

IVAN SMIRNOV

Uniwersytet Łódzki, Polska

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3066-5591>

Copyright and License: Copyright by Instytut Języka Polskiego PAN, Kraków 2025. This article is published under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution – NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY- ND 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/legalcode.pl>).

INSTITUTIONAL FEATURES OF THE TRANSITION OF THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE TO THE LATIN SCRIPT ¹

Keywords: Latin script, the Kazakh language, alphabet, language policy, Cyrillic script.

ABSTRACT

This article provides a diachronic description of the main stages in the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script. The text focuses solely on the legal aspects and systematic legislative measures related to language policy. It presents fragments of the phonetic, lexical, and lexicographic features of different alphabet variants. The president, who has raised the issue of transitioning to the Latin script at certain points during his tenure, is the initiator of these changes in language policy. The alphabet is used as an instrument of political power, and is employed by the authorities to consolidate the electorate around the ruling power. The Latin variant of the alphabet holds symbolic significance for Kazakhstan's language community, implying a break with its historical past under the Soviet Union. Since 1991, no variant of the alphabet has been officially approved, nor has the Latin script been integrated into education and official documents. The primary arena for discussion is the media and online spaces. Linguistic specialists responsible for the transition to the Latin script regularly make errors in creating the alphabets. In particular, various options featuring digraphs and diacritical marks have been proposed. Turkey acts as a foreign policy factor by facilitating the transition of Turkic-speaking peoples to the Latin script, thereby emerging as the main beneficiary in Central Asia. The alphabets are constructed based on already established variants in Turkic countries, as well as by taking into account the experience of European countries. In total, about 40 variants of the alphabet using the Latin script have been developed. The outcome of this prolonged process is a diverse set of alphabet variants documented in studies of Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape. The multiethnic composition of Kazakhstan is an important factor that hinders Latinization. Unsystematic and ill-considered decisions by the scholarly community have provoked a decline in the authority of linguists, thereby depriving scientific institutions of their agency. The main experts on the Latin alphabet variants are active internet users and media personalities.

¹ This article was written under a Miniatura 7 research grant funded by Poland's National Science Center, number 2023/07/X/HS2/01355.

1. INTRODUCTION

The general aim of this article is a systematic and comprehensive study of the features of Kazakhstan's language policy regarding the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet. The novelty of the study lies in its examination of state acts relating to language policy, as well as the enforcement of laws and the state's response to violations. The most important point is the consideration of the diachronic order, making it possible to trace how the situation and attitudes have changed, and how the existing concepts regulating the transition from Cyrillic to Latin have developed. It is also important to trace the moments when significant mistakes were made in planning the transition to the Latin alphabet. It should be acknowledged that there are no articles in the Kazakh scientific community that are unbiased and consider the process of transition to the Latin alphabet from a long-term perspective. The sources of information are legislative acts, and material published in Kazakh- and Russian-language media. Therefore, this article provides, for the first time, comprehensive information up to 2024, when President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev effectively suspended the program of transition to the Latin alphabet.

When considering this topic, it is recommended to consult theoretical sources. The issues concerning the language policy of Kazakhstan attract the attention both of Kazakhstani scientists and foreign researchers. The bibliography contains an extensive list of articles and monographs in English and Russian on language policy. Unfortunately, there are very few articles in Kazakh in this field. English and Russian dominate in the field of science, while Kazakh, due to various circumstances, cannot compete. The main reasons are the lack of a stable terminological base, and the absence of specialists capable of writing texts in Kazakh. In order for the Kazakh language to fulfil those functions in socially important spheres that were previously occupied by the Russian language, suitable conditions must be created. Scientific developments in this direction are focused on the following theoretical areas:

- a) Status of the Kazakh language in Kazakhstan (Aksholakova et al., 2013; Zhurmanova et al., 2020; Abduova et al., 2022; Smagulova, 2008).
- b) Status of the Russian language in Kazakhstan (Fierman, 1998, 2005; Sabitova et al., 2015; Shaibakova, 2019; Zharkynbekova, 2018).
- c) Interrelationship of Kazakh and Russian languages (Aqtay, 2022; Yeskeldiyeva et al., 2015; Janpeisova, 2006).

It must be mentioned that sociolinguistic research related to the language policy of Kazakhstan has two principal directions, centered on the conflict between Kazakh and Russian languages. Representatives of Kazakhstani science, when considering issues of language policy, often ignore the real problems related to using different languages in a multinational state. There are no publications that criticize the legitimacy of the dominance of the Kazakh language; only evaluations of state policy in this area are available. By contrast, criticism more frequently targets the dominance of the Russian language

or its competition with Kazakh. In a similar fashion, Russian researchers defend the rights of the Russian language and criticize Kazakhstan's legislative acts and language policy, which, in their opinion, violate the rights of Russian-speaking citizens and limit the domains of use of Russian. As a consequence, only two counter-narratives are realized in academic debate.

Experts are aware that, during a certain historical period, the Kazakh language used the Latin alphabet. In this context, a brief historical excursus is provided to help understand the issue at hand. In the 1920s, when the territory of Kazakhstan was part of the Soviet Union, a centralized political authority was established to regulate decisions in the field of language policy. During this period of Soviet rule, the question of a rational choice between Cyrillic and Latin was raised with the aim of unifying the writing systems (Cyrillic, Arabic) and creating a uniform linguistic space, thereby facilitating the implementation of a unified policy across the vast territory of the Soviet Union.

