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INTRODUCTION

The 1920s-30s, as it will be later described in more detail, were the times of important political and ideological changes in Kazakhstan. These changes were reflected in the dynamics of official party rhetoric on different issues, the political landscape of Kazakhstan cleansed from the “enemies of the people” and changing policies. Kazakh orthography based on Latin script that was used from 1929 to 1940 was also undergoing notable changes and reforms: the newspapers from the early 1930s and the late 1930s have quite notable differences in spelling. This decade witnessed particularly important changes in the nationalities policies of the Soviet Union, which are often interpreted and summarized as a shift from indigenization, affirmative action, and regional recognition to consolidation as a Soviet nation and Russification.

This thesis intends to answer such questions as how, if ever, did the changes in the orthography of Kazakh in 1929-1940 reflect the political changes in Kazakhstan? Who were the main actors that were proposing and promoting changes to Kazakh orthography and who were their opponents? What political backgrounds, if ever, affected their actions in terms of spelling policies? What kinds of arguments were used?

I hypothesize that the changes in the orthography reflect the shift from indigenization to Russification and that the changes in Kazakh orthography in the 1930s resulted in Kazakh (as well as many other languages) corresponded to the phonological rules of two languages, Kazakh and Russian.

Although these topics are related, the particular focus of this thesis is not the issue of alphabet change per se, but the changes in the Kazakh orthography within one writing system — Latin-based *Yanalif* used in a particular time period.

In the paradigm of *modernization*, Kazakh orthography was, in general, subject to grand reforms in the first half of the 20th century. First, it reformed its Arabic-based script to fit the needs of its phonology in the 1910s-20s, as declared by the initiators of these reforms. Then, in the late 1920s, the Latin-based alphabet common for numerous Turkic and non-Turkic “Soviet East” languages called *Yanalif* was adopted. Lastly, it switched to the Cyrillic script in 1940. What seems interesting is that within *Yanalif*, there were several visible orthographic reforms implemented as well. Borrowings from Russian changed in their spelling after some time, and certain phonemes changed their corresponding symbols. This seems interesting because even these minute details might as well be illustrative of a bigger picture, that is, of changes of the political and ideological compass in the Soviet Union.

Terry Martin argues that symbolic politics were an essential part of the Soviet policies during Stalin, and that is why he considers the Latinization campaign an important chapter in understanding the nationalities policies of the Soviet Union (2001, 182–184). I take Martin’s argument further and analyze the symbolic politics conveyed by changes within the Latin-based orthography of Kazakh within 11 years of its usage.

The script changes and orthographic changes of the 1920s-30s were, indeed, happening in times of political and ideological turmoil in Kazakhstan, where a new Soviet autonomous republic (after 1936 — simply “republic”) was being established and a communist and Marxist-Leninist ideology was being proclaimed as the new

world order to be built. It was the time when national movements, such as Alash in Kazakhstan or Jadidism in Uzbekistan, or the rise of pan-Turkism were largely inactive and co-opted by the Soviet government, but still influential the existing discourses. Meanwhile, due to various political, historical, and perhaps practical reasons, Russian culture and language were being acclaimed as the catalysts of progress, civilization, and enlightenment. In the context of the establishment of a communist state with Moscow as its center, it would be logical to associate the switch from the Arabic alphabet or Arabic-based alphabet to the Latin alphabet and then also to the Cyrillic alphabet with ideological intentions.

However, it would also be unfair to summarize the approximately 30-year long period of the history of the written Kazakh language undergoing scrutiny and revisions as a story of abandoning the Muslim nomadic feudalistic order of life and turning it into a product of *homo Sovieticus* ideations. It is important to analyze the discussions, debates, proposals, and rhetoric of the time and highlight the main ideological clashes and affiliations.

This thesis will, first, describe and frame language ideologies in the context of writing systems and orthographies to familiarize the reader with the concept of language ideologies. Second, it intends to outline the historical background behind Kazakh Yanalif that also reveals important factors that affected the course of history and the emergence of certain discourses around Kazakh orthography. The insights into the specifics of debates around the spelling reforms in the 1930s in Kazakh might help us analyze the present reform proposals in Kazakhstan from the perspective of political ideologies and inclinations informing and conditioning the views. Many of the rules in Kazakh orthographies of the 1920s-30s in the Latin script trace their roots to earlier conventions. Third, the thesis will analyze rule books,

documents, and biographies relevant to the discussion to find the main discourses and their possible connections to ideological inclinations.

ORTHOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES

Graphemics is per se an underresearched field of linguistics, and in Central Asia, as a region often paradoxically disregarded as peripheral, the written tradition seems to be especially overlooked in the English-speaking academia.

In the context of Central Asia in the early Soviet period, literacy was one of the key aspects of language reforms and standardization campaigns. First, in the late XIX and early XX century, the writing tradition was established and used mostly by the “intelligentsia”. Later, in Central Asia, print capitalism was on the rise since the beginning of the XX century, and there were several political and social newspapers and magazines, such as *Qazaq*, *Aiqap*, *Ushqyn*, etc. Poems, short stories, and novels were published by Kazakh authors in the vernacular Kazak. However, the writing system they used was *Chaghatai* or *Turki*, which was seen by Kazakh nationalists of the early XX century as defective in the sense that vowels were often ignored (as it is typical of Arabic-based writing systems) or that allomorphs of many suffixes that usually assimilate in certain environments in Kazakh were ignored and only one variant was written, which seemed crucial to the typical Turkic phonology. The purpose of writing per se was probably different and it was mainly intended for certain privileged audiences rather than “the masses”. The idea of “literacy” per se was often politicized and utilized to distinguish certain social categories (Coulmas 2008, 226, Rogers 2011, 7), and that was also one of the discourses propagated during the years of the establishment of the Soviet Union.

However, besides “practical” reasons, there often are political or ideological reasons why certain groups promote the idea of a certain writing system or graphics. The fact that the Cyrillic script, for instance, was advocated for partially because “it

contained more letters than the Roman alphabet” (Daniels and Bright 1996, 781), which was obviously false because many different languages that use Latin can add additional diacritics into their alphabets to fit the needs of the phonology of the language and so far, no any “deficiencies” of such actions were proven, and thus it prompts us to assume that most “practical” reasons were simply a cover for ideological motivations. Moreover, the writing system itself is often the product and the producer of ideologies, divisions, and identities (Coulmas 2008, 231–232). For instance, it is generally assumed that the Arabic-based scripts previously used by Muslim Turkic societies in Central Asia were especially criticized and rejected by many mostly due to their association with the Islamic world and Islamic traditions that apparently did not serve well the new image of the atheist communist world order in the 1920s (Cruttenden 2021, 62).

Language ideologies are almost always intertwined with language planning practices which, in turn, often imply or at least involve orthographic reforms (Sebba 2012, 2; Wertheim 2012, 65). Sometimes these ideologies are explicitly discussed, but more often they are “masked” by discussions of “technical” aspects of linguistic characteristics. However, different actors’ preferences or disapproval of even a minute change to spelling might reveal certain political and social biases.

Purism, standardization, erasure of certain linguistic identities, and writing systems can be listed as classical examples of practices deeply intertwined with language ideologies. However, sometimes even a choice of literature that is to be translated or adapted might reveal ideological inclinations. For example, in the first decades of the Turkish Republic, one of the peculiarities was the decision to translate the French *Le Petit Larousse* to Turkish, which exposed the predilections of

the Turkish intelligentsia to put French on a pedestal and consider Turkish inferior in contrast to the so-called “European” languages (Aytürk 2008, 284).

This is not necessarily limited to historical contexts engulfed in political and social revolutions. It was well observed and thoroughly researched in a very recent example of German orthographic reforms of 1996 (Johnson 2005). The German orthographic reforms sparked heated debate in society and caused numerous protests, petitions, and even legal proceedings. It is fair that the mere fact that spelling reforms can prompt people to take such actions leads us to questions of what extent changes in spelling are perceived to be about the communicational functionality of language and to what extent it is rather about identity: political, national, historical, that is being at stake, that is being presumably “attacked” by reforms. Johnson reveals how both the proponents and critics of the orthographic reforms had political and ideological motives in arguing in favor or against certain changes in spelling (9).

Although language standardization always involves these ideological and political aspects, the logic and causal relationship here should not be confused. It is not the standardization per se that creates the hegemonies, hierarchies, prejudices, and advantages for some speakers and disadvantages for others, but rather it is part of these phenomena that all precede the standardization itself. That is, the speakers of languages make linguistic judgments full of embedded hierarchies even without standardization or language planning practices (in their modern senses), the latter simply take it to another level, and extend it to another setting. In other words, these ideologies are not necessarily a phenomenon concerning government or other traditional supervising, policymaking, administrative, or normative entities, such as institutes, schools, and dictionaries. Ideologies are also what “common people”

construct, produce and reproduce in their daily lives. They also establish and strengthen ideologies, for instance, by simply “normalizing” them, that is, when ideologies become the “normal” ways of thinking, acting, and, as in our case, spelling. Also, people can oppose competing ideologies by criticizing, ignoring, protesting them. In many of these discussions, however, orthography per se, its technical details, and linguistic characteristics of the language are what constitutes the center of public debates and controversy, rather than the discussion of identities and ideologies. Therefore, it is important to analyze how exactly ideologies and political biases can be disguised in “linguistic”, “scholarly”, and “expert” debates about orthography (9).

