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KAZAKH LANGUAGE MODERNIZATION – FROM CYRILLIC TO LATIN

This paper is aimed at investigating process of switching the alphabet of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin. In addition, the paper proposes analysis of historical experience about linguistic reformations in Turkic countries. The main part of the paper contains an analysis of public opinion based on survey among Kazakhstan citizens.

Key words: *Kazakhstan, the Kazakh language, the Kazakh alphabet, Latin script, Cyrillic script, Turkic languages.*

Introduction. The 21st century is the century of innovations that appear both in engineering and natural science, and in philology. The developing process of languages all over the world is running up. In the age of globalization it is very important not to lose languages and culture. A lot of scientists are researching new ways of developing different languages in the modern conditions. One of the most pressing problems is a large number of foreign words in national languages. The global trend of modernity is the transition to the use of the Latin alphabet and the penetration of English words into many languages. In this paper, the authors attempted to examine this trend on the example of the Kazakh language.

Since Kazakhstan is the birthplace of one of the authors of this article (A.A. Trubachev), changes in the Kazakh language and the language policy of Kazakhstan are a subject of his interest. So it was decided to conduct a survey among Kazakhstani people about their views on the language reforms undertaken in the country.

The relevance of this article lies in the fact that Kazakhstan is a developing country, and looking for its special place in the world community in order to create a state with better living conditions. One of the current objectives of the state policy is the self-identification of Kazakhstani society, the consolidation of various sectors of society in a difficult situation of using different languages in one country. It is necessary to defend the choice of different languages, but to preserve the authority of the titular nation language. According to the Constitution of Kazakhstan, Kazakh is the official language of the country, Russian is a means of interethnic communication.

The aim of this article is to study the process of the Kazakh language changing and research the public opinion about it. Also it is necessary to find out the advantages and disadvantages of modern reformations of the Kazakh language.

Historical introduction and experience of other countries. The question of changing the Kazakh alphabet dates back to the twenties of the 20th century, when Soviet philologists tried to unify language systems.

Until 1929, Arabic script was used in Kazakhstan, the alphabet used to write the Arabic language. In 1929, the Soviet government, on the recommendation of philologists, decided to change Arabic to Latin. Then in 1940, the Soviet government decided to change the alphabets of the peoples of Central Asia into Cyrillic. Most scholars studying language transformations in the USSR are confident that the government tried to distance the Turkic peoples from Turkey where Latin script was used and from the Middle Eastern Islamic countries where the Arabic alphabet was used. Consequently, language transformations can be considered politically sound [1; 2]. Cyrillic has been used in Kazakh, a Turkic language, for more than 70 years.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in some of the post-Soviet republics, there were changes in the alphabets back to the Latin alphabet: Azerbaijan in 1992; Uzbekistan in 1993; and Turkmenistan in 1993. These transformations were carried out in different ways and gave different results [3]. If for the Azerbaijani language this was a successful reform, then for the Uzbek it was not. Currently, the Cyrillic alphabet is still used in the government and everyday life in Uzbekistan, since the modern Latin alphabet is only a transliteration of the Cyrillic alphabet and is more convenient to write in Cyrillic letters, since they better convey the specifics of the language.

The way of Kazakhstan. In 2012 the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev first spoke about switching alphabet to Latin and instructed the philological commission to make research and find the best variant of Latin script for the Kazakh language [4].

In 2017 and 2018 several variants were checked by linguistic commission. One of them was really inconvenient for reading by cause of difficult letter combinations and incomprehensible using of letters. Another variant of alphabet with large number of apostrophes is one of the most understandable, but it is unable to convey the correct pronunciation of many words. Undoubtedly the first variant has the one advantage – only 25 letters and opportunity to use classic computer keyboard without extra keys [5,6].

On October 26, 2017, Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a decree introducing the new Kazakh language alphabet with a lot of corrections, in comparison to previous versions. The new alphabet consists of 32 letters and the most adapted to the Kazakh speech [6].

The public opinion research. The process of the alphabet switching continues to cause many questions. It is the usability of the new alphabet, the relevance of switching and clarity in using. Most of the Kazakhstan's youth speak English at different levels and it isn't hard for them to understand something was written by the new alphabet, but for the elderly it is quite difficult. Another issue is the presence of teachers who could teach children how to use the new alphabet correctly.

Exploring this issue, we conducted a survey among Kazakhstani people in order to find out their point of view on this reform.

We asked only one question: *How do you feel about the switching Kazakh alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script (Positive, Neutral or Negative?)*. The survey was held only among Kazakhstan citizens and showed the following results: 35 of 220 respondents supported this reform; 50 of them were neutral; 135 were against the switching.

We tried to find out the respondents' opinions on the changing the alphabet advantages and disadvantages.

Respondents indicated the following *benefits*: ease with use of the new alphabet in computer and modern technologies; popularization of the Kazakh language in the world; accessibility for foreigners, including those from Turkic countries, such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. One of the respondents expressed an interesting position that it will be easier for foreign-born Kazakhs to learn the language of their ancestors. Nowadays people from other countries must learn the Cyrillic alphabet before studying the Kazakh language.

The citizens who are *against* the reform noted the following reasons: incomprehensibility of the new alphabet; the necessity of reissue of a huge amount of literature; the creation of new educational programs; large expenses and «top down» type of the reform, because there was no large demand in our society for that.

People who answered that they were *neutral* in this quiz said that their life would not change by switching the alphabet and their level of the Kazakh language knowledge would not rise or go down after that. It shows that not all of the Kazakhstanis are ready for this reform and a big number of citizens do not support it.

Some believe that the reform of the alphabet is a political step by the Government of Kazakhstan to distance itself from the Russian sphere of influence. This view is dominant in Russian media, and some politicians are trying to use it to improve their ratings and sow misunderstanding among the citizens of their country. Nevertheless, Russia continues to be the main ally of Kazakhstan. In addition, in Kazakhstan, Russians do not lose the official status of their language as a means of interethnic and everyday communication.

Conclusion. Based on the results of the study, the authors came to the following conclusion: switching the alphabet has its advantages and disadvantages. Consequently, some sectors of society support reform, and some do not support it, arguing for reasons based on their own views and interests. The change of the alphabet is a really complicated process that requires the most serious approach and close attention from philologists and the state in order to successfully carry out this reform. Changes in languages are undoubtedly a component of its development and adaptation to modern conditions of social development.

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