# Alphabet Reform in Kazakhstan: History and Linguistic Foundations

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## ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the alphabets used in Kazakhstan from the 5th century BCE to the present, tracing the history of Kazakh writing's formation, development, and transformation. It also offers insights and analysis on the specific linguistic steps of the national plan of transitioning to the Latin graphics. Although the transition to the Latin graphics is crucial for Kazakhstan's development and the future of the Kazakh language, it has faced significant delays since 1991 due to the complexity of the issue, which includes political-economic challenges and numerous linguistic hurdles. The current study examines Kazakhstan's modern alphabet reform from a linguistic perspective and explores the extralinguistic influences. It details the specific steps in the transition process, including the linguistic work conducted between 2017 and 2023, the five officially proposed Kazakh-Latin alphabet versions, and the corresponding spelling rules and orthographic dictionaries. The research also analyzes the theoretical issues, linguistic difficulties, and scholarly debates among Kazakh linguists regarding the transition to the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics. As a result of the study, the linguistic reasons for the delay in the process of Kazakhstan's transition to the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics are identified, and certain conceptions are presented.

**Keywords:** Kazakh writing; Kazakh alphabet; Latin graphics; Kazakh language orthography; Akhmet Baitursynuly

## INTRODUCTION

The territory of Kazakhstan is one of the ancient cultural centers where writing emerged in the 5th-4th centuries BCE. The distant ancestors of the Kazakhs used methods such as "placing a branch on the road to indicate the direction someone took, sticking an arrow into a tree, carving wood, drawing parallel lines to denote decoration, stringing beads, tying knots" (Myrzakhanuly, 2006: 53-54) to communicate visually, utilizing ancient forms of semiotic symbols. In the following centuries, they expressed their spiritual values and worldviews by drawing various symbols and images on rocks. These practices eventually evolved into a more systematic form of writing.

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The oldest written artifact in Kazakhstan is a silver bowl with 26 characters on it, found in the 'Saq Castle' near the town of Yesik, dating back to the 5th century BCE. This script is known in academia as the 'Yesik inscription'. Scholars hypothesize that the 'Yesik inscription' is the precursor to the 'Runic script' used in the territory of Kazakhstan in the 3rd-2nd centuries BCE.

In the 2th-8th centuries CE, the Old Turkic script was used in the region encompassing what is now Kazakhstan, as well as modern Mongolia and Western Siberia. This script became known to modern scholars in Kazakhstan through stone monuments discovered along the Orkhon and Seleng rivers in Mongolia and the Talas River in Kazakhstan. In 1893, Thomson and Radlov first deciphered these inscriptions and identified them as the original script of the Turkic peoples.

Following the Arab expansion and the spread of Islam, the Old Turkic script fell out of use in the 9th century, and the Arabic graphics began to spread throughout Central Asia, including southern Kazakhstan. The Muslim Kazakh-Turkic people adopted the Arabic graphics, which they used for several centuries. With its strong spiritual content and Islamic values, Arabic graphics left a lasting impact on the Kazakh Turkic culture.

The Arabic graphics used in Kazakhstan from the 9th century to the early 20th century underwent three distinct stages of development. From the 9th to the 13th centuries, Turkic peoples used the Arabic alphabet without modifications. From the 13th century to the late 19th century, a version based on the Persian script, known as the 'Kadym script' was used, sometimes referred to as the 'Shagatai script'. In the late 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, the 'Jadid script', which introduced some modifications to the 'Kadym script', became prevalent.

In the early 20th century, a modern educational movement influenced by European culture spread across Kazakhstan, leading to the emergence of a new generation of educated Kazakh intellectuals. Among them was Akhmet Baitursynuly[1]. In 1912, Baitursynuly, the spiritual leader of the Kazakh national liberation movement at the beginning of the 20th century, reformed the traditional Arabic script and the 'Jadid script' to create the 'Kazakh alphabet' and the first national orthography, which accurately reflected the phonetic and grammatical structure of the Kazakh language. This new writing system, often called the 'Baitursynuly alphabet' or 'Baitursynuly orthography' was widely adopted among the Kazakh people. Its success lay in its alignment with the phonetic system of the Kazakh language, as well as its simplicity and ease of use. This script was further popularized through the first Kazakh national newspaper, titled 'Kazakh', published by Baitursynuly in 1913.

Baitursynuly's writing reform lasted 12 years. During these years, Baitursynuly systematically supplemented the symbols and spelling rules of the 'Kazakh National Alphabet' 3 times in 1912, 1923, and 1924. The original sounds and spelling rules of the Kazakh language systematized during this period became the codification basis of the modern Kazakh language spelling rules.

