“You Should Speak Kazakhsha:” Scales and Super-Diversity

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Singer-songwriter Son Pascal’s career reads something like a geographical game of “Mad Libs”: an Italian musician, living in Kazakhstan and singing in English, has a hit with a tri-lingual rap anthem about Kazakh ethno-linguistic nationalism. Only on the Internet, one might say, or only in an age of globalization; Pascal's career seems like a case study of what Vertovec (2007) calls “superdiversity,” a new paradigm of porous boundaries and creative chaos. Chaotic though it may be, there is nothing random about the use of languages in “You Should Speak Kazakhsha.” Exorting people, in English, to speak Kazakh seems like a contradiction, given the reputation of English as a “killer language” in globalizing communities and the all-too-recent anxieties of Kazakhs about Russification (Dave 2007). But Pascal's song is not ironic—rather, it targets a young, tech-savvy audience of urban Kazakhstanis.

For the analysis of multilingualism in globalization, Jan Blommaert (2005) has proposed the concept of scales, which orient language practices in both space and time. This provides an ideal framework with which to wrestle with a translocal performer and a multilingual performance, and to untangle the complexities of superdiverse contexts. In particular, by using a set of hierarchically ordered scales, we can tease out the complex history of Kazakhstan as part of the former Soviet Union, and the different ways ethnic Kazakhs may identify themselves through language. In doing so, we will see the utility of a multi-valent “glonacal” (Marginson and Rhoades 2002) perspective on globalization, one that resists binarization in favor of embracing multiple levels of meaning and the layered simultaneity (Blommaert 2005:130) that undergirds all discourse.

The rest of the paper will be organized as follows: first, I will review the notion of “scale” and how it relates to a “glonacal” perspective on multilingualism. Second, I will briefly review the relevant history of Kazakhstan's multilingual situation, and propose how scales can help us understand the various, sometime conflicting indexicalities of the major languages of the region. Thirdly, these scales will be applied to a close analysis of code-switching in Pascal's music, specifically “You Should Speak Kazakhsha.”
1. Sociolinguistic Scales

What is obvious from the case of Pascal and other such translocal performances is that something is moving—not just a person from place to place, but discourse from one semiotic context to another. Blommaert (2007) and Blommaert et al (2005) use the concept of *scale* to situate this discursive movement, and more generally the movement of linguistic practices through a globalized world. Blommaert (2007) defines scale as a “historical TimeSpace,” relating it to Goffman’s notion of discursive frame (1974) and Bakhtin’s (1981) chronotope. Unlike these constructs, however, Blommaert's scales have an inherent stratification: local scales are below global ones, momentary below timeless, specific below general, etc. This is different from simple orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003) in that scales are concretely grounded in a particular “slice” of physical space and time: thus when Blommaert speaks of a local scale, he is speaking of a particular location, while at the same identifying properties of all local scales in contrast to global ones. This falls naturally out of his earlier discussion (Blommaert 2005:130-137) of layered simultaneity. Simply put: the context surrounding a particular bit of discourse seems to vary depending on how widely or narrowly we construe that context. But in truth, “the” singular context does not exist; there are multiple contexts, on multiple scales, that interact in complex and sometimes contradictory ways to inform and influence our moment-by-moment communication. He gives the example of how university students should address their professors: the range of scales involved include the nature of a specific interaction, the habits and preference of those particular individuals, the norms established by the university as an institution and by the tradition of university education in general, other social categories to which both professor and student belong, etc. Some of these scales are large, encompassing many countries and centuries of tradition, and change slowly; others are ephemeral and involve the moment-by-moment interactions of a few people.

Blommaert concerns himself chiefly not with the semiotic content of a particular scale so much as the moments when discourse moves from one to another (“upscaling” and “downscaling”) and how a text created within one scale may be reinterpreted and reentexualized at another—sometimes with dramatic differences in meaning. However, despite the firm grounding of scale in physical space and time—or perhaps because of it—what exactly “global” and “local” mean in a given discourse, and the axes along which these are differentiated, are specific to each discourse context. Similarly, the meanings available when communicating at a particular scale are constructed within the discourse context, not *a priori*, and must be identified independently.

