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Research article

## Normalizing a new language hierarchy: Event names in post-Soviet urban space

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### Abstract

Naming practices not only reveal ideological contestation in a particular community, but also contribute to the discursive construction of a new social reality. However, the transformative role of naming practices as a semiotic resource for reimagining language hierarchy has been overlooked. This socio-onomastics study aims to explore shifting ideological premises and semiotic mechanisms of normalizing a new language hierarchy in post-Soviet urban space. In doing so, the study diachronically examines naming practices of choosing and using event names, which are more fluid and often short-lived in comparison to other names such as toponyms, anthroponyms or brand names. The study analyses 1246 unique event names mentioned in a local Russian-language newspaper “Вечерний Алматы” (“Vechernii Almaty”) over the period of time from 1989 to 2019. The results show a decrease in the use of Russian for name production. Further examination reveals a steady increase in non-integrated event names in Kazakh and English in Russian-language newspaper texts; there are few examples of translation and transliteration, no examples of transcription or loanwords in more recent texts. Our comparison shows that in the context of the multilingual Almaty transgressing the purist norms of standard Russian has become a new norm. We argue that these new local strategies of naming and using names are a semiotic mechanism of domination; they work to normalize a new language hierarchy where the Russian language is no longer the only dominant code of the public and official domain. Our account adds to the discussion of the discursive power of naming in challenging dominant language practices.

**Keywords:** *Naming practices, language ideology, language hierarchy, semiotic strategy, Russian, Kazakhstan*

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## Нормализация новой языковой иерархии: Эвентонимы в постсоветском городском пространстве

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### Аннотация

Практики именованя не только раскрывают идеологическое противостояние в конкретном сообществе, но и способствуют дискурсивному построению новой социальной реальности. Однако преобразующая роль практики именованя как семиотического ресурса для переосмысления языковой иерархии была малоизучена. Целью данного социономастического исследования является анализ меняющихся идеологических предпосылок и семиотических механизмов нормализации новой языковой иерархии в постсоветском городском пространстве. Для этого описываются изменения в названиях различных общественных мероприятий, которые являются более гибкими и часто недолговечными по сравнению с такими названиями, как топонимы, антропонимы или торговые марки. В исследовании анализируется 1246 уникальных эвентонимов, упомянутых в местной русскоязычной газете «Вечерний Алматы» за период с 1989 по 2019 гг. Результаты показывают снижение использования русского языка для создания названий. Дальнейшее изучение выявило устойчивый рост неинтегрированных эвентонимов на казахском и английском языках в русскоязычных газетных текстах; в более поздних текстах мало примеров перевода и транслитерации, нет примеров транскрипции или заимствований. Данный сравнительный анализ показывает, что в контексте многоязычного Алматы нарушение пуристских норм стандартного русского языка стало новой нормой. Мы утверждаем, что эти новые локальные стратегии именованя и использования имен представляют собой семиотический механизм символического доминирования; они работают на нормализацию новой языковой иерархии, в которой русский язык больше не является единственным доминирующим кодом общественного и официального домена. Наше исследование вносит вклад в понимание дискурсивной силы именованя в процессе изменения языковых практиках.

**Ключевые слова:** *практики именованя, языковая идеология, языковая иерархия, семиотическая стратегия, русский язык, Казахстан*

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## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the transformative role of naming practices as a semiotic resource for the discursive construction of a new language hierarchy. “It is the essential strategy of language dominance to establish the hierarchy of languages as if it were the natural order of things” (Kasuya 2001: 235). During the Soviet time the taken-for-granted representation of Russian as the supreme language of the Soviet Union was naturalized through various kinds of metalinguistic discourses (Smagulova & Suleimenova, forthcoming). This

qualitative study proposes a historical perspective on naming practices in the linguistic landscape with the purpose of identifying semiotic strategies challenging the previously established hierarchy of languages in urban Kazakhstan, where Russian used to be the single dominant language of public and official spheres. This study aims to analyze changing naming practices as a semiotic strategy of normalizing a new language hierarchy in post-Soviet space. Specifically, the paper examines: a) the transformation of naming of various public events – political, sports and cultural events, e.g., fora, concerts, exhibitions, etc., in Kazakhstan’s largest city Almaty over a period of 30 years, from 1989 to 2019, and b) changes in uses of event names in a Russian-language newspaper. Diachronic analysis of both removal and introduction of languages and scripts (Pavlenko & Mullen 2015) in event names contributes to the discussion of language ideologies in the context of sociolinguistic change.

