 1993, the Kyrgyz language became a sole state language. Because of this policy, the rapid migration processes of Slavs and other russofone ethnic groups occurred. Therefore in 2000, the law “On the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic” was adopted, according to which the Russian language becomes the official language of the republic, and documentation in state and local government bodies is allowed in the official language. In addition, the new version of the law on education defines the state and official languages as the main languages of instruction, and also permits learning in any other language. At the same time, the Program for the Development of the State Language for 2000-2010, developed by the National Commission on the State Language, assumes “the translation of official documents in all regions and Bishkek into the state language.”⁷³

However, *de facto* this legal status and a priority of the Kyrgyz language occurred only in a “paper”. As Brubaker asserts in analyzing Post-Communist nationalizing states, the language policies and practices became an important instrument for nationalizing polity. He claims that even “the state can mandate that the titular language will be used in certain settings; but such mandates may or may not be enforced.”⁷⁴ Exactly the same situation happened in Kyrgyz language processes and practices.

One of the difficulties in Kyrgyzstan was the huge proportion of ethnic minorities, whose native language was Russian and who was living mostly in the capital city, Bishkek. Moreover, because of Russification process, which succeeded in the Central Asia, the Russian language served a communicational function in inter-ethnic interaction. But the other side of the coin was the huge number of ethnic Kyrgyz population, who were living in the

⁷³ Chotaeva, Cholpon. *The features of nation-building process in Kyrgyzstan*

⁷⁴ Brubaker, Rogers. *Nationalizing States Revisited: Projects and Processes of Nationalization in Post-Soviet States*. p. 25

urban area. About 75% of Kyrgyz, living in Bishkek city defined Russian as their main language in 1989. Also, all administrative documents and mass media in the country were still in Russian at the beginning of 1990's. The classes of Kyrgyz language were added to the curriculum of the schools and universities. However, there were not enough top-down policies for the promotion of Kyrgyz language. Such treatment and neglect toward an official language created ultra-nationalistic activities and dissatisfaction among the population. At the same time the gap between Russified urban population and Kyrgyz-speaking rural one became even more evident.⁷⁵

Another issue was related to the status of Uzbek language. As Uzbek population were concentrated in southern part of the country and tended to preserve its language in the Soviet period, there was no opportunity not to take in into account. As the first president of Kyrgyzstan developed friendly politics towards ethnic minorities, he granted special status for the Uzbek language, the possibility of studying in Uzbek in schools and universities were given. However, not all of the promises were realized, mostly because the Kyrgyz elite worried about possible succession mood among Uzbeks.⁷⁶

Dyatlenko (2010) argues that there is a controversial rhetoric of the Kyrgyz political elite toward language. On the one hand, they promote the Kyrgyz language as a sole state language. On the other hand, they admit a role of the Russian language for the development of society and the relations with the Russian-speaking world. He claims that Russian still functions as an economically-effective language. Knowledge of the Russian language allows citizens of the republic to count on a more privileged place in the labor market in the CIS countries, primarily in the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. This situation will continue to

⁷⁵ Marat, Erica. *National Ideology and State-building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*.

⁷⁶ Marat, Erica. *Kyrgyzstan: Prospects for Pluralism*.

be maintained, due to the shortage of jobs in Kyrgyzstan and the growing need for the labor force of the growing economies of Russia and Kazakhstan.⁷⁷

The lack of resources for promoting the Kyrgyz language and economic incentives of learning it became the factors that did not give a chance for the Kyrgyz language to compete with Russian.

⁷⁷ Dyatlenko, Peter. *Russian language in Kyrgyzstan: contemporary trends and perspectives*.