Thus the exact parameters of “local” and “global” are moving targets, constructed and reconstructed in the moment for specific communicative needs; but what do we do when are more than two points of contrast, as in a multilingual (rather than merely bilingual) discourse? Can we interpolate within the binary opposition one or more intermediate scales? Using a very different definition of “scale” from Blommaert's, Marginson and Rhoades (2002) do just that. They propose a “GloNaCal heuristic,” one which recognizes multiple parallel scales—local, national, regional and global—each featuring different actors, different resources, and different constraints. We can also also apply a modified form of such a multivalent heuristic to the more abstracted discursive scales that Blommaert proposes. Our world is not broadly divided into our moment-to-moment personal experience and a vast, homogenous everything else; we can talk about a variety of intermediate scales in both space (a community, a region, a state, a continent) and time.
(a semester, a decade, a generation). Recognizing this plurality of scales in the semiotic sense gives us powerful additional insight into how upscaling and downscaling work, what moves are available in a given discourse event, and what these moves accomplish.

It also helps us recognize what Bhatt (2008) calls “third space,” though “third” becomes something of a misnomer in the absence of strict binary opposition. Bhatt proposes the third space as the site of hybridization, where categorical dichotomies such as traditional/modern and local/global are actively broken down and rebuilt into new combinations and new meanings. In a framework of multiple, parallel scales, we can still identify such points where scales intersect and come into creative conflict: these chutes and ladders allow us to move dynamically between scales and invoke elements of two or more simultaneously. By clearly delineating the scales on which discourse operates, we see more clearly where they meet, blur, and come together. One such site of this blurring, in contemporary Kazakhstan, is language politics in a multilingual state.

2. Multilingual Scales in Kazakhstan

Under Soviet rule, which lasted until 1991, the territory of present-day Kazakhstan was subject to drastic demographic changes and intensive cultural Russification (Olcott 1995:185, Akiner 1995:45). While an extremely high percentage of ethnic Kazakhs continued to claim Kazakh as their mother tongue throughout the Soviet period, from the 1970 Soviet census on it became clear that large numbers of them were bilingual in Russian (Silver 1975, Suleimenova et al 2007) and in the 1980s it was frequently claimed that as many as 40% of ethnic Kazakh children and teens did not know Kazakh well enough to hold a conversation (Dave 2007:52-3, Fierman 2010). The actual number may have been as little as 20% (Suleimenova et al 2007) but the higher statistic took hold of the national imagination, stoking anxieties about the loss of culture and identity.

In December 1991, Kazakhstan became an independent republic. This new state was conceived of as the property of the Kazakh ethnic group, first and foremost, and other ethnic groups resided there as their “guests” (Kolstø 1998, Akiner 1995:71, Sürrücü 2005). There has also been another demographic shift, with large numbers of non-Kazakhs emigrating as the number of ethnic Kazakhs has risen (O Beachain and Kevlihan 2011, Kolstø 1998, Dave 2007:103). But the Russian language has remained prominent, and efforts to completely replace it with Kazakh (or English) are contentious (Sürrücü 2005, Dave 2007, Fierman 2005, 2009, O Beachain and Kevlihan 2011). State-funded initiatives to encourage the use of Kazakh have explicitly linked it to ethnic identity, with billboards exhorting “Kazak, speak Kazak to Kazakhs!” (Dave 2007). However, as Sürrücü (2005) notes, Russian retains strong indexical links to urbanity, education, and a Soviet concept of cosmopolitanism (or “Eurasianism”) that has been reframed in opposition to Kazakh ethno-nationalism (see also Dave 2007 and Suleimenova 2008).

The debate about language, and the concomitant question of identity, can be seen playing out differently at different scales. We can identify at least four of them:

- **Local**: Truncated multilingualism (as defined by Blommaert et al 2005) is widespread; many people have knowledge of both Russian and Kazakh, in addition to what Suleimenova et al (2007) call “diaspora” languages such as...
Uzbek, Korean, and Ukrainian. (See O Beachain and Kevlihan (2001) for a discussion of ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan.) Individuals vary considerably in when, where, to what end, and how comfortably they use these languages (Fierman 2009, 2010, Dave 2007, Suleimenova et al 2007). Code-switching is frequent, particularly by Kazakh speakers (Muchamedowa 2010) and bilingual signage and advertising are widespread.