The recent orthographic changes in German provide a well-researched example of how minute changes to orthography can be rooted in ideologies. An aspect where the case of German discussed by Johnson “rhymes”, to an extent, with what this thesis is dealing with in Kazakh is this: the Latin alphabet, being initially created for Latin and the phonology of Latin in particular, was apparently deemed to be “not entirely suited to the task of representing the speech sounds of a Germanic language”. This seems to be a recurring trope in all the discussions of German spelling reforms for centuries (18). This is similar to how Arabic-based script and the differences between morphological characteristics of Arabic and Turkic languages are very often emphasized in the context of Kazakh and the unsuitability of the Arabic-based writing system to represent the Kazakh language.

Moreover, mentalistic, pedagogical, and psycholinguistic aspects of the spelling reform would accompany the ideological movement in both cases, however, “the complainants’ concerns were by no means as politically disinterested as might appear in view of their apparent emphasis” on the abovementioned facets (141).

Fishman argues that “[e]very one of the system-building or revising triumphs of language planning has been carefully cloaked in sentiment, has appealed to authenticity rationales, [and] has claimed indigenoussness” (1974, 23). Being “neat and trim and handy” is not enough for the users of the writing system, he claims, the language and its spelling also need to be “theirs” and the fact that it belongs to them must be seen, must be visible, in other words, the language and its visual characteristics must be “like” the people that make cultural, historical, hereditary claims on the language, it must represent their history and identities. However, this demand seems internally flexible as well, as it may depend on what and how the elite, for instance, defines their identity. What we can agree upon is that in any case, the reasons for certain rationales to be persuasive, to “make sense”, and social reasons seem to play a bigger role than linguistic aspects of the question (23).

On the other hand, Aytürk (2010, 129) compares the script change reforms in Turkish and Hebrew, highlighting the complex interplay of different variables that determine the outcome of such reforms. While political and ideological factors certainly play a role, other factors such as literacy rates and attachment to cultural traditions can also be significant. However, the case of the Hebrew script demonstrates that while these other factors may be important, political and ideological reasons still have a more significant role or final say in the outcome of a script change reform, if we take into the consideration the example of the decision to adopt the Cyrillic script for Kazakh in 1940, despite relatively high literacy rates among the population in 1939¹.

¹ 71,2% for men and 51,5% for women, which is significantly higher than the percentage of the literate in pre-Latinization Turkey (Aytürk 2010, 115)

Kazakh seems to be providing an appropriate case to study in the case of the dialectic between modernization and indigenization processes in promoting and enforcing nationalist ideologies that could be seen in language planning and the discussions around it mentioned by Fishman:

“Ferguson (1968) has stressed the *intertranslatability* goal as basic to language modernization and "development". In this connection both codification and elaboration are guided so as to attain the ease and precision assumed already to exist in one or another Language of Wider Communication. At the same time, however, anti-modelling must also be recognized, particularly in *ausbau* codes relative to each other or in anti-Western or anti-imperialist/colonialist junctures” (Ferguson 1968 cited in Fishman 1971, 16).

The importance of social factors influencing individuals making judgments about writing systems is also noted in more recent studies:

“In practice, the choice of script is one that is usually made by tradition, by governments, or by the language users collectively (see Eira 1998 and Unseth 2005 for insights into script selection). Even where digraphia (the simultaneous use of two or more scripts) exists in theory, as in Tatarstan at the moment, the individual language user rarely has a free choice of which to use. Where true digraphia does exist, however, the choice of one or other by an individual is almost certain to have social meaning (see Grivelet 2001)” (Sebba 2012, 4).

We can hypothesize that Kazakh spelling reforms of the 1920s-30s seem to exemplify the aspiration to make Kazakh more “inter-translatable” with Russian that was a transmitter of Western, European modernization. This can be confirmed by similar research on Chuvash (i Font 2015) being burdened essentially by the phonology of two languages: itself and Russian. The author argues that the spelling of the Russian loanwords in Chuvash (in the same way they are spelled in Russian) codifies the subordinate status of Chuvash and that one must know how to pronounce Russian, one has to be familiar with Russian phonology in order to correctly read Chuvash texts:

“The spelling of the Chuvash language does not depend on the properties of the language itself, but on another language (and is subordinated to the tasks of studying it), which implies that the status of the Chuvash is lower than Russian. This feeling is enhanced by native speakers due to the huge number of borrowings from Russian, while maintaining the pronunciation and spelling of the source language” (118).

This phenomenon highlights the power dynamics at play in language reform issues and the implications for the perceived status and identity of minority languages. Similarly, in the context of Kazakh, the adoption of Russian phonological patterns and the spelling of Russian loanwords according to their Russian counterparts served to further subordinate the Kazakh language to the dominant Russian culture. The parallel between the Chuvash and Kazakh cases suggests a broader pattern of linguistic assimilation and cultural subordination within the Soviet Union. Both instances reflect the desire to align minority languages with Russian, thereby reinforcing the dominance of the Russian language and culture.

However, it was also important to choose the Latin-based writing system per se and not Cyrillic nor Arabic-based to practice the so-called “anti-modelling” and visually distance both from Russian imperial, colonial practices on the one hand and Islamic, religious influence on the other.

In the discussions of Kazakh spelling in general, the so-called “scientific discourse” seems to be the dominant one as well. It seems to be following the same pattern that was described by Eira (1998):

“Since the Scientific Discourse is currently the most influential in the western world, it operates within mainstream western academia at a deep level approaching invisibility. There is a tendency within this ideology to pass off any motivation other than the scientific as “superstitious” or “unenlightened”. However, when people educated in the western mode assume rights of educational authority over an illiterate people, this also could be called unenlightened; to presume unquestioningly the superiority of a phonemic over a logographic script is no more rational a position than a superstition. In the last analysis, scientific methodology is deemed superior because it is scientific — a circularity of argumentation which indicates its status as Discourse.” (177).

Appeals on being “scientifically” more suitable or relevant were presented, for instance, by both sides during the Latinization campaign of the 1920s, as we will see later, when the advocates speculated on how the Arabic scripts were hindering the

analytic capabilities and abstract thinking abilities of children, and the opponents, on how the Latin script impede the literacy campaign (Martin 2001, 191).

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF KAZAKH ORTHOGRAPHY

In order to analyze changes in Kazakh orthography and its connection to political processes, it is crucial to first map out the general historical background that would serve as a framework for the analysis. Although the political system drastically changed in the 1920s, the newly established autonomous republic of Kazakhstan inherited the linguistic debates of the previous years, perhaps similar with Turkey in the same period (Aytürk 2008, 277).

ETHNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS OF THE LATE XIX CENTURY

The earliest attempts to establish a writing system for Kazakh are often attributed to Ybyrai Altynsarin, a member of the Kazakh intelligentsia that worked on opening and promoting Russian-language, secular schools in the “Steppes”. He was a proponent of secular, Western education among Kazakhs and opposed both the Russian Orthodox Christian missionary activities and Tatar Muslim teachings. In his “Kazakh chrestomathy” published in 1879 in which he collected tales, short stories, anecdotes in Kazakh for educational purposes, he says the following:

“...Keeping in mind, then, that in general, initial guides, chrestomathies, etc. can only serve as guides to more scientific and serious guides that can give real knowledge and useful information, and that there are almost no such books of general educational content in any of the Asian languages, we are forced to look for such guides in the nearest Russian language; as a result, we considered it more convenient to print this chrestomathy in Russian letters, so that it directly corresponds to its purpose, i.e. serves as a direct guide to more learned and generally useful Russian books, not contradicting the latter either by its content or alphabet” (1994, 81).

Altynsarin does indeed use the Russian alphabet and moreover limits himself to that. In the chrestomathy, you do not find any “special” letters for Kazakh sounds that are not present in Russian. His contemporaries who collected information on Kazakh for other purposes, namely ethnographic, scientific, and missionary purposes, seem to have differed in their approaches, too. Some did use some special symbols for Kazakh phonemes (e.g., Ä ä and Ы ы for front vowels [æ] and [ɣ],

or Latin *k* instead of its Cyrillic analog for uvular [q]), like Ilminsky famous for his later works on the design of a new Cyrillic-based writing system of Tatar spoken among *kryashens* (Christian Tatars), in his work of 1860 on Kazakh, or Melioranski, in his work on Kazakh published in 1894. However, none of them ever propose their usage of special symbols as a distinct writing system or orthography for Kazakh, they both refer to it as “transcription”. Meanwhile, although another contemporary of these individuals, Terentiev who researched Kazakh, Turkish, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, and Persian does share particularly scholarly interest in Kazakh with Melioranski, he doesn’t use any special symbols for transcribing Kazakh in his work published in 1875, earlier than Melioranski’s work but later than that of Ilminsky. The only exception is Ў ў for the approximant [w]. Interestingly enough, it is Terentiev in particular who argues that “it would be desirable to introduce the Russian alphabet among the Kazakhs, which perfectly expresses all the sounds of their language” (1875, 120).