In 1929-1940, the Kazakh-Latin alphabet was used in Kazakhstan. Although this was initiated by the political leaders of the Soviet Union, it was also supported by a certain part of Kazakh intellectuals. However, Baitursynuly was categorically against abandoning the Arabic graphics and switching to the Latin graphics. He made a public statement about this at the 1st All-

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[1] *Ahmet Baitursynuly (1872-1937) was a leading political figure who fought for gaining Kazakhstan's independence from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 20th century. Baitursynuly pursued this struggle through three main directions: 1) political struggle, 2) enlightenment, and 3) scientific research. He redirected the old Kazakh society towards European-style education and culture. He understood that language was essential for the preservation of the nation. He conducted some research on the Kazakh language, authored the first Kazakh textbooks, developed the alphabet and orthography, and wrote the grammar of the Kazakh language. Baitursynuly was the founder of Kazakh linguistics, literature, and journalism, and an organizer of European-style Kazakh science. He was one of the first Kazakh professors and the first Minister of Education of Kazakhstan, as well as a poet, philosopher, cultural expert, educator, and a major scholar in Kazakhstan's history who influenced the Kazakh intelligentsia at the beginning of the 20th century. In 2022, UNESCO celebrated the 150th anniversary of Baitursynuly's birth.*

Union Turkological Congress held in Baku, Azerbaijan in 1926 (Baytursynuly, 1926: 287-289). However, due to the strong political support, the scholar could not prevent this, and in 1928-1929, the Kazakh script was transitioned to Kazakh-Latin alphabet. Although the letters of this alphabet are Latin, its spelling rules are based on Baitursynuly's spelling rules from the period between 1913 and 1927.

In 1940, the Soviet government forcibly changed the national script of all autonomous republics within the Union to the Cyrillic-Russian alphabet. In 1939-1940, Kazakh scholars led by Amanzholov prepared the Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet consisting of 42 letters[2]. This alphabet consists of 28 original sound-letters and 14 borrowed letters. 8 Russian letters /В/ (v), /ц/ (ts), /щ/ (shsh), /ё/ (io), /и/ (i), /э/ (ie), /ю/ (iu), /я/ (ia) and conditional signs 'ъ', 'ь' and /х/ (h), /һ/ (kh), /ф/ (f), /ч/ (ch) are 4 letters representing Arabic sounds that entered the Kazakh language.

The Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet has been in use since 1940s. During the period when the Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet was used, Baitursynuly's main spelling rules for writing original words were preserved. Additionally, complex writing issues that had been neglected until 1940 were addressed. As a result, the Kazakh script was updated with new spelling rules, and orthographic works, research, and dictionaries were published. These efforts aimed to strengthen the theoretical foundation of the Kazakh language, improve written communication, and standardize Kazakh written text.

Between 1940 and 1991, foreign words were written according to the Russian orthography. Many aspects of Kazakh spelling rules focused on representing Russian words and sounds, including applying Kazakh suffixes to Russian root words. As a result, the fundamental principle of Kazakh phonology, known as the 'Synharmonism' (Vowel Harmony) was violated. Synharmonism dictates that in polysyllabic words, vowels must harmonize as either 'thick' or 'thin' and any attached affixes must also follow this vowel harmony, maintaining a consistent melodic pronunciation. But Russian influence led to a mix of 'thick' and 'thin' vowels, weakening the language's resistance to foreign influences and diverting its evolution from traditional norms. Had this continued, Kazakh might have lost its intrinsic rules and become a language with only a small number of native words remaining in its vocabulary.

From 1989 to 1991, as the Soviet Union disintegrated, newly independent republics sought to preserve their national identities, languages, and cultures. A critical step in preserving the Kazakh language was transitioning from the Cyrillic graphics to a new alphabet. Turkic countries such as Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan transitioned to the Latin graphics in the early years of their independence. Kazakhstan, which had strong Russian influence, could not implement this change immediately. However, since 1991, Kazakhstan has been pursuing the initiative to switch to the Latin graphics and continues to work towards that goal.

And yet, although 33 years have passed, the transition to the new Kazakh alphabet has not been carried out. Why is that? To answer this, it is necessary to identify the diachronic and synchronic foundations of the contemporary alphabet reform in Kazakhstan. This is the main aim of the current article. In order to reach the aim, the following objectives must be resolved: first, to demonstrate the chronology and the stages of the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics as well as its societal and social causes; second, to determine the historical basis of the current Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet and orthography, and its connection with the linguistic works of Ahmet Baitursynuly in the early 20th century; and third, to analyze the linguistic issues and various

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[2] *Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet: Аа, Әә, Бб, Вв, Гг, Ғғ, Дд, Ее, Ёё, Жж, Зз, Ии, Йй, Кк, Ққ, Лл, Мм, Нн, Ңң, Оо, Өө, Пп, Рр, Сс, Тт, Уу, Ұұ, Үү, Фф, Хх, һһ, Цц, Чч, Шш, Щщ, Ъъ, Ыы, Іі, ьь, Ээ, Юю, Яя.*

perspectives that have arisen in the process of the current reform of the new Kazakh alphabet based on the Latin graphics.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Kazakh writing is characterized by the use of various well-known alphabets that have left a significant mark in world history, research on this topic is both complex and extensive. There is no voluminous study that fully covers all types of writing used in Kazakhstan and explores their linguistic issues in detail. Instead, research tends to focus on the eras, periods, and types of Kazakh writing. Given the scope of this article, we will review the main literature only.

Among the studies on the ancient Turkic alphabet, Aidarov's (1986) work is of particular importance. He was the first Kazakh turkologist to study the ancient Turkic script and had a significant impact on the development of Turkic scholars who followed and the creation of foundational Turkological studies. Currently, Amanzholov's (2019) research is highly regarded for its innovative approach to the ancient Turkic script. Additionally, Burkitbayeva's (2023) article offers valuable insights into the old writing systems used by Turkic peoples and the composition of their alphabets.

