

Phonological foundations of the transition Kazakh alphabet to Latin graphics

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Abstract. In the selection of the most appropriate draft consistent with the phonetic & phonological and orthographic laws of the Kazakh language, one should take into consideration the history of the language development as well as the dialectical development of our society. The alphabet of any language is conditional in conveying sounds of live speech flow to the written form. Conventionalities and shortcomings of the alphabet are usually compensated by the orthographic rules. When making up the Kazakh alphabet based on the Latin graphics, certainly, orthographic and phonological laws should be taken into account. With a view to save graphemes, the original Kazakh phonemes are proposed to be designated with over-letter and under-letter diacritic marks.

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Introduction

In 1992, a congress of Turkic peoples of the former USSR was held in Turkey. One of the main agenda issues was that of the change-over of the writing of Turkic-speaking peoples to the Latin graphics. The idea was welcomed by the members of delegations with enthusiasm. After the instruction by the President to discuss the said question in newspapers, discussion articles are published taking into consideration economic, political, historical & cultural and other extralinguistic factors of the change-over to the Latin alphabet, and all of “pro” and “con” are thoroughly justified. In the solution of such not simple task, not only linguists participated but also politicians, economists, sociologists and psychologists. The question of the change-over to the Latin graphics was resumed as far as in 1995 and 2006 at sessions of the Assembly of peoples of Kazakhstan. After that there was some interruption and again after the speech of the President of the Republic, the society has become agitated proposing various drafts of the Kazakh alphabet on the basis of the Latin graphics [1].

During that period of time while the Kazakhstan people were getting used to the said idea, our neighbors managed to change over to the Latin alphabet: the Azerbaijanians, the Turkmen, and the the Uzbeks. The Kazakhstanis did not idle away, for the years of independence our sovereign state has improve in strength, and as a result of the social and market reforming, there occurred a stage of forming a social & political image of our state as a stable and fast developing one.

Political & economic reforms always impact on the society demanding from it the adequate response to the realities of a new historical stage. The social and economic changes occurring in the society have

wakened the people’s self-consciousness. Kazakh has become more popular and in demand as the state language both inside and outside the country. The foreign Kazakhs communicating with their congeners in the native language use information networks based on the Latin alphabet more and more. The aspiration of young people to master foreign languages, the computerization of the society, the use of Internet, the impact of the western culture through television and cinema, the striving for the European quality (eurostandard, european-style remodeling), all of this are promoting our society steadily and successively to appear “in the arms of the Latin alphabet” [2].

The society likes stability, and due to his inertness, habits or laziness an ordinary inhabitant will not get down to his learning of the Latin alphabet. It is rather difficult to make people relearn and break former stereotypes and master new graphics. In such situation, an important part is assigned to the most conscientious social strata, the intelligentsia, who, by virtue of their spirituality and civic stand, have assumed the society’s locomotive role. In this respect, it is appropriate to mention the words of the Leader of the Nation, who said that «the intellectuals should become the leading force in the strengthening of the nationwide values on the stage of the established state. The intelligentsia can and must play a key role in designing a mental world-view model of the country’s future». During the epoch of globalization and high technologies, introduction of the Latin alphabet would allow our society to become integrated together with the Turkic-speaking peoples and to join the world information space.

Some people believe that due to the change of the alphabet, the state and the people will distance themselves from Russia, the Russian culture, and the

entire cultural stratum based on the Cyrillic alphabet will be lost. This point of view is not correct since our extensive borders with Russia will not allow us to isolate ourselves from each other, so much the more that our cultural and alliance links are firmly bound so that we are “doomed” to be together during our lives. The knowledge of Russian, the competence in the Cyrillic alphabet in future will, as we think, the major criterion of a man of education. It is our national and cultural asset and, according to the President, «it is important that this people’s asset could not be lost for the future generations of the Kazakhstan people, and we ought to treat the Russian language and the Cyrillic alphabet as much carefully as in relation to the Kazakh language, and the competence in Russian is the historical advantage of our nation».

