

Language for Peace  
Kazakhstan  
Union College  
Abylay Aitkazy (Kazakhstan, Union College)

## **Background Information**

Kazakhstan is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Central Asia, with a very substantial non-Kazakh population. Even though Kazakh is the official state language, the historically and geographically inherited Russian language holds its position as a language of interethnic communication and is spoken by the vast majority of the country. The Kazakh government never took any active steps to purposefully displace the Russian language and implement the Kazakh language into the everyday lives of the population. Leaders of the Soviet Union were cultivating the idea of a single “Soviet” identity in the country, which was home to hundreds of different nationalities and the Russian language was the only possible way of communication between different ethnic groups. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many countries were facing an issue with national and language identification and this issue is still visible in modern Kazakhstan. Only half of the population can fluently speak Kazakh in the county, the second half only speaks Russian and this often leads to disagreements between the two groups. The situation started to get worse after 2014, as Russia launched its armed aggression on Ukraine and the Kazakh government started to take action to be less dependent on Russia and develop the usage of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan.

Street names, media, governmental documents, and statements started to be written only in the Kazakh language. A person must know Kazakh to be able to work in all government companies by the law, but still 40% of secondary schools use the Russian language in teaching and 70% of higher education is available in the Russian language.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, more than half of businesses require employees to know the Russian language, and for the person who doesn't know both Kazakh and Russian in Kazakhstan, life is much more difficult. It has divided people into two groups and the only way to end conflicts is by uniting two groups through mutual language learning.

However, due to the fact that the Kazakh and Russian languages belong to completely different language families (Slavic and Turkic), knowing one of the languages does not help with comprehension and understanding the other one. Back in the USSR, the government nearly erased the history, culture, and language of Kazakh people in order to fully assimilate ethnic Kazakhs. The effect of the USSR government can be felt even today, as even now many people who are ethnically Kazakh and really want to learn the Kazakh language find it extremely difficult since there is very little information available on the internet on how to learn the Kazakh language. There are not enough publicly available sources on how to learn the Kazakh language, as the USSR destroyed almost all vocabulary, articles, and research papers related to the language.

From my early childhood in my hometown Almaty, the biggest city in Kazakhstan, I was surrounded by people who were embarrassed for being able to speak only the Kazakh or Russian language, and children were not able to find a way to communicate properly, which always led to conflicts. Even though we all grew up, the problem still remains the same. When you try to use online translators to get the meaning of some words from the Kazakh language using the Russian language, it is rarely correct. When I was in high school, there weren't any online translators between Russian and Kazakh languages, not to mention articles on how to learn the grammar, structure, and spelling of the words! Currently, the only way to learn these two languages is by having bilingual parents who pass down the knowledge in the household, or by hiring personal teachers that are not affordable for most families. I believe that creating a comfortable learning environment that will help people to learn a language, history, and culture will help to resolve the conflict between the two groups and allow citizens of Kazakhstan to live together peacefully.

<sup>1</sup>Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <https://kazakhembus.com/about-kazakhstan/culture/ethnic-groups>

## **Project Description**

Project language for peace aims to facilitate and make the study of the Kazakh and Russian languages more accessible to solve the acute conflict in Kazakhstan between the two groups. With this aim in mind, I and a group of passionate volunteers will create an online platform, where everyone can learn Kazakh and Russian languages to make learning more accessible and possible for citizens of Kazakhstan.

## **Project Plan**

### **Phase I – Partnership with a nonprofit organization “Alma-Ata” Women’s Club. May 20- June 1st.**

“Alma-Ata” Women’s Club is one of the biggest and most trusted non-profit organizations in Kazakhstan. It conducts more than fifty projects annually and has many volunteers and resources to support my project. More important is that this organization has experience in translating and teaching resources in both languages. In partnership with them, we will select two diverse groups of students, one group with people who are fluent only in the Kazakh language and one who are fluent only in the Russian language. With the organization’s help, we will rent a suitable office for teaching the students for 2 months.

### **Phase II – Creating an offline course with the help of volunteers and linguists. Jun 2nd- Jun 25th.**

I and the group of volunteers, in consultation with linguists, will start creating language courses. Volunteers are native speakers of both languages and have experience in teaching these languages. The offline course will include educational videos, articles, and research papers. We are planning to produce at least 120 lessons, that is 100 hours of videos and 25 research papers on the history and culture of the Kazakh language.