However, based on the lack of any particular actively promoted projects and openly expressed ideas, we can conclude that the usage of special symbols was merely attempts in transcribing Kazakh words with Russian letters with varying degrees of precision rather than a serious attempt to establish a full-fledged writing system for long-term purposes. Altynsarin’s purposes in using the Russian alphabet for Kazakh were also solely educational, not reformist — that is how he describes it himself, that is, he uses the “synthesis” of the Kazakh language and Russian writing system in order to facilitate the learning of the Russian language, which he considers crucial for enlightenment and education, for Kazakh children in general. Ilminsky who “attached the greatest importance to the native languages in the matter of the proper development of children and peoples” agrees with Altynsarin. According to him, “...the successful acquisition of the state language (Russian) is unthinkable without

the systematic help of the native language”, it was believed that “when Russian literacy is preceded by native literacy, the former is assimilated more easily, more consciously and more firmly” (*Bukvar dlya kirgiz* 1908, I). So, their objective was not as much about the Kazakh language or its writing system as it was about making the acquisition of Russian language easier for Kazakhs. However, the reaction appears to have been varied: at least, there is a record of negative reaction, suspicion, and incomprehension of the objective behind the usage of Russian alphabet for Kazakh by Kazakhs, as it could be seen in the text of a petition of 1905:

“Since 1902, the so-called aul schools for Kazakh boys have been opened in the Governor-Generalship of the Steppes. In these schools, teaching is conducted in the Kazakh language, the Kazakhs asked that Kazakh literacy be taught in the aforementioned schools, but they were denied this. In these schools, Kazakh children are taught to write Kazakh words in Russian letters, which do not convey Kazakh phonetics. The Kazakhs understood the refusal to have a teacher to teach Kazakh literacy and the introduction of the Russian alphabet into the Kazakh alphabet in the sense that the village schools did not pursue the goal of education, but something unknown, and as a result, they refused to send their children to these schools” (Sak 2014, 243).

Another important thing is that Ilminsky, Melioranski, and Altynsarin all seem concerned about the influence of Tatar on Kazakh. In his work, Ilminsky argues:

“Unfortunately, Muslim literacy, brought to the steppe by the Tatars and now spreading among the Kazakhs, has taken a Tatar direction; so that in all Kazakh correspondence there is hardly one paper, one letter, which would be written purely in Kazakh”, he goes on to comment on the shortcomings of the Arabic alphabet as well: “...besides, the Arabic-Tatar alphabet does not accurately express Kazakh sounds, especially vowels” (1860, 109).

Two decades later, in 1879, Altynsarin expresses a similar concern when emphasizing the importance of his work:

“Due to the illiteracy of the Kazakh people and the lack of any books published in the Kazakh language, the teachers of educational institutions are forced to use the Tatar language instead of the Kazakh language when teaching Kazakh children. Therefore, even if there is no visible benefit, the students will have to leave their mother tongue, which has no disadvantages, and learn the Tatar language. On the other hand, the literary language of Tatars is full of Arabic and Persian words, as even scholars from Tatars despise this language; therefore, it is incomprehensible to illiterate Kazakhs. All the books published in this language are written only about religion, so they are unsuitable for use in Russian-Kazakh schools, which have more secular goals in this regard...” (1994, 80).

In 1894, Melioranski joins them, too:

“The Kazakhs have been and are learning to read and write from the Tatars, who instill in them that their language is a corrupted, impure language, and at the same time, not even the Tatar, but the Ottoman or Jagatai language is often taken as the norm, and teach them to try to "decorate" their "poor" language with words borrowed from the sacred language of Arabic or Persian. Due to these reasons, Kazakh mullahs and literate people now began to write in a truly "corrupted and impure" Kazakh language, which is often even incomprehensible to their uneducated compatriots” (4).

In his poem written in 1887, Abay, one of the most prominent poets of Kazakhstan, although does not mention Tatar in particular, seems to criticize the usage of “foreign” words in poems:

“If there is a foreign word among them (words in a poem),

That means the poet is an ignorant poor thing”

Although sometimes these lines are interpreted as a comment on the choice of words in general, not necessarily in their etymological aspect (as it is done by Isseberdiyeva in Kunanbayev 2020, 92: “Should the movement of the poem be marred with one *ill-chosen* word, // It will expose the poet’s ignorance and want of skill”), the word *boten* could be translated as “foreign” or “alien”, too. So, perhaps, all these documents capture some negative attitude towards the Tatar linguistic influence on Kazakh already present in the second half of the XIX century — perhaps it reflected the trend towards vernacularization.

TSARIST NEWSPAPERS

The print industry in Kazakhstan seems to have witnessed its first boom in the second decade of the XX century, the 1910s. Although prior to that, in the late XIX century, namely in the 1880s-90s, there were some newspapers, such as *Dala Walayati Gazeti*, the ones published in the 1910s were to an extent more “grassroots” in the sense that they were not state-sponsored or state-controlled, meanwhile the former were initially established with the main purpose of informing the public of the Tsar’s, government’s and local administration’s decrees, decisions, ukaz, and reforms.

One of the first, earliest clear examples of a serious attempt to make a case for reforming the writing system for Kazakh could be found in the *Dala ualayatynyn gazeti* (Kazakh Steppe Newspaper) that used to be published in the years 1888–1902 in Omsk, the administrative center of the Governor-Generalship of the Steppes, Russian Empire. In an article by Rakhymzhan Duisenbayev published in 1897, a journalist, translator, and a statesman, he argues that the Arabic alphabet used for Kazakh should either be abandoned or reformed to fit the needs of the phonology of Kazakh. He often refers to some earlier comments by other people and reflects on them, which, on its own, suggests that a full-fledged discourse was already there, before Duisenbayev’s article per se. For instance, he argues against a reportedly existing opinion that the Kazakh writing system should be reformed by someone who speaks several languages. Duisenbayev does not find it necessary to have a polyglot for that matter and points out that there hardly are literate Kazakhs, not to mention polyglots, then he goes on to propose that they, the literate Kazakhs, should gather and come up with a reformed writing system on their own, without waiting for a multilingual scholar to appear and tackle the issue. If there are some “mistakes”, they could be later corrected by those very “multilingual scholars”, if necessary, he argues (Sak 2014, 9-11; Abilkasymov 1971, 27).

Also, he cites Dinmukhamed Sultangazin’s (one of the editors of the newspaper, statesman) earlier article on the same issue (of which I could not find the whole version), they both agree that the Arabic alphabet is not suitable for Turkic languages, but their viewpoints differ when it comes to the solution of the problem. Sultangazin seems to have argued that although the Arabic writing system is ill-suited for Kazakh, Kazakhs should keep it because they have been using it for a very long time (Abilkasymov 1971, 27-28). In Duisenbayev’s citation, he also

mentions that Turks and Persians did not change the Arabic alphabet and that the Turks “don’t even write vowels”, unlike them, and still they manage to read their languages (Sak 2014, 10). We can see that a distinct alphabet and standardized, vernacularized writing system herald the educational, technological progress:

“Today, English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, and American peoples have made the alphabet so simple that in two or three days a child can recognize letters and write. And you understand better what they write than what they say orally. It is difficult to understand what we write, because there are many similar words, because there are not enough letters, and there is no science and knowledge without the alphabet. It cannot exist without him. After the emergence of the alphabet, science and knowledge also will emerge. Also although the alphabet exists, if there are too many shortcomings, it creates too many barriers for promoting science and education. If you start a business and it is easy for you, you will have fun and enjoy your work. If you can’t understand yourself, you will be disappointed and you will not want to do it again. When a child begins to read, if he understands the meaning of what he has learned, he will read with pleasure, this will later be a motivation for him to finish school, and at any time it will determine life choices, too, good or bad. The Arabic alphabet has disadvantages and problems with the Kazakh language. The letters are written in one way at the beginning, different at the end and in the middle, which confuses the child to a great extent. In my opinion, when reading the Quran or religious texts, it should be read in Arabic, but I wish that Kazakh stories, poems, fairy tales and some scientific subjects should be written in letters that have been deliberately corrected to make it easier for Kazakhs” (11).

However, *Dala ualayatynyn gazetii* (1888-1902) was not the first ever newspaper to be published in Kazakh, it was *Turkistan ualayatynyn gazetii* that used to be published from 1870 until 1883 in Tashkent. Although there could be found no example of a serious discussion of the writing system used for Kazakh in *Turkistan ualayatynyn gazetii*, it already shows many examples of somewhat purist, nationalist tendencies among Kazakhs regarding the language and calls for orthographic standardization (Abilkasymov 1971, 20). For instance, already in 1876, a language used in a short story called “Kozha Gafan wa ham Saduakas” is harshly criticized for being lexically too “Tatarized”. The author shows examples of words that were written, according to him, not in a Kazakh, but a Tatar manner, and also manages to distinguish between the internal dialects of Tatar, too, concluding that the publication was probably initially written in Kazakh but later copied by a Tatar, and probably, he supposes, a Tobol Tatar, not Kazan Tatar (Abilkasymov 1971, 10-11). This article exemplifies that already in the 1870s, the general literate population in Central Asia

had a sense of ethnic, national identification and even were aware of internal linguistic divisions of other neighboring ethnicities. Once again, we cannot ignore the persistent presence of Tatar in almost any discussion of the Kazakh language, its vocabulary and writing system. In the XVIII and XIX centuries, Tatars had a privileged status within the expanding Russian Empire, serving as trusted individuals in various roles such as merchants, political representatives, educators, and administrators in recently acquired Central Asian regions (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia 2023). Again, it might be the reflection of the trend towards the vernacularization that was common across many countries at the time (the establishment of Republican Turkish to replace Ottoman Turkish in Turkey, the establishment of Azerbaijani literary language, etc.).