Chapter 4. Methodology

In the previous chapters of the thesis theoretical framework, historical background and political rhetoric of the context were presented. It shows public discourse and top-down perspective on the issues of ethnicity and language in Kyrgyzstan in general. However one of the main objectives of the current study was to investigate how Russified Kyrgyz citizens construct and define their ethnic identity in everyday life, how a lack of proficiency in the Kyrgyz language impacts their lives and how they treat the Kyrgyz and the Russian language. There are several reasons why the qualitative method was chosen. First of all, there is a lack of qualitative studies on ethnic identity, especially in the Central Asian region. This method allowed me to get an insight into the lives, experience, and practices of ordinary people, who are usually, are not heard in public debate. The participants were also able to theorize their life experience in a more constructed way, which helped them to evaluate their ethnic identification. Few participants were thankful for an opportunity to have such kind of conversations.

The fieldwork was carried out in April, 2017. During three weeks of data collection, all the interviews were conducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Bishkek was chosen because of its multiethnic environment, where ethnic minorities and Russified Kyrgyz are concentrated.⁷⁸ All interviews were face-to-face lasted from 35 to 65 minutes. The interviews were conducted in the Russian language. All of them were recorded and transcribed afterward. After each interview, the interviewer filled out a small questionnaire in order to

⁷⁸ According to the official statistics of 2016, the ethnic groups of Bishkek city were represented by 72% of Kyrgyz, 18% of Russians, 1.6% of Uighurs, 1.3% of Uzbeks, 1.3% of Koreans, 1.2% of Tatars, 1% of Kazakhs, 0.6% of Ukrainians, 0.5% of Dungans and 2.5% of other ethnic groups (Natsional'nyi statisticheskiy komitet Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki).

systematically record basic socio-demographic information of the respondents. The questionnaire consists of following questions:

- Place and date of the interview;
- Name, age, gender, and occupation of an interviewee.

There were two types of interviews that differ a lot in the sense of structuring, interview guide and context: interviews with individuals (Russified Kyrgyz) and expert interviews.

4.1. Individual interviews

In the light of this study, the target population as ethnically Kyrgyz people, who do not speak Kyrgyz and their mother tongue is Russian. The recent study of language use by OSCE⁷⁹(2010) shows that 70,9% individuals identify themselves with Kyrgyz ethnic group. For 71,4% of the whole population reported that Kyrgyz is their mother tongue. However in practice, because of post-Soviet mother tongue is not used in everyday practice. According to the data, Kyrgyz speak either ethnic language or bilinguals (speak Kyrgyz and Russian). There are no any statistical data of Kyrgyz ethnic population, who do not speak the Kyrgyz language; therefore the most appropriate way for selection of respondents was snowball sampling. Prior to conducting interviews, potential participants were checked with the preliminary questionnaire in order to select proper respondents. With the objective of the study, the age, ethnic affiliation and language use are the main criteria. The age criterion was fixed in order to select the respondents who were born in Soviet Union period and were adults till its collapse. The questionnaire is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Preliminary questionnaire for recruitment to individual interview

1) Are you Kyrgyz?	1) yes 2) no (finish interview)
2) What is your age?	less then 40 years old (finish interview)
3) Is Russian your mother tongue?	1) yes 2) no (finish interview)
4) Do you speak Kyrgyz?	1) yes 2) no (finish interview)

⁷⁹ Aminov, K, Jensen, V., Juraev, S. Overland, I., Tyan, D. & Uulu, Y. *Language Use and Language Policy in Central Asia*

5) Are you Bishkek resident?	1) yes 2) no (finish interview)
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Semi-structured interviews with individuals

The overall quantity of respondents was 9 individual interviews; four men and five women were interviewed. (more detailed see Table 3) The interviewing of Russified Kyrgyz participants provided valuable interpretations and experience by their self-concept and ethnic affiliation. In order to be able to create rapport between interviewer and participant, the conversational and more informal way of carrying interviews was used. (Flick, 2009) Therefore each interview started from a biographical background of the respondent and then went to more specific questions of particular study. The interview guide⁸⁰ consisted of:

a. Identity related questions

- How would you describe yourself? What are the main roles in your life?
- What does it mean for you to be Kyrgyz? Is that important part of your identity?
- How does being Kyrgyz influence your life? When, where do you feel more Kyrgyz?
- What kind of Kyrgyz tradition do you follow?
- There is a term, which people usually use in Kyrgyzstan as “Russified Kyrgyz people”, are you familiar with it? Do you think it is such a thing? If yes, how would you describe them? Do you feel like this?
- Whether other people relate to you in such a way? If yes, what does it mean for you? How do you react on this? Why do you think you are perceived in such a way?