- National: Kazakh is the "national language," but Russian retains heavy institutional use (Dave 2005) despite its ambivalent associations with the Soviet past (Sürücü 2005). While Soviet Russian was largely de-ethnicized (Martin 2001:17-20) and presented as a neutral, international language, at the scale of national discourse it is still frequently portrayed as the language of non-Kazakh ethnic groups and an intruder into what historically has been and should be a Kazakh territory (Kolstø 1998). The state has made numerous efforts to Kazakhify public documents, university curricula and place names (Ismagulova 2013) but have generally focused pro-Kazakh propaganda on ethnic Kazakhs, rather than the entire population, which indirectly reinforces the role of Russian as a lingua franca (Dave 2007, Fierman 2005).

- Regional: Russian remains a widely-spoken language in all the CIS countries, which are still closely linked institutionally, economically, and politically, and thus its utilitarian value remains high (Dave 2007). Sürücü (2005) further argues that the discourse of Soviet cosmopolitanism remains strong for Russophones at this scale: Russian is a language of regional friendship and cooperation, not just business and politics, and it represents both the modernizing achievements of the 20th century and a sense of community in which all Russian speakers can feel at home wherever they are. Kazakh, on the other hand, is widely seen as “useless" (Ismagulova 2013) outside the borders of Kazakhstan, and support for Kazakh may be perceived as a mark of narrow-minded ethnic chauvinism (Sürücü 2005).

- Global: As with many countries, English has been made an educational priority. English signage can be seen around the new capital, Astana, and English is the language of instruction at prestigious national universities. Kazakhstan is also hardly immune from the influence of globalized English-language media, including rap, pop music and (dubbed) films, but in the 2009 census the number of citizens who claimed to understand English was around 15%, and even fewer reported being able to read or write well (Statistics Office of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2011). Thus Russian remains the primary gateway to the globe for most Kazakhstans.

In other words, while Kazakh is opposed to Russian on a national scale using national/ethnic identity as an axis of differentiation, at both local and regional scales there is far less sharp a distinction: many ethnic Kazakhs are comfortably bilingual, particularly in urban areas (Fiermann 2009) and all citizens encounter a mixture of Kazakh, Russian and possibly other languages in their day to day lives (Suleimenova et al 2007). At regional scales, the Kazakh language begins to fade from view because of a perceived lack of instrumental value and nationalist sentiment, while “global” English and “cosmopolitan” Russian become more significant. It is in this context that “You Should Speak Kazaksha” makes it unlikely appearance, from an even more unlikely source.

Italian musician Son Pascal moved to Kazakhstan in 2011 to compete on a reality show, and shortly thereafter began releasing music videos on YouTube. He performs in a mix of English, Russian, Kazakh and occasionally Italian; his first successful videos were parodies/rewrites of pop songs such as Sting's “Englishman in New York” and James Blunt's “You're Beautiful.” Pascal's versions, however, incorporate Kazakh and Russian lyrics and are recast to discuss local themes. His subsequent YouTube releases have been traditional pop songs mostly or entirely in Kazakh, including duets with both Kazakhstani and international artists.

Journalist Matt Kupfer has criticized Pascal for “playing with fire” by taking up the contentious theme of Kazakhification; the August 2012 release of the song “You Should Speak Kazaksha” happened to coincide with anti-Uzbek riots in and around Osh, Kyrgyzstan, and Kupfer draws a connection between the two events (Kupfer 2012). However, the discourse surrounding Pascal and this particular song is more focused on Kazakhs themselves: Pascal has been juxtaposed to those Kazakhs who do not speak Kazakh proficiently (however many of them exist) either to frame his fluency as a remarkable achievement or to shame those Kazakhs who have failed to acquire “their own” language. Regardless of whether Pascal's Kazakh really is all that good, this opposition of “Kazakh-speaking foreigner” to “non-Kazakh-speaking native” is regularly brought up in the Kazakhstani press and in catchy memes on message boards.

4. “You Should Speak Kazaksha”

The song “You Should Speak Kazaksha” was released as a YouTube video on August 14, 2012. The song is a collaboration in which Pascal sings the verses, while Kazakhstani rapper Abylai Sarsenbekov (who performs under the stage name “Gallardo”) performs the verses. The video itself is a less than subtle metaphor: while Pascal and another Kazakh singer sing and dance with a multi-ethnic crowd aboard a crowded transit van, Gallardo chauffers a beautiful but standoffish Russophone Kazakh woman around in a fancy car—until the car breaks down and has to be towed by Pascal's van.

