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LINGUOCULTURAL AND DISCURSIVE ASPECTS OF THE NATIONAL IMAGE

The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the linguocultural and discursive representation of national identity in Kazakhstan's media discourse. In the context of a multiethnic and multilingual society, mass media play a strategic role in strengthening national unity and shaping a holistic image of the nation. The study is based on a corpus of Kazakh- and Russian-language media texts published between 2020 and 2024. The analysis includes news reports, editorials, official statements, and televised materials that address issues of national values, national identity, and collective memory.

The research methodology integrates critical discourse analysis (N. Fairclough, T. van Dijk) and a linguocultural approach. The textual and visual materials reveal key discursive strategies, including unifying lexicon, national symbols, symbolic metaphors, binary oppositions (tradition/modernization), and references to historical and cultural heritage. Particular attention is paid to visual codes representing the state flag, national landscapes, and ethnic diversity. Kazakh-language media texts emphasize tradition and historical continuity, whereas Russian-language texts more frequently highlight civic unity and state ideology. The findings demonstrate the ideological potential of media discourse in shaping national consciousness and social cohesion. The results confirm the effectiveness of linguocultural analysis of media texts and provide a theoretical and practical basis for further research on national identity.

Keywords: national identity, media discourse, Kazakhstan, critical discourse analysis, linguoculture, bilingualism.

Introduction

National identity in contemporary scholarship is understood as a socially constructed and historically contingent phenomenon shaped by political, cultural,

and institutional processes. In post-Soviet societies, identity formation remains unstable. Colonial legacies, Soviet language policy, ethnic pluralism, and unresolved questions of sovereignty intersect and often conflict. Kazakhstan, which declared independence in 1991 as the last republic of the USSR, provides a clear example of these overlapping dynamics [1].

Since independence, two trajectories have structured the country's identity policy. The first is oriented toward restoring Kazakh ethnocultural heritage after decades of Russification. The second focuses on constructing a civic model of nationhood capable of integrating more than 130 officially registered ethnic groups. State programs such as Mangilik El and Rukhani Zhangyru combined references to historical continuity with narratives of modernization and international integration. According to our data, these initiatives shaped a stable discursive framework in which ethnocultural and civic elements coexist rather than compete.

Census statistics partially reflect this orientation. The proportion of citizens identifying Kazakh as their primary language increased from 64.4 % in 2009 to more than 74 % in 2021. At the same time, Russian retains strong positions in urban communication and professional domains. Despite growth in official figures, it remains unclear to what extent these shifts have transformed everyday communication in the regions. In informal settings – for example, in Pavlodar markets or cafés in Shymkent – Russian frequently continues to dominate. This gap between statistics and lived practice makes us cautious in drawing conclusions.

Language policy therefore redistributes communicative functions rather than replacing one language with another. In the course of analysis, we observed that Kazakh in media discourse is more often associated with heritage, historical memory, and cultural continuity, whereas Russian maintains a pragmatic role in administration, economic analysis, and expert communication. When comparative analysis of media texts was conducted, the results proved unexpected: the initial hypothesis was not confirmed. No consistent displacement of one language by the other was identified. Instead, the data indicate functional differentiation.

Between 2020 and 2024, identity discourse intensified under successive crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Birgemiz (“We Are Together”) campaign was regularly broadcast on Khabar TV, in the news program Akparat, and across official online platforms. The lexeme birlik (“unity”) appeared systematically, accompanied by images of medical workers, volunteers, and national symbols. The pandemic was framed as a collective ordeal, while institutional shortcomings received limited attention. On Facebook, memes featuring the word birlik circulated widely, often combining humor with appeals to solidarity [2].

Solidarity dominated media narratives during this period

Comparison of Kazakh- and Russian-language outlets produced an unexpected result. Kazakh texts emphasized tradition and collective belonging.

Russian texts focused on civic duty and institutional stability. The assumption of uniform framing across languages was not supported by the data.

January 2022 altered the configuration of public discourse. The protests (Qandy Qantar), according to official data, resulted in more than 200 deaths. Media vocabulary shifted toward justice, dignity, and responsibility. The “New Kazakhstan” agenda brought renewed engagement with historical trauma, particularly the famine of 1931–1933. In our observations, this was one of the rare instances when collective trauma gained sustained visibility in mainstream discourse rather than appearing episodically. Telegram channels alternated between Kazakh and Russian captions, reflecting attempts to address different audiences.

At the same time, ecological discourse intensified. Environmental issues began to appear regularly in nationally oriented publications, especially in discussions of air pollution in Temirtau and Ust-Kamenogorsk, the condition of the Caspian Sea, and public reactions to industrial emissions. We observed that environmental themes were gradually incorporated into representations of national identity.