a. Language related questions

- You do not speak Kyrgyz; tell me please how did Russian language become mother tongue for you? (Family, educational institution, friends etc.)
- Do you face any challenges or issues that you do not speak Kyrgyz? If yes, in what situations? How do you cope with it?

⁸⁰ Interview guide was modified as a result of pilot Skype interview with the respondent

- Do you want to learn Kyrgyz? Why?
- (If respondents have children), what language do you prefer your children speak? Why?
- There are newly implemented laws on the Kyrgyz language to make it more popular, do you think it will work? Why?

Table 3. List of respondents of individual interview

#	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation
1	Bakyt	45	Male	Private businessmen
2	Saltanat	48	Female	School teacher
3	Aselya	50	Female	Housewife
4	Gulnara	45	Female	NGO employee
5	Bela	40	Female	Shop assistant
6	Emil	42	Male	Bank employee
7	Maratbek	47	Male	Private businessman
8	Asyla	42	Female	University teacher
9	Aibek	50	Male	Freelancer

4.2. Expert interviews

As debates and discussions over enforcement of Kyrgyz language occurred and started to play one of the main roles of political discourse nowadays, who targeted ethnically Kyrgyz population in the first place, it deserved a huge amount of space in media coverage and political and social experts' talk. Therefore expert interviews show the alternative point of view of ethno-national identification and language repertoires in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. The expert interviews included five experts from different public spheres (more detailed see Table 4). The interview guide covered the following topics:

Language political discourse

- What is the role of language in building national consciousness for the Kyrgyz society?
 - How do political elite deals with the problem of the status of Kyrgyz and Russian languages so far?
 - Is the phenomenon of Russified Kyrgyz population problematic nowadays? If yes, why and how does it appear among the population?
- a. Implementation of Kyrgyz language
- What kinds of practices help to push people to learn Kyrgyz?
 - What are the challenges and issues related to state language in Kyrgyzstan?

Table 4. List of respondents of expert interview

#	Name	Occupation
1	Cholpon Chotaeva	Professor of AUCA
2	Snejana Saltanova	Employee of NGO “UNICEF in Kyrgyzstan”
3	Gulmira Diusheeva	Kyrgyz language expert, professor of Kyrgyz State University
4	Bektur Iskender	Editor of online news portal “kloop.kg”
5	Sergei Kuklin	Social researcher in “M-Vector” company

4.3. Limitation of the Research

The initial idea of the empirical research was to select respondents, who identify themselves ethnically Kyrgyz but due to socialization process, their mother tongue was Russian. Before going into the field, I recruited potential participants through personal contacts. Geographically only Bishkek is covered in the study; therefore the research findings cannot be generalized to either whole Kyrgyzstan or ethnically Kyrgyz population in other parts of the country. At the same time, the topic turned out to be a sensitive issue for participants, and a lot of people refused to talk about it. Overall, I have found about 30 potential respondents however most of them did not want to participate. As language issues

are very politicized in the political debated and media coverage in 2017 because of presidential elections, people felt suspicious about ethnicity and language topics.

Also, my personal characteristics should be taken into considerations. Being an out-group member (ethnically Korean) could impact a perception of the interviewees and sometimes lead to socially desirable answers.

Despite these limitations, the empirical study sheds light on the topic of ethnic identification of Russified Kyrgyz and shows the complex identity construction process. It also explained Russian language repertoire of Kyrgyz population and showed how language shapes their ethnic identity. In the following chapter, I will be discussing the finding of empirical fieldwork in details.