It was linguists, who caught the idea of latinization as the very first ones, as due to their profession they, like nobody else, understand the importance and the necessity of alphabet reforms during the epoch of the Kazakh language renaissance, the informational technological expansion, the globalization and the computerization of our life [3]. For the time being, there is already a lot of drafts of a new alphabet. After the available variants have been studied and summarized, to our mind, the scientists of the A. Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics should have the last word as in such difficult and responsible step of the change-over to the Latin alphabet, the linguists, who are competent in the matters of phonetics and phonology, orthography and orthoepy, should be involved.

The alphabet reform is of great practical importance [4]. It is much easier for a first-form schoolboy to learn 26 Latin letters than 42 Cyrillic ones. As a result of the phonological system development, there are much more phonemes than graphemes in the European languages. For example, there are 35 phonemes in French and 44 ones in English [5]. These numerous phonemes are only conveyed with 26 Latin letters. But in Kazakh, 28 original sounds-phonemes are conveyed with even 42 letters. Therefore, it is much more difficult for the said little countryman to learn Kazakh than a little European - his English or French. The mere letter *a* in French corresponds to the following three phonemes: <*a*> – front, <*a*> – back, <*a*> – nasal. The letter *o* is also realized in three phonemes as follows: <*o*> – open, <*o*> – closed and <*o*> – nasal. The letter *e* is, accordingly, realized in the three phonemes: <*e*> – open, <*e*> – closed and <*e*> – nasal.

It’s common perception that such alphabet should be deemed to be ideal, in which there is an individual graphical unit for each phoneme [6]. But the other thing is already proved namely that such method

of the phoneme designation is not only unnecessary but is not always desirable as it is unthrifty [7].

The linguists tried to establish mathematical formulas of phoneme and grapheme combinations involving the establishment of a formula to build the most thrifty alphabet [8]. In the Russian language, the alphabet building economy is achieved by the fact that differential features of hardness and softness peculiar to the consonant phonemes are designated with the following further vowels. This method for the Russian writing was referred to as the syllabic principle of the Russian orthography. As applied to the Russian language where there is a great deal of consonants distinguished according to the consonant softness and hardness, the syllabic principle of graphics is very advantageous as it reduces the number of necessary letters in the alphabet to designate soft consonants with special letters, one would have to invent and learn 15 new letters. The designation of the consonant softness by using five «palatalizing» vowels (*ya, yu, ye, yo, i*) creates much economy of graphical tools that is very important for computer typesetting and letter. And hard and soft consonants can alternate within one word. In the Kazakh language, unlike Russian, the consonant softness and hardness is of no phonological importance. Please compare, in Russian the consonant phonemes are used for the word distinction in the examples *kon* and *кон’*, *mol* and *мол*. In Kazakh, in the examples *tan* and *та’н*, *tys* and *тис* the distinctive function of the words is performed by the hard and soft vowels, which influence the neighboring consonants.

In the Kazakh language, a thrifty letter was proposed by the founder of the Kazakh linguistics A. Baitursynov. According to the Vowel Harmony Law, the Kazakh words may be pronounced hard or softly. For the soft word pronunciation, the scientist used the characters, which were placed at the beginning of whole word. It was also the first professor of the Kazakh philology K. Zhubanov, who wrote about the necessity to reduce letters in the Kazakh alphabet. In 1935, he prepared a draft to change the Kazakh orthography and alphabet on the basis of the Latin graphics, which proposed to reduce the number of letters due to the double designations of vowels, and to the individual designation of hard and soft varieties of sounds. As we can see, the ideas expressed by our scientists over half a century ago, have not lost their applicability to the present day.

It would be inconvenient and disadvantageous to designate softness of consonants with any special mark, for instance with an apostrophe (which is proposed sometimes). On the one hand, the apostrophe, if used often, is inconvenient, uniform and cannot be seen. On the other hand, it bears excess information as the soft vowel phonemes already sensitize the speaker to the soft pronunciation of consonants. Please

compare the words written with an apostrophe: m'is'i, k'il'em'.

