

Article

# Bottom-Up Approach to Language Policy and Planning in Kazakhstan

Dinara Tlepbergen <sup>1,\*</sup> , Assel Akzhigitova <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Anastassia Zabrodskaia <sup>2,\*</sup> <sup>1</sup> Faculty of Philology, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana 010000, Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup> Baltic Film, Media and Arts School, Tallinn University, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia

\* Correspondence: khamidulladinara@gmail.com (D.T.); aakzhigitova@yahoo.com (A.A.); anastassia.zabrodskaia@tlu.ee (A.Z.)

**Abstract:** National and world news is constantly accompanied by inter-group dramas which are permeated by the dynamics of language use and attitudes. Conflicts can arise between the state insisting on an official language and the family and community who may support the preservation or revitalisation of heritage languages. Kazakhstan is an example of how languages (official Kazakh, the language of communication Russian and international English) coexist peacefully. Language policy and planning depend on the ability and willingness of individual members of the speech community to adopt a language. Language planning is often seen as a top-down, government-controlled activity. This paper shows that language planning can also be carried out from below. Here, we analyze the main initiatives of grassroots movements in promoting the status of the Kazakh language and the emergence of new bottom-up approaches facilitated by the Internet and present sociolinguistic survey results regarding the roles, importance and prestige of languages for the people of Kazakhstan. The focus of the study reported in this article is to monitor the transformative character of bottom-up approaches to language-policy study in Kazakhstan.

**Keywords:** language policy; language planning; bottom-up approach; grassroots processes; micro-level planning; Internet space; language prestige

**Citation:** Tlepbergen, D.;Akzhigitova, A.; Zabrodskaia, A. Bottom-Up Approach to Language Policy and Planning in Kazakhstan. *Societies* **2023**, *13*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13020043>

Academic Editor: Gregor Wolbring

Received: 6 December 2022

Revised: 6 February 2023

Accepted: 9 February 2023

Published: 13 February 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

Language policy and planning has always been an effective tool of domestic policy with its scope extending from preserving linguistic diversity, with regard to the sustainable development of the country, to strengthening the position of the official language, as well as standardization of languages and educational policy [1]. The area of language policy and planning deals with overt and covert policies that influence what languages are spoken, when, how, and by whom, as well as the values and rights associated with those languages [2]. It is now accepted in language-policy studies that ‘planning’ and ‘policy’ take place at all levels of society, from the individual and family level to supranational organizations [3].

Language policy in Kazakhstan is a system of measures in the field of the language situation carried out by the authorities and public institutions of the country [4]. The concept of language policy in Kazakhstan identifies the main difficulty, ‘creating an optimal language space of the state’, which requires ‘a clear definition of the functional correlation of languages, in which the state language should take its rightful place’ [5].

Beyond that, currently, the fully enfranchised population of Kazakhstan itself has organized a powerful grassroots campaign to take substantial actions to promote the state language.

This paper argues that the role of local communities in language planning is not only a necessary gap-filling exercise aimed at meeting planning needs that official policies cannot meet. Micro-planning is an important and necessary complement to open, formal language policy and planning at the macro-level for obvious reasons. Firstly, if language

planning is about influencing the language behavior of local communities, then it is the local communities who are in the best position to fulfil this role [6]. Secondly, the language policy of the 21st century must address the problem that language communities are ‘local and global at the same time’ [7]. Localized planning, supported by national policy and ideology, therefore seems necessary in order to respond to the many challenges that languages face due to the ever-increasing forces of globalization [8].

The choice of study design and method in sociolinguistics, as in any social-science research, stems from the research question and its goals. The present research is aimed at monitoring the transformative character of bottom-up approaches to language-policy study in Kazakhstan. In particular, three main research questions were posed:

1. What is the nature of the bottom-up language policy in Kazakhstan?
2. What are the main initiatives of grassroots movements in promoting the prestigious status of the Kazakh language?
3. How does the social mobility of citizens support the integration and development of the state language?

The research paper argues that the emergence of new bottom-up approaches was facilitated by an expanding media landscape (Internet) which sought to promote a critical re-consideration of problematic aspects of the de-jure and de-facto language-policy implementation, most notably the case of grassroots movement in modernizing language use.

Before presenting our research, we have organized the article as follows: after a brief introduction to Kazakhstan, we move on to its language policy and planning, focusing on bottom-up theoretical assumptions and examples from Kazakhstan.

## 2. Kazakhstan: Background Information

The modern Republic of Kazakhstan is a recognized democracy, partly in Eastern Europe and mainly in Central Asia. It is bordered by Russia to the north and west, China to the east, Kyrgyzstan to the south east, Uzbekistan to the south and Turkmenistan to the south west, with a coastline along the Caspian Sea [9] (see Figure 1). It is the world’s largest landlocked country, the largest and northernmost Muslim-majority country by area and the ninth largest country in the world [10]. It has a population of over 19 million and has one of the lowest population densities in the world: fewer than six people per square kilometer [11].



**Figure 1.** Kazakhstan land boundaries (Source: <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-kazakhstan-political-map-with-capital-astana-national-borders-important-111312043.html> (accessed on 23 November 2022)).

Today's Kazakhstan is a state with a multi-ethnic population composition (see Table 1). According to the 2021 Kazakhstan census, the main ethnic groups are Kazakhs (70.4% of the population), Russians (15.5%), Uzbeks (3.2%), and Ukrainians (2.0%), Uyghurs (1.5%), Germans (1.2%), Tatars (1.1%) and others [12]. In general, the demographic situation in Kazakhstan is characterized by a gradual increase in the country's population.