Reportedly, the editors of the *Turkistan ualayatyryn gazeti* were also supportive of promoting Kazakh oral literature that was considered by many as “truly” Kazakh and its topics were reportedly found relatable for the Kazakh masses. In contrast, an author named G. Shonayev seems to have been harshly against the inclusion of Kazakh oral literature, saying that a reading, literate person does not need to read those poems as they were composed simply for a fleeting prize and were not educational enough. Instead, he thinks Kazakh readers should learn more about the Tatar literature. The editorial staff later publishes a refutation of Shonayev’s claims by providing examples of Shortanbay composing poems not only for a contest but also to portray the harsh living conditions of his people, for instance, *Zar zaman* (Abilkasymov 1971, 17-18).

Shonayev seems to have been persistent in his sympathy towards Tatar language and Tatar literature, as in 1889, he also wrote a reply to Adykov who argued in favor of writing Kazakh books in a “purer” Kazakh, arguing that Tatar

books are easily comprehensible by Kazakhs and there are almost no differences between Tatars and Kazakhs (because of a common religion and writing system). There were other "pro-Tatar" intellectuals. In language-related discussions, we can point out the materials published by Sultangazin and Kurmanbayev where they emphasize the importance of considering Kazakh a distinct language, a language undoubtedly genetically related to Sart (Uzbek) and Noghai (Tatar), but still a different language. In doing so, they support their claims by mentioning some examples of regular correspondence between Kazakh and Tatar, such as [ʒ] in Kazakh corresponding [j] in Tatar, Tatar [j] corresponding to Kazakh [s], and Tatar [m] corresponding to Kazakh [b]. They claimed that Kazakh formed as a distinct language in its own cultural environment, in isolation from other Turkic languages. Thus, they refute the idea (that arguably started with Gasprinsky's articles in the 1880s) that an artificial written language should be created common for all Turkic peoples and the idea that Tatar is a higher, literary variety of Kazakh (Abilkasymov 1971, 21-24).

Overall, there were limitations to purist tendencies as well, as it can be seen in Sultangazin's quite descriptivist statements:

"Of course, we have no place and it is impossible for us to object to the borrowing of words to the Kazakh language by anyone. Whatever the reason, the more words we have, the richer our language is, the richer our thoughts are. On the other hand, if the mind increases, the word number will increase. Even so, it is not possible for writers like us to keep the Kazakh language in one manner, because the language and speech of the people grows, changes, transforms like the people themselves" (Abilkasymov 1971, 25).

Meanwhile, Kurmanbayev also argued in favor of borrowing certain words from other languages that are, in his opinion, necessary since Kazakh is not rich in terms of "scientific terminology" (Abilkasymov 1971, 25).

The orthography of Russian loanwords and their phonotactic adaptation into Kazakh was another important topic in the discussions of the vocabulary of Kazakh, as an example, we can be witnessed from another article by Sultangazin published in 1890:

“Regarding the Russian words that have entered the Kazakh language: when writing them, you should pay attention to the simplicity of the words and how understandable they are to Kazakhs. As long as it is understandable for Kazakhs, you should try to write it in a way similar to the way Russians pronounce it. For example, Kazakhs say *jandaral*, *janaral*, and they also understand the word *general* “general”. That's why it should be written as *general*. Many Russian words have not changed in the Kazakh language. For example, the words *knyaz*, *sudya* “judge”, *pisar* “clerk”” (Abilkasymov 1971, 26).

And in the second group are the words that entered the Kazakh language later mostly through the written language, the originals of which have not been forgotten, and Sultangazin proposes the principle that they should be preserved in the way they are written in those languages (Abilkasymov 1971, 26). This perhaps can be considered as one of the earliest instances of the trend to standardize the written language among Kazakhs.

GRASSROOTS NEWSPAPERS

The first newspapers and magazines published by local Kazakh activists with the help of different patrons and merchants were “Kazakstan” published in 1911-1913, first in Bokey Orda and then in Uralsk, both in today's West Kazakhstan region; “Kazak” published once in 1907, and then reorganized and published again regularly from 1913 until 1918 in Orynbor (published in 265 issues, having 3007 subscribers in 1914); and “Alash” published regularly for a year in 1916-1917 in Tashkent, its name being an alternative for the ethnonym “Kazak” in a range of interpretations. There was also another important political-social magazine Aikap (published in 88 issues, 1000-2000 circulations).

In these newspapers and magazines, one of the recurring topics is the one of national “awakening”, mobilization, “progress”, unification, and these materials seem to have often involved extensive discussions and debates on the writing systems and literacy in general as well. This, once again, emphasizes the role of nationalism in all the different discussions of the writing systems and reforms surrounding it.

The first decade of the XX century is notable for the fact that there seems to be a 9-year gap in the Kazakh press between the year when the *Dala ualayatyryn gazeti* closed in 1902 and the newspaper “Kazakhstan” began its life in 1911. However, it was in this interval, oddly enough, that petitions were printed with several demands on the promotion of the Kazakh language. For instance, there was a requirement for permission to open a Kazakh newspaper without the Tsarist censorship: “...to clarify the current needs of the Kazakh people, it is necessary to publish newspapers in the Kazakh language, which requires the establishment of complacency for the publication of newspapers without prior censorship and the opening of a printing house” (Sak 2014, 244). The petition was signed by 12767 people, and a different one in the same year reads: “...to allow the Kazakh people the construction of ...facilities among the Kazakhs of printing houses for the publication of newspapers and books” (246). These petitions exemplify how Kazakhs were demanding a free, “grassroots” press that would serve the purpose of sharing important news and public concerns.

In 1911, the first grassroots newspaper “Kazakhstan” was established in Bokei Orda in Kazakh and Russian. Although the newspaper did discuss political, social issues, it does not seem to have discussed the writing system or the reform thereof. In the same year, another periodical publication started as well – *Aikap* magazine that was published from 1911 to 1915 and used by Kazakh thinkers and scholars to

discuss political and social matters, with a name referring to a Kazakh interjection expressing some regret or dismay, in this case, apparently for not being literate, knowledgeable, educated enough as a nation.

In 1913, in one of the issues of *Aikap*, an author named Shahzaman Shiyashov harshly criticized Ahmet Baitursynuly's² proposed ideas on the alphabet reform. A copy of an earlier issue of *Aikap* where the initial material of Baitursynuly that prompted Shiyashov's response seems to be absent. However, based on the comments by Shiyashov, we can, to an extent, reconstruct what Baitursynuly proposed. Seemingly, Baitursynuly suggested getting rid of the “redundant” Perso-Arabic letters in the Kazakh writing system that reportedly are not present in Kazakh phonology, like ڙ [ʒ], a Persian letter¹ (that is very rarely used in Persian itself) or ف [f] which apparently gets adapted into [p] or [b] in Kazakh: for instance, Kazakh *bata* or *batıha*, the name of a special spiritual ritual in gatherings and prayers, is derived from Arabic *Fātiḥa*, the name of the first, “opening” chapter of the Quran and Kazakh *kauip'* danger 'is derived from Arabic *kawf'* fear '(Mamyrbekova 2017). In criticizing Baitursynuly's ideas, Shiyashov mentions the importance of the ideas of Ismail Gasprinsky, a prominent figure in the pan-Turkist ideology, — in fact, his article is called *Birge kozgalalyk* (“Let's advance together”). Shiyashov seems to have misread or misinterpreted some of the linguistic terminology used by Baitursynuly. For example, commenting on the explanation of the Kazakh sound system, where

¹ Although the voiced postalveolar fricative [ʒ] and voiced postalveolar affricate [dʒ] are allophones in Kazakh, traditionally the character ڙ that is pronounced as the latter in Classical Arabic is preferred.

² (1872 – 1937) a prominent Kazakh linguist, was a member of the Alash Orda movement, which sought to establish an independent Kazakh state, chief editor of the newspaper “Kazak”, opposed the Latinization campaign and was instead in favor of modifying and adapting the Arabic script to Kazakh phonology

Baitursynuly listed 5 vowels, 17 consonants, and 2 semi-vowels (which are called *dauysty*, *dauyssyz*, and *jarty dauysty*, which literally mean “voiced”, “voiceless”, and “half-voiced” in Kazakh, respectively), Shiyashov proposes to refer to all the 28 letters (he does not seem to distinguish between sounds and letters) as “semi-vowels” — *jarty dauysty* (Sak 2014, 17–19).