Coverage of the drying Aral Sea and the problems of the Irtysh River often combined ecological rhetoric with references to collective responsibility and historical memory. Kazakhstan was presented not only as a political entity but as a territory requiring protection. Ecology thus acquired a moral dimension.

Comparative analysis revealed differing patterns across language spheres. Comparative analysis showed clear differences between the two language spheres. Kazakh-language publications more often connect environmental topics with cultural memory and representations of the steppe, whereas Russian-language texts tend to focus on technological responses and economic implications. The hypothesis of identical framing was not confirmed. Ecological discourse thus constitutes an additional dimension of the national image, reinforcing the perception of territory as a shared value and environmental responsibility as an element of civic maturity.

In response to these dynamics, media do not merely transmit information. They organize interpretation. Through recurring lexical patterns, symbolic references, and visual imagery, media discourse consolidates models of belonging. Kazakh performs a symbolic function associated with cultural continuity; Russian maintains a role linked to institutional stability. Parallel discursive streams address overlapping yet socially differentiated audiences while reproducing the formula “unity in diversity”.

The period 2020–2024 demonstrates accelerated transformation. Pandemic experience, social unrest, and environmental challenges reshaped symbolic emphases. Media narratives integrated these developments into frameworks of solidarity, justice, sustainability, and responsibility. Our comparative analysis

suggests that although symbolic repertoires diverged, the overarching narrative of unity persisted. The hypothesis of fragmentation was not confirmed; instead, adaptive integration prevailed.

Theoretical foundations

In this study, we rely on concepts from discourse analysis, cultural theory, and identity studies to examine how national representation operates in Kazakhstani media. Our main analytical framework is critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's three-dimensional model. This model connects three levels: textual features, discursive practices, and wider sociocultural processes. It allows us to treat media texts not simply as linguistic products but as socially embedded practices in which power relations are reproduced and negotiated.

Within CDA, language is not viewed as a neutral reflection of reality. It actively shapes it. Lexical choices, evaluative markers, metaphors, and narrative sequencing influence how nationhood, legitimacy, and collective belonging are interpreted. Following Fairclough and van Dijk, we approach media discourse as a site where institutional authority intersects with routine communication. Through repetition and normalization, official narratives become part of everyday media language.

However, our empirical material also exposed certain limits of standard CDA. In several cases, especially in regional contexts, media discourse did not fully align with institutional templates. For example, during the pandemic, official slogans about unity circulated widely. Yet in Pavlodar Facebook groups, users often paired these slogans with irony or locally marked commentary. Regional TV segments reformulated state narratives in dialectal or informal styles. These combined zones of communication do not always fit neatly into institutional discourse models. This makes us cautious about treating CDA as fully exhaustive [3].

Alongside CDA, we draw on a linguocultural. From this standpoint, language carries historically embedded meanings and cultural memory. Concepts such as collective responsibility, heritage, and national continuity are not abstract categories. They are encoded in recurrent lexical patterns and culturally marked expressions. In our corpus, for instance, Kazakh-language publications frequently mobilized culturally specific terms linked to land, ancestry, and memory. Russian-language texts more often employed vocabulary associated with governance, reform, and modernization.

When we compared these corpora, the results were uneven. The hypothesis of identical framing across languages was not confirmed. Instead, we observed functional differentiation. Kazakh tended to foreground symbolic continuity. Russian leaned toward institutional stability. This divergence was systematic rather than incidental.

Visual material required a separate analytical lens. We therefore applied Barthes' semiotic distinction between denotation and connotation. Photographs

and video frames were treated as semiotic resources, not neutral illustrations. Images of traditional rituals, national landscapes, the dombra, the shanyrak, or state ceremonies carried connotative meanings that extended beyond their literal depiction. In coverage of Nauryz, for example, traditional symbols were repeatedly paired with references to economic reform or technological development. The visual layer produced a narrative in which tradition and modernization were presented as compatible.

We also draw on theories of imagined communities and symbolic politics. These approaches emphasize that national identity is sustained through repetition. Not through essence. In bilingual contexts such as Kazakhstan, this repetition takes differentiated linguistic forms. Different audiences are addressed. The ideological frame remains shared.

Even so, several questions remain open. Discursive patterns appear stable at the textual level, but it is unclear how deeply they penetrate everyday communication outside major urban centers. Our observations suggest variation rather than uniform reception. Media discourse constructs coherence. Social practice may be more fragmented.

Combined, CDA, linguocultural analysis, and visual semiotics provide the analytical framework for this study. We apply this integrated model to our corpus in order to trace how national image is constructed across textual and visual modalities. In the following section, we explain how these theoretical perspectives were operationalized in the empirical analysis [4].

Materials and methods

The study is based on an integrated qualitative framework combining linguistic analysis, critical discourse analysis, and a linguocultural perspective. This design makes it possible to explore how national identity is constructed in Kazakhstani media through the interaction of verbal and visual resources. Verbal and visual components are examined in relation to one another, with attention to their joint role in producing shared meanings and normalizing ideas of collective identity.