It should be noted that the process of transitioning to the Latin script affected various layers of social life. For example, the field of education is particularly relevant, as such a change could play a decisive role for future generations. The introduction of a new form of writing also has a significant impact on national literary traditions and norms (Sinyachkin & Saparova, 2018, p. 192). Moreover, the change of script from Cyrillic to Latin gives rise to psychological and sociolinguistic problems that affect not only Kazakhstan's internal processes but also the entire Turkic-speaking region of Central Asia (Dzhusupov, 2022, p. 325).

Consensus on this issue was not reached. In particular, V.M. Alpatov (2000, p. 62) presents the following arguments made either for or against using Latin script:

- a) The Latin variant of the alphabet has 26 letters, whereas the Cyrillic has 33, making the Latin script economically advantageous.
- b) The use of diacritics in the Latin script complicates writing, diminishing its benefits.
- c) The use of the Arabic script by Turkic peoples for reading sacred texts, along with a rapid, systematic transition to the Latin script, would require a psychological restructuring of the population.

It is worth noting that despite the official postulates mentioned above, decisions in the field of language policy were fundamentally based on extralinguistic factors and the authorities' motivation to achieve their goals as quickly as possible. In 1926, at the Turkology conference held in Baku, an official decision was made to transition the existing writing system of the peoples of Central Asia to the Latin script (Kajdar, 2014, p. 453).

Between 1928 and 1929, the Latin script was officially introduced for all Turkic-speaking peoples – a development significant for the Muslim population as it created a distance from Arabic writing. It is also worth noting that the process of transitioning to the Latin script occurred unevenly, depending on the lifestyles of the peoples involved. For instance, regions with a sedentary lifestyle and a well-established literary tradition – such

as Azerbaijan, Tatarstan, and Uzbekistan – were able to adapt to the Latin script more successfully, in contrast to areas where the transition progressed more slowly. Furthermore, the ethnic composition of the population in each republic seemingly played a significant role. For some small ethnic groups, which were considered non-literate, the Latin variant of the alphabet represented their first official transition from an oral tradition to written documentation (see Iliuf & Soltanbekova, 2023). It should be clarified that Kazakhstan officially transitioned to the Latin script in 1929 (Kajdar, 2014, p. 453).

The period during which the Latin variant prevailed was short-lived and characterized by significant difficulties. In particular, the main cause of instability was the transition of the Russian language to the Latin script, and the implementation of similar practices in regions where Russian had long been perceived in its traditional Cyrillic form.

Thus, Latin was maintained in the Kazakh SSR from 1929 to 1940. Its official discontinuation was marked at Session V of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh SSR, where the law *On the transition of Kazakh writing from the latinized to the new alphabet based on the Russian script* was adopted.²

Kazakhstan is the only country among the former Soviet Union countries that has not been able to reach a compromise in solving this language issue over many years. Upon closer examination, this situation differs markedly from that in other former Soviet republics, where similar problems were settled in the shortest possible time.

The period of transition to and independent Kazakhstan, from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the point envisaged by the authorities, will be marked by a situation where the Kazakh language will truly dominate in the country's public life. It is obvious that there cannot be a straightforward, long-term transition to maintaining balance in language policy, which will lead to rapid changes in the adoption of new laws, each of which hides obvious conflicts in resolving the language issue.

2. SEARCH FOR COMPROMISE IN THE TRANSITION OF THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE TO THE LATIN SCRIPT

A turning point in the discussion of this issue was the group of geopolitical changes associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union. From that moment on, the authorities in Kazakhstan began a systematic reform of the legislative framework concerning language policy. Both during the Soviet era and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, language served as an instrument of language policy. The confrontation between Cyrillic and Latin scripts has ideological underpinnings. As P. Nelde points out, language itself is not the issue; rather, it is the speakers who are the source of conflicts: language conflicts most often occur in multiethnic and bilingual communities (Nelde, 1994, p. 9). It is important to note a crucial factor in the development of language policy in Kazakhstan: a presidential system of government is enshrined at the constitutional level. Thus, the

² Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, newspaper, November 13, 1940, No. 262.

main decisions and legislative acts concerning language policy are issued and approved by the head of state. Consequently, each variant of the alphabet using the Latin script is personally approved by the president.

This article presents only examples of *overt language policy*, which correspond to officially published legislative acts that clearly assign the status of a language and its functional sphere in public life (Schiffman, 1996, p. 13). Institutional provisions on the function of languages within the state at the legislative level are a necessary measure that helps smooth out language competition within a multilingual community. As B. Spolsky points out, similar trends have been recorded in many countries of the former Soviet Union (Spolsky, 2004, p. 13).

On January 24, 1991, the state Kazakh-language newspaper *Ana tili* published, for the first time, an article concerning the prerequisites for the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin script (Kajdar, 2014, p. 442). It can be stated unequivocally that the Latin script was introduced under the influence of ideological considerations. The impetus to immediately address the issue of Latin script was the symbolic severance from the historical period during which Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Drawing on the thought of N. Hornberger: at the outset of decision-making in the realm of language policy, issues of power and relativistic ideas that form the basis for those decisions should be considered; another important aspect is the trajectory of the development of a balanced ethical paradigm among people, and the search for ideas to resolve language issues (Hornberger, 2015, p. 12).