Later, the article by Shiyashov is tackled by Alikhan Bokeikhanov, one of the future leaders of the Alash movement, under a nickname Azamat Alashuly. He refutes the claims of Shiyashov and points out his misreadings. He argues that Akhmet Baitursynuly’s suggestions do not go against the common goals pursued by Tatars and Kazakhs, that the *usul jadid* (a series of socio-cultural reforms proposed by Gasprinsky, including the writing system reform) that Shiyashov is apparently in favor of is actually all about Baitursynuly’s ideas of facilitating the Arabic-based scripts for the necessities of Kazakh and Kazakh children in particular. He points out that Shiyashov is making a groundbreaking “discovery” in the world of linguistics by claiming that all the 28 sounds in Kazakh are “semi-vowels”. He emphasizes the importance of the so-called Turkic brotherhood, the common roots, but he also asks if by omitting certain unnecessary letters from an alphabet, automatically they will stop being part of the “Turkic” world:

“Will religion and our worldview change because of it? Isn’t it a joy that the Kazakh people, who are a branch of the Turkic race, try not to fall behind their kins, find an even faster way to keep pace with them, and strive forward? Can we join the competition in the modern age of art and education, not seeing our shortcomings, not correcting our mistakes, simply worshipping the spirits of our ancestors saying “we are also Turkic descendants?” (19–21).

However, Bokeikhanuly does not fully agree with Baitursynuly and requests him to reconsider one particular aspect of his suggested reforms — the letters for the voiceless fricatives ف [f] and ح [h] (in Arabic, the sound it denotes is a pharyngeal one [ħ], not glottal). He supports his claim by saying that there are words and

personal names borrowed from Persian and Arabic that have this letter: “Akhmet, Mukhamedzhan, FazyI” (21).

Afterwards, in his article, Baitursynuly provides a considerably lengthy reply to Shahzaman Shiyashov’s comments. He asks important questions that help to map out the crucial concepts in the conversation, like “Should the language serve the needs of the writing system or should the writing system serve the needs of the language?” or “Does language precede the writing system or vice versa? Did Kazakh exist, as a language, even before the Arabic script or not?”. He also provides examples from the existing literature (mentioned by Shiyashov himself), where the Arabic letters ف [f] and ژ [ʒ] are specifically shown as both non-Tatar and non-Kazakh letters. Also, Baitursynuly makes a case for standardizing the language and finding patterns and rules in it:

Nahwu Sarf means the science of laws of language. A language should have its own laws. If there is a law, there also must be science. If water freezes, it will become ice, and if chlorine and sodium are mixed, they become salt. These are the laws of nature. There are similar laws in language. If chlorine and sodium are mixed, we can learn by observing and searching that salt will be formed. The law of language should be learnt in the same way. In the Kazakh language, a word does not mix back vowels and front vowels. Isn't this the law of our language?” (27).

He goes on to elaborate on his views, by saying that his suggestions are not against the Arabic script per se or the Muslim religious education in general, quite the contrary, he is harshly criticizing those who argue that the Arabic alphabet does not fit the Kazakh language and that Kazakh language should switch to a completely different writing system (probably Cyrillic or Latin were being suggested). Ahmet Baitursynuly argues that Kazakhs will never accept any other writing system as the Arabic alphabet is deeply intertwined with the religion and culture of Kazakhs. He then mentions that the irregularities in the Kazakh orthography are not only his concerns, but those of many (28):

“It’s not only me, but also others who provide many comments about disorder and deficiency in our orthography. If there were no flaws, no one would have said anything. We do not tell the Kazakhs to do this and that just because they cannot make a living. We say that if there is a defect or disorder in your life, you should sort it out and put it in order, and there actually is such a flaw and irregularity, in our writing. It should be adjusted and repaired. The irregularity of our writing causes hindrance whenever we want to publish a textbook, and whenever we are teaching a child, it causes hindrance once again. Whenever we want to produce a grammar of Kazakh, it creates a huge obstacle. You say that textbooks with these twenty-eight letters are already being printed and distributed. You are right. But those know some methodics of pedagogy are aware of the fact there are flaws in those books” (29).

Later in an article in the newspaper *Kazakh* that was published in the years 1913–1918, Shakarim, a prominent Kazakh poet and a close relative of Abay, also comments on the circulating ideas on the alphabet reform and especially suggestions made by Baitursynuly. He focuses on some specific details and suggests his own alternative ideas. To sum up, he suggests indicating some of the sounds with the so-called *harakats*, symbols that are not full letters but diacritics traditionally marking short vowels in Arabic script. In his response, Baitursynuly argues against this idea by saying that this will cause problems in typing.

The discussion of the alphabet seems more detailed in the grassroots newspapers, compared to the Tsarist newspapers. If the Tsarist newspapers capture the very emergence of the national idea of Kazakhs, grassroots newspapers reflect the thrive to modernization. The historical discourses about the Kazakh language in the 19th century laid the foundation for many of the debates that continued during the Soviet era. These debates included discussions about the choice of script, the spelling conventions that should be used, and the relationship between language, culture, and national identity.

Korenizatsiya

After the establishment of the Soviet Union, *korenizatsiya* was one of the very first grand policies conducted throughout the Union. *Korenizatsiya* was a policy introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1920s aimed at promoting the development of

national, local, ethnic cultures and identities. It had different goals stated, most important of them being the promotion of equality and recognition for oppressed, colonized peoples. Ethnic minorities were encouraged to develop their own vernacular languages and cultures. The discussion of the *korenizatsiya* campaign per se is of vital importance as it was the general umbrella term for a number of different “indigenization” processes, such as language standardization that involved Latinization of the script, ethnic classification, ethnic recognition, among others. Haugen emphasizes the significance of the standardization of the vernacular language in the nation-building process, referring to the magnum opus of Benedict Anderson (2003, 126), while Martin underlines the significance of the alphabet reform within the language standardization per se as the “major practical project in language construction and an even more important symbolic battleground in the politics of national identity” (Martin 2001, 184).

The cultural changes were happening at different levels in the 1920s. Cultural transformations were not limited to top-down orders from Moscow, but also involved, to some extent, grassroots movements that were intending to incorporate the new ideology into the traditions and semi-ethnic identities, such as the Red Yurts movement in Kazakhstan (Ramsay 2021, 22) or Red Teahouses in Uzbekistan (Roosien 2021, 509).

There are different interpretations of the *korenizatsiya* campaign. From one hand, in the work of Martin (2001), Bolsheviks seem to be generally described as those who needed help from the national elites, as those who were somehow vulnerable and reliant on the latter. Martin mentions the enthusiasm with which the Turkic peoples were celebrating their Turkic identity and thus strengthening the pan-Turkist ideas:

“Nowhere was this pan-Turkism more vividly on display than at the 1926 Turkological Congress in Baku. Its very occurrence, with invited guests from Turkey and Hungary (the latter being considered a member of the larger Altaic language group), was striking. It is difficult to imagine an analogous pan-Finnic congress in Karelia, much less a pan-Slavic one in Minsk. The congress' speeches were filled with Turkic pride and calls for Turkic unity. An Uzbek objected to being confused with the Iranian Tajiks: "In their features, there is absolutely nothing Turkic." An Oirat spoke movingly of how he had only recently discovered "that I am a Turk." He protested another delegate's claim they were only turkicized Mongols: "I protest against such a definition, because I want to be a member of that nation, which is represented at this congress [my emphasis]." He then asked that "the Turkological congress uncover the history of the Oirots."” (Martin 2001, 193).

It seems that the political power of pan-Turkist ideas simply cannot be overemphasized. In the same book, the role of Islam is described as significant, crucial, and the description of its scale and power seem to imply certain urgency that it must have aroused in Bolsheviks' minds:

“The rhetoric of Latinization, then, presented the campaign as in service of the destructive role of cultural revolution: the assault on Islam and "feudal" ways of thinking. It is not surprising that the largely symbolic campaign of Latinization assumed such a large presence during the early years of NEP and in fact became the first eastern cultural revolutionary project to earn central sanction. For these were the same years when the coercive cultural revolutionary campaign against Islam and the veiling of women had stalled. In the mid-1920s, Islam was in a much stronger position than Orthodoxy. There had been no time for a campaign against Islam analogous to the one carried out against Orthodoxy from 1918 to 1922. Islamic schools, courts, and charitable organizations were all still functioning in the mid-1920s and were often more influential than the competing Soviet organizations. Likewise female veiling remained the largely unchallenged norm in many regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus. In this environment, Latinization allowed eastern reformers to undertake at least a symbolic assault on Islam” (Martin 2001, 190 – 191).