Our decision to focus on naming practices stems from the conviction that names and their meanings “structure and nuance the way we see, understand and imagine the world” (Peteet 2005: 154) and that “shifts over time in the naming patterns may provide a very powerful indicator of profound societal shifts” (Lieberson 1984: 85). The paper draws from critically-oriented literature on the linguistic landscape (LL), critical and socio-onomastics, and language ideology which share an understanding of language as a symbolic form of power. While differentiating people, places, events, brands, and actions, names are foremost symbolic systems of identification that provide ways of knowing and being; “construct and reify human bonds and social divisions” (Charmaz 2006: 396). Because of the symbolic salience of names, there is a continuous rivalry for monopoly in production of names. Bourdieu (1991: 239) observes that this struggle for the monopoly of legitimate naming is actually a struggle to impose the legitimate vision of the social world and positions in that world<sup>1</sup>. This symbolic struggle for the production of names is most visible in linguistic landscape and toponymy. Public signs and place names, as it was established by various studies, reflect the relative power and status of the different speakers and languages in a specific sociolinguistic context (cf. Landry & Bourhis 1997, Ben-Rafael et al. 2006, Gorter 2006, Shohamy et al. 2010, Blommaert 2013, Giraut & Houssay-Holzschach 2016). It is well known that the majority language or higher prestige language is more likely to be used in place, event and corporate names and other public signage while some languages are silenced and made invisible.

Naming practices not only reveal ideological contestation in particular communities, but they also contribute to the discursive construction of new social

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the authors’ older relatives who lived through the events of 1917 stubbornly refused to use *Октябрьская революция* ‘The October Revolution’ (when the Soviets came to power) and referred to the event as *переворот* ‘the coup’, saying that there was only one revolution – *Февральская революция* ‘The February Revolution’ when the monarchy was overthrown (personal communication). For them this contestation of the official event name was about questioning the legitimacy of the Soviet regime.

realities and transformation of language practices. Moscovici and Duveen (2000: 45) argue that by naming something we “endow it with a genealogy ...[and] locate it in the identity matrix of our culture.” Because proper names are important cultural signs indexing social and cultural roots, naming practices are a continuous process of actualization, reaffirming and transforming identities. Thus, renaming places, people, events, actions and things as a way to discursively construct a new social reality has become a standard practice (Peteet 2005: 153). Official public signs, such as street and place names, are sanctioned by local authorities precisely because public space is an important political arena for the enforcement of language policies and new identities. Peteet (2005) shows, for example, the way Israeli colonial power crafts imaginaries about occupied places by controlling the naming of events, actions, places and people in occupied Palestinian territories. Manipulating the linguistic landscape is widely used in post-colonial, post-imperial, and newly independent states for nation-building purposes (cf. Akzhigitova & Zharkymbekova 2014, Backhaus 2009, Cenoz & Gorter 2006, Hult 2018, Manan et al. 2014, McDermott 2019, Moore 2014, Saparov 2017, Zabrodskaia 2014). In newly independent Kazakhstan, one of the first language policy documents was the decree “On order of naming and renaming of entities, organizations, institutions, railroad stations, airports, and geographical objects in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the change in their spelling” (1996) enforcing the use of Kazakh in linguistic landscape while concurrently affording removal of the Soviet names (Smagulova & Fleming 2020).

Because names carry such a symbolic weight as major instruments for imagining the past and future, the act of naming becomes significant on its own. Naming is an assertion of power; by naming something “the person demonstrates his/her legitimate right to do so” (Vigouroux 2001: 610). In many contexts naming of places, events and actions reinforces past socio-political hierarchies (Puzey 2016); and thus, in situations where socio-cultural tensions are high, counter hegemonic acts of naming become highly symbolic. An attempt to reclaim the original name of Victoria Falls (Nyambi & Mangena 2016) or restoring the old name Almaty instead of the Soviet Alma-Ata are very symbolic acts signaling a new social order.