**Table 1.** Dynamics of demographic changes in the Republic of Kazakhstan [13].

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total population	18,157,337	18,395,567	18,632,169	19,177,128	19,691,858
Kazakhs	67.47%	67.9%	69.93%	70.4%	69.3%
Russians	19.76%	19.3%	18.67%	15.5%	18.47%
Uzbeks	3.18%	3.2%	3.33%	3.2%	3.29%
Ukrainians	1.53%	1.5%	1.5%	2.0%	1.3%
Uyghurs	1.46%	1.3%	1.38%	1.5%	1.5%
Germans	0.99%	1%	1.07%	1.2%	0.9%
Tatars	1.11%	1.1%	0.9%	1.1%	1.06%
Others	4.5%	4.7%	3.22%	5.1%	4.18%

Genealogically, languages of Kazakhstan belong to the following language families: Turkic languages (26 languages, including Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatar, Turkish, and Uyghur, etc.), Slavic languages (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Polish, etc.), and other language families (Germanic, Finn-Uralic, China-Tibetan, Semitic, and others) [14]. The Kazakh language is a member of the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family. Like all Turkic languages, it is believed to have descended from Chagatai, an extinct Turkic language which once served as a lingua franca in Central Asia [15].

### 3. Language Policy and Planning in Kazakhstan

In accordance with the Constitution, the Kazakh language has the status of the state language, while the Russian language has the status of an official language.

The current language policy in Kazakhstan reflects the socio-demographic and linguistic complexity of the country. On the one hand, the government is pursuing a monolingual Kazakhisation policy aimed at establishing Kazakh as the state language of independent Kazakhstan [16]. On the other hand, Kazakhstan is historically a multi-ethnic state, with a significant proportion of the population speaking Russian as their first or second language [17]. This prompted the government to introduce a multilingual policy to preserve Russian and other languages. Furthermore, the rapid penetration of English into Kazakhstani society, combined with the government's ambition to make Kazakhstan a competitive player in the regional and global economy, has also contributed to the adoption of a multilingual ideology.

Russian is the de-jure and de-facto official language in Kazakhstan [18]. In the 1995 Constitution, its status was upgraded from a language of inter-ethnic communication (Law on Languages of the Kazakh SSR 1989, Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1993) to an official language [17]. This is why all legal documents, official notices and letterheads are issued in two languages.

The other main aim of language policy in Kazakhstan is the comprehensive development of English and the expansion of its use. This is evidenced by the 'Trinity of Languages' project, launched in 2007, in which English was given a special status as the language of integration in the world economy [19]. In the 'State Programme for the Functioning and Development of Languages 2021–2025', one of the target figures is the share of the population that speaks English (24% by 2021, 25% by 2022, 30% by 2025); another is the

share of the population that speaks three languages (state language, Russian and English) (26% in 2020, 27% in 2021, 28% in 2022, 29% in 2023, 30% in 2024, 31% in 2025) [20].

It is also worth mentioning the gradual transition of the Kazakh alphabet to the Latin script. The reform of the alphabet is driven by historical context and aimed to increase the global competitiveness of Kazakhstan, and accelerate integration into the global scientific, educational, technological and communication space [21]. Modernization of the Kazakh language is also necessary in order to reveal its full potential—not only as a means of communication, but also as a powerful factor in spiritual revival, strengthening national identity. At the same time, the reform of the state language does not imply a change in the state language policy [22]. The implementation of the policy for the development of multilingualism will continue [23]. The change of the alphabet affects only the Kazakh language. The transition to the Latin alphabet is aimed primarily at reforming the Kazakh alphabet and spelling rules, which will make it possible to establish a correspondence between the phonetics of the language and its graphics [24].

The transition to the Latin alphabet has been carried out dynamically, since it does not accept haste and the ill-conceived forcing of events. In the modern information and technological space, the Latin alphabet is a global and pragmatic tool [25]. It is also important that the Latin alphabet allows not to lose, but to optimally adapt, international, scientific and technical vocabulary into the national dictionary.

#### 4. Bottom-Up Approach to Language Policy and Planning

Language policy is a systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare [26]. It is typically conducted by official bodies or their surrogates and aimed at part or all of the population living under their jurisdiction [27].

While language policies are usually associated with the state and with political decision-making (macro-planning) [28], language policies and language planning initiatives also happen at the community level. These initiatives are often referred to as grassroots language policies [29], or micro-planning [30]. Non-governmental organizations and various institutions can be important actors in language planning and play a crucial role in the initiation and implementation of such policies.

According to Ager, language planning refers to ‘the ways in which organised communities consciously try to influence the languages their members use’ [31]. It is widely recognized in the literature on language planning and policy that there are several levels of planning involving different actors who have different degrees of influence on language. Kaplan and Baldauf identified three main levels of planning: macro, meso and micro [32]. Macro refers to top-down public policies, meso refers to policies applied at the institutional level, and micro refers to grassroots or bottom-up processes initiated by the community or individuals [33].

Accordingly, grassroots language planning is defined as bottom-up initiatives to influence language use by speakers with little or no involvement from official authorities [34]. Language plans originating at the grassroots would enable planners to incorporate community language attitudes, desires, and patterns of use as inputs into the planning process. As Paulston has suggested, these inputs are crucial to the successful implementation of a language plan [35].

With that in mind, bottom-up language planning arises from the goals and desires of the population whose language behavior is the focus of the plan. This does not mean that organized, higher level authorities are not involved in setting policy; rather, they base their policy decisions on the target population’s attitudes and actively seek the participation of community representatives during the entire planning and implementation process [36]. In this sense, grassroots language planning often reverses the traditional order of language-policy decision-making followed by language planning for the implementation of the policy decision [37]. As in the examples from the literature discussed above, grassroots language

planning occurs when planners and policy-makers base their decisions on input from the sector of the public that is affected by those decisions.

Language-planning scholars have repeatedly called for the incorporation of popular attitudes and values into the language policy and planning process. Rubin points out that language planning will not be effective unless the target population feels a need or an advantage in changing language behaviors [38]. Moreover, she stresses the difference between language policy, often government legislation or pronouncements, and language planning, which must be coordinated with the target population's sociocultural values and attitudes in order to successfully implement a policy [39].

In the analysis of the influence of public opinion on policy formulation, Van Horn et al. differentiate between top-down and bottom-up public opinion. They define top-down public opinion as 'the creation, interpretation, and use of public sentiment by public officials, the media, and interest groups in the policy process' [40]. Their description of the manipulation of alleged 'public opinion' by policymakers and interest groups reinforces the elitist nature of top-down decision-making in government, whether it applies to language policy or general legislation. By contrast, bottom-up public opinion is often expressed directly through voting on policy issues on state referenda and local initiatives. Van Horn et al. call such direct citizen participation 'grassroots politics' [41].