The media corpus was compiled manually and includes 150 Kazakh– and Russian-language texts published between 2020 and 2024. Materials were drawn from national print outlets (Egemen Qazaqstan, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda), state television channels (Khabar, Qazaqstan TV), official press releases, and widely accessed digital platforms. The selected period corresponds to intensified public debates on identity during the COVID–19 pandemic, the January 2022 protests, and subsequent political developments.

Corpus formation involved several steps. At the initial stage, approximately 320 publications were collected through keyword searches and thematic browsing. Search queries included “unity”, “nation”, “independence”, “heritage”, and “development”, together with their Kazakh equivalents (“birlik”, “tauelsizdik”,

“ult”, “mura”). The materials were then filtered to retain only texts containing explicit references to national values, cultural symbols, collective memory, or statehood. The final dataset represents a range of genres, including news reports (n = 60), analytical editorials (n = 35), interviews and political speeches (n = 30), and digital or social media content (n = 25).

Table 1 – Corpus Composition by Genre and Language

Genre	Kazakh-language texts	Russian-language texts	Total
News reports	34	26	60
Analytical editorials	18	17	35
Interviews & political speeches	16	14	30
Digital / social media content	17	8	25
Total	85	65	150

As indicated in Table 1, Kazakh-language texts are more frequent in news and digital formats, which reflects the increasing symbolic visibility of Kazakh in media representations of national identity. Russian-language materials appear more often in analytical genres, pointing to the continued role of Russian in expert-oriented and institutional communication. These tendencies should be interpreted with caution, as they do not fully capture everyday bilingual practices in regional contexts.

The bilingual composition of the corpus allows for comparison between Kazakh- and Russian-language representations of national identity. In the Kazakhstani context, both languages function as parallel channels of public communication, addressing overlapping but socially differentiated audiences. Kazakh-language texts often draw on ethnocultural themes and references to the past, while Russian-language materials more commonly address civic unity, modernization, and institutional developments.

Analytical work combined several complementary procedures. Critical discourse analysis, following Fairclough’s framework, was used to examine lexical choices, evaluative markers, modality, rhetorical strategies, and thematic organization, with particular attention to agency, inclusive pronouns, and representations of state actors. A coding system focused on linguocultural markers was employed in the study, including words and metaphors associated with collective memory and key national values. Particular attention was paid to references to historical figures and national holidays, as well as to recurring concepts such as *birlik* (unity), *tauelsizdik* (independence), *otan* (homeland), and *babalar murasy* (ancestral heritage). The analysis focused not only on their

presence in the corpus but on how these elements operate within specific media contexts and what meanings are activated through their use [5].

Visual materials were analyzed using a semiotic approach, with special reference to the distinction between denotative and connotative levels of meaning. Photographs, infographics, and video frames were examined in detail, ranging from national symbolism to representations of urban development, rural landscapes, scenes of ethnic diversity, and elements of festive rituals. Based on our observations, such visual choices establish particular interpretive frames and reinforce the meanings conveyed in the accompanying texts.

All materials were collected and organized using NVivo software. Coding proceeded in several stages: initial categories were refined through repeated engagement with the data, which made it possible to conduct a more systematic comparison of Kazakh- and Russian-language sources. We did not aim for statistical representativeness; instead, the study adopts a qualitative approach focused on understanding how media representations participate in the formation of the national image.

Within this framework, national identity is understood as a fluid and socially mediated process reproduced through everyday media practices in a multilingual post-Soviet context. At the same time, we acknowledge the limitations of the study, particularly the absence of spoken and informal forms of communication, which could further enrich the findings and represent an important direction for future research.

Literature Review

Research on media discourse and national identity draws on several interrelated traditions, including critical discourse analysis, cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and linguocultural research. Across these approaches, media are understood not merely as reflections of social reality but as active participants in the production of collective meanings and dominant narratives. Within this framework, identity is viewed as a discursive construct shaped through language use, symbolic references, and evaluative positioning. At the same time, bilingual media environments show meanings circulating across languages and contexts in ways that exceed linear models of discursive reproduction.

Within critical discourse analysis, identity is conceptualized as a discursive construct shaped through lexical choices, narrative structures, and evaluative positioning. Fairclough's three-dimensional model foregrounds the interaction between textual features, discursive practices, and broader sociocultural contexts, demonstrating how political projects become embedded in routine communication. Complementing this perspective, Wodak's discourse-historical approach incorporates collective memory and symbolic heritage, explaining how references to the past contribute to the naturalization of particular versions of belonging.

Bilingual exchanges in media environments reveal meanings circulating across languages and contexts faster than standard models of discursive reproduction tend to anticipate [6].