Chapter 5. Findings and Discussions

Due to two types of in-depth interviews: individual and expert ones, and different nature of the interview guides, the chapter will be divided into the analysis of individual and expert interviews separately. After transcribing the interviews, I have defined few major topics that will be covered in the subsection of the chapter.

5.1. Individual interviews

Constructing of ethnic identity in everyday life

“I do not speak Kyrgyz, but it does not mean that I am less Kyrgyz than someone who speaks.” Asyla, 42

The quotation above was narrated by the female respondent during the interview. She was highly passionate and emotional expressing his Kyrgyz ethnic identity. Her claims seemed to be defensive confronting mainstream discourse of stigmatization and attitude toward “Russified” Kyrgyz citizens. However, it was not only her who pointed out that being Kyrgyz is an important part of the identity and trying to justify an inability to speak Kyrgyz because of Soviet Russification and further underdeveloped policies of the state language. It was clear that they aware of stereotypes like “being non patriotic”, not “pure Kyrgyz” toward them. At the beginning of few interviews, the participants performed in a protective manner. As Crocker and Quinn argue these stereotypes are not internalized but rather situational. Being asked and interviewed about their ethnic identity signalized about the stereotypes toward them. However, during the interviews, the respondents position themselves higher than non-Russified Kyrgyz.

As all interviews started from background information, it was found that all respondents were born in Bishkek and went to Russian language kindergartens and schools. They were socialized in Russian-speaking environment where most of them were an ethnic minority in the schools and places they were living. Socialization was the main aspects that

defined the identification of Russified Kyrgyz in the society. Many respondents emphasized how the parents, school, and friends became the main actors for future identity construction. Few of them stated that it was only Bishkek phenomenon that Kyrgyz people who could move to the city because of economic advantages started to shift from “only Kyrgyz” to “only Russian” language repertoire.

“We were raised during the Soviet time I was living in Russian speaking community, my parents spoke only in Russian with me, and you know, I called myself Russian in the childhood [Laughing].” Saltanat, 48

Interestingly, during the interviews, there were two major discourses how individual described their ethnic identity. The first one is when the respondents claim that despite speaking Russian they preserve “inner” sense of being Kyrgyz. In this case, ethnic achievement was not presented by competence in the ethnic language. For them “Kyrgyzsness” is presented in respect of elderly, kindness, hospitality and some other positive characteristics. However, they never mentioned religion or language as a marker of ethnic identity. Most of them mentioned ethnic traditions as an element of their ethnic identity and also pre-Soviet historical heritage.

“In our time, religion was prohibited, that is why we did not practice religion at home. Of course, I believe in God, but I do not practice religion and does not belong to neither Islam or Christianity.” Bella, 40

“For Kyrgyz people, I think it is important to remember our ancestors and culture. For me, I would say personal qualities such as openness and hospitality is the main features of Kyrgyz identity.” Bakyt, 45

“You know, a lot of people nowadays associate Islam with Kyrgyz culture, however originally we were not Muslims but prayed for pagan gods.” Emil, 42

The other discourse appeared when people told of being Kyrgyz as an important part of their identity but during the interviews, they mostly referred to themselves being a Soviet person (which has a positive connotation), Bishkek resident, a representative of northern part of the country “severyanin”. It was hard to define which factors impact their identity. However, it was clear that ethnicity as it is, is not the main identity in their lives.

“I was born in Soviet period and still remain Soviet person...” Aibek, 50

“Being born in Bishkek is just another thing, I have totally different values comparing to people came from villages.” Saltanat, 48

The other aspect that was mentioned by the majority of interviewees is their self-referring belonging to Russified Kyrgyz population. Without mentioning this term at the beginning of interview, the participants called themselves “Russified” Kyrgyz. When the question, what does it actually mean was asked, they usually explained by words: an urbanite, a Russian speaker, “Kirgiz”, “civilized” and also an elite. They clearly separated themselves from “Kyrgyz” and positioned themselves more advantaged and privileged group in general.

