

Evaluation of Askarbek Mambetaliev's Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

Faculty of Modern Philology and Social Sciences
Multilingualism Doctoral School
University of Pannonia

Title: Language Policies, Attitudes, and Beliefs in Kyrgyzstan

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. István Cséricskó

Assessor: Dr. Sándor Czeglédi

Mr. Mambetaliev's dissertation is probably the most comprehensive evaluation of language policies and language ideologies in Kyrgyzstan to date, as earlier studies and books were based on considerably more limited samples of statistically analyzable data or have by now become outdated—but overall: the topic has rarely attracted scholarly attention of this depth and potential practical applicability so far.

The introduction is well-written and informative. It provides a comprehensive overview of the key concepts related to language policy (LP), including its role in nation-building, liberation or oppression, inclusion or exclusion, and identity construction. The literature review is extremely detailed; it thus provides a solid enough basis for the reader to understand the importance of language policy and its complexity, while at the same time demonstrates the author's unquestionable familiarity with both the general foundational literature of the field and the particularly Kyrgyzstan-focused scholarly works.

The research aims and questions presented in this dissertation are well-defined and ambitious for a study on language policy and its effects on undergraduate students in Kyrgyzstan. The central thesis—that there has always been a difference between the declared and actual language policies implemented in Kyrgyzstan—is demonstrated clearly by highlighting the covert and “vague” policies, as well as their sometimes half-hearted implementation, which resulted in the formation of frequently ambiguous attitudes towards the native language, nevertheless.

The conceptual framework and research design—which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods, a pilot phase, data collection, data cleaning, and data analysis—are highly appropriate. The employment of multiple methods to rigorously analyze both top-down and bottom-up components of language policy is necessary for the full understanding of the issues of this complexity.

The results indicate that the covert LP of the Soviet Union and the vague LP of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan reinforced language-based discrimination and contradictions between regions and ethnicities, which has divided students into Kyrgyz and Russian speakers with occasionally mutually exclusive linguistic identities, values, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. The study argues that impediments to overt language planning have contributed to the Russification of ethnic minorities, preventing their integration with the titular nationality.

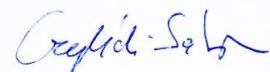
The findings suggest that promoting the use of Kyrgyz on campus, admitting more students from peripheral regions, and improving language policies in general could help increase the number of Kyrgyz speakers among students. The author also recommends raising awareness of the role of languages in constructing identities for independent Kyrgyzstan, and identifies several areas for future research, including investigating the linguistic landscape of universities and studying the views of students towards minorities in the country. Overall, the conclusion are convincing, valuable, and are clearly worthy of being seriously considered for future language-related decisions in Kyrgyzstan.

The finished work is exemplary; the few (mostly insignificant) mistakes in the preliminary version have been corrected. Its publication would definitely represent a notable contribution to scholarly efforts focusing on language management in the successor states of the former Soviet Union—and even beyond the post-Soviet sphere.

Questions to the candidate:

The questions are mostly related to the methodology of the dissertation (to the conceptual framework and the research questions outlined in Chapter 3, and summarized on p. 74).

1. Could the analysis of the legislative proposals (or other records) of the Supreme Council (Parliament) of Kyrgyzstan provide additional insight into (mostly top-down) language policies “in the making,” and into shifting language ideologies in general? (In this respect, even the failed proposals may be informative.) How accessible and available are these documents?
2. How useful (and feasible) would it be to examine social media comments on language-related posts focusing on various aspects of linguistic diversity/language ecology in Kyrgyzstan in order to map and monitor grassroots level opinion changes to complement macro-level analyses (e.g. the one mentioned in question 1)?



Veszprém, April 13, 2023

Dr. Sándor Czeglédi
UP English and American Studies Institute