For Haugen, language policy can begin at the grassroots level with individual decisions of language choice and use which work their way up through that individual's social networks and may eventually become accepted as de-facto (or enacted as de-jure) language policy [42].

#### *Bottom-Up Approach to Language Policy and Planning in Kazakhstan*

The effectively evolving Internet space in Kazakhstan is a favorable area for the development of the state language. The Kazakhstan Internet space is a dynamically growing social industry, which is maintained by the state and by ordinary supporters of language development, linguists, activists, volunteers. Let us look at the language movements of activists who advocate for the development of the language and contribute to the strengthening of the status of the language.

*Qazaqsha Jaz* (written in Kazakh) [43] is a movement which strives to expand the scope of the Kazakh language. The goal of this movement is to increase the representation of the Kazakh language in social networks. The group for the protection of Kazakh-speaking consumers' rights, consisting of young activists, visits the pages of various companies, cafes, restaurants and shops on the Web, leaves comments in Kazakh and politely requests information. Activists have several rules: act exclusively within the law, be polite and do not write abusive words. The group of active individuals have achieved good results in a fairly short period of time. According to Aliya Sari, one of the administrators of the *Qazaqsha jaz* movement, they managed to get hundreds of companies to start their social-media accounts in the Kazakh language. In addition, as one of the achievements of the *Qazaqsha jaz* movement, we can note that they influenced the creation of the Kazakh version of the Kasp.kz banking application and the InDrive mobile application. They also translated the beta version of the Telegram app into Kazakh. The more people install the application in the Kazakh language, the more likely it is to be among the official languages of the messenger. [44].

In addition, the campaign regularly posts about new reforms, about Kazakh-speaking consumers' rights, and creates various interesting rubrics to expand the use of the Kazakh language. The campaign on its page uses both the Latin alphabet and the Cyrillic alphabet. If the Latin alphabet usually prevails in headlines and in posters, Cyrillic is used in post descriptions.

The *Qazaq Grammar* [45] group has chosen a unique way to develop the Kazakh language. On their Instagram page, they publish informative posts about the Kazakh language, interesting facts and funny memes. According to the author of the project, Nursultan Bagidolla, *Qazaq Grammar* is an educational project run by two volunteers. The

main goal of the group representatives is to contribute to the preservation of the Kazakh language and its rules.

*Kazaksha tea-talk* [46] is another great project created by journalist Alexandra Myskina. The activist organizes traditional Kazakh events, with tea drinking and conversations in the Kazakh language. Those who want to learn and improve their Kazakh language do not sit at student desks, but at a laid table, perform assignments, compose dialogues, and listen to speakers. All this is in a friendly, relaxed atmosphere to remove constraint and barriers.

*Batyl bol* (Be brave) [47] is a new project of Alexei Skalozubov from Almaty. The name of the club clearly expresses the idea of overcoming personal obstacles and fear of speaking Kazakh. Alexey organizes weekly meetings with those who want to learn and practice the Kazakh language together. At each meeting, there are volunteers and curators who are fluent in the Kazakh language, teach the language and have tutoring experience. The author's methodology is very simple: he just distributes brochures with sentences, phrases, and simple dialogues related to the topic to language learners every meeting. As a result, even beginners and foreigners who do not know the Kazakh alphabet greet each other and order food in the cafe from the first meeting.

Quite recently, the *Korneki project* [48] was launched to monitor the linguistic space of Kazakhstan. The goal of the project is to improve the quality and quantity of visual information in local public places by ensuring the implementation of laws related to visual information in Kazakhstan.

On 29 December 2021, the President of Kazakhstan signed amendments to the law on visual information. According to the new requirements, road signs, advertisements, signboards, price tags, catering menus and other information must now be written in Kazakh and, if necessary, in Russian or other languages. In addition, norms have been approved aimed at presenting traditional, historically established Kazakh names of administrative-territorial units, as well as other physical and geographical objects in the state language. The law also sets out the procedure for placing visual information on letterheads and signboards of state and non-state organizations, road signs, and at railway and bus stations. Forms and signboards of non-governmental organizations must be written in the Kazakh language and, if necessary, in Russian and (or) other languages [49].

Within the framework of the *Korneki project*, the following work is performed: with the help of volunteers who have undergone special training, photographic recording of errors and violations of the law related to the Kazakh language (objects without visual information in Kazakh or incorrect translation into the Kazakh language) is carried out. Further, a special headquarters works with these facts, presents them to those business entities and demands correction to the mistakes made.

The *QialDub Studio* project [50], created by translators and amateur voice recorders, deals with dubbing short clips of foreign films and cartoons into Kazakh. Qial Dub Studio often dubs a film clip with a different meaning, linking it to a pressing issue in society. The goal of the project members is to contribute to an increase in content in the Kazakh language.

The above-mentioned groups are a manifestation of the civic activity that has appeared in Kazakhstan in recent years. Volunteers are open-minded, literate, freethinking young people who, as citizens of Kazakhstan, cannot be indifferent to the state of the Kazakh language. Groups of ordinary volunteers are using all the potential of social networks to strengthen the status of the language.

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Research Context

In selecting the research methodology, we started with the premise that grassroots language planning in a multilingual setting must take into account the language attitudes and sociolinguistic conditions of the local community. In planning the data collection, our aim was to gather the information necessary to yield a comprehensive picture of citizen involvement in the language-planning process. In order to achieve this objective, we

selected a quantitative research method. The questionnaire, consisting of 57 questions and 3 sections, was used to gather data from respondents. In Section 1, the questions were aimed at identifying language proficiency levels; thus, we were able to see how many respondents know the Kazakh language today, as well as Russian and English; in Section 2, we compiled questions to ascertain the importance, role, and prestige of languages, as well as the attitude of respondents to the policy of multilingualism and the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script. Finally, in the third section, we asked participants about the development of the Kazakh language in the Internet space of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This section allowed us to learn about the choice of language in Internet communication, about the opinion of respondents regarding the use of the Latin alphabet for the Kazakh language, and to see how many respondents use the Kazakh language in mobile applications and on various media platforms.