I also investigated a gender difference among the respondents. In general, men tended to refer less to their ethnic identity, whereas women were more likely to construct their identities in ethnic terms. I assume this situation occurred due to the gender roles in Kyrgyz society. Women are perceived to be holders of cultural heritage and are responsible for transmitting values and traditions of the Kyrgyz ethnic group to children.

In the case of Russified Kyrgyz, it was traced in all interviews, that Kyrgyz ethnic identity as such is not the prevailing identity of people. And being born in Bishkek were much more salient during the interviews.

Between us and them

The distinction between “us” and “them” is one of the key elements of one’s identity. During the interviews with the respondents, it was also important to define how they see

themselves and others and whether the term Russified Kyrgyz encompass more that language repertoires by the respondents. As I mentioned above, they hold a strong feeling being different from Kyrgyz-speaking co-ethnics. However, the point was that the majority of respondents stated that the language itself does not play a role in such differentiation. There was a variety of ways how they were explaining that differences. The participants were telling about their lives, their social surroundings, and values and were convinced that mentality of non-Russified individuals is different. All respondents mentioned it in more or less vivid manners.

“Pure “Kyrgyz” as they call themselves sometimes behave in a very uncivilized way.

They gossip a lot and care a lot of other people’s live.... Russified Kyrgyz never does it.” Gulnara, 45

One woman mentioned how non-Russified Kyrgyz’s look and the way they interact differ.

“I am working in as a shop assistance in a grocery store. There are a lot of people coming to there every day, and you know, when a person comes in from the first look I almost immediately understand whether this person is Russified Kyrgyz or not.” Bella, 40

This statement seems not that evident because physical appearance of Russified and non-Russified Kyrgyz does not really exist. Therefore I started to keep asking what kind of the features of Russified and non-Russified Kyrgyz appear to her. In the end, it turned out that basically, she defined this fact by Russian language proficiency. However, this example shows how strong and powerful the construction of boundaries among individuals. As Weber and Barth point out the subjective perception of individuals to belong to a distinct community could be much more powerful than objective criteria.

Another investigation that was evidently showed during the interviews was the boundary maintenance in everyday life. The woman told about her son who recently married non-Russified Kyrgyz woman, and how much she was against this marriage. Her main point

was based on the perception that the son's wife is not a right choice, because she has totally different background, values and views. She stated:

*“When I met Begaiym [the son's wife name] and her family for the first time, it was clear at the beginning that they are different people. It was hard for me to perform happiness. I felt uncomfortable and disappointed with my son's choice.... It seemed to me that her parents also were not happy about this marriage.”*Aselya, 50

People not only emotionally feel distance with non-Russified co-ethnics, but also they prefer to remain established boundaries between them.

What I also would like to mention is the concepts of “Russified Kyrgyz”, “Kirgiz” or other categorical terms for the people that I have interviewed. All of them were socially constructed but had the real value and the meaning to people. The language criterion is not the main attribute of such division. It became an indicator for “Russified Kyrgyz” to have a social status, a particular position in the society and construct their own understanding of where they belong and where they do not. Despite negative stereotypes and prejudices and the respondents' awareness about them, their own conceptualization of “Russified Kyrgyz” does not depend on this fact.

Attitude toward Russian and Kyrgyz language

One of the objectives of the study was to explore how language repertoire impacts ethnic identity of the respondents and their attitudes toward Russian and Kyrgyz languages.