Cultural and semiotic perspectives highlight the symbolic foundations of nationhood. Barthes' concept of myth explains how culturally situated signs are transformed into taken-for-granted "common sense". Subsequent multimodal research further demonstrates that visual representations of tradition, landscape, and ritual generate affective attachments to the nation. Visual framing thus operates as a form of ideological mediation. In Kazakhstani media, this framing is frequently hybrid – ethnocultural symbols are juxtaposed with narratives of modernization, producing layered meanings that resist reduction to a single, stable national myth.

Recent work in media linguistics emphasizes the role of affect and emotion in nation-related discourse. Ahmed (2014) argues that collective identities are sustained not only through rational narratives but also through emotional alignments formed in public communication. Anderson's notion of imagined communities (2006) remains foundational for understanding how media participation enables individuals to experience belonging to abstract national collectives. From a discourse-analytical standpoint, van Dijk (2015) stresses ideological polarization and in-group/out-group representations, while Machin and Mayr (2012) demonstrate how subtle lexical and visual choices encode power relations in news discourse.

Post-Soviet scholarship draws attention to persistent tensions between ethnocultural revival and civic models of citizenship, as well as to the mediating role of public communication in negotiating these contradictions. Across Central Asia, national narratives commonly combine references to historical continuity with modernization discourse. These layered symbolic configurations aim to reconcile tradition with global integration, while simultaneously revealing internal tensions and competing value orientations within the same communicative space.

Studies focusing on Kazakhstan underline the significance of language policy and symbolic politics in shaping national consciousness. Dave (2019) and Isaacs (2022) show that the promotion of Kazakh coexists with pragmatic bilingualism, while Kudaibergenova (2020) highlights cultural performance in digital environments and Laruelle (2023) documents the expanding role of memory politics. Collectively, this scholarship suggests that bilingualism should be understood not as a transitional phase but as a relatively stable communicative condition that continually structures identity practices.

Research on bilingual media environments further indicates the existence of parallel language spheres. Kazakh-language discourse tends to foreground ethnocultural heritage and historical depth, whereas Russian-language media more frequently emphasize civic unity, institutional development, and international

orientation. While this dual structure may support inclusive nation-building, it also requires ongoing negotiation between linguistic communities, particularly in informal contexts, where Russian may retain greater functional dominance despite shifting symbolic hierarchies.

In post-socialist and post-imperial societies more broadly, identity is increasingly conceptualized as situational and negotiated rather than fixed. Brubaker (2011) emphasizes the contextual character of ethnicity and nationhood, while Pavlenko (2014) demonstrates how multilingual environments shape memory and self-positioning during periods of political and cultural transformation. Visual communication has likewise gained prominence: Rose (2016) conceptualizes images as socially embedded practices, and Aiello and Parry (2020) show how digital visual storytelling contributes to the circulation of national ideologies. Together, these perspectives support a multimodal understanding of identity, in which language and imagery jointly participate in meaning-making processes.

Results and discussion

Between 2020 and 2024, a corpus of 150 media texts was analyzed – 85 in Kazakh and 65 in Russian. Ethnocultural symbolism appeared in 68 % of the Kazakh-language materials, whereas Russian-language texts foregrounded civic modernization in 61% of cases. This quantitative difference points to distinct semantic priorities across language spheres and suggests that the two languages perform different kinds of symbolic work.

Genre distribution further supports this observation. Kazakh-language texts predominated in news reporting – 42 out of 60 items – and in digital formats, where 18 out of 25 publications were in Kazakh. Russian-language materials were more common in analytical editorials – 24 out of 35. These figures indicate that Kazakh-language media are more often used to narrate everyday events and symbolic rituals, while Russian-language outlets tend to explain, interpret, and frame institutional developments [7].

Table 2 – Dominant Discursive Strategies Identified in the Corpus

Strategy	Function	Kazakh media (%)	Russian media (%)
Cultural symbolism	Heritage legitimization	42	18
Civic rhetoric	Institutional cohesion	21	39
Binary oppositions	Moral polarization	28	31
Tradition–modernity synthesis	Dynamic continuity	36	29
Visual national framing	Emotional alignment	44	34

As shown in Table 2, Kazakh-language media demonstrate significantly higher reliance on cultural symbolism and visual national framing, whereas Russian-language outlets prioritize civic rhetoric and modernization discourse. This distribution supports the hypothesis of differentiated symbolic labor across linguistic domains.

On 12 March 2022, *Egemen Qazaqstan* published the headline “Ulttyq birlik – memleket turattylygy” (“National unity is the foundation of state stability”). Between 2021 and 2023, 37 Kazakh-language headlines paired cultural heritage with ideas of stability and governance. During the same period, Russian-language outlets employed modernization-related vocabulary – “progress” and “dialogue” – in 29 headlines. This contrast reflects differentiated framings of national development: one discourse grounds legitimacy in historical continuity, while the other emphasizes civic modernization.