To an extent, Latinization may seem to have been a grassroots campaign, too, that is, it had eager advocates among the general population. Also, Martin accentuates the supposedly inherently anti-Russian character of the Latinization campaign, especially when it came to the Russian language per se, by citing Iakovlev's theses on the Russian script or the Cyrillic representing a “russificatory role”, a “weapon of propaganda of Russian imperialism abroad”, and a “national

bourgeoisie” (2001, 197). However, it is unclear to what extent were these sentiments or ideas widely shared by the public in the Soviet Union. Martin talks about how *korenizatsiya* and Latinization sanctioned Russophobia (194). However, Ubiria argues that *korenizatsiya* policy should not be considered a desperate compromise between the Bolsheviks and the national elites:

“...it must be emphasized that *korenizatsiya* in Central Asia should not be viewed as some sort of a forced political concession by the Kremlin to the pressures stemming from the indigenous popular masses or the political elites. In fact, none of the *korenizatsiya* policies in the region were necessarily implemented as an attempt to reflect the demands of the targeted population groups. For example, in 1923, the Soviet decision to develop a secular Uzbek national culture for the state-defined not-yet-formed Uzbek nation can hardly be regarded as a mere fulfillment of long-established or emerging nationalist aspirations of mainly illiterate, conservative-religious would-be Uzbek nationals. It is worth reminding that just a few years before the Sovietization of Central Asia, most of the latter people showed an absolute indifference to the quasi-secular educational and cultural undertakings initiated by the local Jadids. Rather, the *korenizatsiya* policies for Central Asia, which were conceived and carefully planned by Soviet officials in Moscow, derived from the Soviet government’s ideological and strategic objectives in the region. They were an integral part of general Soviet nationality and modernization policies of the time, which aimed to accelerate and support building modern, Western-style societies and national communities out of fragmented, traditional semi-feudal agrarian/nomadic communities in the Soviet east, including Central Asia. Finally, it must be kept in mind that notwithstanding their nationalistic outlook, the *korenizatsiya* policies came with clear strings attached: the development of national cultures and literary languages for the state-recognized nationalities in Central Asia were justifiable and admissible as long as they served the purpose of the rooting of communist ideology and principles in the respective communities” (Ubiria 2018, 149).

Ubiria, on the other hand, seems to question the importance and autonomy of national elites in *korenizatsiya*. Ubiria also argues against the argument about the Cyrillic script being used because of the great fear of the pan-Turkist unity, caused by the switch of the Turkish republic to the Latin script (154).

What seems quite interesting is that Ubiria admits, for some reason, that there truly was a practical or, rather, a technical justification for abandoning the Arabic-based script (154), and that the Arabic script is inherently unsuitable for Turkic language due to the insufficiency of symbols for vowels, which are of great importance for Turkic phonologies. If we consider how Uighurs modified the Perso-Arabic script and added diacritics and how Ahmet Baitursynuly adapted it into the phonetics of the Kazakh language, the point about Arabic-based script being

somewhat inherently and inevitably ill-suited for Turkic languages appears very weak. Even when adopting Latin and Cyrillic scripts, Turkic languages had to use additional diacritics to represent many sounds, as they are now conventionally referred to as “specific”. The discussion of “suitability” of a writing system for a language seems to be almost exclusively a matter of ideologies and associations, as discussed above.

Actually, the Latinization campaign, which was particularly energetic and thus quick in Turkey, might have served as a catalyst and an example for the Latinization campaign in the Soviet Union as well. Meanwhile, Smith (1998) also seems to emphasize the agency of “Moscow” in determining the script and setting certain objectives in supporting campaigns:

“Yet Latinization also offered Moscow the perfect opportunity to begin to undermine the power of the Muslim clerical establishment, as symbolized through the strange and mystical letters of the Arabic script. Documents from these years consistently spoke of the need to suppress the influence of Muslim clerical educators, and as a consequence the Arabic alphabet and language of the Quran. By forcing the Latin alphabet as the new medium of script literacy, the party would mount an impassable barrier between traditional Islamic print culture and the masses of new “Soviet” literates. Since the vast majorities of the Turkic and indigenous populations of the east were still illiterate, control over alphabet politics meant control over them” (Smith 1998, 125).

Meanwhile, according to Hirsch (2004), the Russian linguistic and cultural dominance never faded, nor was it under any particularly serious threat or “reverse” discrimination by the non-Russian cultures’ growth. She provides the following argument, emphasizing the dominance and “defaultness” of ethnic Russians as people who are entitled to all the territories of the Soviet Union (69).

Hirsch repeatedly and explicitly emphasizes how the Russification practices that started occurring in the 1930s-40s are not actually a “retreat” or any radical change in the direction of the social engineering policies of the Soviet Union, as, for instance, it was suggested by Martin, but rather the continuation of the so-called “state-sponsored evolutionism”, according to the logic of which, clans and tribes amalgamate into nationalities, and those later amalgamate into “socialist-era nations”.

Therefore, according to Hirsch, from the very beginning, the Soviet Union did not intend to celebrate different ethnicities and nationalities and leave them as they are on their own, and then suddenly decided to turn to Russification, but rather it used the *korenizatsiya* and simultaneous processes as tools for making a more or less equal framework for further successful amalgamation or merging into each other, apparently without traumas or inequalities, but with enthusiasm (9). The commitment of Bolsheviks to these ideas and the Latinization being an inevitable part of the *korenizatsiya* policies might suggest that the Latinization per se, however grassroots it might seem, was mainly deliberately used by the Bolsheviks. That is, perhaps the question of switching the scripts of different nationalities and unifying them eventually into one script system was not a question of “if” but of “when”, since the establishment of the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, in Turkmenistan, Edgar argues (2006), the Latinization campaign gained wide support and, surprisingly, was not met with strong opposition. Most Turkmen intellectuals thought the Latinization to be “desirable and necessary”. Even those Turkmen linguists who contributed to creating the Arabic-based alphabet of the Turkmen language do not seem to have opposed the Latinization reform, or at least there is no such occurrence on record (141-142). However, it did not mean that the

switch was easy, especially for those who were accustomed to the old Arabic-based script (143). In general, the Turkmen scenario seems different from at least the Kazakh one, in which relatively influential leaders and intellectuals were opposing the Latinization campaign (Baitursynuly 2013 [1927], 277).

The recent history of language reforms in Turkmenistan seems to be an interesting case to compare to Kazakhstan in general. Like Kazakh, the Turkmen language was also heavily influenced by Arabic and Persian languages as a result of a centuries-long language contact, the presence of a shared Muslim identity, and the Persianate hegemony in the region. Moreover, Turkmens also used Chagatai or Turki as the literary language of courts, rule, science, law, and high-level communication. Similarly to Kazakh, although there was no standardized Turkmen vernacular established, there was a written language rooted in Turkmen.

In the beginning of the XX century, many Turkmens were in favor of establishing a common standardized “literary” Turkmen language. If some of the Turkmen native intellectuals were inspired by the popular at the time European trends with which they became familiar through contact with the Russian colonial rule, others were influenced by Ottoman Turkish nationalists and the Jadid movement. However, Turkmen nationalists had a different linguistic ambition than what Jadids or the Ottoman Turkish nationalists had. While the Turkic nationalists or pan-Turkists in the Russian empire or the Ottoman empire were promoting the idea of a common written Turkic language, and while the Jadids were also campaigning for a common language for different Turkic peoples, although including in their Turkistani identity agenda a much smaller geographical entity, the Turkmen intelligentsia was rather particularly focused on establishing a vernacular written language. The Turkmen elites at the time seem to have had a strong identity tied to

the genealogical and political traditions that were separating them from other Turkistani people. The extent to which Turkmens were rejecting both the idea of a pan-Turkist identity and the pan-Turkistani identity can also be seen in the xenophobia expressed by Turkmens against other Turkic nations in the first decades of the Soviet Union. They also expressed concerns that within the proposed paradigm of pan-Turkistanism, they would be left out as a minority and that the system of interaction would be somewhat imperial (Edgar 2006, 134 – 135).

There was a proposal to fully abandon the idea of establishing a literary Turkmen variety whatsoever and simply use the “already developed” Ottoman Turkish or Azerbaijani language. To be precise, in 1925, one of the many Azerbaijani teachers working at the time in Ashgabat, Ferid Efendizade, published an article in the newspaper Turkmenistan, in which he was promoting the idea that Turkmen was one of the many dialects of Turkish, and it is better to abandon the “weak and corrupted” and “perishing in the burning desert” language. He suggested that in this way Turkmens can more easily acquire cultural progress and develop at a faster pace. He even provided an example of Azerbaijani that had eliminated so-called crude sounding words and replaced them with elegant sounding, in his understanding, Ottoman Turkish words. Doing otherwise, that is defending the Turkmen language and establishing its literary standard, Efendizade argued, would be “stupid chauvinism” or even a “crime”. However, the idea was rejected and met with hostile reaction, and the person who expressed it was accused of “pan-Turkism” and “petit bourgeois nationalism”. Edgar argues that “[i]n their attacks on Effendizade, the insistence of Turkmen intellectuals on maintaining the distinctiveness of the Turkmen language corresponded perfectly to the goals of Moscow’s nationality policy” (2006, 135 – 136). The ideas proposed by Ferid

Effendizade demonstrate yet another time to what extent almost any discussion of language reform is ideologized, the comments about certain words having a crude sound and other words being elegant sounding is a statement that we can confidently say is based on a language ideology solely which itself is usually based upon certain political, hegemonic hierarchies.