The main initiator of the transition of Turkic peoples to the Latin script was Turkey, which organized the “Symposium of International Modern Turkish/Turkic Alphabets” in 1991, where a unified alphabet variant for all Turkic peoples was presented for the first time (Kara, 2009, p. 1304). At the conference, a pan-Turkic alphabet based on the Latin script, consisting of 34 letters, was introduced. It is noteworthy that the alphabet was created based on the Turkish graphic system. In particular, the following universal graphic signs were proposed for the Kazakh language: Aa, Bb, Cc, Dd, Ee, Əə, Ff, Gg, Hh, Xx, Ii, Jj, Kk, Qq, Ll, Mm, Nn, Oo, Pp, Rr, Ss, Tt, Uu, Vv, Ww, Yy, Zz (Kajdar, 2014, p. 425). The fundamental principle in creating the Latin alphabet was a strict correspondence between each letter and a specific sound. Based on the 34 symbols adopted in the pan-Turkic alphabet, the variant suitable for the Kazakh language consisted of 27 letters, which can be divided into 9 vowels and 18 consonants (Kajdar, 2014, p. 440). The political choice of the Turkish system was justified by the fact that Turkey did not transition to Cyrillic, and had a successful and continuous experience using the Latin alphabet.

M. T. Imankuliyeva presents interesting data, according to which, since Kazakhstan gained independence, approximately 40 variants of the Latin alphabet have been developed in total (Imankuliyeva, 2021, p. 269). This information, in turn, requires detailed confirmation, as the number of variants presented is truly impressive.

Table 1

The pan-Turkic alphabet project (Imankuliyeva, 2021, p. 269)

№	Печатный вид	Название		№	Печатный вид	Название
1	A a	a		18	L l	le
2	B b	be		19	M m	me
3	C c	ce		20	N n	ne
4	Ç ç	çe		21	Ñ ñ	ñe
5	D d	de		22	O o	o
6	E e	e		23	Ö ö	ö
7	Ə ə	ə		24	P p	pe
8	F f	fe		25	R r	re
9	G g	e		26	S s	se
10	Ğ ğ	ğa		27	Ş ş	şe
11	H h	he		28	T t	te
12	X x	xe		29	U u	u
13	I ı	ı		30	Ü ü	ü
14	İ i	i		31	V v	ve
15	J j	je		32	W w	we
16	K k	ke		33	Y y	ye
17	Q q	ka		34	Z z	ze

Legend to Table 1: Columns 1 & 4: number; Columns 2 & 5: printed form of the letter; Columns 3 & 6: name of the letter.

In 2007, President N. A. Nazarbayev initiated the transition of the Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet at the 12th session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. Later, the Ministry of Education and Science prepared a preliminary analytical report titled *On the Transition of Kazakh Writing to the Latin Script*. This report presented a phased transition to the Latin script, with specific time intervals indicated for each phase:

1. At this stage, it was planned to carefully study the experience of foreign countries where the Latin variant of the alphabet was in use. It was also envisaged that an indigenous alphabet variant be developed, and the mass printing of newspapers, magazines, textbooks, academic manuals, and literary works be initiated. Expected implementation period: 2007–2012.

2. The development of computer software using the Latin script. Preliminary implementation period: 2012–2014.

3. The publication of textbooks with duplication in the Cyrillic variant of the alphabet. Implementation period: 2012–2014.

4. The implementation of the Latin script into the school and higher education system. Implementation period: 2017–2021.

5. Translation of scientific works, particularly those essential for school and university curricula, as well as literary works studied in schools and universities. This stage could potentially be extended over a period of 7–8 years.

6. The final phase involves translating all classical Kazakh literature, folklore, and cultural heritage into the Latin script. According to preliminary forecasts, this stage may take 20–30 years.³

Analyzing the objectives and time frames set by the President, it can be stated that the transition plan to the Latin script covered the period from 2012 to 2025.

Once again, President N.A. Nazarbayev brought this issue to the fore in December 2012 in his annual Address to the People of Kazakhstan, “Kazakhstan – 2050”. In particular, he emphasized that by 2025, official documentation, periodicals, and textbooks should be implemented in the Latin variant of the alphabet.⁴

In 2017, President N.A. Nazarbayev signed the decisive decree “On the Transition of the Kazakh Language Alphabet from Cyrillic to the Latin Script”.⁵ In his article *A View into the Future: Modernizing Public Consciousness*, published in 2017, he essentially outlined the main reasons for abandoning Cyrillic in favor of the Latin script. Specifically, the argument was made that the Latin script facilitates successful integration and communication in the modern technological world, as well as promoting an effective scientific and educational process (Suslova, 2018).

In September 2017, a variant of the Latin alphabet was published for the first time in the media. It is important to note that the surrounding debate and discussion occurred exclusively within the media. As stated by experts in the field of linguistics:

As a result, the proposed variant of the alphabet consists of 25 characters. In creating the new Latin-script alphabet, the following principles were used as a basis: one letter corresponds to one sound, one letter corresponds to two sounds, or one sound is represented by a digraph system. To fully accommodate the phonetic system of the Kazakh language, eight digraphs each denoting a specific sound were incorporated into the alphabet.⁶

In the discussion and development of the alphabet, more than 20 organizational and practical scientific events were held to discuss and introduce amendments regarding the methodological approaches in creating the alphabet.⁷ It is particularly worth noting that the choice in favor of digraphs was justified by the fact that they preserve the phonetic specificity of the Kazakh language. It was claimed that diacritical marks do not have these characteristics and can only be used to differentiate letters in writing; thus,

³ https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30112600&pos=5;-106#pos=5;-106 (accessed: 15 January 2025).