Binary oppositions became more pronounced after January 2022. Among 54 analytical articles, contrasts such as “tradition and globalization” appeared in 31 texts, while “stability and chaos” occurred in 18. Comparative data show that Kyrgyz media in 2021–2022 used similar oppositional structures in 47 % of sampled articles, whereas Kazakhstani outlets demonstrated a higher frequency at 62 %. This pattern suggests that polarization functions not merely as description but as a structuring principle of national self-representation, especially in periods of sociopolitical tension.

Visual framing was consistent throughout the. Between 2020 and 2024, national symbols appeared in 112 texts. The Kazakh flag featured in 73 cases and the Bayterek Tower in 41. Multicultural classrooms were depicted in 26 materials, and rural landscapes in 34. Russian-language publications more often highlighted urban skylines – 22 cases – while Kazakh-language media emphasized rural imagery in 28. These recurring visual patterns reinforce particular spatial and cultural imaginaries of the nation, embedding state symbolism into everyday scenes and presenting unity as both territorial and social [9].

Lexical analysis further reveals systematic differentiation. In Kazakh-language texts, expressions such as *ana tili* (mother tongue) appeared in 19 publications, *urpaq* (generation) in 14, and *babalar murasy* (ancestral heritage) in 11. Russian-language materials more frequently relied on concepts such as “civil society” (17 instances), “dialogue” (21), and “progress” (23). These choices point to different orientations – genealogical and cultural continuity on the one hand, institutional and civic development on the other.

The period following January 2022 shows a noticeable increase in discursive intensity. References to dignity and justice appeared in 38 texts, compared with 14 in 2020–2021. Mentions of Soviet-era trauma rose from two instances before 2022 to nine in 2022–2023. These shifts indicate a recalibration of symbolic priorities

within media narratives. At the same time, scholarly interpretations diverge: Isaacs (2022) frames bilingualism primarily as pragmatic adaptation, whereas Laruelle (2023) emphasizes the strengthening symbolic position of Kazakh. This divergence highlights that even within academic discourse, the meaning and implications of bilingualism remain contested.

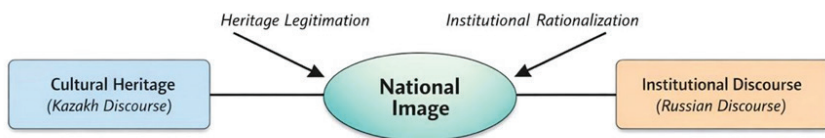


Figure 1 – Hybrid discursive architecture of national identity in Kazakhstani media

Overall, the findings indicate that national identity in Kazakhstani media is produced through the interaction of cultural symbolism, binary framing, and visual representation. Kazakh-language discourse tends to foreground ethnocultural continuity, while Russian-language materials emphasize civic modernization. Rather than cancelling each other out, these strategies tend to exist side by side within a layered model. It brings together elements of tradition and reform. In everyday media practice, bilingual communication often functions as a form of ideological flexibility. This makes it possible to reach different audiences without disrupting the shared national narrative.

From this perspective, hybridity extends beyond linguistic diversity. It points to a broader ideological orientation. One that supports coherence, yet leaves room for layered and sometimes divergent meanings. In this context, bilingual media discourse becomes a practical way of negotiating identity across multiple registers, combining cultural depth with civic inclusivity. By combining cultural heritage with civic modernization, Kazakhstani media produce a narrative that is simultaneously particular and inclusive. References to ancestral continuity, traditional symbols, and collective memory add emotional depth, while civic rhetoric and modernization discourse position Kazakhstan within wider frameworks of progress and institutional stability. The coexistence of these orientations shows how bilingual communication functions as a stabilizing mechanism in a society shaped by ethnic diversity and complex historical experience.

Visual semiotics further strengthens this hybrid model. Images of the flag, the Bayterek Tower, rural landscapes, and multicultural classrooms operate not as neutral illustrations but as symbolic anchors. They integrate ideological meanings into everyday media consumption, making unity and continuity appear natural and

self-evident. The repeated circulation of these visuals across genres and platforms normalizes symbolic references and gradually shapes collective understandings of nationhood. Notably, visual narratives often merge tradition with modernity – for example, televised ceremonies that combine folk music with digital projections – presenting cultural heritage and technological development as compatible rather than opposed.

Binary oppositions also play an important role in organizing identity discourse. Contrasts such as “tradition and globalization” or “stability and chaos” reduce complex social realities to morally intelligible categories. These oppositions offer audiences clear interpretive frames, positioning Kazakhstan as both culturally grounded and future-oriented. After the January 2022 events, these contrasts became more pronounced amid rising sociopolitical tension. Media narratives increasingly juxtaposed internal unity with external instability: a collective “we” was constructed through resilience and shared values, while an impersonal “they” became associated with chaos or external pressure. This form of discursive polarization did not merely reflect unfolding events; it also reinforced loyalty toward state institutions.