When I started asking about their mother tongue, most of the participants referred to the Kyrgyz language. Their practical non-usage of the ethnic language did not mean for them to perceive Russian as a mother tongue. In other words, their linguistic identity is still Kyrgyz, and usage of the Russian language makes them neither bicultural or hybrid. Only two female respondents mentioned Russian culture or Russian ethnic group. For the majority, the Russian language was not associated with either Russia or Russian culture. They were

proud of being Russian language speakers and were explaining how many advantages the Russian-speaker has over the Kyrgyz one. They claimed that the Russian language helps them to be connected to the world and get access to the information. In most cases, they claimed that speaking Russian has pragmatic reasons and social and economic benefits.

“For me as a businessman operating in Bishkek, there is no need to speak in Kyrgyz. The majority of my clients are russophone.” Maratbek, 47

“The government tries to implement Kyrgyz but you know, we watch Russian television, read books in Russian and use this language in everyday life.” Bella, 40

The attitude toward the Kyrgyz language in most cases was positive. The participants stated that it would be good for them to speak Kyrgyz as well as Russian. However, no one presented a desire to learn it. Most of participants told that it is not functional for their lives and Kyrgyz has only symbolic meaning, whereas language is a tool for social mobility.

“It would be good to understand and speak Kyrgyz, but it is not the main goal of my life.” Gulnara, 45

“We have enough Kyrgyz speakers already who try to learn Russian and it is difficult for them. I am lucky to be socialized in Russian-speaking environment.” Aibek, 50

“We watch Russian channels, go to cinemas where all movies are in Russian, and I like it. There is no something good in Kyrgyz so far. At least it is hard to find.” Asyla, 42

The other aspect that was evident in almost all conversations that there are very different images toward the Kyrgyz and the Russian language. The Kyrgyz language was associated with its speakers – rural residents, whom they perceive “backward” and nationalistic. Moreover, according to interviewees’ account, the Kyrgyz language is much less developed and do not have rich in term of professional and literal words.

Despite previously mentioned issues related to the Kyrgyz language, the respondents mentioned political pressure and promotion of the language. Few of them were very emotional talking about forcing policies pushing people to learn their ethnic language.

“In the news and the internet, the deputies talk a lot about the importance to speak Kyrgyz to preserve our culture and traditions. But in the schools and the universities, the teaching program of Kyrgyz is really poor, even comparing to English. Kyrgyz has to be learned at home with relatives and friends, but if I was raised in other environment and social surrounding how could I do it? Pay for that? No, thanks.” Bella, 40

All of my respondents have a child or children. I asked the question whether they speak Russian or Kyrgyz and whether they want their children to learn Kyrgyz. Most of them were either bilingual or speak only Russian. However, my respondents did not show a willingness to invest money into learning Kyrgyz for their children. Most of them preferred their children to learn foreign languages (English, Chinese, French), which help them expand their professional opportunities.

Summarizing the chapter, I would like to point out few key findings of individual interviews. Firstly, Russified Kyrgyz people construct their ethnic identity based on traditions, personal qualities of being Kyrgyz, where ethnic language proficiency is not the main attribution to ethnic self-identification. However, speaking Russian does not make them assimilate into Russian culture. Their linguistic identity is still Kyrgyz, where the Kyrgyz language remains the status of the mother tongue. Secondly, they differentiate and distance themselves from Kyrgyz-speaking citizens and preserved the image of themselves as more intelligent and privileged group. And thirdly, they perceive second language learning in terms of practical usage and a tool for reaching economic goals rather than its symbolic meaning. Therefore learning Kyrgyz is not functional for people in today's reality.

5.2. Expert interviews

In order to understand the processes and issues related to ethnicity and language in Kyrgyzstan, I will present the finding of the interviews of experts from educational and public spheres. The experts agreed that there is a gap in political rhetoric and the real situation of the functioning of Russian and Kyrgyz language nowadays. The mechanism and the practical implementation of the Kyrgyz language face economic and social challenges. However, the recent trend of the language situation in Kyrgyzstan has been changing in last five years. The russofone and Russian speakers started to show an interest in learning Kyrgyz. However, the Russian language has been saving its position and became the most popular language in rural areas due to migration processes to Russia. The experts argue for the development of bilingualism and balance between Russian and Kyrgyz languages.