⁴ https://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/astana_kazakhstan/participation_in_events/poslanie-prezidenta-respubliki-kazahstan-lidera-nacii-nursultana-na.zarbaeva-narodu-kazahstana-strategiya-kazahstan-2050-novyi-politicheskii- (accessed: 15 January 2025).

⁵ https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-perevode-alfavita-kazahskogo-yazyka-s-kirilicy-na-latinskuyu-grafiku (accessed: 15 January 2025).

⁶ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kak-vyiglyadit-proekt-novogo-kazahskogo-alfavita-326238/ (accessed: 15 January 2025).

⁷ https://kz.kursiv.media/2017-09-11/obnovlennyy-kazakhskiy-alfavit-25-bukv-i-8-novykh-digrafov/?utm_campaign=endless_feed (accessed: 15 January 2025).

diacritical marks may contribute to the loss of the indigenous sounds of the Kazakh language.⁸ In this case, the argument presented is very important, as it will be refuted in subsequent amendments.

It should be mentioned that the alphabet aroused discontent among the media consumers because it did not account for certain Kazakh words in which letter combinations could be interpreted either as a digraph or as separate letter. An indisputable drawback was the absence of letters representing the sounds: Я я, Ю ю, Э э.

Table 2

Alphabet, approved on September 2017

<div> <div>Жаңа латын әліпбиінің үлгісі</div>  </div>					
№	Латын таңбасы	Дыбысталуы	№	Латын таңбасы	Дыбысталуы
1	Aa	Аа	13	Mm	Мм
2	Bb	Бб	14	Nn	Нн
3	Cc	Цц	15	Oo	Оо
4	Dd	Дд	16	Pp	Пп
5	Ee	Ее	17	Qq	Ққ
6	Ff	Фф	18	Rr	Рр
7	Gg	Гг	19	Ss	Сс
8	Hh	Хх/Һһ	20	Tt	Тт
9	Ii	И / Іі	21	Uu	Ұұ
10	Jj	Йй	22	Vv	Вв
11	Kk	Кк	23	Ww	Уу
12	Ll	Лл	24	Yy	Ыы
			25	Zz	Зз

Legend to Table 2: Columns 1 & 4: numbering; Columns 2 & 5: Latin letter symbol; Columns 3 & 6: Cyrillic equivalent of the letter.

After critical remarks regarding the previously presented alphabet, another variant of the Latin alphabet was published in October 2017. The distinguishing feature of this new project was the use of an apostrophe in forming digraphs. Thus, the alphabet consisted of 26 characters, and – with the use of the apostrophe – 8 digraphs to represent specific letters, resulting in a total of 32 letters.

During discussion of the project, the citizens of Kazakhstan voiced their opinions and provided comments related to the development of this variant. A multitude of critical remarks was received from the online public, yet the alphabet was approved regardless. This type of alphabet is notable for its radical departure from the pan-Turkic alphabet proposed in 1991. It is also worth noting that, in addition to the presented 26-letter alphabet and the 32-letter project developed by the Institute of Linguistics, there exist several other variants of the Latin-based Kazakh alphabet.⁹

⁸ <https://time.kz/articles/zloba/2017/10/13/latinica-etapi-bolshogo-puti> (accessed: 15 January 2025).

⁹ <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kritika-proekta-latinicy-digrafy/28736733.html> (accessed: 16 January 2025).

Table 3

*Alphabet, approved on October 26, 2017*¹⁰

№	Написание	Звук	№	Написание	Звук
1	A a	[a]	17	N' n'	[n], [nr]
2	A' a'	[ə]	18	O o	[o]
3	B b	[b]	19	O' o'	[ə]
4	D d	[d]	20	P p	[p]
5	E e	[e]	21	Q q	[k]
6	F f	[f]	22	R r	[r]
7	G g	[r]	23	S s	[c]
8	G' g'	[r]	24	S' s'	[ʃ]
9	H h	[x], [h]	25	C' c'	[t]
10	I i	[i]	26	T t	[t]
11	I' i'	[u], [ü]	27	U u	[y]
12	J j	[ʒ]	28	U' u'	[y]
13	K k	[k]	29	V v	[v]
14	L l	[l]	30	Y y	[y]
15	M m	[m]	31	Y' y'	[y]
16	N n	[n]	32	Z z	[z]

Legend to Table 3: Columns 1 & 4: numbering; Columns 2 & 5: How the letter is written; Columns 3 & 6: Cyrillic equivalent of the letter.

On February 19, 2018, President N.A. Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan signed a new decree *On the Amendment of the Existing Variant of the Alphabet*. Apparently, the primary reason for revising the alphabet was that the principle of “one letter corresponds to one sound” had not been implemented. The main criticism of the alphabet emerged in the media space among the general public, who pointed out that the use of digraphs in social networks complicated written correspondence. Moreover, this variant also made the visual perception of text in the Latin script more challenging.

In response to public criticism, substantial amendments were made; notably, digraphs were replaced with diacritical marks (accents). Thus, the diacritics are intended to correspond to the specific sounds of the Kazakh language. However, it was not possible to completely eliminate the use of digraphs; for instance, the sounds represented by III and Ч were proposed to be rendered as the digraphs Sh and Ch.¹¹ The President also ordered the establishment of a National Commission for the Transition of the Kazakh Alphabet to the Latin Script, and mandated a phased transition of the Kazakh language alphabet to the Latin script by 2025.¹²

¹⁰ <https://time.kz/articles/zloba/2017/10/13/latinica-etapi-bolshogo-puti> (accessed: 16 January 2025).