Numerous onomastics and linguistic landscape studies demonstrate that (re)naming is one of the most favoured strategies for reimagining the world, probably because the characteristics of proper names make them easy to manipulate. Proper names “appear to fall partly inside and partly outside the lexicon and grammar of the average speaker” (Allerton 1987: 61). New names are easily added to the existing name inventory since they can be invented in an ad hoc way or borrowed. Of course, some naming systems are more productive and less conservative than others. While the system of personal names is relatively stable, other naming systems could be extremely fluid. Rivlina (2015), for instance, describes how language and scripts are used in creative and playful ways for

generating new domain names (e.g., ENA, May 15, 2021)<sup>2</sup> continuously. Brand and corporate names is another example of very fluid proper name systems which heavily relies on borrowing or foreignization as a way of creating new names, e.g., Russian brand ‘Vitek’ or Kazakh company ‘Nomad Insurance.’

On the one hand, we see that “[o]ften the connotation of proper names seems to be more important than their denotation” (Edelman 2009: 150). On the other hand, there is some degree of pressure to normalize the appearance and grammar of foreign names, especially when they appear in a text like a newspaper article or advertisement. Some proper names become well integrated into a language (e.g., month names, *в январе* ‘in January’), standing closest of all to common nouns in a language. But not all names are domesticated in accordance to orthographic, semantic, morphological, syntactic and phonological rules; there are proper names which are highly idiosyncratic and language-independent, non-integrated and spelled as they are, for example, *велогонку Tour de France из-за пандемии коронавируса перенесли на конец августа* ‘because of the coronavirus pandemic the Tour de France cycling race was postponed until the end of August.’ In general, the choice of adoption strategy – transcription, transliteration, calque, or direct graphic transfer – is conditioned by language ideology (cf. discussion of linguistic purism in the modern Russian language by Vysotskaya 2010, Špacova 2015), sociolinguistic hierarchy between dominant and marginal culture, and the purpose and activity of translation (Venuti 2003: 18):

<...> the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts.

All in all, numerous studies demonstrate that naming is a political act, and “there is no social agent who does not aspire, as far as his circumstances permit, to have the power to name and create the world through naming” (Bourdieu 1991: 105). However, it is still not very clear how discursive construction of a new language hierarchy is achieved through naming. How does discursive change take place? To address these questions, this paper aims to describe some of the semiotic mechanisms of creating the new hierarchies through naming. In doing so, we diachronically examine naming practices of choosing and using event names, which are more fluid and often short-lived in comparison to more durable names, which are well described in the literature, such as toponyms, anthroponyms or brand names. Our analysis focuses on changes in the language of newspapers which used to be highly prescribed during the Soviet period.

The paper continues with a brief overview of the sociolinguistic context of Russian language use in Kazakhstan and description of the data. The following diachronic socio-onomastics analysis focuses on the changing uses of Russian in naming events in a Russian-language local newspaper over the period of 30 years.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://gepatitu.net/> (accessed 13 November 2021).

## 2. Russian in Kazakhstan: A sociolinguistic context

Almaty is an excellent site for studying historical discontinuity and semiotic strategies of normalizing a new language hierarchy. The history of the city reflects the fact that Kazakhstan did not have much of a history of independence until 1991. Fort Verny ('faithful' in Russian) was founded as an Imperial military stronghold by the Tsarist colonial regime in 1854 on the lands of an early local settlement. The city was renamed Almaty (an ancient form of adjective from 'apple' in Turkic languages) in 1921 after it became a Soviet city and the new government began the policy of nativization. Almaty was the capital of the Kazakh Autonomous Socialist Republic (as a part of the Russian Federation) from 1927 to 1936 and then the capital of the newly established Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic from 1936 to 1997 when the capital was relocated to Tselinograd (first renamed Akmola, then Astana, and lastly Nur Sultan). While Almaty remains one of the most russified cities in Kazakhstan, the country's largest megapolis has experienced a dramatic shift in its demographics. In 1991, the year of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its population was 1,086,000, of which less than a quarter were ethnic Kazakhs. The population increased to 1,896,000 residents in 2019 (a 75% increase in comparison to 1991) and Kazakhs made up two thirds of the population.