Following the study of the ancient Turkic alphabet, Kashkari's work provides information on the composition and writing rules of the Arabic script used in Kazakhstan and Turkic-speaking countries from the 10th to the 13th centuries, a period spanning over ten centuries (Kashkari, 1997; Maralbek, 2018).

There is a lack of specialized studies on the later eras of the Arabic script, such as the 'Kadim script' and 'Jadit script', which are based on the Persian alphabet and its spelling rules. This topic is complex and requires thorough research, considering the numerous written legacies from the Middle Ages. Бұл бүкіл Орта Азия халықтарында осылай аталады. Salehuddin and Mohd. Jaafar (2024) provide significant information and valuable insights about the spread of the Arabic script in Southeast Asia, its place in the written culture of the Muslim nations, and the possible ways of reforming its spelling system as a means to revitalize the script.

Extensive research on Baitursynuly's 'Kazakh Alphabet' from the early 20th century, the theoretical issues of writing reform, and the significance of spelling rules is very scarce. Maralbek's (2023) work provides data on Baitursynuly's writing theory. Key articles on the subject include the research by Momynova (2022), Maralbek (2019), Toktarbekuly and Saishankhuli (2023). Additionally, Amirzhanova's (2012) monograph examines the first Kazakh-Latin alphabet used in Kazakhstan between 1929 and 1939

There are numerous studies on the Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet, which has been in use since 1940, and its spelling rules. The works of Syzdyk (2018), Uali (2018), Aldash (2021), and Kuderinova (2013) are particularly important as they focus on the complex theoretical problems and challenges of writing. These scholars have specifically addressed the theoretical issues of writing, developed spelling rules and orthographic dictionaries for the modern Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics, and contributed to the development of its concepts and principles.

Numerous articles have been published on the linguistic challenges of the modern Kazakh alphabet reform. Among these, the works of Bazarbayeva (2013), Fazylzhanova (2007), and Rsaliyeva (2021) are of particular value. Additionally, since 2007, researchers at the Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics have conducted studies on various linguistic aspects of the Kazakh-Latin alphabet, resulting in the publication of 4 collections of articles.

Since 2017, the project 'Spelling Rules of the Kazakh Language Based on the New Alphabet' has been in development. These spelling rules were discussed several times and were officially approved on February 9, 2021, at the meeting of the National Commission for the Transition of the Kazakh Language Alphabet to Latin Graphics under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The spelling rules consist of 9 chapters and 105 articles. The chapters cover 'Spelling of Letters', 'Spelling of Root Words', 'Connection of Suffixes', 'Spelling of Separately Written Words', 'Spelling of Compound Words', 'Spelling of Hyphenated Words', 'Capitalization', 'Abbreviations', 'Spelling of Borrowed Words' and 'Word Division'.

Baitursynuly, the author of the first Kazakh spelling book 'Til-kural' (Baitursynuly, 1914), established a set of 34 spelling rules. They are divided into two main chapters: 'Spelling of Letters' and 'Spelling of Roots and Suffixes'. While the spelling rules for the new Kazakh alphabet with Latin graphics feature more categories and rules, many of them align with Baitursynuly's 'Rule of Root and Addition'. The structure and content of modern Kazakh spelling with Baitursynuly's approach were compared and their theoretical continuity and unique features were identified and published in Maralbek (2022).

Orthograms, individual words, phrases, and unresolved graphic issues are codified using an orthographic dictionary. Baitursynuly laid the foundation for the Kazakh language and its national script in the early 1920s. Although spelling rules for the Kazakh language were established during this period, an orthographic dictionary was not compiled. This was due to societal development, the level of written communication, and the financial and linguistic resources available at the time. The first orthographic dictionary of the Kazakh language was published in 1957, followed by seven updated editions in 1964, 1978, 1988, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2013.

Between 2019 and 2021, as part of the effort to establish the foundation for transitioning the Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet to the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics, an unpublished manuscript titled *Parallel Spelling Dictionary in Cyrillic and Latin Graphics* was prepared at the Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics. The Dictionary includes approximately 50,000 words and phrases.

The works presented above, along with collective monographs and dictionaries, form the empirical and theoretical foundation of the current research.

In today's era of global integration, it is crucial to present significant events in the political, cultural, and spiritual life of any country to the global community. However, foreign scholars and the international community often lack accurate information about the history of the Kazakh alphabet and the ongoing alphabet reform. This is largely because in Kazakhstan, most works are still written in Kazakh and Russian, with few being translated into international languages such as English, Chinese, French, Spanish, or Arabic. Additionally, there are few articles that thoroughly discuss the theoretical significance and social context of the modern alphabet reform, covering the entire history of the Kazakh script. Therefore, it is essential to bring the issue of Kazakhstan's transition to the Latin graphics to global attention and present it to foreign scholars. Research on this topic will be far more credible and valuable if conducted by Kazakhstani scholars who have a deep understanding of the subject.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is impossible to fully uncover the history and theoretical issues of the Kazakh script or the scientific foundations of the new Kazakh alphabet with Latin graphics currently being implemented without thorough research. To achieve the goals of this study, first of all, materials were collected from libraries and archives in Kazakhstan and abroad. Notably, the works of Baitursynuly, which are not available in Kazakhstan, were sourced from the Russian State Library in Moscow (i.e. Baytursynuly, 1924), the Azerbaijan National Archive in Baku (i.e. Baytursynuly, 1926), and the National Archives of Uzbekistan in Tashkent (i.e. Baytursynuly, 1922). Archival research led to the compilation and publication of a collection of materials with explanations (Maralbek, 2023). This work provided the theoretical foundation for the conclusions presented in this paper.