### 5.2. Data Collection

In this study, convenience sampling was used. It is a relatively simple and efficient method in which participation depends on the proximity of the researcher and the availability of the respondent. The survey questionnaire was distributed through Survey Monkey and all responses were recorded in Excel for data analysis.

The data-collection period lasted from September 2022 to November 2022.

### 5.3. Ethical Considerations

Respondents took part in the questionnaire on the basis of informed consent. We provided sufficient information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach a fully informed, considered and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion.

According to the principle of confidentiality, the identity of the participants remained anonymous and the information they supplied was respected. In order to guarantee the protection of their fundamental rights, in particular their right to privacy, research was conducted in accordance with country's legislation and with the regulations set up in the data protection directive (95/46/EC) of the EU and in the 'Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data' (CETS No.: 108) of the Council of Europe.

## 6. Results and Discussion

This study follows a descriptive research design. We surveyed 371 participants, among which 267 people (72%) were females and 104 people (28%) were males. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 52. The study involved respondents with different first languages. The number of respondents for whom the Kazakh language is native was 83.9%, native Russian speakers were 12.4%, participants with Uzbek as the first language were 2.9%, and German speakers were only 0.8%.

First, we decided to find out their level of knowledge of three languages of Kazakhstan.

The data presented in Table 2 show a clear dominance of the Russian language among the study population. Meanwhile, it should be noted that both Kazakh and English are quite strong in their communicative positions, which demonstrates the effectiveness of policies that expand the spheres of use of the state language, as well as promote English into the trinity of languages.

Further, the results of the analysis of answers related to the importance of knowledge of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages, as well as the attitude to the policy of multilingualism in Kazakhstan are considered.

To the question 'How would you rate the value of knowledge of the Kazakh language on a scale from 1 to 5?' respondents answered as follows: 'very valuable', 81.7%; 'valuable', 13%; 'neutral', 4.8%. For 0.5% of respondents, knowledge of the Kazakh language is not valuable. In fact, the Kazakh language is developing quite a strong competitive advantage

in the labor market in Kazakhstan. Therefore, more and more people want to learn the Kazakh language. At the dawn of our independence, only Russian speech could be heard on the streets all the time, but now we hear Kazakh speech more often. The number of people for whom the Kazakh language is prestigious is growing, and the scope of the language is expanding every year. Now, we are witnessing a surge in the production of original creative content in the Kazakh language—films, series, songs, and educational content.

**Table 2.** The respondents' language proficiency level.

Level	Kazakh	Russian	English
Speaks fluently	77.4%	86.4%	30.6%
Has problems in speaking	19.5%	12.2%	37.1%
Does not speak	3.1%	1.4%	32.3%

As for the value of knowledge of the Russian language, the following answers were received: 29.2% noted 'very valuable'; 29.6%—'valuable'; 33.4% chose the option 'neutral', and for 7.4% knowledge of the Russian language was not valuable. As can be seen, the data convincingly demonstrate a real strengthening of the positions of the Kazakh language compared to the Russian language.

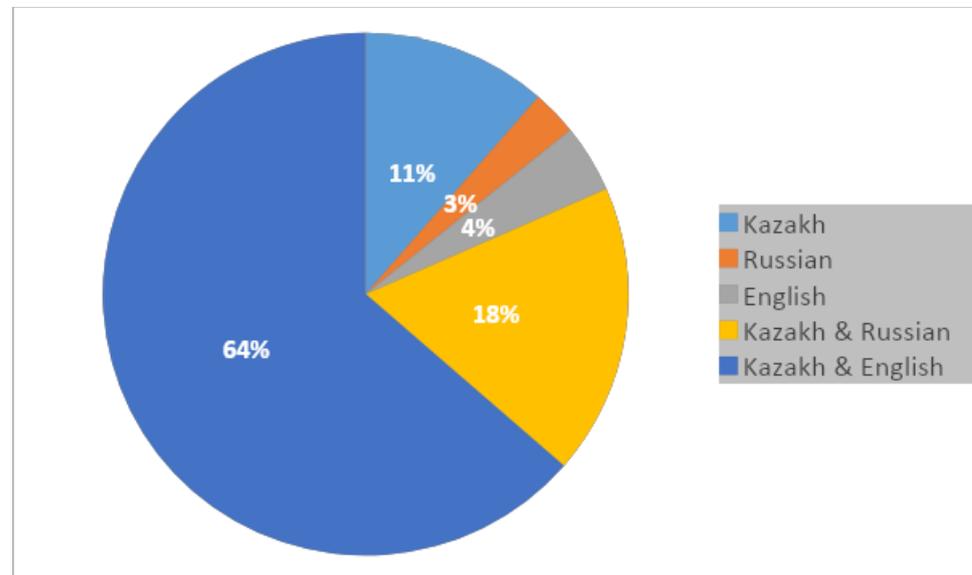
Regarding the value of knowledge of the English language, the following answers were obtained: 48.3% noted 'very valuable'; 37.3%—'valuable'; 12.6% chose the option 'neutral'; and for 1.8% knowledge of the English language was not valuable. The answers of the respondents allow reasoning about the high value of the English language in the country. The importance of English in the life of modern Kazakhstani society is also evidenced by the respondents' answers to the question concerning the role of English in further professional development—'How important is knowledge of English to you for further professional growth?'—to which respondents answered as follows: 'very important', 41.2%; 'important', 36.3%; 'not very important', 16.6%; 'not important', 5.9%. Thus, the majority of respondents associate further advancement in their careers with knowledge of English. In addition, based on the survey data, it can be argued that English language proficiency is one of the main factors associated with career opportunities for Kazakhstani people.

The next series of questions was devoted to identifying the respondents' opinions about the development of multilingualism in Kazakhstan. The vast majority of respondents are confident that the support of the English language by the state is the right policy: 76.8% of respondents agreed with the opinion that the support of the English language helps to strengthen the position of the Kazakh language. Only 26.9% of respondents agreed with the opposite opinion—the weakening of the Kazakh language positions with regard to the support of the English language. Furthermore, respondents' answers show the beneficial effect of the multilingualism policy: 91.4% agree that such policy has a positive effect on the harmonious development of the individual, 71.7% assert the strengthening of the Kazakh language as a result of the development of trilingualism, 84.9% of respondents believe that the development of multilingualism contributes to the strengthening of the position of the English language.