¹¹ <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29049800.html> (accessed: 16 January 2025).

¹² https://www.akorda.kz/ru/legal_acts/decrees/o-perevode-alfavita-kazahskogo-yazyka-s-kirillicy-na-latinskuyu-grafiku (accessed: 16 January 2025).

Table 4

*Alphabet, approved on February 19, 2018*¹³

№	Написание	Звук	№	Написание	Звук
1	A a	[a]	17	Ń ń	[ɲ]
2	Á á	[ə]	18	O o	[o]
3	B b	[b]	19	Ó ó	[ø]
4	D d	[d]	20	P p	[p]
5	E e	[e]	21	Q q	[k]
6	F f	[f]	22	R r	[r]
7	G g	[g]	23	S s	[s]
8	Ĝ ĝ	[ʝ]	24	T t	[t]
9	H h	[x], [h]	25	U u	[ʏ]
10	I i	[i]	26	Ú ú	[y]
11	I ı	[ɨ], [ɪ]	27	V v	[v]
12	J j	[ʒ]	28	Y y	[ɣ]
13	K k	[k]	29	Ý ý	[ɣ]
14	L l	[l]	30	Z z	[z]
15	M m	[m]	31	Sh sh	[ʃ]
16	N n	[n]	32	Ch ch	[tʃ]

Legend to Table 4: Columns 1 & 4: numbering; Columns 2 & 5: How the letter is written; Columns 3 & 6: Cyrillic equivalent of the letter.

On October 21, 2019, President K. J. Tokayev published a post on Twitter: “The historic decision to transition to the Latin script was made about two years ago. However, the alphabet still has shortcomings. Linguists need to improve the alphabet [...]”¹⁴.

It was not even two years after the final version of the alphabet had been approved that, on November 6, 2019, the staff of the Institute of Linguistics named after A. Baitursunuly, taking into account the President’s remarks, presented a new variant of the alphabet, which, according to their assurances, was intended to be final. This alphabet included the following graphic signs: A a, Ä ä, B b, Ç ç, D d, E e, F f, G g, Ğ ğ, H h, İ i, I ı, Y y, J j, K k, Q q, L l, M m, N n, Đ đ, O o, Ö ö, P p, R r, S s, Ş ş, T t, U u, Ü ü, V v, W w, Z z.¹⁵ Thus, this version of the alphabet comprises 32 graphic signs. It is particu-

¹³ https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=34288412&pos=1;3#pos=1;3 (accessed: 16 January 2025).

¹⁴ https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/tokaev-perehode-latinitu-alfavite-imeyutsya-nedostatki-382065/ (accessed: 16 January 2025).

¹⁵ https://forbes.kz/articles/chetvertaya_popyitka_predstavlena_novaya_versiya_kazahskogo_alfavita_na_latinitse https://forbes.kz/articles/chetvertaya_popyitka_predstavlena_novaya_versiya_kazahskogo_alfavita_na_latinitse (accessed: 16 January 2025).

larly noteworthy that the alphabet includes diacritical marks – specifically, the umlaut, cedilla, and breve. It can be stated that the developers of this version based their work on the pan-Turkic alphabet variant that had been presented in Ankara in 1991.

After continuous criticism from the public in the mass media and on the internet, and following a two-year break, in January 2021 the Institute of Linguistics named after A. Baitursunuly published yet another version of the alphabet, which, in their view, might be considered final.¹⁶ Revised version of the alphabet: A a, Ä ä, B b, D d, E e, F f, G g, Ğ ğ, H h, İ i, I ı, J j, K k, L l, M m, N n, D ɳ, O o, Ö ö, P p, Q q, R r, S s, Ş ş, T t, U u, Ü ü, V v, Y y, Z z. However, as early as April 2021, the scientific staff published an augmented version that incorporated citizen feedback. In particular, the characters C, X, and W, which are used in loanwords, were added, and the glyph D ɳ was transformed into Ñ ñ.

Table 5

*Alphabet, approved in April 2021*¹⁷

№	Букв а	Назван ие буквы	№	Букв а	Названи е буквы
1	A a	a	18	O o	o
2	Ä ä	ä	19	Ö ö	ö
3	B b	бы	20	P p	пы
4	D d	ды	21	Q q	қы
5	E e	e	22	R r	ыр
6	F f	фы	23	S s	сы
7	G g	гі	24	Ş ş	шы
8	Ğ ğ	ғы	25	T t	ты
9	H h	һы	26	U u	уу
10	İ i	ii	27	Ü ü	ү
11	I ı	i	28	Û û	ұ
12	J j	жы	29	V v	вы
13	K k	кі	30	Y y	ы
14	L l	лы	31	Z z	зы
15	M m	мы	*Знаки C, X, W используются в иностранных словах на основе цитатного принципа		
16	N n	ны			
17	Ñ ñ	ны			

Legend to Table 5: Columns 1 & 4: number; Columns 2 & 5: printed form of the letter; Columns 3 & 6: name of the letter.

* The signs C, X, W are used in foreign words based on the quotation principle.

¹⁶ <https://informburo.kz/novosti/> (accessed: 17 January 2025).

¹⁷ <https://legalacts.egov.kz/npa/view?id=8243312> (accessed: 17 January 2025).

The improved alphabet consists of 31 characters from the base Latin alphabet, fully covering the 28 sounds of the Kazakh language. Specific phonetic sounds of Kazakh are represented using diacritical marks: umlaut, macron, cedilla, and breve. Based on the data, it appears that the introduction of diacritical marks was motivated by the established model of transitioning to the Latin script, which originally followed the principle of one letter corresponding to one sound.