Secondly, the graphic features of approximately 30 letters exchanged between Kazakh khans and Russian emperors and governors, sourced from the 'United State Archives of the Orenburg Region' of the Russian Federation, were analyzed using the textological method. This analysis uncovered previously unexplored graphic features, alphabetic composition, and periods of use for the 'Kadim script' and 'Jadit script' used in Kazakhstan between the 15th and 19th centuries.

Thirdly, the search for the official documents and decrees from the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics and the transition process was conducted. Statistical data from reliable internet sources were gathered and carefully sorted. This approach helped to elucidate the socio-political background of the transition to the Latin graphics.

Following this, interviews were conducted with leading linguists who were involved in the preparation and discussion of the new Kazakh alphabet. In particular, the interviews were conducted with philological science scholars from linguistic research institutes and universities in Kazakhstan to understand their conceptions and perspectives regarding phonetics and the theory of writing. It can be seen from these interviews that Kazakh linguists can be classified into two groups: those with a historical-traditional direction and those with a progressive-modernist direction.

In the final stage of the study, the historical-comparative and structural methods to analyze materials from all periods of Kazakh writing were employed, the development of spelling rules and alphabets were assessed, and the conclusions were draw. This analysis provided a balanced evaluation of the linguistic issues that have sparked debates among Kazakh linguists, assessed the research made, and clarified their significance for the readers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The alphabet is more than just a set of letters; it embodies writing rules and norms and in a broad sense, it is the future development of the national language. Therefore, the current alphabet reform in Kazakhstan can be called a major historical period that shapes the future direction of the Kazakh culture.

In 1991, Abduali Kaidarov, the then Director of the Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics, sent an open letter to the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, regarding the transition to the Latin graphics. This led to the formation of a special commission to address

the complex issues related to the transition and from 1994 to 2013, President Nazarbayev periodically revisited the issue of transitioning to the Latin graphics.

In 1994, at a Turkological conference in Antalya, Turkey, a decision was made to adopt a common Latin graphics for Turkic countries, resulting in the creation of the 'Common Turkic Alphabet' with 34 letters (Kuderinova, 2021). However, no spelling rules, orthographic dictionaries, or educational materials were developed for this alphabet.

The second wave began in 2006-2007 when President Nazarbayev raised the issue in his Addresses to the People of Kazakhstan and important meetings. In 2006, during the 12th session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, he stated, "We need to revisit the issue of transitioning the Kazakh alphabet to Latin. Although we postponed it before, the Latin alphabet is increasingly prevalent globally, and many countries, including post-Soviet ones, have adopted it" (Nazarbayev, 2006). During this period, a three-year, five-year, and seven-year plans for the transition to the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics for 2008-2010, 2008-2012, 2008-2014, respectively, were made. However, this also remained a plan, as the exact political decisions on transitioning to the Latin graphics were not made, and the corresponding linguistic issues were not researched thoroughly.

On December 14, 2012, President Nazarbayev's Address to the People entitled 'Kazakhstan-2050 Strategy: The New Political Direction of the Established State' included a call to start the transition to the New Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics by 2025. He emphasized that "This is a fundamental issue that we must address as a nation. Our decision will benefit future generations by facilitating their access to global communication and modernizing the Kazakh language" (Nazarbayev, 2012). Following this Address, the third wave began in early 2013. This time, rather than a plan, concrete steps were initiated.

Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics has always been the primary institution addressing large-scale linguistic issues in Kazakhstan. Embracing the third wave as a decisive step toward the Latin graphics, the Institute began developing the linguistic foundation for the transition. In 2013, research trips were organized to Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and the Xinjiang region of China, to study their experiences and progress in adopting the Latin graphics.

In 2013, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan set a goal to begin the transition to the New Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics in 2017. This initiative sparked widespread interest across the country, leading to extensive research and discussions among various groups and linguists.

In 2017, the President of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, signed a Decree 'On the Transition of the Kazakh Alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin graphics (Nazarbayev, 2017). By the order of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a National Commission for the transition of the Kazakh alphabet to Latin script was established. A step-by-step plan for the transition of the Kazakh alphabet to Latin script by 2025 was developed, and four work teams were formed to support the process in terms of orthography, methodology, terminology, and technical information support.

Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics served as the central body for the orthography team, with the authority to make the final decisions on the alphabet and spelling. However, this authority was largely nominal, as government representatives intervened in critical linguistic matters, proposing their own versions of the alphabet. Despite the existence of a linguistic alphabet project developed by the Institute's scholars, this proposal was sidelined by the authorities, who instead directed the creation of spelling rules for their flawed alphabet versions and insisted on presenting these to the public as the correct option.