In some variants of the said drafts, the Kazakh specific phonemes are proposed to be designated as letter combinations, for examples <a'> as **ae**, <o'> as **oe**, <u'> as **ue**, and **kh**, **gh**, **nh** and so on. The designation of phonemes as letter combinations would increase a volume of printed texts, which is inconvenient both for the writer and the reader, besides that, it fails to comply with the main principle – the language tendency for economy.

At different times, the scientists of the Institute of Linguistics Academicians A. Kaidarov, R. Syzdykova, and Professors K.Khusainov, A. Zhunisbekov and N.Ualiyev expressed their opinions about the change-over to a new Kazakh alphabet based on the Latin graphics in press. Currently, work in this direction is continuing: the already available drafts are summarized, linguistic principles and methods of changing over to the Latin are selected and concretized, work is carried on the Latin writing unification, and ratios between the particular sounds and the letters are analyzed in detail on the phonological basis. Upon the final (positive) solution of the problem, the linguists are ready to offer the most optimum alternative.

In the selection of the most appropriate draft consistent with the phonetic & phonological and orthographic laws of the Kazakh language, one should take into consideration the history of the language development as well as the dialectical development of our society. The development of the phonemic structure of each language is a continuous process of constant improvement of the sound expression of the language [9]. The universal process of phonologization by transforming allophones into the independent phonemes is typical of languages of different types. It's curious that the phoneme <f> as well as the affricates <ts> and <th>, which are not included in the Kazakh phonetic system but occur in some international words of the Greek and Latin origin, which came through the Russian language, but they did not take root in the Russian language itself for long time. In the L.N. Tolstoy's Work «Philippok», the principal character cannot pronounce his name and calls himself Khvilippok as there was no phoneme <f> in the Slavonic, and the organs of articulation was not adapted to pronounce this phoneme. In the original Russian language, there are no words beginning with the phoneme <f>, and the existing words: *factory*, *firm*, *film* are borrowed from the European languages. In some Russian subdialects, the affricates <ts> and <th> have not been used to the present day, so, *kurisa* is pronounced instead of *kuritsa*, *shai* instead of *thai*, as earlier in the Russian language, there was no phonological opposition <v> : <f>, <s> : <ts>, <sh> : <th>. These phonemes were still included in the

Russian phonetic system. Thus, the phoneme is a historically developing and changing category.

In the original Kazakh language, there are no phonemes <ts> and <th>, <f> and <v> in its paradigmatics, though they are available in the syntagmatics, i.e. they exist as physical sounds being variations of the phonemes <s> и <sh>, <p> and in the weak position. The phoneme allophones concerned have already adapted themselves to the organs of articulation of the native-speakers under the influence of phonetic laws and the frequent use [10]. As related to these borrowed consonants, there were also disputes and discussions concerning the inclusion thereof in the Latin alphabet of the Kazakh language, however, after all, a consensus was reached. Taking into account that the phonetic system of each language develops and improves enriched with new phonemes, a majority of linguists support the opinion that some borrowed phonemes should be present in the new Kazakh alphabet based on the Latin graphics. In the Kazakh alphabet based on the Cyrillic alphabet, for the purposes of economy, these sound combinations has become to be designated with the letters **i** and **u**. These sounds are perceived by the native-speakers as diphthongoid phonemes, and they are conveyed with the relevant graphemes in the writing that penetrated deeply into the mind of people, so here the phonologization law is available, i.e. generation of new phonemes. Without a second thought we write **ine**, **ikemdeu**, **institut**, **universitet**, **kino** etc., but not **ijne**, **ijkemdew**, **ijnstijtuwt**, **uwnijversijtet**, **kijno iñne**, as written in the transcription. Therefore, it is desirable to comply with the succession and the simplicity in the writing in the change-over to the Latin alphabet. Such writing is welcomed by the middle and young generations, who grew up in the Cyrillic tradition. The senior citizens, who are over seventy years old, used the former Latin alphabet for some time and they remember with nostalgia the transcriptional writing of words showing all pronounced sounds in the writing. This sociolinguistic factor is a sticking point in the selection of the final draft of the Latin alphabet. Even in any one family a dispute may arise between the different generations. Therefore, in the change-over to the Latin alphabet, extralinguistic and also sociolinguistic factors should be taken into consideration in addition to the scientific and linguistic features [11].