The following are the opinions of respondents regarding the prestige of languages. To the question 'Which of the languages do you consider the most prestigious in Kazakhstan?' the respondents' answers lined up as follows (see Figure 2):

As can be seen from the pie chart, 63.6% of respondents believe that Kazakh and English are the most prestigious languages in the country. For 18%, Kazakh and Russian are prestigious languages. A total of 11% of survey participants noted only the Kazakh language as the most prestigious language in the country. It is demonstrated that the popularity of a language, due to its demand in various fields, is associated with the value of the language in terms of advancement in society and achieving a more prestigious position. These studies testify to the real strengthening of the positions of the Kazakh language,

the growth of its prestige and the strengthening of the motivation for its study and use in everyday life. There is also a growing interest in English, which is only natural as it is now the language of international communication in tourism, business, science and technology, and knowledge of it opens up more opportunities.



**Figure 2.** The most prestigious language in Kazakhstan.

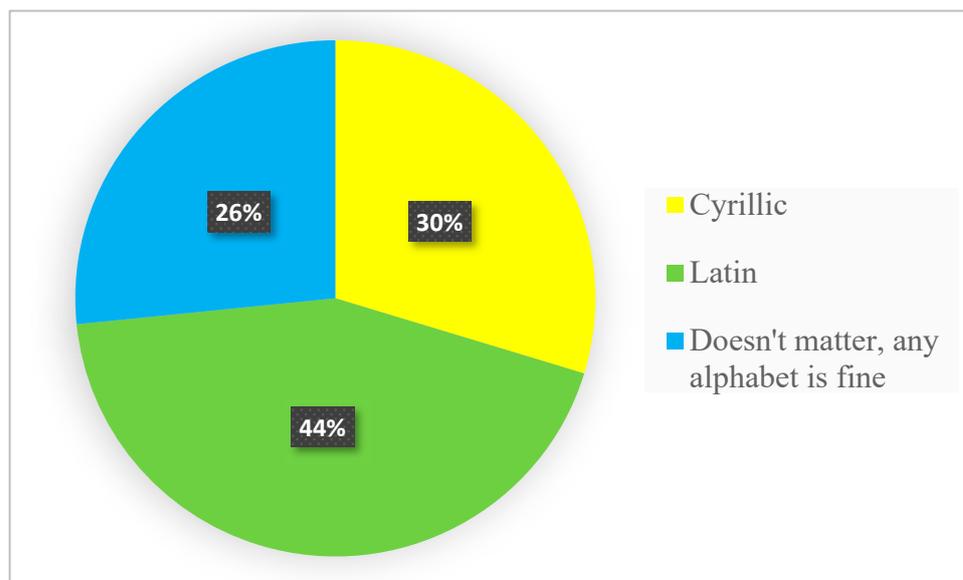
This block of questions ends with identifying the respondents' attitudes to the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script. To the question 'Do you support the idea of switching the Kazakh language to the Latin script?' responses were given in which there is an obvious, but at the same time expected, balance. A total of 32.5% of respondents answered positively, 30.2% gave a negative answer, and 37.3% chose the option 'neutral'. Among the arguments 'for' changing the alphabet in Kazakhstan, the following two are most often used: technological—a reference to the greater suitability of the Latin alphabet for Kazakhstan's entry into the global virtual space in the context of the country's ongoing integration into the world economy; and linguistic—the thesis about the fundamentally greater suitability of the Latin alphabet for transmitting the sound structure of the Turkic languages, including Kazakh. Among the arguments against the Latin alphabet, with all their diversity, the main ones are the following: economic—the obvious and inevitable laboriousness of this project and the inevitability of significant financial costs; and political—an indication of the political background of Latinization, as well as its possible negative (political) consequences. And the last one-third of the respondents believe that with the transition from Cyrillic to Latin there will be no significant changes in terms of politics or the development of the state, arguing that it is not the language that is changing, but only its shell. Here, there is a view that we are not switching to some other language, but only modernizing graphics which were first introduced back in Soviet times. The state is moving towards it purposefully and gradually.

In addition, the absolute majority of survey participants, 67.2%, are sure that the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet will not create difficulties, although they often use the Kazakh language, and only 14.6% note that changing the alphabet will create significant difficulties, since they often use the Kazakh language. It should be noted that among these 14.6% of the respondents were older people who received a Soviet education. In fact, it may be quite complicated for them to get used to the new alphabet. Meanwhile, we believe that the younger generation will master the new format of the language without any problems.

The last block of questions was devoted to the development of the language in the Internet space of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Continuing the issue of the alphabet change in Kazakhstan, we decided to ask the survey participants whether they agree that the Latin alphabet will help the Kazakh language meet the requirements of modern society, contribute to the modernization of the country and improve Internet communication. As a result, the following responses were received: 62.9% of the participants agreed with the above statement, only 13.8% of the respondents did not agree, and slightly more than 20% of participants chose a neutral position on this issue.

To the question 'Which alphabet is more suitable for use in Internet communication?', the respondents' answers lined up as follows (see Figure 3):



**Figure 3.** The most suitable alphabet for use in Internet communication.

Looking at the chart from an overall perspective, the majority of respondents believe that the Latin alphabet is the most applicable in communication for Kazakh-speaking users of the Internet space (using the Latin alphabet in chats, forums, blogging, and receiving and exchanging information, etc.). For almost one-third of the respondents, Cyrillic remains convenient for use on the Internet. For the remaining 26.6%, it does not matter which alphabet is used to communicate on the Internet. Moreover, 61% of the survey participants agree that the use of the Latin alphabet for the Kazakh language reduces the dominance of the Russian language in the Kazakh Internet space, while only 9% disagree with the above statement. The rest of the participants remain neutral on this issue.