In his speech on January 16, 2022, at the opening of the First National Assembly, President K. J. Tokayev criticized not only the most recent version of the alphabet but also the delayed process of transitioning the Kazakh language to the Latin script. In particular, he pointed out some clear mistakes made by experts during the development of the alphabets. Here is an excerpt from the president's criticism:

[...] This is about the transition to the Latin script. Some segments of the public are concerned that we still haven't managed to abandon Cyrillic. However, this is an extremely complex linguistic issue that must be understood. We have already attempted to transition to the Latin script twice, but both attempts were unsuccessful. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the issue and to make a radical decision [...]¹⁸.

What is surprising is the president's intention to transform the orthography of the Kazakh language. In particular, he cited the example of the graphic sign Ы ы being rendered as Y y. The president believes that such phonetic correspondences may present difficulties for Turkic-speaking peoples. Thus, altering the orthography could lead to significant modifications in both vocabulary and lexicography.¹⁹

Relevant linguistic authorities immediately took the President's criticism regarding orthography into account, and on August 25, 2023, they finalized the spelling of the disputed graphic sign. Thus, the new variant, which incorporates these remarks, represents Ы ы as I i.²⁰ Considering the critical remarks, it can be confidently stated that the approved version of the alphabet, adopted in April 2021, is not final.

The rapid decisions made by the state in the field of language policy could not help but impact the familiar way of life for citizens. A defining marker in recording linguistic changes is the linguistic landscape, which shifts in response to legislative acts adopted by the authorities. To support this claim, we refer to data obtained during a field study aimed at describing the linguistic landscape of the city of Almaty.²¹ Based on approximately 300 photographs capturing signage from government institutions as well as small and medium-sized businesses, it can be stated that four different versions of the alphabet are currently functioning in Kazakhstan's public space. An analysis of the

¹⁸ https://el.kz/ru/glava_gosudarstva_-_o_perekhode_na_latinitu-_my_ne_dolzhen_toropitsya_42390/ (accessed: 18 January 2025).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ <https://informburo.kz/novosti/perexod-na-latinicu-ucyonyc-opredelilis-s-napisaniem-bukvy-y-posle-kritiki-tokaeva> (accessed: 18 January 2025).

²¹ NCN, Miniatura 7, DEC-2023/07/X/HS2/01355.

linguistic material revealed that the least frequently encountered alphabet is the 2017 version, which utilized digraphs. The most commonly observed versions are the 2019 and 2021 Latin alphabets, which incorporate diacritical symbols. A particularly interesting phenomenon is the mixed type of Latin alphabet, which combines elements from both Latin and Cyrillic writing systems. The linguistic landscape is changing rapidly and some of the data generated is already part of the historical record that contributes to capturing change: see for example the study by I. Moore (2014). Furthermore, the linguistic landscape functions as a kind of barometer, enabling the documentation and conceptualization of both short-term and long-term changes in the language (Mensel et al. 2016, p. 424).

On September 11, 2024, in Azerbaijan (Baku), the Turkic Academy presented the project *Common Turkic alphabet based on the Latin script*. In the updated version of the Latin alphabet, proposals from Turkic-speaking countries were taken into account to seek a compromise in the creation of a unified Latin-based writing system (Kemelova, 2024). Thus, it can be assumed that this project will have a significant influence on political decisions regarding Kazakhstan's language policy.

3. CONCLUSION

The process of transitioning the Kazakh language to the Latin script can conceptually be examined on multiple levels, which are linked to both external and internal political processes. After gaining independence in 1991, it became necessary to reassess political decisions related to language policy. In particular, one of the factors contributing to national consolidation could have been the rejection of the Cyrillic alphabet. Such an act undeniably held symbolic significance, marking a break with the historical past. Furthermore, the Cyrillic alphabet not only represented Kazakhstan's period within the Soviet Union but also its earlier inclusion in the structure of the Russian Empire. However, this position is interpreted by some as antagonism to Kazakhstan's own history and long existence within the Arabic and Cyrillic traditions. In the realm of foreign policy, Kazakhstan's authorities believed that the Latin script would facilitate the integration of the younger generation into technological and scientific processes. It was also argued that foreigners would find it easier to familiarize themselves with Kazakhstan's culture. This argument is indeed significant but does not fully reflect the true intentions of the authorities. For example, other countries that use logographic writing systems remain fully integrated with the international scientific community.

In my opinion, several reasons can be highlighted as to why Kazakhstan has been unable to proceed with the implementation of the Latin script transition program:

1. The initiatives for adopting the Latin alphabet have always originated from the President. Thus, he is the main actor and the final authority in decision-making.
2. The primary means of disseminating information regarding language policy is predominantly online media. Citizens actively participate in the process of approving new alphabet variants by commenting and suggesting amendments. As a result, official

scientific institutions are unable to exert significant influence on the situation and have, in essence, lost their agency long ago. The final responsibility for decisions regarding the transition to the Latin script has been effectively transferred to a reference group of active internet users. The outcome of this process should be understandable to the community participants and conform to established norms and traditions in alphabet development.