Throughout modern history the city existed in a state of structural inequality and asymmetrical bilingualism (cf. Olcott 1995, Laitin 1998m Smagulova 2008m Bissenova 2017). While Kazakh was used in education, media and cultural domains, it was rarely used in everyday interaction in the field of government, science, health care, technology and entertainment. Russian became the dominant language and grew to be perceived as an intrinsically superior language as result of a myriad of factors (discussed in more detail in Smagulova 2008) such as the Soviet policy of language unification, the totalitarian political regime and hierarchical structure of the Soviet Union, mass immigration of Russian-speaking population, the demographic prevalence of Russian speakers in urban centers, limited institutional support for Kazakh, the prestige associated with Russian and Russian speakers, and the impossibility of social advancement without Russian proficiency.

After the 1991 independence, the political legitimacy of the state and the privileged status of ethnic Kazakhs has been discursively constructed through the ideology of a monolingual nation-state. This implied challenging the role of Russian by reclaiming political, linguistic, cultural ground that had been yielded to Russian during the Soviet period. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kazakh is the sole state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Russian, which was given the status of the language of interethnic communication in 1989 (Law on Languages in the Kazakh SSR), in 1995 was upgraded to a language that can be used along with Kazakh for official purposes (The Constitution 1995, Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan 1997). In addition to reinstating Kazakh as a fully-fledged state language (Order On principles of language policy in the RK 1996, Order On the principles of formation of state identity of the RK 1996, Decree on State program of developing languages 1996,

Decree on implementation of the state program 2001, Ministry of Culture of the PK 2001, Ministry of Culture of the RK 2011, etc.), the nation-building agenda included establishing Kazakh as a language of education (Ministry of Education and Science of the RK 2010), developing a “pure” Kazakh standard language free of Russian elements, reshaping the linguistic landscape by replacing Russian names with Kazakh, rewriting the history of Kazakhstan to demonstrate the continuous presence of Kazakh on the Kazakh land, etc. (Decree On naming and renaming 1996, Decree on terminological committee 1998, Decree on onomastics 1998, Decree on expanding the use of Kazakh in government offices 1998, Decree on placing product information 1998, etc.).

At the same time, there is a growing importance of English which is highly visible in linguistic landscape and branding (Smagulova and Fleming 2020). Kazakhstani authorities activity promote trilingual policy in education which is aimed at developing proficiency in three languages – Kazakh, Russian and English for all students defined by the cultural project “Trinity of Languages” (Ministry of Education and Science of the RK 2007), the roadmap of trilingual education (Ministry of Education and Science of the RK 2015), new education standards (Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2018), salary increase for teachers teaching in English (Ministry of Education and Science of the RK 2020). There are several schools and universities where English is the only medium of instruction. Researchers are encouraged to publish internationally, which implies publishing in English. All in all, English now is an important language in the national linguistic repertoire.

Amid this physically palpable transformation of the broader political and public discourse and linguistic landscape in favour of the national Kazakh language and the global English, Russian persists as a regional lingua franca and a major choice in urban public domains, academia, media and publishing. Despite the apparent perpetuation in the use of Russian, there are signs that the dominance of Russian is being challenged and a new linguistic hierarchy is emerging. This context offers an excellent opportunity to examine the process and semiotic mechanisms of reimagining a language hierarchy.

### **3. Data and methodology**

The paper presents a socio-onomastics analysis of 1246 unique names of events extracted from the city Russian-language daily newspaper “Вечерний Алматы” (“Evening Almaty”). For understanding the process of change, it is important to know not only what is displayed now, but also what has been removed and what has been added to the landscape, as Pavlenko & Mullen (2015: 114) poignantly explain: “while signs do operate in aggregate, the common focus on all signs at *a single point in time* (italic by the authors) on one street is problematic because the interpretation of signs is diachronic in nature, intrinsically linked to the preceding signs in the same environment and to related signs elsewhere.” Therefore,

we argue that the use of event names in a local daily newspaper over a period of time provides an excellent dataset to illustrate changes of naming practices. Because of time limitations, the data was collected from the issues published in four three-year periods: 1989–1991, 1999–2001, 2009–2011, and 2016–2019. In total we collected data covering a period of 30 years – from pre-independence 1989 to 2019.