For the purposes of economy of the writing, the sound **u** consisting of the combinations **uw**, **uw** is designated with the single letter **u**. The hard vowel **u** designating the hard original Kazakh sound, may be conveyed with the over-letter diacritic mark *circumflex* **û**. To designate the hard consonant **g** over the letter **g**, the diacritic mark *brevis* **ǵ** should be placed.

There are also different opinions about the designation of the original Kazakh hard sound **k**. This sound is a hard variant of the sound **κ**, the same as **g** is a hard variant of **g**. If the letters **g** are designated as **ğ** and **g**, accordingly complying with the system, then **κ** and **κ** should be conveyed with the similar marks. The extended Latin alphabet has the letter **ķ**. And this grapheme is widely used in the European languages, for example, in the Latvian alphabet. When using this mark on the state symbols of the Republic as well as on passports and documents, the words **қазақ** and **Қазақстан** could be written much the same in the Kazakh, Russian, English and other European languages. Please compare: in Kazakh - **қазақ**, **Қазақстан**, in English – **kazakh**, **Kazakhstan**. In some drafts the hard sound **k** is proposed to be designated with the grapheme **q**, (**qazaq**, **Qazaqstan**, **Qaydar**, **Qazbek**), that is not very convenient as the writing of words should meet the basic criteria such as succession, identity, recognizability and aesthetic qualities, moreover, there should be no difficulties and confusion in the learning of the Kazakh language as a non-native one by representatives of other nationalities, for example, in English, French and other European words the mark **q** is always accompanied by the mark **u**, quality, quarry (English), quelque, quartier (French) and so on. Such established rules in the languages, based on the Latin, may adversely affect the learning of the Kazakh orthography. Though the question about the designation of the Kazakh hard **κ** is unprincipled, a compromise solution can be found at all times. Therefore, the two variants of both **ķ** and **q** are proposed in the alphabet.

The letter **h** of the Latin alphabet is proposed to be used in the words *habar*, *hat*, *kaharman* as well as in the proper names *Mûhtar*, *Dinmûhamed*, *Hûsni*.

To designate hard vowels, the traditional letters of the Latin graphics are accepted, and the two-spot is put over the letters: **ä**, **ö**, **ü** for the relevant soft vowels. These over-letter diacritic marks *umlaut* are used not only in the Turkic but also in German. The Latin letter **i**, like in many languages, is intended for the designation of the vowel **i**, and the short **i** as well.

For the original Kazakh hard **i**, the letter **y** is proposed. The soft **i** will be designated as **ı**, available in the general Turkic alphabet. For the nasal consonant **n** the letter **ŋ** is proposed, which was used earlier in the Latin graphics of 30s.

For the consonant **sh**, the Latin letter **ş** is proposed according to the experience of the Turkish and Azerbaijani languages.

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ikemdeu, kino, institut, universitet, tau, kelu, baru, säur (saur), su, siyr, ayu, himia, fizika, Mahmet, Uali, halyқ (halyq), kün, қûn (qûn), қағаз (qağaz), şapan, alaş, tsirk, Thili.

The present-day Kazakh phonetic system is at the stage of development and formation under the influence of external and internal factors. On the one hand, the phonetic system is enriched due to the phonemes, which came from the Russian language through a borrowed word, on the other hand – due to the internal laws of the language itself, and the transfer of phoneme variations from the syntagmatic axis to the paradigmatic one. The phoneme formation process, i.e. the phonologization phenomenon in the language occurs in connection with the development of the language and the thinking, and due to the enrichment thereof with new concepts, a new dictionary, and the impact of allied cultures and world-views.

As a result of the opinion poll among teachers, students and schoolboys, taking into account their wishes and requirements for the alphabet reform to make it to the maximum available and easily teachable.

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