Apart from that, it was interesting to know the opinions of the survey participants regarding the use of the Kazakh language in Latin when choosing a resource in the Internet space. A total of 21.6% of respondents agree that the use of the Kazakh language in Latin causes a positive impression of the resource. A total of 10.8% reacted negatively to this statement. For 67.6%, it does not matter which alphabet is used to describe the resource. We believe that such a pattern of responses has developed due to the fact that today there is still no approved version of the Latin alphabet for the Kazakh language.

Next, we would like to present an analysis of the respondents' answers regarding the choice of language in mobile applications and television shows and opinions on new discoveries in the IT field concerning access to the Kazakh language.

In June 2022, Apple released iOS 16 as an updated operating system. Now the Kazakh language has become available to users as a system language. In addition, the language was connected to the artificial-intelligence function for automatic correction [51]. Therefore, we decided to ask the survey participants *whether they are aware of the addition of the Kazakh language to the new IOS 16 operating system and would they like to install it on their mobile phones*. Respondents' answers were the following: only 13.3% of the participants have already

installed the new operating system and use the interface in the Kazakh language. One third of the respondents know about adding the Kazakh language to the system, but do not use it, and almost half of the survey participants do not know about the possibility of installing the Kazakh language on a phone in the new operating system.

The international IT platform for transport and household services *inDrive* is now available in the Kazakh language. *inDrive* entered the Kazakhstan market in 2014. Since then, the application has changed a lot: additional security features have been built in, new services have been launched (users can call a repairman, courier, loaders, or beauty specialist, etc., through the platform) [52]. However, all this time the service continued to work only in Russian. The launch of the Kazakh version is intended to make the experience of using the platform more convenient for those users who prefer to communicate in this language. With that in mind, we also decided to ask the respondents if they know that the *inDriver* transport services application is now available in the Kazakh language, and also to find out in which language the survey participants use the application. Only 9% of participants use the mobile application in Kazakh, and the rest of the respondents, almost 90%, use the Russian language in the platform.

*Kaspi.kz* is a super app that brings together a variety of services for daily needs. More than 11 million customers make commission-free payments and great purchases, manage personal finances and accumulate bonuses with *Kaspi.kz*. It is one of the first companies in the world to launch a super app. When it was created, there were no such examples yet, and so far there is no such combination of services anywhere. Today, *Kaspi.kz* is one of the most advanced technology companies known far beyond Kazakhstan. To illustrate, master's students at Harvard are taught on the basis of the Kazakhstani *Kaspi.kz* case [53]. Within the framework of supporting Kazakh-language development, the *Kaspi.kz* mobile application has also become available in the Kazakh language. Accordingly, we decided to find out in what language the respondents use the application. The following responses were received: 18.3% use both languages (Kazakh and Russian), only 7% choose Kazakh when using the application and the rest of the respondents use Russian.

As can be noted, the Russian language prevails when using the above applications. This is explained by the fact that for a prolonged period of time, all the mobile applications were available only in Russian and English. Based on the bottom-up policy and the hard work of linguists, language activists, and volunteers, applications began to be translated into the state language. However, most users to this day use applications in Russian, as they are already accustomed to the interface in this language.

*QOS* [54] is an online movie theatre that contains the biggest premieres of Kazakh cinema, popular domestic and foreign films, cartoons and TV shows, educational films and series and original content created together with young Kazakhstani directors and content creators. Thus, to the questions '*Do you know about the launch of the QOS online cinema and are you a user of this media platform?*' the following responses were received: 24.2% of the participants are users of the given platform; a third of respondents do not know about the launch of the online cinema, but would like to become its users; and another 36.3% do not know about the existence of this media platform.

President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared 2022 the Year of Children in Kazakhstan [55]. As a result, the Ministry of Information and Community Development in the Year of Children completed negotiations and established cooperation with Nickelodeon and Tiji channels [56]. Thus, the country's cable operators have started showing these channels in Kazakh. It should also be noted that in order to develop domestic market competition, the government does not restrict foreign content, but allows viewing in the state language. Therefore, one of the most promising projects in this area is the translation of popular children's channels with animation into Kazakh.

Survey participants' answers to the question 'In what language do you think children would like to watch these channels?' were as follows: almost half of the respondents chose the option 'Kazakh and Russian', 18.4% believe that children like these channels not only in Kazakh and Russian, but also in English, and 24.1% noted the Kazakh language.

Kazakhstani scientist Orken Mamyrbayev has developed a Kazakh language speech-recognition system that turns voice messages into text. The application of the new development opens up great opportunities: recognition of Kazakh speech by virtual assistants, use in various programs and smart-home technology. Moreover, this project will provide significant impetus to the development of inclusion in Kazakhstan. The new technology can be used in voice and text programs widely used by people with special needs [57]. We decided to ask the survey participants whether they know that a Kazakh language speech-recognition system has been developed that turns voice messages into text and if they would like to use such a function. The answers of the respondents were as follows: 14.6% of the participants already use this feature; a third of respondents do not know about such function, but would like to use it; and another 31.3% do not know about the development of such a system.

## 7. Findings

The focus of this research on aspects of language planning and policy in Kazakhstan is on the emergence of bottom-up practices and the potential they hold for transforming the dynamics of the Kazakh language in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The case of language planning described in this study documents the successful implementation of a state-level language plan because of grassroots participation which is in-line with [25]. Grassroots movements became an emerging force in the country confirming the theories of [29,30]. There is evidence that more such movements are on the rise. Individuals, groups, organizations, with vastly different attributes, structures, and ways of functioning, use all the potential of social networks to strengthen the status of the language. The focus of activity is also highly diverse: from publishing informative posts about the Kazakh language and dubbing short clips of foreign films and cartoons into Kazakh to improving the quality and quantity of visual information in local public places.

Thus, the Internet has become an important tool for grassroots language planning in Kazakhstan. Instagram can be identified as a great tool for increasing the prestige of the state language and a useful channel for language maintenance.

This study also suggests that social actors have taken ownership over macro-level community programs to promote Kazakh at a grassroots level, as, similarly, was previously found [41]. This highlights evidence of community autonomy and ownership of language-planning strategies specifically tailored by the communities themselves. This is a clear example of the blurred lines between macro- and micro-level community language planning, as actors are often tasked with implementing macro-level language-planning strategies on a micro community level. This research study found that local actors and grassroots-based community groups also contributed to the local linguistic landscape and to language development in the Internet space.