The selection of “Вечерний Алматы” (“Evening Almaty”) as a source of our data is not arbitrary. It is an official city news outlet. It has been published daily since January 1968. The newspaper prints news about Almaty and its citizens, reports about the work of city municipality and its structures, as well as provides information about culture, sports and public life. Because of its nature, it is in this newspaper that one can find announcements, mentions, descriptions and reports about most of the city events, at least about the major city functions. The decision to collect mentions of event names in a newspaper also stems from the assumption that “media texts constitute a sensitive barometer of socio-cultural change, and they should be seen as valuable material for researching change” (Fairclough 1995: 52). Indeed, even at first glance it is hard not to notice the change in the nature of events over time. In the last years of the Soviet era, dominant events were numerous nameless Communist Party functions; today the reports of events are dominated by various concerts, shows, exhibitions, sports competitions, etc., most with unique names.

We collected word types, not tokens; more specifically we collected only one mention of a unique event name per year. For example, the name of a crafts bazaar “Краски Азии” (“The Colours of Asia”) was counted once, even though the name of the event was mentioned in the article a couple of times (or two tokens in one text). We understand the limitation of this approach as it does not provide a full quantitative picture, yet under the circumstances it was the only feasible way to collect data. The earlier issues of the newspaper were not available electronically, no photographing was permitted; there was limitation on the number of pages scanned, and a long wait time was required. Therefore, we chose to count only word types to make the process more efficient and less time consuming.

Since the main concern in socio-onomastics is name variation (Ainiala 2016), our analysis looked for variations of language and scripts in event names over times. The data was sorted into the following categories – Russian, Kazakh, English, Bilingual, Mixed and Bivalent. While in general there were no problem categorizing event names by languages because Kazakh, Russian and English are linguistically distinct, we, however, created a separated category for bivalent personal names to account for ambiguous names.

In the following sections we present the quantitative results, describe changing strategies of incorporating foreign words in the Russian-language text and analyze how these strategies hint at the emergence of a new language hierarchy.



#### 4. Use of event names in a Russian-medium newspaper

The study results unmistakably point at changing naming practices after Kazakhstan became an independent state. There has been a sharp decrease in the use of Russian, a steady increase in the use of Kazakh, and an upsurge in the use of English. Table 1 summarizes changes in the choice of languages for naming events. As we can see, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian was the dominant choice for naming events: in 1989–1991 about two thirds of all event names were in Russian. Many of the events were ideological in nature and had standard, Soviet government approved names such as *Праздник дружбы “Пою мое Отечество”* (Friendship festival “Lauding my Motherland”) or *массовое гулянье, посвященное Дню железнодорожника “Стальными маршрутами пятилетки”* (mass/folk festivities dedicated to the Railroad worker day “By steel routes of a five-year plan”). The share of the event names in Russian declined rapidly during the first decade of independence and has stayed steady since the early 2000s. One would expect that with the backdrop of nation-building, Kazakh would become the dominant choice in naming of events. However, as we can see it is English that is fast overtaking Russian and to an even larger extent Kazakh when it comes to creating names for various events. As the data show, the share of event names in English went from zero in 1991 to 34% in 2016–2019.

Table 1

Change in event names by languages (1989–2019)

Languages	Examples	1989–1991		1999–2001		2009–2011		2016–2019	
Russian	<i>выставка “Цветы Алма-Аты”</i> (exhibition “The Flowers of Almaty”)	113	73%	49	41%	63	35%	279	35%
Kazakh	<i>фестиваль “Шығыс сәні”</i> (festival “The Eastern Beauty”)	33	21%	38	32%	57	32%	137	17%
English	<i>благотворительный концерт “Art 4 Peace”</i> (charity concert “Art 4 Peace”)	0	0%	19	16%	35	20%	273	34%
Bilingual	<i>акция “Жасыл жапырақ – Зелёный лист”</i> (campaign “Green Leaf”)	6	4%	4	3%	8	5%	10	1,5%
Mixed (Kaz+Eng)	<i>форум “Media Құрылтай”</i> (Forum “Media Council”)	1	0,7%	0	0%	2	1%	66	8%
Mixed (Rus+Eng)	<i>показ мод “Baby Fashion: мои наряды от семейного кутюр”</i> (Fashion show “Baby fashion: My Outfits from Family Coutures”)	0	0%	2	2%	4	2%	21	3%
Mixed (Kaz+Rus)	<i>спортивная акция “Здоровый Наурыз”</i> (Sport campaign “Healthy Novruz”)	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	3	0,5%
Bivalent personal names	<i>ежегодная альпиниада “Нурсултан-2016”</i> (annual mass ascend “Nursulatan 2016”)	2	1,3%	7	6%	9	5%	5	1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>155</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>100%</b>

