

The Republic of Kazakhstan earned its independence from the Soviet Union in 1992, making it legally and politically relevant on the world stage. Sadly, it was not until Sasha Baron Cohen's abstract use of the country's enigmatic nature that Kazakhstan was jugged to the forefront; this time not for its historical or geopolitical importance, rather, due to it being a target of satire. While this is, unfortunately, the impression of many people in the United States, for myself, personally, the mystery that surrounds this massive, intriguing, and truly amazing country that rises out of the middle of Eurasian steppe has been a continual source of wonder, study, and deep inspiration in my personal and professional life for most of the past decade.

I was first only passively aware of Kazakhstan, knowing only that it was a country of the Soviet Union. Being fairly good at middle school geography and the child immigrants from northwestern Russia, I knew of only the *name* Kazakhstan. "Kazakhstan", "Kyrgyzstan", "Uzbekistan" – these countries had always conjured up images of far-flung nomadic cultures, far from the centers of "western" civilization, and were lands of mystery. It was not until I began my studies in Linguistics and Russo-Slavic studies at the University of Arizona that I began to peel back the veil of mystery that shrouded "the 'Stans". I began to meaningfully interact with contemporary cultural, linguistic and identity issues in Kazakhstan. I was fortunate enough to participate not only as a student, but later as a preceptor and student organizer in instructor Dotton's course, *The Other Kazakhstan*. The experience of instructor Dotton's course gave me a deep understanding of Kazakhstan as not only a country, but as a culture and a society that is committed to traditional values of hospitality, tolerance, and inclusiveness, even (and I would argue, *particularly*) in the face of adversity. Kazakhstan gradually inched out of the shadows of mystery. To my great fortune, as I would come to understand, the Kazakh nation became even *more* unique and, as it would turn out, unquestionably seminal of my personal and professional life.

After graduating from the University of Arizona in 2008, I was very lucky to find a job with *Intellect: Educational Consulting Agency* in Almaty, Kazakhstan, where I worked for nearly 2 years as an educational consultant and teacher for English and German as a second language. During my time in Almaty I was able to fulfill a rewarding career preparing young Kazakhstani scholars for study in overseas institutions. I also established strong contacts for my own research projects in formal and documentary linguistics, which concentrated on the sounds and structures Kazakh. This laid the groundwork for later projects at the University of Chicago on the sociolinguistics of *Shala-Kazakh*, a type of Russian-Kazakh mixed language. Happily enough, my "consultants" in Kazakhstan became my friends. I gained a working knowledge of Kazakh, I experienced, first-hand, Kazakh traditions such as the festivals of *Nauryz* and *Qurban-Ayt*, and I broke bread with every-day citizens of this fascinating country. My transition to living abroad in Kazakhstan was very smooth and I felt more at home in Almaty than expected. I attribute this ease to transition to my participation in *The Other Kazakhstan* with instructor Dotton and my work on the Kazakh language. The key to understanding many cultures is the language and, as I came to find out, this is particularly true in modern Kazakhstan.

The Kazakh language exhibits a litany of features that reflects Kazakhstan's long history as a crossroads of cultures and as a country of multiculturalism, tolerance, and intellectual exchange. Kazakh is a member of the Turkic language family and shares close ties with the Mongolic and Tungusic families. Speakers of Turkic, Tungusic and Mongolic languages boast figures as Genghis and Kubulai Khan, as well as the emperors of the Qing Dynasty. In addition to sharing close genetic ties with these families, Kazakh also has a large number of Persian and Ar-

abic borrowings; evidence of the influence and involvement with Islamic scholarship in the development of the literary Kazakh language. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Kazakh continued to borrow from Russian, the dominant language of the Soviet Union. Despite Kazakh taking a backseat to Russian in terms of sociolinguistic prestige, Kazakh continued to survive. The retention of the native language in the face of strong pressure from an outside sociolinguistic force is a testament to the strong connection that Kazakhs have with their cultural and ethnic roots. Currently, I am working on an analysis of the Kazakh verb, in which I argue that Kazakh exhibits features that reflect the unique structure of information and perception of the world from a *Kazakh* point of view. In Kazakh, one may say that he “*sits while writing*” to mean “he is writing” or “*he goes while lying down*” to mean “he is on the way”. On the surface, the relationship between these words seems arbitrary or even contradictory. In truth, the system of complex predicates in Kazakh allows for the modification of *every* verb to crisply reflect the direction or permanence of the event, the degree to which an event is or is not inherent to the subject or object of a sentence, and the way in which motion (or lack thereof) is captured with a given verb. While similar patterns can be found in most Turkic languages (a finding that indicates a deep connection between modern Kazakh and the ancestral Turkic language), Kazakh is one of the only Turkic languages that robustly retains this construction in modern use. This type of construction is interesting from a generative or theoretical basis for theoretical linguistics, but, more importantly, this behavior in the Kazakh language reflects, in my view, a set of values that contemporary Kazakhstanis hold dear today: a strong connection to the past as they move forward into the future. The specifics of the Kazakh language can also be seen in the wide variety of dialects and regionalisms, which, to the present time, have not been exhaustively documented. Until the work of Kazakh poet, intellectual and author Abai Ibrahim Qunanbayev, transmission of literature and folklore in the Kazakh speaking world was oral. Abai’s *The Book of Words* and Kyrgyz author Chingiz Aitmatov’s *A Day Lasts a Thousand Years*, both played a seminal role in forming my understanding of both Kazakh and Central Asia’s personal and intellectual histories. I was first introduced to these works in translation in professor Dotton’s class and, since having lived in Kazakhstan, I have been fortunate enough to read Abai’s *Book of Words* in the original Kazakh.

In conclusion, *The Other Kazakhstan* did wonders for me. It gave me direction and allowed me to sink my intellectual teeth into a land and culture that I have some to view as a second homeland. The course and my experiences after my time at the University of Arizona in Almaty have laid the groundwork for continued work focused in and about Kazakhstan. It has given me an invaluable perspective as an academic, an ethnographer and, more importantly, as a citizen of the world. While it is a tired cliché to say that “there are no words to express my gratitude,” I think that “*Сізге, достарыма, көмектеріңіз және қонақжайлылығыз үшін көп рахмет айтамын. Осы елді екінші Отаным деп есептеймін. Сізге жақсылық, денсаулық, және табысқа жетуіңізге тілектес болып отырмын*¹”, might be a very good start.

¹ *To you, my friends, I say thank you so much for your help and hospitality. I consider this country to be my second homeland. I wish you all health, success, and happiness.*