Cholpon Chotaeva, the professor of American University in Central Asia and a researcher of language dynamic in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, asserts that Soviet legacy cannot be diminished as well as the Russian language. She states:

“After the Soviet Union collapsed with the phenomenon of ethnic revival and an increase of national consciousness, the government took the nationalistic vector and built the ideology centered around the titular nation. Consequently, a lot of Slavic and russofone ethnic minorities migrated from Kyrgyzstan.... The nationalistic elite declared Kyrgyz one and only state language. However, at that time, the Kyrgyz language itself was not linguistically developed. Therefore Russian language for many years remained the main language of the educational system, mass media, and public lives.”

Gulmira Diusheeva, Kyrgyz language expert, who was involved in the development of National Language Program 2014-2020 of Kyrgyz Republic, shared the same view of the role of Russian language in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

“In 1989, Kyrgyz government started to actively work on Kyrgyz language development. In the beginning, the main issue of national language policies was a desire to replace Russian language by Kyrgyz. The politicians tried to eliminate the Russian language in public spheres. But we live in multiethnic society; therefore bilingualism will be the best solution for the society.... This position was evident in recent language program where my colleges and I were introducing bilingual education for our schools.” Duisheeva, Gulmira

The representative of mass media, Bektur Iskender had a strong opinion that language issues are too much politicized by the elite because of its powerful symbolic meaning to Kyrgyz society nowadays. He said:

“Learnt from childhood, language becomes an integral part of personality. The individual usually identifies with his language and has a strong sense of loyalty to it. Because of its powerful and visible symbolism, skillful politicians use language as a banner to find mass support and gain political power. However, linguistic nationalists usually emphasize the communicative aspect of language when initiating their campaigns to revive and preserve their languages.”

Experts also shared their opinion on the division of Russified and non-Russified Kyrgyz population today. They argued that one of the main problems relates to stigmatization and negative stereotypes toward Russified people. Sergei Kuklin, a sociological researcher, interestingly pointed out:

“Russian is an organic part of modern Kyrgyz culture. It also serves as a kind of social marker - education, cultural openness, social emancipation, in general, for Kyrgyzstan. Russian is the marker of the “middle class”, i.e. class of skilled wageworkers, the most economically and socially active strata of society. Moreover, in Kyrgyzstan, Russian-speaking as a marker makes it possible to classify quite a large number of people with different economic status as “middle class”. This creates a situation in which there is not

only an economic “middle class”, defined by the level of income, but also a symbolic one, determined by socio-cultural indicators. Thus, the desire to limit Russian-speaking in Kyrgyzstan should be considered not only as a linguistic or cultural conflict, but also as an economic, or even class, because the campaign against the Russian language is not a struggle for the Kyrgyz language and “Kyrgyzness”, but the desire to affirm the power of the minority.”

The experts considered the issue of Russified and non-Russified population as a declining phenomenon thought. With the reconceptualization of political and social construct of identity, “Real Kyrgyz speaks only Kyrgyz”, and the renouncement of the essentialist approach toward ethno-national identity, the boundaries among these groups of Kyrgyz will be less visible from generation to generation.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of Russified Kyrgyz population has become the topic of public debate since independence. The government puts pressure and target ethnic Kyrgyz for lack of proficiency in their ethnic language. Kyrgyzstan, as well as other Post-Soviet Central Asian countries, still is in the process of nationalization, where the state is perceived to be of and for the titular nation. However, the attitude and policies toward the Russian language in five newly emerged Central Asian republics drastically differ from each other.