While event names in Kazakh are not quantitatively dominant, the changing strategies of incorporating event names in Kazakh in Russian-language newspaper

texts is revealing. Over the years we have observed a transition in the use of names in Kazakh, from transliteration of Kazakh words in accordance with the Russian pronunciation norms to transplanting of non-integrated Kazakh words in Russian texts. Kazakh and Russian use the same Cyrillic alphabet, but Kazakh has several additional letters to signify language-specific sounds. If the word has no Kazakh-specific sounds it is difficult to determine whether the word is spelled in its original form or transliterated. However, phonological differences and grammar marking allowed us to categorize names as transliterated or transplanted. As Table 2 shows, the share of transliterated names has decreased dramatically over time.

Table 2

Change in transliteration of names in Kazakh

	1989–1991	1999–2001	2009–2011	2016–2019
All event names in Kazakh	33	37	57	131
Transliterated	13	21	14	10
Share of transliterated names	39%	57%	25%	8%

Figure 1 is an example to illustrate the trend. In 1990 Almaty launched an international music competition “The Voice of Asia.” The event was first mentioned in the newspaper in 1989 and it was in Russian, “Голос Азии.” In 1990, the name was translated into Kazakh and its use in the text became bilingual: *Голос Азии – Азия даусы*. (Here and after Kazakh is in boldface). Please note that initially the Kazakh version was transcribed ‘*даусы*’ [daUsy] in accordance with its Russian pronunciation. In the bilingual version mentioned in 1991, the Kazakh variant was already spelled in accordance with the Kazakh orthography ‘*дауысы*’ [dauYsy]. From 1994 until its termination in 2005 the international festival was mentioned in the newspaper only as an undomesticated direct graphic transfer of the Kazakh name.



Figure 1. Office of the ‘Asia Dauysy’ festival<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Source: [https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Азия\\_Дауысы#/media/Файл:VoiceofAsiaDoor.JPG](https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Азия_Дауысы#/media/Файл:VoiceofAsiaDoor.JPG) (accessed 13 November 2021).

The trend continues as the more recent samples demonstrate. Examples below show variation in the use of transliterated and transplanted form of the same event name. An annual stair climbing competition has been held in Almaty for 30 years. The full distance is 841 stairs from the level of the skating rink Medeu to the dam at the top. The name of the event is *Баспалдақ* ‘stairs’. Initially the name was transliterated (replacing Kazakh uvular [q] with velar [k]) and explained, glossed, e.g., *ежегодный бег по лестнице “Баспалдак”* (annual run up the stairs “Baspladak”). We encountered the first direct graphic transfer of the name “*Баспалдақ*” in 2009; it was accompanied by the Russian equivalent “*Бег по лестнице.*” Since then, we have observed variation of domesticated or undomesticated forms as the following examples 1–3 illustrate. In Example 1, the name is well integrated; it is transliterated and shows grammatical marking of the Russian prepositional case. In Example 2 we see two event names, one of which is transliterated (“*Баспалдак*”) while the other name in the same sentence is transplanted (“*Спорттық Алматы*”). Finally, in Example 3, we see the use of the unintegrated event name in the Kazakh script with specific uvular stop [q].

- (1) *Их можно встретить в легкоатлетических забегах, на “Баспалдаке”, лыжных гонках, футбольных турнирах и других соревнованиях.* (22 September 2017)

One could meet them at races, at “**Baspaldak**+ Prep. Case ending”, ski races, football tournaments and other competitions.

- (2) *В урочище Медеу в рамках программы “Спорттық Алматы” состоялся 30-й забег по лестнице “Баспалдак-2018”* (25 September 2018)

Under the umbrella of “**Sporttyq Almaty**” (Sporty Almaty) campaign the 30th stair climbing competition “**Baspaldak**” took place in the Medeu gorge.

- (3) *В субботу, 14 сентября, на селезащитной плотине в урочище Медеу состоится массовый забег “Баспалдақ – 2019”.* (12 September 2019)

“**Baspaldaq**” mass race will be held on Saturday, September 14, at the mudflow central dam in the Medeu gorge.