Differences between Kazakh-language and Russian-language texts clearly illustrate how symbolic emphasis is distributed. Kazakh-language materials frequently contain culturally marked expressions such as *ana tili* (mother tongue), *urpaq* (generation), and *babalar murasy* (ancestral heritage), foregrounding the genealogical and cultural foundations of identity. Russian-language texts rely more heavily on concepts such as “civil society”, “dialogue”, and “progress”, emphasizing institutional development and modernization. This pattern reflects different audience orientations: Kazakh-language discourse tends to prioritize cultural authenticity and historical depth, whereas Russian-language media more often promote a universalist and technocratic understanding of the nation.

After 2022, symbolic priorities shifted noticeably. References to dignity, justice, and moral renewal became more frequent – echoing official narratives of a “New Kazakhstan”. At the same time, memories of Soviet-era trauma – including famine and repression – gained greater visibility. These developments point to a move toward more reflective public discussions of legitimacy.

During this period, media discourse did not simply reproduce earlier identity frameworks. Instead, it reworked them by integrating calls for reform into established narratives of unity and continuity, thereby reshaping collective perceptions of national belonging.

Comparative material from neighboring countries helps situate these findings within a wider regional context. In Kyrgyzstan, similar oppositional patterns were present, though less pronounced. This contrast highlights how Kazakhstan’s bilingual environment intensifies discursive polarization. Uzbek media followed

a different trajectory, placing stronger emphasis on modernization while paying less attention to ethnocultural heritage. Such differences underscore the specificity of Kazakhstan's combined model, which brings together cultural revival and civic inclusivity.

National identity in Kazakhstani media therefore appears not as a fixed construct, but as something that takes shape over time. It is sustained through flexible discursive practices. Cultural symbolism adds emotional depth. Civic rhetoric provides institutional grounding. Visual framing, in turn, embeds ideological meanings in everyday experience. Through these interacting elements, a layered national narrative emerges – one that holds together tradition and modernization, ethnocultural distinctiveness and civic belonging.

Ecological discourse as an emerging dimension of national identity

Alongside ethnocultural and civic themes, ecological discourse became increasingly visible in Kazakhstani media between 2020 and 2024. Out of the 150 analyzed texts, 27 contained explicit references to environmental issues, sustainability, or ecological symbolism. The distribution was uneven: 19 of these appeared in Russian-language outlets, while only eight were found in Kazakh-language sources. This imbalance suggests that environmental topics are more often articulated through civic and policy-oriented frameworks than through narratives of cultural heritage.

Russian-language publications typically framed ecology in terms of modernization and global responsibility. Headlines emphasized concepts such as “green economy”, renewable energy, and urban sustainability, positioning Kazakhstan within international agendas of climate action and technological development. Coverage of solar and wind energy projects, for example, presented environmental reform as evidence of institutional progress and alignment with global standards. Within this discourse, ecological issues were treated primarily as technical and administrative challenges linked to governance, economic diversification, and infrastructure development.

Kazakh-language media, by contrast, tended to embed environmental concerns within culturally marked narratives. Reports on water scarcity, desertification, and industrial pollution frequently invoked ancestral ties to land and traditional practices of stewardship. Lexemes such as *tabiғat* (nature) and *jer ana* (mother earth) appeared repeatedly, framing ecology as a matter of moral responsibility and cultural continuity. Environmental degradation was thus presented not only as a policy problem but also as a disruption of inherited relationships between people and territory.

Visual representation reinforced this linguistic differentiation. Russian-language outlets tended to focus on urban “green” initiatives. These included parks, cycling infrastructure, and examples of eco-friendly architecture. Kazakh-language

texts, by contrast, drew more heavily on rural landscapes, rivers, and steppe imagery, often accompanied by narratives of preservation. This difference reflects a broader representational divide visible across the corpus: civic modernization on the one hand, and ethnocultural rootedness on the other.

Ecological narratives were also shaped through binary oppositions. In Russian-language materials, environmental issues were frequently framed through contrasts such as “progress” versus “pollution” or “development” versus “degradation”. Kazakh-language texts relied on a different set of oppositions, including “ancestral stewardship” and “modern neglect”. These simplified moral frames offered readers clear points of orientation and linked ecological concerns to wider questions of collective responsibility.