### **Phase III Teaching the offline course / receiving feedback from the students. Jun 26th-July 25th.**

With my team, we are going to intensively teach two groups of students based on the content that we produce and receive feedback from them. Based on their feedback we are going to alter and improve the content of the course before finally uploading it to the website.

### **Phase IV – Creating a website where all content is going to be published. July 26th- August 22nd**

I and one more volunteer who is pursuing a graphical design will create an education website where all our created content will be published. As I have 4 years of experience in creating websites, I will be able to code a functional educational website and another volunteer will help to design it properly.

### **Phase V – Publishing a website and marketing it. August 22nd-August 29th.**

With the help of the organization and volunteers, we will promote the website in the media, so we can attract the attention of a large audience to use the website as learners. We will also solicit volunteers who are willing to add content to the website and help to expand and develop it.

## **About Me**

I am a first-year student at Union College currently pursuing Computer Science. Before moving to the USA to pursue higher education, I lived in Kazakhstan for 19 years. I still remember my struggling classmates and neighborhood friends who were not able to properly learn one of the languages throughout the years. It is hard to imagine that in one part of the city everyone mostly speaks in Kazakh language and in another part of the same city everyone mostly speaks the Russian language. It got to the point that all my life I had to divide my friends into two groups even though we all lived in the same city and were part of the same community. Luckily, I am a native speaker of both languages, as my mother is from Russia and my father is from Kazakhstan. On top of that, in Union and in my high school I practiced creating websites using HTML, Java SQL, and JavaScript for years. In this project, I want to use all the prior knowledge that I learned in the past and in Union College about Computer Science and Languages to create a sustainable project that will give the opportunity to people to learn, understand each other and prevent conflicts.

## **Sustainability and Future of the Project**

The project's final product is designed to be developed and improved even when the Davis Project is finished. It is planned that the hosting and domain for the website are going to be purchased for 3 years with the extension option. The website creates open space and gives the opportunity to any volunteer in Kazakhstan to upload new unique content or to improve existing content on the website. I firmly believe that this particular project can eventually develop and extend to the point where daily involvement won't be required, as it's going to start functioning independently. Only 1-2 volunteers will be required to moderate and approve the newly uploaded content. I believe that this digital project has huge potential and will be able to continuously develop in the future, as the problem it is trying to solve is close to the hearts of all residents of Kazakhstan, and it will receive huge support from the community.

Language for Peace  
 Kazakhstan  
 Union College  
 Abylay Aitkazy (Kazakhstan, Union College)

### Budget Planning

Action	Description	Estimated Costs
Trip to Kazakhstan and back to USA	Trip to Kazakhstan from Schenectady city and a trip from Kazakhstan to Schenectady city.	<b>Own funds</b>
Rent of location	Rent of the study location in the city of Almaty with a capacity of a minimum of 20 people for 2 months. Location will include all the furniture and boards that are required for offline classes.	A total of 2 months is <b>\$3000</b> .
Basic stationery needs.	Basic stationery needs for students and books for teachers.	In total <b>\$850</b> .
Content creators	The content creators will be me and the 6 volunteers that I pick.	<b>Volunteers.</b>
Payment for the linguists' work	After consulting with the organization we decided that it is better to pay for 2 linguists (Kazakh-Russian language) that will support the content creation. After consultation with people from the organization " <i>Alma-Ata</i> " <i>Women's Club</i> , it is estimated that the cost will be approximately \$2800. \$1400 for each linguist's work for 2 months.	<b>\$2800</b>
Cameras and other filming equipment	For digitization of the content (filming the videos), we will require professional equipment that will be provided by the organization "Women's Club of Almaty"	<b>Rented for free.</b>
Editing videos	Videos and digital content will be edited by me and volunteers.	<b>No cost</b>
Website	The website is going to be coded by me.	<b>No cost</b>
Domain and hosting for the website	The domain for the website for 1 year costs \$30 and hosting provider costs \$540 a year. I want the project to develop further even after the end of the Davis Project and other volunteers will still continue to develop it. So, it is planned to buy hosting and domain for at least 3 years.	For 3 years in total will be <b>\$1710</b> .
Media promotion	Media promotion of a website will be organized with the help of the "Women's club of Almaty".	<b>No Cost</b>
Food for volunteers	Food for the volunteers while they are working on the project.	<b>\$650</b>
Transportation expenses of volunteers	On average transportation expenses of 6 volunteers inside the city of Almaty for 2 months will cost \$400.	<b>\$400</b>
Additional expenses	Additional unplanned expenses that will appear in the process of the project	<b>\$590</b>
Total		<b>\$10000</b>