As we can see, the names of long-running events are transformed gradually from integrated (translated, transliterated, domesticated) to non-integrated forms. Recently we noticed a tendency for the transplantation of not only unintegrated words but also whole phrases in the Russian text, as the next example demonstrates:

- (4) *Назову здесь лишь некоторые из запланированных и успешно осуществляемых в связи с поставленными целями мероприятий: айтыс молодых акынов “Менің пірім – Сүйінбай”, конкурс патриотической песни “Мой Казахстан”, поэтический онлайн-конкурс молодых поэтов “Мен елімді жырлаймын!”, историко-познавательная лекция-путешествие “Ұлы жібек жолымен”, дебатный турнир “Молодежь Великой степи: общество,*

образование, будущее”, международный молодежный фестиваль “**Абай руханияты**”. (ENA, February 19, 2019)<sup>4</sup>.

I will name just some of the planned events successfully taking place to fulfill the stated aims: aitys (song competition) of young akyns (singer + Plural ending) “**Mening pirim – Suinbai**” (My friend Suinbai), patriotic song contest “My Kazakhstan”, online competition of young poets “**Men elimdi jyrlaimyn**” (I sing my country), history educational lecture “**Uly jibek joly**men” (On the Great Silk Road), debate tournament “The youth of the Great Steppe: Society, education, future”, international youth festival “**Abai rukhaniaty**” (Abai’s spirituality).

Our data also shows that in addition to the expected frequent use of well assimilated and integrated loanwords from Kazakh to refer to local realia such as *akyn* and *aitys*, newspaper texts are peppered with other unintegrated foreign names. This practice is very different from the prescribed norms of the standard Russian (cf. Gorham 2000a, Ermolovich 2001, Vysotskaya 2010, Basovskaya 2011, Špackova 2015). The difference between regional variety and the standard mainstream Russian is more visible in the use of event names in English. They are almost always unintegrated, as the following illustration shows, with very few exceptions such as *праздник алматинских мамочек Мама Пати* (celebration of Almaty mommies “**Мама Party**”).

(5) *В рамках событийного туризма ежегодно проводится не менее 50 мероприятий международного масштаба, таких как Международный джазовый фестиваль, **Spirit of Tengri, Star of Asia, Парад оркестров, Алматы Коктобе Опера, Apple Fest, Tour of Almaty, Almaty Marathon, Almaty Mount Fest.***

(In the framework of event tourism not less than 50 events of international calibre are organized annually, such as International Jazz Festival, **Spirit of Tengri, Star of Asia**, Parade of Orchestras, Almaty Koktobe Opera, **Apple Fest, Tour of Almaty, Almaty Marathon, Almaty Mount Fest.**)

Example 5 evidently demonstrates that the local variety of Russian is also conditioned for use of the Latin script. As readers may know, Kazakhstan had decided to switch to the Latin-based alphabet by 2025. Indeed, in our data we have numerous examples of use of the Latin script for event names in Kazakh such as *день скачек Qazaqstan Tulpary* (horse race day **Kazakh Tulpar**) or *благотворительная акция Ashyq Jurek* (charity campaign **Open Heart**). The share of event names in the Latin-based Kazakh alphabet has increased from 1% in 2009–2011 to 9% in 2016–2019. There are also many event names created through the play and mixing of languages and scripts when even Russian words are written in the Latin script. For example, the bicycle race “*Home Credit Kosmos Uphill*” (*космос* ‘space’) or the children’s festival “*Happy Belka Nice Fest*” (*белка* ‘squirrel’).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kaznpu.kz/ru/6713/press/> (accessed 13 November 2021).

To sum up, while the data provides evidence of continuous maintenance of Russian in Almaty, it also shows that the use of Russian for creating event names has decreased since the Soviet era. When it comes to domesticating foreign proper names and script choice, our data point at the emergence of practices of transgressing norms of standard Russian. The majority of event names used in the Russian-language newspaper texts are unchanged foreign words in their original alphabets; they are often not translated, nor explicitly glossed (explained). This usage presupposes readers' familiarity with the Kazakh and English languages and alphabets. The naming practice of inserting unintegrated foreign names in the Russian text is taken for granted. Most significant is the lack of public commentary about non-standard lexical borrowings which seems to indicate that frequent use of unassimilated lexical items from Kazakh and English is perceived as a norm. Overall, the data seems to indicate that the multilingualism is increasingly visible and normative and 'otherness' in the Russian text is now taken for granted.