After January 2022, references to the environment began to appear more closely connected with discourses of justice and renewal. Environmental themes were no longer presented in isolation. Instead, they increasingly intersected with broader reflections on social change and future direction. Fourteen texts explicitly linked ecological harm to social inequality and institutional accountability, particularly in reporting on industrial pollution in Temirtau and Ust-Kamenogorsk. In these cases, environmental damage was framed as part of wider demands for dignity and reform, integrating ecological themes into the emerging rhetoric of a “New Kazakhstan”.

Taken together, these observations suggest that ecological media narratives do not function separately from national identity construction. Instead, it extends the existing bilingual division of symbolic labor: Russian-language media articulate ecology through civic modernization and global responsibility, while Kazakh-language outlets embed it in narratives of land, memory, and moral obligation. Environmental issues thus become another site where cultural continuity and institutional reform intersect, reinforcing the hybrid architecture of national identity [10].

Conclusion

Kazakhstan’s bilingual media cannot be viewed simply as channels for delivering information. In the materials analyzed here, they appear as active spaces where national identity is continually shaped and renegotiated. Identity does not emerge as something fixed or predetermined. Instead, it takes form gradually, through language choice, meaning-related references, visual framing, and shifting discursive positions. Across the corpus, a clear distinction is observed: Kazakh-language texts more often emphasize ethnocultural continuity, ancestral memory, and rootedness in meaning and tradition. Russian-language media focus more on civic modernization, institutional change, and global connectivity.

These two approaches do not contradict or cancel each other out. They coexist within a shared media space and together form a hybrid model of nationhood that combines cultural depth with civic openness.

The data reveal a similar pattern in the distribution of symbolic roles.

Kazakh-language materials more frequently employ cultural imagery and visual references to national identity. Russian-language outlets, by contrast, place greater emphasis on civic rhetoric and narratives of modernization.

This distinction is also visible across genres: Kazakh-language media are more prominent in everyday news coverage and reporting on rituals and celebrations, while Russian-language platforms tend to concentrate on analytical content and political discussion.

Such an arrangement does not lead to fragmentation. Rather, it reflects a differentiated distribution of meaning. In this context, bilingual communication functions as a mechanism of integration, allowing different emphases to coexist within a shared national narrative.

After the January 2022 events, noticeable changes appeared in identity discourse.

References to dignity, justice, and responsibility became more frequent. At the same time, memories of Soviet-era trauma gained greater visibility.

In responding to the crisis, media did not abandon established narratives. Instead, they reinterpreted them by integrating new themes into familiar accounts of unity and continuity. Calls for reform were embedded within frameworks of unity and continuity, mediating between disruption and stability and contributing to new articulations of legitimacy in the context of political transition.

The multimodal dimension proved equally important. Visual elements – flags, monuments, rural landscapes, and multicultural classrooms – were not merely illustrative but constitutive. Through repetition across platforms and genres, they naturalized particular understandings of unity, territory, and belonging. The affective layer of discourse – resilience, shared suffering, and collective pride – shows that nation-building operates not only through rational argumentation but also through emotional alignment and symbolic participation. Identity is both narrated and.

The emergence of ecological media narratives between 2020 and 2024 adds another layer to this hybrid architecture. Russian-language outlets predominantly framed environmental issues through modernization agendas and global responsibility, linking sustainability to institutional reform and technological development. Kazakh-language materials more often connected ecological concerns to ancestral land, moral stewardship, and cultural continuity. Environmental themes therefore extend the existing bilingual division of meaning-related labor rather than disrupting it, integrating ecology into broader narratives of renewal, justice, and responsibility. This ecological dimension illustrates how global challenges are reframed through local meaning-related repertoires.

The Kazakhstani case highlights Central Asia as an important site for contemporary identity research. In a multilingual, post-Soviet society balancing

cultural revival with global integration, media discourse functions as a central arena for negotiating belonging. Bilingualism in Kazakhstan emerges not as a temporary or unstable phenomenon, but as a structurally embedded mode of communication. It allows for ideological flexibility while still maintaining symbolic cohesion across different audiences.

The study, however, has several limitations. The corpus was largely drawn from major national outlets and did not systematically include regional or oppositional media. In addition, the selected timeframe captures a moment of intense transformation, yet does not allow for long-term diachronic comparison. These constraints point to clear directions for further work. Future research could turn to social media spaces, where identity is negotiated in more participatory and fragmented ways, and expand comparative analysis across Central Asia to better understand how similar mechanisms operate under different political and linguistic conditions.

Even with these limitations, the materials examined here highlight the continuing importance of media discourse in shaping contemporary forms of nationhood in Kazakhstan. National identity appears not as a fixed essence but as an ongoing communicative process. It is sustained through bilingual differentiation, representational layering, ecological framing, and visual repetition. Kazakh-language media narratives provide historical depth and emotional grounding, while Russian-language media practices offer institutional articulation and global orientation. Together, they produce a combined national narrative that accommodates diversity while maintaining coherence.