As examples of language-planning activities have shown, a large number of Instagram pages have started posting posts about their services in Kazakh, as well as correcting errors and violations of the law related to the Kazakh language on visual information and signage in cities. Most importantly, there are more and more people who want to learn the Kazakh language thanks to interesting projects such as *Kazaksha tea-talk* and clubs such as *Batyl bol*, where there is a friendly, relaxed atmosphere to remove constraints and barriers.

## 8. Conclusions

The present study analyzed the nature of the bottom-up language policy in Kazakhstan. As a result of our research, we have consistently addressed the objectives set in the context of bottom-up language planning in Kazakhstan, such as:

- The main initiatives of grassroots movements in promoting the prestigious status of the Kazakh language were considered;
- The efforts of language activists and the noticeable changes taking place in the language situation were analyzed;

- The attitude of respondents to the policy of multilingualism and the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script was studied;
- The development of the language in the Internet space of the Republic of Kazakhstan was scrutinized.

The conducted sociolinguistic survey helped to determine the respondents' positions regarding the roles of the Kazakh, Russian and English languages in Kazakhstan. It was demonstrated that the popularity of a language, due to its demand in various fields, is associated with the value of the language in terms of advancement in society and achieving a more prestigious position. These studies testify to the real strengthening of the positions of the Kazakh language, the growth of its prestige and the strengthening of the motivation for its study and use in everyday life. There is also a growing interest in English, which is only natural as it is now the language of international communication in tourism, business, science and technology, and its knowledge opens up more opportunities.

Overall, it could be argued that all current efforts include some measure of bottom-up planning, explicitly or implicitly. It can also be stated that the spread of any language can happen because of soft power used by a nation that persuades, rather than imposes, its values and attitudes. Therefore, we consider the systematic introduction of the Kazakh language from the bottom up without any pressure to be effective.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, D.T. and A.A.; methodology, D.T.; software, D.T.; validation, A.A., D.T. and A.Z.; formal analysis, D.T.; investigation, D.T. and A.A.; resources, D.T.; data curation, A.A.; writing—original draft preparation, D.T.; writing—review and editing, A.A. and A.Z.; visualization, D.T.; supervision, A.Z.; project administration, A.Z. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study did not require ethical approval because of national laws and non-existence of such practices as IRB.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** Data are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Spolsky, B. *Rethinking Language Policy*; Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, Scotland, 2022.
2. Sallabank, J. *Attitudes to Endangered Languages: Identities and Policies*; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2013.
3. Baldauf, R.B., Jr. Language planning and policy: Recent trends, future directions. In *Proceedings of the American Association of Applied Linguistics*, Portland, OR, USA, 1–4 May 2004; pp. 1–8.
4. Nysanbaeva, A. Language Policy in Kazakhstan. «Kazakhstani Patriotism Must Adopt the Features of the American. 2003. Available online: <https://centrasia.org/newsA.php?st=1041890340> (accessed on 20 September 2022).
5. Smagulova, J. *On the Principles of Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Main Legislative Documents on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan*; Jurist: Almaty, Kazakhstan, 1996; pp. 11–17.
6. Baldauf, R.B., Jr. Micro language planning. In *Directions in Applied Linguistics; Multilingual Matters*: Bristol, UK, 2005; pp. 227–239.
7. Canagarajah, A.S. *Reclaiming the Local in Language Policy and Practice*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2005.
8. King, K. Language policy and local planning in South America: New directions for enrichment bilingual education in the Andes. *Int. J. Biling. Educ. Biling.* **2004**, *7*, 334–347. [CrossRef]
9. Kazakhstan 2022: A Country Profile. Published by the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Available online: [https://www.gov.kz/uploads/2022/6/21/cd9b96fe6b95dc380c88dade8fae93d2\\_original.61045758.pdf](https://www.gov.kz/uploads/2022/6/21/cd9b96fe6b95dc380c88dade8fae93d2_original.61045758.pdf) (accessed on 21 September 2022).
10. Kazakhstan. Geographical Profile. Union of International Associations. Available online: <https://uia.org/s/geo/en/140000129> (accessed on 21 September 2022).
11. Kazakhstan Population. Available online: <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/kazakhstan-population/> (accessed on 21 September 2022).
12. Results of the 2021 Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Agency of Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan National Bureau of Statistics. Available online: [www.gov.kz](http://www.gov.kz) (accessed on 21 September 2022).