The song's use of English, as well as Pascal's status as a foreigner from the West, immediately link it to global scales—the ones where Kazakh is usually barely visible (Ismagulova 2013). The choice to release the song on YouTube, an international site, as opposed to a Russian-language site such as RuTube or Rambler, also contextualizes the song in a global scale—Pascal is not presenting his song solely to a Kazakhstani or even CIS audience, leaving the “You” in the title potentially ambiguous.

However, Pascal does not sing solely in English. The refrain also includes Kazakh (as is befitting of a song with such a title) but also Russian, often code-mixed:

(1) Апашка көп рахмет, Апашка, көп rakhmet Auntie, thanks very much
тамак просто керемет! Tamaq prosto keremet The food is just delicious
You should speak Kazaksha!
You should speak Kazaksha!
Apashka represents a fusion of the Kazakh root apa for “aunt, older sister” and the Russian diminutive suffix -shka, a construction that appears multiple times throughout the song (with zhengeshka “sister in law”, aghashka “bro, older brother”). Prosto “just” is similarly a Russian lexeme inserted into a Kazakh sentence frame. This type of code switching is exceedingly common among urban Kazakh speakers (Muhammedova 2010) and has the effect of downscaling the song, linking it to actual local-scale language practices rather than monolingualist prescriptive norms at the national scale (Suleimenova et al 2007).

The verses similarly begin on a local scale: the first is rapped in Russian and features references to Almaty landmarks such as KIMEP, the restaurant Kaganat, and “Lenin (boulevard)” the Soviet-era name for what is now officially Friendship Avenue (Dostyq danghyly). Such name-dropping, and in particular the use of the old (but still widely known) street name, authenticates Gallardo’s identity at a local scale in a way that is simply not legible at higher scales. At such a local scale, the choice of Russian does not index any resistance to Kazakh national identity, but rather a facet of urban identity, where Russian is generally the unmarked code of daily interaction (Fiermann 2009).

When the verses switch to Kazakh, however, the discourse upscales rapidly. The first verse invokes proverbs and quotations that are regularly used in the Kazakhification discourse targeting Kazakhs (Fierman 2005, 2009) and address the audience with familial terms such as “baurym” (“brothers/relatives”) and the first-person plural:

(2) ана тілді құрметте
ана тілі құрметте
Honor the mother tongue

багаласы қалай біз
baghalasy qalay bız
how much we value it

сөндің қазыр ғызы
sondaysunday bolar
thus will be

бізден ұлығы
біздің қазырғы
bızdīng qazyr naghyz
our true value now

baghamyz

Subsequent verses address not just Almaty locals but a list of Kazakhstani cities—“Astana men Almaty, Semey, Taraz, Zhezkazgan”—as well as the three zhuz (“hordes”) that comprised the Kazakh people prior to domination by tsarist Russia. These references jump up to a national scale, but a very specific one: they serve to distinguish a “good,” authentic, national past from the “bad” past represented not specifically by Russian, but by the absence of Kazakh. Such discourse historicizes Kazakh identity as something timeless, predating tsarist/Soviet influence, which is being recovered or rediscovered rather than constructed anew (Dave 2007, Sürücü 2005, Arel 2002, Odgaard and Simonsen 1999). In this case, the upsampling links today’s ethnic Kazakhs to those of the pastoral, imagined past. Much of the Kazakhification discourse promoted by the state has also focused on such an idealized, pre-Soviet notion of Kazakhness: traditional costumes, folk songs and rural settings are common themes, reflecting the “reified and folklorized” national identity constructured during the Soviet period (Dave 2007:21). Unsurprisingly, discourse on this scale often fails to resonate with the urban youth (Fierman 2005, 2009). What is different about “You Should Speak Kazakhsha” the blending of this discourse with a more modern chronotope—both the urban, code-switching Kazakhs who are presumably watching this clip on YouTube, and the global multilinguals like Pascal, who acknowledge Kazakh as a language worth learning and using. The song explicitly praises “the youth” as a “new life” (for Kazakh, presumably) linking the language to futurity as well as tradition—just as English, the global language of the title, is linked to future prosperity on a global scale.
5. Sociolinguistics and the glonacal heuristic

A globalizing world is not a simple dichotomy between the local and the global, macro and micro, past and future: there are intermediate layers of meaning that cannot be handwaved or collapsed. Confronted with this irreducible complexity, the concept of scale becomes useful for parsing out the multiple meanings of multilingual discourse. Scales accommodate multiple levels of hierarchy and anchor discourse practices in specific spaces and times, while allowing us to see how the discourse moves among them and occasionally brings them crashing together. Sociolinguistics needs access to not just a global, not just glocal, but a glonacal—or greater—perspective, to fully appreciate the hybridities that surround us in the modern world (Bhatt 2005).