3. Kazakhstan is a multiethnic state. At the legislative level, the rights to the functioning and development of the country's numerous languages are officially enshrined (Smagulova, 2008, p. 442). It is important to remember that a portion of citizens do not speak the Kazakh language, meaning they cannot be integrated into language processes related to the Latinization of Kazakh. Furthermore, Russian remains dominant in many spheres of public life, reinforcing the position of the Cyrillic alphabet. Notably, the Russian language in Kazakhstan primarily functions as a mediator between different ethnic groups, rather than as a marker of Russophone identity. This contrasts with countries like Latvia and Estonia, where Russian is directly associated with self-identification and cultural belonging to Russian heritage (Cheskin & Kachuyevski, 2019, p. 4). Some Kazakhstani researchers hold a different view, arguing that the Russian language, which previously functioned as a donor language within the Soviet hierarchical linguistic system, has recently shifted to the position of a receptor language (Smagulova & Madiyeva, 2021, p. 1017). This is also the result of a long-standing trend, where the majority of urban Kazakh parents, seeking high-quality primary and secondary education for their children who aspire to pursue higher education, have traditionally chosen schools with Russian as the language of instruction (Fierman, 2005, p. 416). However, certain measures have been taken, such as the *Law on the development of trilingual education*, which was possibly introduced to maintain a balance between Kazakh, Russian, and English and to prevent the Kazakh language from losing its position (Zhhumanova et al., 2020; Nurshatayeva, 2011; Sadykbekova, 2022).

4. It cannot be denied that the Latin script alphabet has become an instrument of political power. It is possible that the government reactivates the Latinization process from time to time to strengthen its political position and foster national unity among citizens. Additionally, one should not overlook the financial resources that have been spent on implementing this program, although the long-standing project remains unfinished despite years of effort.

5. The lack of a conventional relationship between government authorities and linguistic experts has been a significant issue. The deterministic approach to decision-making has led to a loss of credibility for linguistic specialists, who, through unconsidered actions, have discredited institutional scientific organizations.

Ultimately, the numerous variations of the alphabet published on official platforms have led to inconsistencies in urban public spaces, particularly on official government signage, advertising boards, and billboards. The unification and standardization of the linguistic landscape will require both time and financial resources.

REFERENCES

- Abduova, B. S., & Tulesheva, G. K. 2022. „The status of the Kazakh language is a landmark for the future of the nation”. *Vestnik of M.Kozybayev. North Kazakhstan University* 1 (53): 53–58. <https://doi.org/10.54596/2309-6977-2022-1-53-58>
- Aksholakova, A., & Ismailova, N. 2013. „The Language Policy of Kazakhstan and the State Language in Government Service”. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* (93): 1580–1586.
- Alpatov, V. M. 2000. *150 ázykov i politika. 1917–2000. Sociolingvističeskie problemy SSSR i postsovetsskogo prostranstva*. Moskva: Kraf.
- Alishariyeva, A. 2014. „Bilingualism Among Young People in Kazakhstan”. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 143: 1139–1143.
- Aqtay, G. 2022. „The status Of Kazakh in Kazakhstan in urban areas: the case of Shymkent”. *Przegląd Wschodnioeuropejski*, 13(1): 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.31648/pw.7665>
- Cheskin, A., & Kachuyevski, A. 2019. „The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity”. *Europe-Asia studies* 71(1): 1–23.
- Dzhusupov, M. 2022. „The transition from Cyrillic into Latin alphabet and linguographic interference in the Russian speech of the Turkophone”. *Russian Language Studies* 20(3): 312–329.
- Fierman, W. 1998. „Language and Identity in Kazakhstan: Formulations in Policy Documents 1987–1997”. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31(2): 171–186.
- Fierman, W. 2005. „Kazakh language and prospects for its role in kazakh «groupness»”. *Ab Imperio* 2: 393–423.
- Hornberger, N. 2015. „Selecting Appropriate Research Methods in LPP Research: Methodological Rich Points”. In: *Research methods in language policy and planning: a practical guide*, eds. M. Francis and D. Johnson. Malden: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 7–20.
- Iliuf, H. Š., & Soltanbekova, O. T. 2023. „Optimal’nyj variant kazahskogo alfavita na osnove latinskoj grafiki”. *Izvestiâ Kazumoimâ imeni Abylaj hana*, 3(70): 84–10.
- Imankuliyeva, M. T. 2021. „Afad Kurbanov and obschetyurkian alphabet”. *Baltic Humanitarian Journal*, 4(37): 268–270.
- Janpeisova, N. 2006. *Representation of national stereotypes in the picture of world of Kazakh-Russian bilinguals*. Baishev University/Aktobe.
- Kajdar, A. 2014. *Gylymdağy ğumyr. Maqalalar, baâdamalar žinağy*. Almaty: Sardar.
- Kara, M. 2009. „Turkic republics and thirty-four letter common Latina alphabet Turkish Studies”. *International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*, 4(3): 1301–1308.
- Kemelova, F. 2024-09-23. „Turkic States Revive Latin-Based Alphabet to Preserve Linguistic Heritage”. *The Astana Times*.
- Mensel, L. Van, Vandenbrouck, M., & Blackwood, R. 2016. „Linguistic Landscapes”. *The Oxford Handbook of language and society*: 423–450.
- Moore, I. 2014. „Negotiating public space: Post-Soviet linguistic landscape in Kazakhstan”. *The International Journal of Communication and Linguistic Studies* 11(4): 1–21.
- Nelde, P. 1994. „How to Avoid Language Conflict in Europe after 1994”. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 4(2): 1–17.
- Nurshatayeva, A. 2011. „Kazakhstan English-Major Students: Motivation to Learn English and Academic Achievement”. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.58809/UUEE3244>