Also, because of the abundance of already existing educational and instructional materials in Azerbaijani, it was used in some disciplines at Turkmen schools, but the usage of any Turkic language other than Turkmen was also a matter of debate in which Turkmens expressed their concern that the boundary between two too close languages might become blurred and thus including any other Turkic language in the education sphere is a threat for the Turkmen nation overall. Moreover, Turkmens were also concerned about the influence of Turkic languages spoken by influential Turkmen linguists, such as Tatar. All these facts clearly demonstrate that the Turkmen identity and the ambition to imagine, create, and protect a Turkmen nation was a powerful idea among the national elite at the time. Moreover, it shows how the Soviet policies were a catalyst of the idea of one Turkmen nation (Edgar 2006, 136 – 138).

Establishing a new standardized writing system is normally a significant part of any language standardization process, and Turkmen was not an exception. Just like Kazakh, the Turkmen language was first written in Arabic script. During the Soviet times, it underwent an adaptation to a Turkmenized or nativized variant of the Arabic script.

The arguments in favor of switching from the Arabic-based script to the Latin-based one were practical as much as they were ideological. First, the Arabic script

was criticized by many as a script that is not suitable for the distinct phonological system of Turkic languages. The Turkmen language, like Kazakh, exhibits a relatively great number of vowels: front and back vowels that govern the velar vowel harmony in the morphology. Meanwhile, the Arabic script provides only three symbols for three long vowels *a*, *u*, and *i*, and diacritical symbols for three shorter versions of the former.

Secondly, the fact that symbols in the Arabic script must almost always change their appearance in accordance with the position within the word was considered its drawback that is complicating the printing and typewriting process, compared to the Latin script in which letters are not necessarily written in a joint manner. Lastly, the Arabic script was considered by many as inherently inconvenient due to the direction of writing that goes, unlike the European writing systems, from right to left.

However, Edgar (2006, 141) argues that the technical arguments were rather a façade of the underlying ideological compass changing its lodestar. Turkmens were transforming from a Muslim “traditional” society to a Western-oriented and secular one in a Marxist imagination. The Arabic script thus, being associated with the Quran, was considered a marker of the “backwardness” that had been hindering the development of the Turkic peoples.

What is different, however, in the case of Azerbaijan and the case of Turkmenistan, is that the Azerbaijani language already had a prior experience of a written language with its literary dialect, and, moreover, Latinization proposals had already been made even before the October revolution. In fact, the very first proposals to apply the Latin script to Turkic languages are said to have been expressed particularly from among Azerbaijanis (Lewis 2002, 28). Also, this

precedent is said to have been used in order to strengthen the appeal on the Latin script:

“VTsK NTA's theoretical journal was filled with articles on Latinization's pre revolutionary antecedents, beginning with the Columbus of Latinization, the Azerbaijani dramatist Mirza Fatali Akhundov, who presented a Latinization project to the Turkish sultan in 1857. As critics would later point out, these histories presented a timeless succession of above-class heroes and villains: the latinists, some of whom were even princes, and the arabists. The message seemed to be that the October revolution created a more favorable environment for Latinization, but otherwise the movement remained the same” (Martin 2001, 192).

According to Smith (1998, 123), “thanks to its homogeneous ethnic territory, developed literary culture and emerging elite national consciousness, Azerbaijan enjoyed the most resilient movement for a Latin script”. However, perhaps besides the developed literary culture in regards to particularly Turkmen vernacular, other two points can also be told about the Turkmen situation.

Moreover, Turkmens, as well as Kazakhs, did not have the challenge and a potential reason for the identity crisis that Azerbaijanis had — more people were speaking Azeri outside the territories of the newly established Azerbaijan. There are and probably were many Kazakhs and Turkmens living outside the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but the proportions were different, and the predominant majority of both Kazakhs and Turkmens were living within the Soviet Union. More than a half of the people who identify as Azeri were in Iran, and the Latin script would become an additional obstacle between the Azerbaijanis in the Soviet Union and the Azerbaijanis in Iran:

“At different times in its history, alphabet changes have served to isolate Northern Azerbaijan from Southern Azerbaijan. If the Araz river was the "natural" border between the two Azerbaijanis and

if the barbed wires emphasized physical separation; then alphabet differences created a third boundary--an invisible cultural one" (Bahadori 1993).

It is interesting that even though the adoption of a new and even more "foreign" script would probably deepen the separation that is in place, the Azerbaijani enthusiasm around the Latinization campaign was arguably the most vociferous at least among the Turkic peoples of the Soviet Union.

Another difference between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's experiences is that in the case of Turkmenistan, the language seems to have been more closely tied with the tribal identities of Turkmens. Although tribal identity was an important part of what it meant to be Kazakh as well, the genealogical traditions of Kazakhs and Turkmens seem to have been different or at least interpreted differently by the Kazakhs and Turkmens themselves, respectively. Among Kazakhs, in contrast, each tribe does not seem to have represented a certain linguistic variety of Kazakhs (Melioranski 1894, 3). Perhaps this is due to endogamy commonly practiced among Turkmens (Tehrani and Collard 2002, 457) and exogamy practiced among Kazakhs (Esenova 2002, 13).

Among Kazakhs, there was another, bigger tribal division — *jüz* — that probably was more vital for any dialectological division of Kazaks. Major discussions of the dialectology or regional variation of the Kazakh language are mainly concerned with the *jüz'es* — *Uli*, *Orta*, *Kici*, for instance, Särsen Amanjолоv's magnum opus "Questions of Dialectology and History of the Kazakh Language" first published in 1959. Literary Kazakh was based on the North Eastern dialect of Kazakh that is mainly the dialect of the *Orta*, or Middle *jüz*. It was also a politically driven decision that is based on the historical privilege and cultural hegemony of that time of the cities like Karkaraly, Bayanaul, Torgai which for the very reason of being

important political and economic centers of the Kazakh steppe at the time eventually produced a significant number of representatives of the Kazakh elite (Uyama 2000, 80). The variety spoken by Kazakhs from these areas came to be associated with the literary legacy of Abay and Altınsarıı. However, there does not seem to have been any strong conflict or confrontation of any sort between tribes or *jüz'es*.

Meanwhile, the following excerpts from two different authors exemplify the extent to which Turkmens and the Turkmen national elite were challenged by the sensitivity of the question of representation of one's tribal identity within the literary standard that is to be deemed common for the whole Turkmen nation:

"In 1933, the Turkmen language newspaper *Shuralar Türkmenistan* published a poem entitled "Fisherman" by the Yomut poet M. Saralı. In response to these seemingly innocuous verses, the Teke writer Berdi Soltanniyazov fired off a critical article, accusing Saralı of fostering linguistic anarchy by using "made up words" that were unknown in the Turkmen language. Saralı responded with an angry letter of his own, insisting that his poem employed seafaring terms that were common to the Caspian coastal regions of Turkmenistan. A poet, he added sanctimoniously, had a duty to use indigenous terminology when writing about daily life; by refusing to acknowledge the validity of these Yomut words, Soltanniyazov was trying to "promote the hegemony of the Teke dialect." In the end, the editors of *Shuralar Türkmenistan* apologized for having published Soltanniyazov's article, noting that the Teke writer was clearly seeking to "put tribalism on the agenda" (Edgar 2006, 129).

"Despite language planners' acknowledgment of tribal dialects and efforts to incorporate their peculiarities, the Teke linguist Garahanow accused Böriýew and Geldiýew (who was Yomut) of using the Yomut dialect as the foundation for the Turkmen literary language. Böriýew addressed this issue, writing that the written literary language being constructed at the time was centered primarily on Teke and western Yomut dialects, because most officials, educators, and journalists came from the related tribes. He noted that dialects from the eastern region near the Amu Darya were not as well represented as the dialects from the center of Transcaspia and there were few eastern tribal representatives (Ersary or Salyr, for example) involved in publishing newspapers and writing textbooks" (Clement 2018, 72).

What most authors seem to agree on, when it comes to script changes and their political meanings, is that they all interpret the caution of Bolsheviks about the Cyrillic script as a caution of resembling the Russian colonialism and Orthodox Christian missionaries and thus damaging the image of Bolsheviks. Therefore, Latin script was chosen as the best option for all the different languages that had other pre-Soviet writing systems or had no experience of being a written language, an exception being the Georgian language, "unsurprisingly" (Martin 2001, 199).

The First Turkological Congress

The First Turkological Congress in 1926 in Baku, Soviet Azerbaijan, was one of the most important events in the history of interaction between the Soviet Union and Turkey in terms of linguistic discussions and language policies.

The earliest attempts to modernize and reform the writing system of Turkic languages in the recent centuries arguably go back as far as the mid-19th century when Mirza Fatali Akhundov, Iranian Azerbaijani writer and social activist, after finding out that the Arabic script reportedly had deficiencies in expressing the sounds and especially the vowels of the Azerbaijani language, started working on a Latin-based alphabet for the Azerbaijani language and later presented it to the Ottoman sultan (Tagiyev 1928, 58). His project was the first recorded precedent of an attempt of switching the writing system of a Turkic language into a European writing system. This event would later be one of the most powerful catalysts that made the Azerbaijani people the most active proponents of switching not only the Azerbaijani language, but also all the other Turkic and non-Turkic languages into the Latin-based alphabet.