13. Key Socio-Economic Indicators. Bureau of National Statistics. Available online: [www.stat.gov.kz](http://www.stat.gov.kz) (accessed on 23 November 2022).
14. Ahn, E.S.; Smagulova, J. *Language Change in Central Asia*; De Gruyter Mouton: Berlin, Germany, 2016.
15. Lee, C. Languages and ethnic politics in Central Asia: The case of Kazakhstan. *J. Int. Area Stud.* **2004**, *11*, 101–116.
16. Smagulova, J. Language policies of kazakhization and their influence on language attitudes and use. *Int. J. Biling. Educ. Biling.* **2008**, *11*, 440–475. [[CrossRef](#)]
17. Sabitova, Z.; Alishariyeva, A. The Russian language in Kazakhstan: Status and functions. *Russ. J. Commun.* **2015**, *7*, 213–217. [[CrossRef](#)]
18. Smagulova, J. Kazakhstan: Language, identity and conflict. *Innovation* **2006**, *19*, 303–320. [[CrossRef](#)]
19. Tsay, Y.N.; Pagnueva, A.S. To the problem of “Trinity of languages” cultural project realization in the republic of Kazakhstan. *Educ. Sci. Without Bord.* **2011**, *4*, 82.
20. State Program for the Implementation of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2025. Available online: <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P1900001045> (accessed on 25 September 2022).
21. Batyrbekkyzy, G.; Mahanuly, T.K.; Tastanbekov, M.M.; Dinashева, L.S.; Issabek, B.; Sugirbayeva, G. Latinization of Kazakh alphabet: History and prospects. *Eur. J. Sci. Theol.* **2018**, *14*, 125–134.
22. Tanayeva, L. The politics of the Latin alphabet in Kazakhstan. *ALPPI Annu. Lang. Politics Identity* **2007**, *1*, 79–84.
23. Kim, B. Transition of the Kazakh writing system from Cyrillic to Latin. *Int. J. Adv. Cult. Technol.* **2018**, *6*, 12–19.
24. Bazarbayeva, Z.; Zhunisbek, A.; Malbakov, M. Phonological foundations of the transition Kazakh alphabet to Latin graphics. *Life Sci. J.* **2014**, *11*, 147–150.
25. Dotton, Z. Language Policy and Language Planning in Kazakhstan: About the Proposed Shift from the Cyrillic Alphabet to the Latin Alphabet. Ph.D. Thesis, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA, 2016.
26. Baldauf, R.B., Jr. Language planning and policy research: An overview. In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2005; pp. 981–994.
27. Grin, F. *Language Policy Evaluation and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*; Springer: New York, NY, USA, 2003.
28. Kaplan, R.B.; Baldauf, R.B. *Language Planning from Practice to Theory*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 1997; Volume 108.
29. Hornberger, N.H. *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas: Language Planning from the Bottom Up*; Mouton: Berlin, Germany, 1996.
30. Baldauf, R.B. Language policy and planning. *Annu. Rev. Appl. Linguist.* **1994**, *14*, 82–89. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Ager, D.E. Prestige and image planning. In *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2005; pp. 1059–1078.
32. Kaplan, R.B.; Baldauf, R.B. (Eds.) *Language Planning and Policy in Europe*; Multilingual Matters: Bristol, UK, 2005.
33. Hatoss, A. Community-level approaches in language planning: The case of Hungarian in Australia. *Curr. Issues Lang. Plan.* **2006**, *7*, 287–306. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Liddicoat, A.J.; Baldauf, R.B. Language planning in local contexts: Agents, contexts and interactions. In *Language Planning in Location Context*; Doctoral dissertation; Multilingual Matters: North York, ON, Canada, 2008.
35. Paulston, C.B. Language planning. In *Language Planning and Language Education*; George Allen and Unwin: London, UK, 1984; pp. 55–67.
36. Hatoss, A. Agency in bottom-up language planning: Motives of language maintenance in the south Sudanese community of Australia. In *Researching Agency in Language Policy and Planning*; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2018; pp. 35–60.
37. Hornberger, N.H.; McCarty, T.L. Globalization from the bottom up: Indigenous language planning and policy across time, space, and place. *Int. Multiling. Res. J.* **2012**, *6*, 1–7. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Rubin, J. *Bilingual Education and Language Planning*; Language Planning and Language Education; Kennedy, C., Ed.; Allen and Unwin: London, UK, 1983; pp. 4–16.
39. Rubin, J.; Shuy, R. *Language Planning: Current Issues and Research*; Georgetown University Press: Washington, DC, USA, 1973.
40. Van Meter, D.S.; Van Horn Carl, E. The policy implementation process: A conceptual framework. *Adm. Soc.* **1975**, *6*, 445–488. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Van Horn, C.E.; Baumer, D.C.; Gormley, W.T., Jr. *Politics and Public Policy*; Congressional Quarterly Press: Washington, DC, USA, 1989.
42. Haugen, E. *Language Conflict and Language Planning*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2013.
43. Qazaqsha Jaz Project. Available online: <https://www.instagram.com/qazaqshajaz/> (accessed on 16 November 2022).
44. Qazaqsha Jaz: Who and Why Asks to Write on the Internet in the Kazakh Language? Available online: <https://www.the-village-kz.com/village/city/situation/12753-qazaqsha-jaz-kto-i-zachem-prosit-pisat-v-internete-na-kazahskom-yazyke> (accessed on 16 November 2022).
45. Qazaq Grammar Project. Available online: <https://www.instagram.com/qazaqgrammar/> (accessed on 16 November 2022).
46. Kazaksha Tea-Talk Project. Available online: [www.kaztea.com](http://www.kaztea.com) (accessed on 12 November 2022).
47. Batyl Bol Project. Available online: <https://batylbol.kz/> (accessed on 12 November 2022).
48. Korneki Project. Available online: <https://www.instagram.com/kornekiproject/> (accessed on 18 November 2022).
49. Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Issues of Visual Information and Religious Activities”. Available online: <https://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z2100000094/history> (accessed on 3 February 2023).
50. QialDub Studio Project. Available online: <https://www.instagram.com/qialdub/> (accessed on 15 November 2022).

51. Apple's iOS 16 Features: Kazakh as System Language. Available online: <https://qazmonitor.com/lifestyle/446/apples-ios-16-features-kazakh-as-system-language> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
52. InDrive in Kazakhstan. Available online: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/InDrive> (accessed on 10 November 2022).
53. Kazakhstan's Super App: Kaspi.kz. Available online: <https://www.generalistlab.com/insights/finance/kazakhstans-superapp-kaspi-kz/> (accessed on 12 November 2022).
54. QOS Online Movie Theatre. Available online: <https://qos.ltd> (accessed on 12 November 2022).
55. 2022—The Year of Children in Kazakhstan and June 1—International Children's Day. Available online: [http://tkaim.kz/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=648%3A2022-1-&catid=35%3A2011-04-02-05-10-11&lang=en](http://tkaim.kz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=648%3A2022-1-&catid=35%3A2011-04-02-05-10-11&lang=en) (accessed on 15 November 2022).
56. Kazakhstan Releases Nickelodeon and Tiji Cartoons in Kazakh. Available online: <https://astanatimes.com/2022/05/kazakhstan-releases-nickelodeon-and-tiji-cartoons-in-kazakh/> (accessed on 15 November 2022).
57. Mamyrbayev, O.; Turdalyuly, M.; Mekebayev, N.; Alimhan, K.; Kydyrbekova, A.; Turdalykyzy, T. Automatic recognition of Kazakh speech using deep neural networks. In Proceedings of the Asian Conference on Intelligent Information and Database Systems, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 8–11 April 2019; Springer: Cham, Switzerland, 2019; pp. 465–474.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.