## 5. Discussion

Promotion of language purism and highly prescriptive grammar became an important tool for both the homogenization of the Soviet-Russian literary language, the symbolic legitimization of the Soviet party regime (Gorham 2000b, 2006), and homogenisation of the population across the Soviet Union. This is not a unique strategy, and as Vigouroux (2001) reminds us, language policy is often used to control population. Not surprisingly, during the Soviet period newspapers and other mass-media became a key tool of instilling language culture (in Russian 'культура речи') and developing the population's oral and written skills (Basovskaya 2011).

Language purism defined the practices of borrowing new words in Russian. The long-standing tradition of domesticating foreign proper names in the standard Russian has been guided by the principle expressed by Reformatskij (1972: 56, cited from Yavari 2017: 220): "Translation seeks to make 'other' maximally 'own'; transcription strives to save 'other' though the means of 'own.'" Typically, foreign proper names would be translated, calqued, transliterated or transcribed (Ermolovich 2001). However, since the break-up of the Soviet Union the situation has changed. Gorham (2000a: 629) notes that with the disappearance of the tight centralized control of mass media by the Communist Party, the polyphony of voices present "a direct challenge to the purifying and nationalizing efforts of language specialists." This trend is more prominent at the new periphery of the Russian-speaking world. In contrast to public discussion in Russia of rapid language change and even proposals to prohibit borrowings from English in the 'mainland' Russian (cf. Poplavski 2014, Kozlova 2019), in Kazakhstan we find that the use of unadapted names is common and there is a lack of such public commentary about the practice.

In order for symbolic power to be exercised, it has to be taken for granted, internalized. The naming practice of inserting unintegrated foreign names in the Russian text is taken for granted. The lack of public commentary allows us to claim

that it became a well-accepted norm. This ‘tacitly accepted norm’ (Pavlenko 2012) is transformative – it creates a social space for generating new values and new language hierarchies because using undomesticated foreign names has powerful symbolic connotations. For one, not all readers are fluent in all the three languages, so these names, in fact, may impede text comprehension. Using unintegrated Kazakh and English event names immediately shifts a ‘text’s cultural identity’ (Sato 2017: 16) and sensitizes readers to multilingual and multiscript practices.

The new use of unintegrated names in Kazakhstan Russian-language newspapers is not just a lexical act of inserting untranslatable and untamed proper names; it is a socially meaningful act. Not only does it serve as a contextual expression of social and cultural identity, it indicates that Russian no longer has a monopoly in name production. This act signals a shift in power:

<...> the words that circulate most profusely and effectively are usually those of the dominant forces as well. Their categories and terms of discourse render domination natural, and part of the taken-for-granted, if you will, as if there were no other possible alternatives. Words are extraordinarily important for the way they embody ideological significance and circulate moral attributes. In other words, in a conflict setting the words chosen from a vast lexicon to describe events, actions, peoples, places and social phenomena reverberate with, uphold or contest power (Peteet 2005: 254).

The naming practice also accentuates that Russian, previously the main donor language in the Soviet hierarchy of ‘mutually enriching’ languages, has become a receptor language. This trend has been already documented by Alisharieva, Ibraeva & Protassova (2017: 258) who even claim that the local Russian has “acquired autonomy from the global Russian.” We would argue that we are observing the process of domestication of Russian, the process of gaining ownership over local Russian, the process of establishing new local norms of usage and a new language hierarchy.

## 6. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze some of the semiotic mechanisms of constructing a new language hierarchy and challenging dominant language ideologies. Our comparison of the present and past naming practices allows us to conclude that in the context of a multilingual Almaty, transgressing the norms of the Russian standard has become a new norm and this new norm is transformative. The usage of foreign proper names, Kazakh and English, in newspaper texts in modern Kazakhstan radically diverges from the purist tradition; we have encountered very few examples of translation, no examples of transcription or calques/loanwords, and transliteration is decreasing. We also see that Russian is no longer dominant in event naming production. We argue that the local strategies of naming and using names are a semiotic mechanism of domination. They work to normalize a new language hierarchy where Russian is no longer a principal language. We believe

that more similar studies are needed if we want to understand how change takes place and what are the other semiotic strategies for challenging dominant ideologies.

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