The first proposed alphabet, known as the 'Digraph Alphabet' was presented on September 11, 2017, at the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This version used digraphs to represent 8 sounds (Tolebayev, Imambayeva & Yesembayev, 2017). However, it was met with widespread criticism from both the public and scientists due to its excessive number of letters and poor linguistic choices, which made it difficult to develop consistent spelling rules. Consequently, on October 9, 2017, a second version consisting of 32 letters was published, and on October 26, it was approved by a Presidential Decree. This version was called the 'Apostrophe Alphabet' because it used apostrophes to modify 9 letters representing the native sounds of the Kazakh language (Nazarbayev, 2017). Despite the revisions, this version was also criticized for its weak linguistic foundation. On February 19, 2018, President Nazarbayev signed a Decree on a new alphabet for the Kazakh language, and on February 20th of the same year, the third version, consisting of 32 letters, was introduced. This version, known as the 'Acute Alphabet' featured acute accents on 6 letters (Nazarbayev, 2018).

None of these three alphabet projects were developed by professional linguists, leading to significant criticism and rejection of the first two versions due to their flawed linguistic foundations, despite being presented at the Parliament and supported by Presidential Decrees. However, the third project has been officially approved and is recognized as a project with progress compared to the previous two projects. It remains official until now. For example (See Table 1):

TABLE 1. Sounds designated differently in the three alphabets, and their letters

| № | Sounds | Digraph Alphabet | Apostrophe Alphabet | Acute Alphabet |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | /ə/ (ä) | Ae, ae | a' | á |
| 2. | /ɵ/ (ö) | oe | o' | ó |
| 3. | /ʏ/ (ü) | ue | u' | ú |
| 4. | /y/ (ᵘw) | w | y' | ý |
| 5. | /ʁ/ (ğ) | gh | g' | ǵ |
| 6. | /ш/ (sh) | sh | s' | Sh |
| 7. | /ч/ (ch) | ch | c' | Ch |
| 8. | /j/ (zh) | zh | j | j |
| 9. | /ң/ (ng) | ng | n' | ń |
| 10 | /й/ | j | i' | ı |

In June 2019, after Kassym-Jomart Tokayev assumed office as the second President of Kazakhstan, he officially announced on his Twitter account on October 21, 2019, that the 'Acute Alphabet' (the third draft) still needed further discussion and improvement (Tokayev, 2019). This announcement made it clear to the public that the current project was not final and that further revisions were possible. President Tokayev emphasized that the selection of the alphabet and spelling rules should be left to linguists, advising that their expertise should guide the decision-making process. Akhmet Baitursynuly Institute of Linguistics was given special tasks to refine the alphabet project. As a result, by the end of 2019, the fourth version, named 'Advanced Alphabet' (Qazaquni, 2020), was prepared and submitted to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This project was developed by phoneticians and grammatologists who were specifically engaged in writing and spelling.

On January 28, 2021, the 'Advanced Alphabet' project was approved by the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and forwarded to the President for final approval. However, the President has not yet approved it. Although the transition to the Latin graphics remains a pressing issue, it is evident that this matter is deeply political and cannot be openly prioritized on the national agenda.

There are three major underlying factors directly affecting the delay in Kazakhstan's transition to the new Latin-based Kazakh alphabet: 1) political-economic significance; 2) social significance; and 3) linguistic significance. These factors are discussed in detail below.

First, the political-economic significance: The decision to switch to a new Kazakh alphabet amid a complex geopolitical landscape such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, global market instability, the rise in commodity prices, and the global pandemic could potentially create unexpected challenges that may affect Kazakhstan's internal stability. Thus, it is evident that the right moment for this transition has not yet arrived.

Second, the social significance: Kazakhstan is home to representatives of over 117 nationalities, with a population of around 20 million. According to the 2021 census, 70.4% of the population are ethnic Kazakhs (Nurdanbekuly, 2023), 15% are Russians, and 14% belong to other ethnic groups. However, the same census reveals that 89% of the population uses Russian in daily life and work (BNS, 2021). This highlights the strong influence of the Russian language and the complexity of the linguistic landscape in Kazakhstan. The linguistic environment is divided into two main groups: Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking. Although all sectors of society are classified within this bilingual space, the proportion of the Kazakh-speaking population has been steadily increasing in recent years. The adoption of the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics is a part of this broader linguistic shift.

Since the alphabet change is related only to the Kazakh language, non-Kazakh and Russian-speaking communities in Kazakhstan may feel excluded from this process. Even after the transition, the previous Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet will continue to be used alongside the Latin one. From the psychological and national perspectives, a certain part of the people of Kazakhstan may not be fully prepared for the shift to the Latin graphics. These factors slow down the progress of alphabet reform and complicate the implementation process. This is why the reform of the alphabet in Kazakhstan has been ongoing since the early years of independence.

The third, linguistic significance: Linguists divide into two main directions when selecting a new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics: the progressive-modernist direction and the historical-traditional direction.