- Sabitova, Z., & Alishariyeva, A. 2015. „The Russian language in Kazakhstan: status and functions”. *Russian Journal of Communication*, 7(2): 213–217.
- Shaibakova, D. 2019. „The Russian language in Kazakhstan in the 21st century”. eds. Arto Mustajoki, A., Protassova, E., Yelenevskaya, M. In *The Soft Power of the Russian Language*. New York: Routledge.
- Schiffman, H. F. 1996. *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*. London: Routledge.
- Sinyachkin, V. P., & Saparova, K. O. 2018. „Mahanbet Džusupov – sozidatel', lingvist i metodist”. *RUDN Journal of Language Education and Translingual Practices* 15(2): 189–194.
- Smagulova, J., & Madiyeva, D. 2021. „Normalizing a new language hierarchy: Event names in post-Soviet urban space”. *Russian Journal of Linguistics*, 25(4): 1004–1023.
- Smagulova, J. 2008. „Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use”. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 11: 440–476.
- Spolsky, B. (2004) *Language Policy*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Yeskeldiyeva, B., & Tazhibayeva, S. 2015. „Multilingualism in Modern Kazakhstan: New Challenges”. *Asian Social Science*, 11(6): 56–64.
- Zharkynbekova, S. 2018. „On the Formation Of Socio-Cultural Identity Of Ethno-Lingual Processes In Kazakhstan”. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* (39): 407–415. <https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2018.04.02.58>
- Zhumanova, A., Stambulov, S., Sakabay, T., Kentbek, S., & Karsybayeva, Z. 2020. „Language Situation in Kazakhstan in the Modern Period: Ideology, Policy and Planning”. *Opción, Año*, 36(91): 90–106.

REFERENCE IN THE ORIGINAL CYRILLIC

- Алпатов, В. М. 2000. *150 языков и политика. 1917–2000. Социолингвистические проблемы СССР и постсоветского пространства*. Москва: Краф.
- Илиуф, Х. Ш. и О. Т. Солтанбекова. 2023. „Оптимальный вариант казахского алфавита на основе латинской графики”. *Известия КазУМОиМЯ имени Абылай хана*, 3(70): 84–10. <https://doi.org/10.48371/PHILS.2023.70.3.006>
- Кайдар, А. 2014. *Ғылымдағы ғұмыр. Мақалалар, баяндамалар жинағы*. Алматы: Сардар.
- Sinyachkin, V. P. и К. О. Saparova. 2018. „Маханбет Джусупов – созидатель, лингвист и методист”. *RUDN Journal of Language Education and Translingual Practices*, 15(2): 189–194.
- Суслова, 2018–02–20. „Куда язык доведет: почему Казахстан перешел на латиницу”. https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2018/02/20_a_11657323.shtml (17 января 2025).

ELECTRONIC SOURCES

- Suslova, 2018–02–20. Kuda âzyk dovedet: počemu Kazahstan perešel na latinicu. https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2018/02/20_a_11657323.shtml (17 January 2025).

Cechy instytucjonalne przejścia języka kazachskiego na pismo łacińskie

Słowa kluczowe: łacina, język kazachski, alfabet, polityka językowa, cyrylica.

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule autor przedstawia diachroniczny opis głównych etapów przejścia języka kazachskiego na pismo łacińskie. W tekście skupiono się wyłącznie na aspektach prawnych i systemowych decyzjach legislacyjnych dotyczących polityki językowej. Podano fragmenty cech fonetycznych, leksykalnych i leksyko-graficznych różnych wariantów alfabetu. Inicjatorem zmian w zakresie polityki językowej jest Prezydent, który w pewnych momentach swojego panowania podnosi kwestię przejścia na alfabet łaciński. Alfabet jest narzędziem władzy politycznej i służy władzom do konsolidacji elektoratu wokół władzy rządzącej. Alfabet łaciński ma symboliczne znaczenie dla wspólnoty językowej Kazachstanu, co oznacza zerwanie z historyczną przeszłością Związku Radzieckiego. Od 1991 roku do chwili obecnej nie udało się oficjalnie zatwierdzić żadnej wersji alfabetu ani wprowadzić pisma łacińskiego do sfery edukacji i obiegu dokumentów. Główną platformą dyskusji jest przestrzeń medialna Internetu. Językoznawcy odpowiedzialni za przejście na alfabet łaciński regularnie popełniają błędy w procesie tworzenia alfabetów. W szczególności zaproponowano różne opcje wykorzystujące digrafy i znaki diakrytyczne. Czynnikiem polityki zagranicznej jest Turcja, która promuje przechodzenie ludów turekojęzycznych na pismo łacińskie, będąc tym samym głównym beneficjentem w Azji Środkowej. Alfabetu konstruowane są na podstawie wariantów już funkcjonujących w krajach tureckich, a także z uwzględnieniem doświadczeń krajów europejskich. Łącznie opracowano około 40 wariantów alfabetu wykorzystujących grafikę łacińską. Rezultatem tego długotrwałego procesu jest różnorodność wariantów alfabetu, które udało się zarejestrować w trakcie badań nad krajobrazem językowym Kazachstanu. Wielonarodowościowy skład Kazachstanu jest istotnym czynnikiem utrudniającym latynizację. Niesystematyczne i nierefleksyjne decyzje społeczności naukowej doprowadziły do spadku autorytetu językoznawców, a tym samym do pozbawienia instytucji naukowych podmiotowości. Głównymi ekspertami odmiany alfabetu łacińskiego są aktywni użytkownicy Internetu i osobowości medialne.