**The Reformation of Writing in Kazakhstan**

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*Abstract*

*Writing is doubtless considered as one of the most vital inventions of the humanity as it is the engine of the science. Kazakh writing also has got a long and rich history of its development. Today after more than half of century since the last reformation of Kazakh alphabet , some unsolved issues are aroused . In this article, an attempt was made to review briefly the history of Kazakh writing and given some reasons for transition to the Latin script.*

The importance of a language in our life cannot be overrated. It is a unique fingerprint of a nation; its identity code. Therefore, to save, develop and popularize a language, a language must be the priority of any government. The former President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, approved, by his decree, an alphabetic system for the Kazakh language based on the Latin script. On February 19, 2018, amendments were made to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan “on the transition of the Kazakh writing system from the Cyrillic alphabet script to the Latin alphabet script."

Kazakhstan gained its independence 28 years ago and since then, a lot has been done to support the Kazakh language because before independence its support had been poor. Majority of the people in big cities, especially in the northern parts of the state, uses Russian in their everyday life. You might not know Kazakh, but knowing Russian is kind of a polite practice. The government did a lot to solve the problem; by increasing the number of schools teaching in Kazakh, organizing free Kazakh language courses for adults, and giving more space for the Kazakh language in mass media. The new Latin alphabet system is one way to motivate Russian speakers to learn and use Kazakh.

Nowadays about 80% of the world’s population uses the Latin graphics, and about 70% of all information in the world are spread in the Latin alphabet. We need to enter this modern information space and increase our competitiveness. Switching to a Latin script will lead to the modernizing of Kazakhstani society’s minds and to a Kazakhstani spiritual revival.

Switching alphabets is not new to Kazakhstan, as it had changed its official script several times before. If we glance to Kazakh writing history we could find that it is divided into several periods of development. In VI –VII century ancient Turkic nations including kazakh ancestors used Orkhon-Yenisey script, Turkic runes. It is one of the early scripts that was found in 1896-1897 in Kazakhstan near the city of Aulie-Ata (Taraz). Five stones with ancient Turkic script were found there. Turkic language played leading role in the international relationship in most Eurasian territory. For instance, during the reign of Mongolian Batu and Monke khans Turkic language was used on a par with the Mongolian language.

Turkic script was replaced by Arab writing in the result of Islam influence. In 1912 Kazakh prominent linguist Akhmet Baitursynov introduced new Kazakh alphabet based on Arabic script which satisfied the requirements of that time. New Alphabet was called “Zhana Emle” and it is still used within Kazakh diaspora in China, Afghanistan and Iran. Kazakh was written in the Arabic script until 1920 when it was switched to the Latin alphabet. In 1940, it was substituted to a Cyrillic one.

Today’s Kazakh alphabet based on Cyrillic has 42 characters; 33 of them are borrowed from the Russian-Cyrillic alphabet and nine characters are created for specific Kazakh sounds.

The new alphabet based on the Latin script has 32 letters, with some specific sounds of the Kazakh language to be covered with the use of diacritical mark. There are six letters with Acute: Á, Ǵ, Ǹ, Ó, Ú, Ý.

There are great prospects for the transition to the Latin alphabet. For example, a switch to Latin script is a godsend for IT specialists. IT specialists have said that “many databases and software don’t support Kazakh letters and it is difficult to use them to search for things”. Another problem with Cyrillic letters is that they take up twice as much memory space. “For example, if Latin letter A needs 1 byte, then letter A in Cyrillic will take 2 bytes” reports programmers.

Political expert Kuat Dombay sees advantages of Latin script for the Kazakh language not only in phonetics, but also in logistics: “To search for 44 letters on a cell phone and on the keyboard is a struggle”.

In addition, most cell phones do not support nine characters for specific Kazakh sounds, and it forces users to type text with mistakes. For example, instead of “Cәлеметсізбе. Қалыныз қалай?” one usually text with “Салеметсизбе” Калыныз калай?” These are just two sentences of greetings which contains 4 mistakes and if we consider how modern youths write SMS every day, it could badly effect the literacy of Kazakh youth. The new alphabet based on the Latin script would easily solve this problem.

On the other hand, new kazakh alphabet still have some problem point like differentiation of signs in some cases , for instance sometimes it is not easy to identify *Iı* from *Ii* because the capital letters are the same. The word “Ilgish” (peg, hanger) must be read as [elgesh] not [ilgesh]. For one who speak kazakh language as a mother tongue it might not be a big problem to understand and use correctly these two sounds but for someone who does not have kazakh as his first language it might be challenging to identify them.