1. The progressive-modernist direction scholars include Nurgeldi Uali, Zeinep Bazarbayeva, Aiman Aldash, Bagdan Momynova, Kuralai Kuderinova, Anar Fazylzhanova, Yermukhamet Maralbek, Nursaule Rsaliyeva, Gulfar Mamyrbek, Nazira Amirzhanova, and others. They specialized in writing-related research, authored monographs, and developed various editions of spelling rules for the Cyrillic-Kazakh script (1988, 2007, 2013, 2019). They are proficient in foreign languages and are capable of reading historical scripts used in Kazakhstan, including all the types of old Arabic script writings.
2. The historical-traditional direction scholars include Alimkhan Zhunisbek, Baiynkol Kali, Beksultan Nurzheke, Yerden Kazhybek, Anar Salkynbai, Kalamkas Kalybayeva, Orynai Zhubayeva, Bizhomart Kapalbek, and others. They are specialists in phonetics, grammar, and other fields, along with studying the issues of stylistics, terminology, and general linguistics. They advocate for developing the new Kazakh alphabet and spelling in Latin script while adhering to the internal rules of the Kazakh language. They emphasize rejecting and eliminating changes introduced by the influence of global languages such as Russian, Arabic, English, and Chinese.

While this position is conceptually sound in terms of ideas and principles, the internal subjective feelings of individuals often do not align with the objective linguistic and social realities. As a result, the historical-traditional direction scholars may struggle to effectively address the linguistic challenges that arise during the implementation of this position.

The historical-traditional direction scholars support the 'National Alphabet' which features 28 original Kazakh sound letters developed by Alimkhan Zhunisbek (2017). However, this alphabet has not produced supporting linguistic materials such as spelling rules or an orthographic dictionary based on this alphabet project.

The arguments of the progressive-modernist and historical-traditional directions regarding the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics are based on the following linguistic issues:

TABLE 2. Controversial Linguistic Issues in the New Latin-Based Kazakh Alphabet

| | Controversial Linguistic Topics | Progressive-Modernist Direction | Historical-Traditional Direction |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | What is the phonological nature of the sounds /и/ (ⁱy, ⁱy) and /y/ (ᵘw, ᵘw, ⁱw, ⁱw) in Kazakh? How should they be written in the new orthography? | These are semi-vowel sounds (sonorants). Therefore, the sounds /и/ (ⁱy, ⁱy) and /y/ (ᵘw, ᵘw, ⁱw, ⁱw) should be represented by the English alphabet letters 'i' and 'u' without fully distinguishing the diphthongoids. | These are vowel sounds. Therefore, /и/ (ⁱy, ⁱy) and /y/ (ᵘw, ᵘw, ⁱw, ⁱw) should be represented as diphthongs with additional vowel symbols, using two letters to denote /ұy/ (ᵘw), /үy/ (üw), /ыy/ (īw), /iy/ (iw), /ый/ (īy), /ій/ (iy). |
| 2 | How should the sounds /ұ/ (u), /ы/ (ī), and /i/ (i) be represented in the alphabet? | /ұ/ should be represented by 'ū', /ы/ by 'y', and /i/ by 'ı', | /ұ/ should be represented by 'u', /ы/ by 'ī', and /i/ by 'i'. |
| 3 | Should the new Latin-based Kazakh alphabet align with the common Turkish alphabet (Turkey's alphabet)? | Alignment is not necessary; each language has its own unique features, and the alphabet should reflect these distinctions. | It should fully align to facilitate mutual readability among Turkic peoples and to strengthen connections. |
| 4 | Should the 12 phonemes from Russian and Arabic /в/ (v), /ё/ (io), /и/ (i), /ф/ (f), /x/ (h), /h/ (kh), /ц/ (ts), /ч/ (ch), /щ/ (shsh), /э/ (ie), /ю/ (iu), /я/ (ia) and the two conditional signs ('ь' and 'ъ') be retained in the new Latin-based Kazakh alphabet? | The new Latin-based Kazakh alphabet should retain only four sounds: /в/ (v), /ф/ (f), /ч/ (ch), and /x/ (h), removing the rest. | All these sounds should be removed from the Latin-based Kazakh alphabet and provided as additional symbols only. Words with these sounds should be transcribed from Russian and other foreign languages. |
| 5 | How should foreign words and terms be written? | They should be adapted to the phonetic rules of Kazakh. Non-conforming foreign words should be written in their original form. Kazakh orthoepy should be taught. | A separate spelling rule should be created for foreign words, similar to how English transliterates foreign terms, to distinguish them from native words. |
| 6 | What should be the primary principle of Kazakh writing? | The primary principle should be the phonemic principle. | The primary principle should be both phonetic and morphological. |

If these controversial issues are not resolved appropriately, they could result in significant problems such as the rewriting of Kazakh grammar and the overcomplication of Kazakh writing. The Kazakh language is agglutinative, meaning that the root of a word is preserved while suffixes are added according to vowel harmony. Since the Kazakh language primarily developed orally until the early 20th century, and its literary form was based on oral traditions, the written and spoken forms of Kazakh are close, but not the same. The controversies surrounding these issues are directly linked to this historical context.