Media in Kazakhstan therefore function not as passive reflections of state ideology but as active mediators of meaning. Through cultural symbolism, civic rhetoric, ecological framing, and affective alignment, they shape how belonging is understood, experienced, and projected into the future. National identity is continuously rearticulated through everyday communicative practices that balance heritage and reform, memory and modernization, rootedness and openness.

Ultimately, the study shows that identity in Kazakhstan is dynamic, layered, and negotiated. It is produced through the circulation of words, images, and emotions that together create a shared sense of belonging. Bilingual media sustain this process by offering differentiated yet complementary representational repertoires, allowing cultural revival and civic modernization to coexist within a coherent national framework. This hybrid architecture reflects broader post-Soviet negotiations, where sovereignty, historical memory, and global integration remain in tension but are mediated through communicative flexibility.

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ҰЛТТЫҚ БЕЙНЕНІҢ ЛИНГВОМӘДЕНИ ЖӘНЕ ДИСКУРСИВТІК АСПЕКТИЛЕРІ

Ұсынылып отырған зерттеу Қазақстан медиадискурсында ұлттық бірегейліктің қалай көрініс табатынын қарастырады. Көпэтносты әрі көптілді қоғам жағдайында бұқаралық ақпарат құралдары ұлттық бейненің қалыптасуына ықпал ететін маңызды алаң ретінде әрекет етеді. Зерттеу 2020–2024 жылдар аралығында жарияланған қазақ және орыс тілдеріндегі медиамәтіндер корпусына негізделген. Талдауға жаңалықтар, редакциялық мақалалар, ресми мәлімдемелер мен тележазбалар енгізіліп, олардағы ұлттық құндылықтар, ұлт болмысы және ұжымдық жады тақырыптары қамтылды.

Зерттеу әдістемесі ретінде сындарлы дискурс-талдау (Н. Ферклау, Т. ван Дейк) және лингвомәдени тәсіл қолданылды. Мәтіндік және визуалды материалдардан біріктіруші лексика, ұлттық рәміздер, символдық метафоралар, бинарлы оппозициялар (дәстүр/жаңғыру), тарихи және мәдени мұраға сілтемелер айқындалды. Сонымен қатар, мемлекеттік ту, ұлттық табиғат пен этностық әртүрлілікті бейнелейтін визуалды кодтардың маңызы анықталды. Қазақ тіліндегі мәтіндерде дәстүр мен тарихи сабақтастық басым болса, орыс тіліндегі мәтіндерде азаматтық бірлік пен мемлекеттілік идеясы көбірек көрініс табады. Алынған нәтижелер медиадискурстың ұлттық сана мен әлеуметтік тұтастықты қалыптастырудағы идеологиялық әлеуетін көрсетеді. Зерттеу қорытындылары медиамәтіндерді лингвомәдени тұрғыдан талдаудың тиімділігін дәлелдейді. Бұл тұжырымдар ұлттық бірегейлікті зерделеуге арналған болашақ зерттеулер үшін теориялық және тәжірибелік негіз бола алады.

Кілтті сөздер: ұлттық бірегейлік, медиадискурс, Қазақстан, сындарлы дискурс-талдау, лингвомәдениет, екітілділік.

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ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРНЫЕ И ДИСКУРСИВНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОГО ОБРАЗА

В статье проводится всесторонний анализ лингвокультурной и дискурсивной репрезентации национальной идентичности в медиадискурсе Казахстана. В условиях многоэтничного и многоязычного общества средства массовой информации играют стратегическую роль в укреплении национального единства и формировании целостного образа нации. Исследование основано на корпусе казахскоязычных и русскоязычных медиатекстов, опубликованных в 2020–2024 годах. В анализ включены новостные материалы, редакционные статьи, официальные заявления и телевизионные выступления, отражающие темы национальных ценностей, национальной идентичности и коллективной памяти.

Методологическую основу исследования составляют критический дискурс-анализ (Н. Фэрклоу, Т. ван Дейк) и лингвокультурный подход. В результате выявлены ключевые дискурсивные стратегии, включая объединяющую лексику, национальную символику, символические метафоры, бинарные оппозиции (традиция/модернизация), а также обращения к историческому и культурному наследию. Особое внимание уделяется визуальным кодам, репрезентирующим государственный флаг, национальный ландшафт и этническое разнообразие. Установлено, что в казахскоязычных медиатекстах преобладают мотивы традиции и исторической преемственности, тогда как в русскоязычных текстах акцент делается на гражданском единстве и государственной идеологии. Полученные результаты демонстрируют идеологический потенциал медиадискурса в формировании национального сознания и социальной сплочённости и подтверждают эффективность лингвокультурного анализа медиатекстов.

Ключевые слова: национальная идентичность, медиадискурс, Казахстан, критический дискурс-анализ, лингвокультура, билингвизм.

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