It is not the only problem with new kazakh alphabet, another dispute is connected with the sound [u:] is represented by the sign Ýý, which is confusing for native speakers who are used to see in the sign Yy other sound. It would be better to take sign Uu for the sound [u:] as in other countries like Germany or Azerbaijan.

In spite of some unsolved issues with the new alphabet, it is high time to start transition, as there is one wise word in kazakh “Kosh zhure tuzeledi” which means it is important to start something not putting things off because of mild problems which will be solved during the applying when the process begins.

There are many evidences of advantages of switching the writing, nevertheless some amount of skeptics remain. One of the arguments against the transition to the Latin is the time, there is a fear that the process might take decades. In order to check how fast school students to learn new writing an experiment was held in Pavlodar oblast Aqquly district at three schools: Lebjazh’e Secondary school, Zhambyl Secondaryschool and Beskaragai Secondary school. The experiment took one month and covered primary schools, grades 2-4. Primary school students were presented short theory and suggested to learn new ABC by ebook “Kyzykty Alippe” on teaching new alphabet.

According to the hypothesis of the experiment students would learn new alphabet in a short period of time, since it is familiar to them by learning English which is also based on Latin script. Moreover, youths often use Latin script in instant text exchange.

The results of experiment significantly impressed us, because students in 3-4 lessons could read immediately texts written in new alphabet. Some students from Grade 4 needed only 2 training lessons to start reading texts in new script.

The research revealed some difficulties which students faced during the training. 23 letters were easy to learn, because students already knew them thanks for English, but some specific vowel sounds as Iı- Ии, Іі – Іі, Uu-Ұұ, Úú-Үү, Yy-Ыы, Ýý- Уу were difficult to cope and needed much more drilling. However, digraphs *sh* and *ch* did not bring difficulties to students, they learnt them easily.

It can be concluded that school students are ready to learn new alphabet, and since they have basis of Latin script due to English they will learn new alphabet easily and it must not take much time.

Kazakhstan is not the first turkic-speaking country that adopted the Latin script. Turkey shifted to the Latin alphabet in 1928, and it took only several months to complete this transition. Azerbaijan changed its alphabet in 1991, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in 1993. Therefore, the Turkic world has a great deal of experience regarding this issue, which Kazakhstani scholars used while creating the alphabet in order to avoid the mistakes and difficulties other Turkic countries had faced. The chief specialist, academic of The Azerbaijan Languages Institute, Fahrettin Veiselli, says that he is not satisfied with the current Azerbaijan alphabet. According to his articles the diacritical signs "ğ", "ə", "ç" in the alphabet should be replaced by letters with apostrophe and digraphs. For example, instead of "ç" it would be more convenient to use digraph “ch” in technological term. It is easy to find digraphs than diacritical letters on mobile phones or on computer keyboards. Hence, using digraphs and apostrophes in creating the new Kazakh alphabet is a logically justified step.

The entire Turkic world warmly welcomed the idea of Kazakhstan’s transition to the new alphabet. Nursultan Nazarbayev believes that adopting the Latin script will help to unify the Turkic nations. He expressed this opinion of his on the Summit of Turkic countries which took place in Kyrgyzstan in 2018.

So, in conclusion, we can say that Kazakhstan is not the only Turkic speaking country that changed its alphabet and certainly not the last. The new alphabet will support the native language and it will be in demand among the local people. Other advantages to switching to the Latin alphabet are, it will unite and tighten the bonds of the Turkic speaking nations and integrate Kazakhstan with the rest of the world.

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Қазақ жазуының реформасы

Аннотация

Жазу ғылымның қозғаушы күші болғандықтан адамзат өміріндегі ең маңызды өнертабыстардың бірі болып саналады. Қазақ жазуы өзінің ұзақ әрі бай тарихы бар. Бүгін қазақ әліпбиінің соңғы реформасынан бері жарты ғасырдан астам уақыт өткен соң, кейбір шешілмеген мәселелер туындады. Бұл мақалада қазақ жазуының тарихына қысқаша шолу жасалды және латын графикасына көшудің кейбір себептері келтірілді.

*Кілтті сөздер:қазақ жазуының реформасы, латын графикасына негізделген жаңа әліппе*

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Реформы казахской письменности

Аннотация

Письмо несомненно считается одним из самых важных изобретений человечества, поскольку оно является двигателем науки. Казахская письменность имеет долгую и богатую историю своего развития. Сегодня, спустя более полувека после последней реформы казахского алфавита, поднимаются некоторые нерешенные вопросы. В этой статье была сделана попытка кратко рассмотреть историю казахской письменности и приведены некоторые причины перехода на латинский алфавит.

*Ключевые слова: Казахская письменность, латинская графика, реформа казахского письма*