According to Dietrich (2010), the most extreme de-Russification policies were in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Turkmenistan from the very beginning of independence, the government systematically closed Russian schools as well as the cutoff Russian channels and press. Therefore the majority of the young population is monolingual. In Uzbek case, where Russian comprises less than 5% of the whole population, the Russian language was easily eliminated from public spheres. Moreover, because the Uzbek government inclines to the West, English as a second language for learning substituted Russian. In Tajikistan there is the smallest Russian minority in Central Asia. Therefore the Russian language issue has never been problematic in the society. However, Tajik government maintains Russian as the language of interethnic communication. Kazakhstan has the largest proportion of ethnic Russian (24% in 2009), and thus the Russian language is still widely spoken among the population. Central Asia Regional review (2010) published that 88% of Kazakh citizens speak Russian, whereas only 50% speak Kazakh. The Kazakh government has close economic and political relations with Russia. Therefore the Russian language is still the language of interethnic communication and dominant in the business spheres. Compared to

other Central Asian states, the Kyrgyz Republic is the only one, which granted the Russian language official status through a law passed in 2000.⁸¹

The Russian language in Kyrgyzstan is still dominant in mass media, higher education and economic spheres. Moreover, there is a huge level of working migration into Russia. For instance, in 2011, working migrants from Russia transferred 1,67 billion dollars, which comprises 28,5 % of GDP of Kyrgyzstan in the same year.⁸²

Speaking Russian has its symbolic meaning and the status of a language of the privileged and elite group. Also, the controversial politics, the gap in the implementation and real practical usage of the Kyrgyz language make it difficult to compete with Russian nowadays. The main issue of language and ethnicity relates to the topdown approach of the political elite and its manipulation of broader society by essentialist rhetoric.

As Soviet Kyrgyz writer, Chingiz Aitmatov (2004) points out, “each language is unique and thirsts for recognition.... But, following our traditions and developing our language, we must never forget about the people and language that have helped us to come out of medieval darkness. For this reason, we will save, protect, use and cultivate the Russian language as one of the greatest values of the Kyrgyz nation.”⁸³ His statement illustrates the attitude of Russified Kyrgyz population toward the Russian language. At the same time, as the empirical study shows the Russified Kyrgyz population constructs their ethnic identification based on the subjective image of being Kyrgyz. The objective criteria as language, religion, and other cultural attributes do not shape ethnic identification of Russified Kyrgyz. However, their language repertoire helps them to maintain symbolic boundaries with non-Russified Kyrgyz. In spite of the stigmatization of this group of people by ultra-nationalists and their supporters from the broader population, Russified Kyrgyz reproduce

⁸¹ Dietrich, Ayse Pamir. *Language Policy and the Status of Russian in the Soviet Union and the Successor States outside the Russian Federation*.

⁸² “Russian language and its status in Kyrgyzstan”

⁸³ “Strong Language in Kyrgyzstan”, The Times of Central Asia

their self-image as more privileged and intelligent group of people. Also, Russified Kyrgyz does not value learning the Kyrgyz language as either an important tool for social and economic mobility or ethnic identity marker nowadays. They still evaluate the Kyrgyz language as mother tongue without practical knowledge and usage of the language. For many people, the Russian language is native. However, this fact of the Russian language as a native contradicts the public opinion and the dominant norm, requiring a person to recognize that his/her native language is a language that he/she does not own and imposes on him/her a sense of guilt.

The situation around “Kyrgyz” and “Kirgiz” is rooted in an extremely populist approach to language policy. Despite the existence of laws on the development of bilingualism, no real and pragmatic steps have been taken in this respect. Even the obvious measures - improving the quality of teaching Kyrgyz and Russian, respectively, in Russian-speaking and Kyrgyz-speaking schools - remain nothing more than a declaration of intent. The division of society according to the linguistic sign seems to be beneficial for the ruling elite by the situation, since it allows them to manipulate public opinion, alternately actualizing the national-patriotic or “internationalist” rhetoric. This situation will be possible to change if it is possible to establish in the public consciousness the necessity of presenting a requirement for the state to implement a language policy that unites people on the basis of bilingualism (and, ideally, multilingualism) rather than a dividing society into antagonistic groups.

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