Son Pascal's multilingual body work is a uniquely globalized phenomenon—an Italian living in Kazakhstan who sings in three languages, one of which is foreign to both him and his audience, and who has achieved his success by appealing to the nationalism of an ethnic group he does not belong to. Traditional analysis of this region would tend to break down along binary lines of Russian vs. Kazakh (O Beachain and Kevlihan 2011), nationalist vs. cosmopolitan (Stürüç 2005), or Soviet vs. modern (Dave 2007). However, such binaries fail to capture meaningful differences in language practices and metalinguistic discourse. In Kazakhstan's multilingual community we find a tripartite distinction among the “good” past, the “bad” past and the future, and among individual authenticity, national identity, and regional utility. A glonacal conception of scale allows us to make all these distinctions, and to pick out the hybrid space they frame: the active coexistence of Russian and Kazakh, of pastoral history and urban present, and the interjection of local identities into globalized spaces by way of one unlikely pop singer.

Appendix: “You Should Speak Kazaksha” lyrics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Прямо, нет алга!</th>
<th>&quot;Straight,&quot; not &quot;straight&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Налево, нет согла!</td>
<td>&quot;To the left,&quot; not &quot;to the left&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>Карындаш шай болама?</td>
<td>Little sister, isn't there tea?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Женгешка ыт кайда?</td>
<td>Sister-in-law, where's the milk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Абая налево, по Ленина на право</td>
<td>Abai to the left, on Lenin to the right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Даже если прямо, все будет как надо</td>
<td>If you keep going straight, you'll be fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Справа от Кимэпа, слева Армашка</td>
<td>Right from KIMEP, left is Armashka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Выше Каганат где ест мой агаашка.</td>
<td>Further is Kaganat where my bro eats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Жоқ, you should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>No, you should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;Өнер алды, қызыл тіл&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;The highest art is eloquence&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;білім өмір шығарғы&quot;</td>
<td>Knowledge is the light of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Аскар ғауда бұлағы</td>
<td>My mother tongue is Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;өзгі тілдің бәрін біл&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Know all other languages&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>өз тілінді құрметте&quot;</td>
<td>honor your own language&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>қазақ болсаң баурым</td>
<td>Brother, if you're Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сөйле қазақ тілінде</td>
<td>speak in the Kazakh language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ана тілді құрметте</td>
<td>Honor the mother tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>багаласы калай біз</td>
<td>how much we value it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сондай сондай болар</td>
<td>thus will be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>біздің қазыр ғыныз ғағамыз</td>
<td>our (own) true value now</td>
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<tr>
<td>өз тіліндегі сөйлесең</td>
<td>Having spoken in our own language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>дұрыс жақсы тамаша</td>
<td>correct, good, excellent</td>
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<tr>
<td>қазақ ағайын -</td>
<td>Kazakh relatives--</td>
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<tr>
<td>you should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Прямо, нет алга!</td>
<td>&quot;straight&quot; not &quot;straight&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Налево, нет солга!</td>
<td>&quot;Left,&quot; not &quot;left&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Апашка қоп рахмет,</td>
<td>Mama, thank you very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>тамак просто керемет!</td>
<td>the food is just delicious</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
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<tr>
<td>You should speak Kazaksha!</td>
<td>You should speak Kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>сөйле сөйле қазақша</td>
<td>speak speak kazakh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ұмытпайық еш қашан</td>
<td>let's never forget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>артымдыда жаңақар бар</td>
<td>at our back there are youths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>олар өмір жаңақарша</td>
<td>They are new life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Астана мен Алматы, Semey, Taraz, Zhezkazgan
Семей, Тараз, Жезказган
ұлы, орта, кіші жүз Elder, Middle, Younger Horde
болінбей еш қашан Let's never separate
сөйле сөйле қазақша speak speak Kazakh
ұмытпайық еш қашан let's never forget
артымызда жастар бар at our back there are youths
олар омір жанаңа They are new life
Өз тілінде сойлеген Haven spoken in our own language
dұрыс жақсы тамаша correctly, well, excellent
қазақ ағайын - Kazakh family
you should speak Kazakh
you should speak Kazakhsha!
[refrain repeats]

References


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