In the first issue, if the diphthongoids /и/ ($^{i}$y, $^{i}$y) and /у/ ($^{ü}$w, $^{ü}$w, $^{i}$w, $^{i}$w) are marked according to the approach of the historical-traditional direction, it may result in increased complexity in written texts. Although this approach aligns with the syllabic system of the Kazakh language, it can lead to a 1% increase in the number of characters in written texts. This complexity can make printing, reading, writing, and learning more difficult, and it may have broader consequences, such as the creation of new types of suffixes in the Kazakh language and the need to revise the grammar of Kazakh, which has been studied since 1912.

In the second issue the historical-traditional direction scholars advocate for a 'Common Turkic Alphabet' using the Turkish alphabet as a base. The Kazakh language contains 28 native sounds, and there is a broad agreement between the two approaches on the representation of 23 of these sounds. The dispute centers primarily around the representation of the 5 sounds /и/ (i), /у/ (u), /ұ/ (ū), /ы/ (ī), /і/ (ı) which has been a point of contention in the preparation of the new Latin-based Kazakh alphabet.

In the third issue, the progressive-modernist direction scholars appreciate that the Kazakh alphabet, as proposed in the 'Advanced Alphabet' project, is unique and distinguishes itself from other alphabets. They consider this project a true 'National alphabet' for Kazakhstan. In contrast, the historical-traditional direction scholars advocate for an alphabet based on the original sounds of the Kazakh language but use the Turkish alphabet as a base. Therefore, alphabet proposed by the historical-traditional direction can be seen as a 'Kazakh-Turkish alphabet' rather than a purely national one.

The fourth and fifth issues are interrelated, concerning how to handle the writing of foreign words and terms in the Kazakh alphabet. These two topics are connected, and the rationale behind each controversial point can be explained as follows:

The progressive-modernist direction scholars support the removal of seven sounds that were introduced into the Kazakh alphabet from the Russian language in 1940, specifically /и/ (i), /ц/ (ts), /щ/ (shsh), /э/ (ie), /ю/ (iu), /я/ (ia), /ё/ (io) as well as the two conditional signs 'ь' and 'ъ', and the guttural consonant /h/ (kh) that entered from the Arabic language, from the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics. These sounds are only used in words borrowed from the Russian language, and their functions can be fully replaced by native Kazakh sounds. For example, /и/ can be represented as /i/, /ц/ as /t/+/s/ or /s/, /щ/ as /sh/, /э/ as /i/+/e/, /ю/ as /i/+/u/, /я/ as /i/+a/, /ё/ as /i/+/o/. Whereas the borrowed glottal sound /h/ and the palatal consonant /x/ may be represented by a Latin letter 'h'.

The two signs 'ь' and 'ъ' are not phonemes and have no sound value. These signs have the function of demonstrating the orthoepic peculiarity of the Russian words: «ь» is put after consonants as a sign to soften them, while «ъ» is put after vowels as a sign to prolong them.

However, the sounds /ф/ (f), /ч/ (ch), and /x/ (h), which entered the Kazakh language from the Arabic alphabet starting in the 9$^{th}$ century, and the sound /в/ (v), which entered from Russian during the switch to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940, are retained in the alphabet. This is because no native Kazakh sound can fully perform the function of /в/ (v), /ф/ (f), /ч/ (ch), and /x/ (h) in modern Kazakh. Removing these sounds from the alphabet would negatively affect the functionality of the Kazakh language. These sounds are found in a large number of loanwords that are actively used in contemporary Kazakh texts. If they are removed, it will lead to an increase in homonyms, alter the form and pronunciation of words, and greatly hinder the correct understanding of word meanings, making it difficult to erase them from people's minds. Additionally, the sounds /в/ (v), /ф/ (f), /ч/ (ch), and /x/ (h) exist in the 6 most prominent lingua francas (i.e., English, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, Portugal, and Russian), and retaining them in the alphabet would enable Kazakhs

to better learn these global languages. This should be seen as a necessary adaptation of the language to the times and a new track that allows for the development of the Kazakh language.

The historical-traditional direction scholars remove the aforementioned 12 borrowed sounds and 2 signs from the main structure of the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics and treat them as additional letters. They propose transliterating borrowed words that contain these sounds in a manner similar to the English practice of writing foreign words. For example, /ц/ becomes 'ts', /ч/ – 'ch', /х/ – 'kh', /щ/ – 'shsh', /h/ – 'kh', /и/ – 'iy', /я/ – 'ya', /ю / – 'yu', /ё/[3] – 'yo', /е/ – 'ye', /в/ – 'v', /ф/ – 'f'.

This approach would require creating two separate sets of spelling rules for the Kazakh language: one for native words and another for foreign words. Additionally, the Kazakh alphabet could evolve into a transcription alphabet that preserves borrowed sounds. From this standpoint, it becomes evident that the historical-traditional direction scholars view 'language' primarily as 'written language'. They believe in maintaining the purity and internal nature of the language through written form and correcting it with rules. In reality, however, 'language' is not just a written construct; it is fundamentally an oral (spoken) phenomenon. Therefore, it is crucial to observe the standard of spoken Kazakh rather than just its written form. Writing is merely a graphic representation of spoken language, a means of conveying ideas through conventional symbols. Thus, to protect and preserve the language, it is essential to adhere to the orthographic norms of the Kazakh language.

In addressing the challenge of writing borrowed sounds and words, representatives from both approaches have offered suggestions at the level of separate letters. However, systematic models for writing borrowed words and full-fledged spelling rules have yet to be developed, as this is a complex issue requiring extensive research. Scholars like Orynai Zhubayeva and Bizhomart Kapalbek from the historical-traditional direction, along with Yermukhamet Maralbek from the progressive-modernist direction, emphasize the need to adhere to the syllable structure and sound combinations of the Kazakh language using Baitursynuly's early 20th-century method; they propose certain models. While the rationale behind this position is sound, the current linguistic environment in Kazakhstan, along with the practical skills of Kazakh language users and the articulation base of spoken language, differ significantly from the early 20th century. Therefore, these early models require further refinement.

As for the sixth issue, the progressive-modernist direction scholars suggest that the alphabet should be adaptable for reading, learning, modern technology, and simplifying writing to save the user's time and energy. They argue that the primary sounds, or phonemes, should be distinctly marked, and the main principle of the Kazakh writing system should be the 'phonemic principle'. As a result of these positions, the progressive-modernist direction scholars recommend separating orthography from orthoepy and teaching it as a separate subject.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the Kazakh language developed orally, and today's phonological and grammatical rules were shaped by this oral tradition. If the Kazakh script follows the 'phonemic principle', then not all sounds of the language are marked – only phonemes are. This approach may not accurately reflect the phonological and grammatical laws of the orally developed Kazakh language and may sometimes contradict the internal system of the language. For this reason, the historical-traditional direction scholars view this as altering the Kazakh language and disrupting its internal system. They advocate for making the spelling and pronunciation of the Kazakh language consistent. Consequently, the historical-traditional direction

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[3] */я/, /ю/, /ё/ are diphthongs in Russian. In Kazakh, they represent the combination of two sounds: 'i' and 'a', 'i' and 'u', 'i' and 'o'.*

scholars believe that the main principles of Kazakh writing should be the 'phonetic principle' and the 'morphological principle'.

The historical-traditional direction scholars do not take into account that writing is not a phonetic transcription and that the main function of writing is not to accurately mark the spoken language but to implement language communication between people. For them, protecting the language without changing it is the main goal. The establishment of such a position is also connected with the fact that the historical-traditional direction scholars are phoneticians, and grammarians.

Both the historical-traditional and the progressive-modernist directions have their merits and shortcomings. From the above analysis, the positions of the historical-traditional direction scholars may appear mostly negative. However, the progressive-modernist direction scholars also have their own challenges. For instance, they can be overly attached to maintaining the graphic norms of words that have become ingrained over time and are reluctant to deviate from the old norms and linguistic standards influenced by the Russian language. The authors of the orthographic dictionaries and orthological tools of the Cyrillic-Kazakh alphabet since 1988, and the main works on the writing theory currently in use, are the progressive-modernist direction scholars. This results in their tendency to protect their research work and contributions.

This debate has now subsided due to the postponement of the issue of replacing the alphabet. Over the last 3-4 years, representatives of the progressive-modernist direction, as the leading specialists in writing theory, have established the scientific basis for the new alphabet and developed both theoretical and practical materials. Between 2017 and 2021, they prepared the unpublished "Spelling Rules of the Kazakh Language Based on the New Alphabet", consisting of 9 chapters and 105 articles, as well as the manuscript for the "Parallel Orthographic Dictionary of the Kazakh Language" in Cyrillic and Latin script, under their 'Advanced Alphabet' project.

Meanwhile, the historical-traditional direction scholars, acting as opponents, discussed the results of the research of the progressive-modernist scholars on social networks and in public forums, expressed their opinions, and voiced their objections. By doing so, they contributed to the quality of the research. However, causing divided opinions in society, this also created obstacles to the transition to the Latin graphics, which is crucial for the nation's future and the country's development.

Although Kazakh linguists have been engaging in intense scientific debate on these critical issues since 2017, they have not yet reached a consensus. As a result, corrections and additions may still be made to the new spelling rules and orthographic dictionaries of the Kazakh language mentioned above.

## CONCLUSION

Kazakh written culture has its roots in ancient times and has evolved through various historical eras up to the present day. Among these periods, the Baitursynuly era at the beginning of the 20th century stands out for its deep national significance. Today's alphabet reform takes a theoretical basis from the national period at the beginning of the 20th century and remains a golden age that created a new language power for Kazakhstan and the Kazakh nation in the current and future era of globalization.

The transition of Kazakhstan to the Latin graphics is a carefully considered historical decision, made by scientists and political figures with the future of the Kazakh language, the country, and the nation in mind. It is a step taken by the Kazakh society through its own choice. As a result of this reform, Kazakhstan will have the opportunity to align more closely with global civilization.

The transition to the new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics is a linguistic, socio-cultural, and political issue. How these challenges are addressed will determine when, at what level, and how Kazakhstan switches to the Latin graphics. This transition will enable Kazakhstan to integrate more fully into the world and foster spiritual, cultural, and political cooperation with the Islamic world, the Turkic peoples, and the English-speaking world. The new Kazakh alphabet based on Latin graphics paves the way for modernizing the Kazakh language in line with global demands, enhancing its functional potential, and serving as a catalyst for Kazakhstan's societal progress in the future.

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