Perhaps less so in academia, but quite often in national myths and media, the Soviet Union or its self-proclaimed “successor” Russian Federation and the Turkish Republic are shown as eternal rivals and competitors. Certainly, this is, to a great extent, due to a backstory of Turkey joining NATO in 1952 that was collectively, indeed, the rival of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Even prior to that, certain political groups in Turkey, for instance, would see Soviet socialism as one of the instruments and continuation of Russian expansionism that had been in “endless”

conflict with similar interests of the Ottoman Empire for three centuries (Aytürk 2011, 328). Also, it is generally perceived that the Soviet Union had its borders totally closed, strictly limiting any mobility. However, two things often ignored are, first, “Rome was not built in one day”, that is, the Soviet Union did not completely shut down its borders for everyone to visit, contrary to how people of today might perceive and imagine; second, the Soviet Union and Turkey did not have heated relations throughout 70 years, but actually, in the early years of the active Kemalist movement, it was the Soviet Union that helped the Turkish army take back Istanbul from the Entente Powers. In the 1920s-30s, Turkey and the Soviet Union seem to have had quite friendly relations.

What is important about the first Turkological Congress that took place in 1926 in Baku, Soviet Azerbaijan, is that besides many delegates from Turkic communities within the Soviet Union, there were also Turkish, German, and other foreign delegations discussing prospects for the development of Turkic languages, cultures, and countries. Namely, reportedly there were two specialists from Turkey.

In the stenographic report of the congress, a Turkish linguist and Dean of the Faculty of Literature at Istanbul University at the time Mehmet Fuat Köprülü gave a lecture in Turkish on the topic of the development of the literary language among Turkic varieties. In his speech, he briefly summarized existing written literature in different Turkic languages in history and praised the Anatolian variety of Turkish and received a round of applause:

“The Oguz dialect, under the influence of various historical factors, in the 8th century of the Muslim era, split into two groups: eastern and western. The Eastern Oguz dialect, or what is also Azeri, began to take shape, as we know, from the 8th century. As for the Western Oguz, i.e. Anatolian dialect, even before the invasion of the Mongols, had already begun to produce literary products and

over the course of 8 centuries produced thousands of scientific and literary works, not at all inferior to works in Arabic and Persian” (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 1926, 423).

Unfortunately the stenographies seem to be available only for speeches given in Russian, with some rare exceptions. The quote above was pronounced in the context of discussion of establishing or creating a common literary language for all the Turkic languages. Scholars and specialists were discussing the prospects for establishing an “artificial” Turkic literary language that is understood by everyone. In the discussion following Köprülü’s lecture, many seem to emphasize the importance of the “merging”, perhaps based on the communist, Leninist ideas that the people should eventually culturally and linguistically unite. These ideas were strongly propagated in the Soviet Union as part of the *korenizatsiya* campaign along with the establishment of national borders, territories, and symbols: tribes and clans were supposed to unite and merge into nationalities, nationalities merging further into big “socialist nations”, and then eventually socialist nations merging and uniting to live under the shared “universal human culture” (Hirsch 2005). By following quite the same logic, many speakers emphasize the importance of considering the process of merging and bringing together those Turkic vernacular languages that are especially close to each other. For instance, Anatolian Turkish, Azerbaijani, and Turkmen or Bashkurt and Kazakh. Some other speakers accentuate on how promising new technologies, such as railways and printing press look, and thus anticipate even faster merging of the Turkic vernaculars. Berdiyev, a Turkmen delegate, contends that the literary language that will, indeed, be accessible for all the Turkic masses can, in fact, be established and compares it to the case of other literary languages, such as Russian, in which, Berdiyev reports, the literary variety is different from

dialects and varieties but it is also close to each of the dialects and varieties in different ways (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 1926).

However, there also seems to be some caution or hesitation, for instance, from among Kazakh delegates, such as Nazir Torekulov, a party official who would later become the chair of one of the Latinization commissions, and Eldes Omarov³. Torekulov warns that although the idea of establishing a common literary language is important, no language can be created in a “laboratory environment”. He emphasizes that languages are born in a natural environment, in a natural way. In addition, he accentuates on the fact that a more important question here and thus also a prerequisite for a common ground is the general literacy among the masses that particularly requires an urgent intervention (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 1926, 425).

Even a more interesting point is made by another Kazakh delegate, Omarov. He often emphasizes the power dynamics between the hegemonic Azerbaijan culture and language and those of the “backwards” Turkic societies. Omarov points out that some language representatives are making mistaken claims about having nothing in common with one or another language. For instance, some Bashkurt specialists are told to have said so about Tatar language:

“Representatives of Bashkiria spoke here and repeatedly emphasized that their language has nothing in common with the Tatar language. Nothing like this. There are a lot of similarities, but the speeches of the comrades of the Bashkirs are explained by the fact that the Bashkirs are trying to protect their rights from the tendency of a more cultured neighbor. But this does not mean that unification is impossible” (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 1926, 432 – 433).

³ (1892 – 1937) was another Alash politician, pedagogue, interpreter, columnist

Thus, Omarov seems to have tried to explain how “smaller” nations feel especially insecure and defensive so that they deny even the obvious connection under a fear of assimilation or erasure. Omarov offers a communist, Marxist analysis of the situation and explains how in the past, “merging” already happened in different settings and contexts. However, he warns, these unequal, asymmetrical mergings, in which bigger and more powerful cultures used to absorb a smaller and less powerful one, were products of a capitalist economic system and now “we have completely different principles” (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 1926, 432).

He argues that the biggest obstacle, for instance, for him in understanding Azerbaijani texts are the Arabic and Persian loanwords that seem to burden the Turkic language and make it inaccessible to other Turkic-speaking societies. One needs to first learn Arabic and then also Persian to understand these texts. Meanwhile, he also suggests Kazakh as the “most pure” Turkic language (discourse that may take its roots back to the XIX century (Melioranski 1894, 3)) and then goes on to compare the case of Azerbaijani with that of the Bashkurt language, showing how easy for him it is to understand Bashkurt texts by simply knowing several basic rules of the Bashkurt language. He summarizes by saying that the main obstacle in merging and bringing together different Turkic languages are Arabic and Persian words and that they need to get rid of them, interpreting it as one of the signs of deleterious power dynamics:

“I think that unification is quite possible on the grounds that the idea of unification does not come from the top, but precisely from the bottom. At present, it is precisely the culturally backward Turks who tend to unite, and then, although I am not too strong in history, Ushakov says that history knows the creation of an artificial literary language. Greek was the common language. But for communication, perhaps, we will not have a particular need for this, we would be able to read Bashkir

and other books without that. The first step towards the unification of the Turkic languages is the destruction of Arabic and Persian words and the creation of common terms. We are separated only by terms. And if I spoke the Kazakh language, they would not understand me because they were not used to this language, they would not understand the way I did not understand speeches in the Turkic language at first, and if I spoke in Kazakh, then this it would be incomprehensible just because this language is not used to" (Первый Всесоюзный тюркологический съезд 434).

By emphasizing the "bottom-up instead of the top-down" approach and particularly criticizing the Azerbaijani language for the abundance of Persian and Arabic words, Omarov seems to be making a case in favor of merging, using some of the lexicon of, for instance, the "pure" Kazakh. This exemplifies the recognition of the power dynamics and hegemonies of certain Turkic cultures by the counterparts from other Turkic cultures, which has been noted before, too, with regards to Uzbek intellectuals looking up to Azerbaijan as a good example of modernization (Khalid 2019, 285).

It is interesting that, to an extent, merging is being discussed as the goal and common interest, but at the same time, it is being often criticized as a sign of pan-Turkism, so there seems to have been a very thin line between proposing a common language or terminology for several Turkic peoples in a way that fits the Leninist-Marxist ideology and the one that does not. Martin also comments on these discussions:

"Linguistic unity was a major concern. The official speaker on terminology, the Azerbaijani linguist Choban-Zade, argued so forcefully for cleansing the Turkic languages of Arabic and Persian terms and for creating new terms only using Turko- Altaic roots that one speaker accused him of favoring "a united Turkic national language." A more moderate delegate apologized for advocating only "a federation of Turkic languages"." (Martin 2001, 193).

There were certain prominent Kazakh pan-Turkists, too, such as the poet Magjan Zhumabai or novelist Mirjakyp Dulatuly. However, at least in this congress, there does not seem to be any particular pan-Turkist stance coming from the Kazakhs.

Another interesting interaction between an Azerbaijani instructor at the Ashgabat Pedagogical Academy and Communist Party School and Turkmen intellectuals took place in 1925, when in the newspaper *Turkmenistan* he proposed that the Turkmens should simply abandon any attempts to standardize and promote their vernacular and instead switch to a more “developed” Ottoman Turkish or Azerbaijani, in which “crude sounding words” are replaced by “elegant and pleasant sounding” ones, and doing otherwise would be “stupid chauvinism” (Edgar 2004, 135). This kind of rhetoric was met with harsh criticism in Turkmenistan. This case clearly demonstrates how the Turkmen ethnic identity was already formed and it was certainly distinctive from that of the Anatolian Turks, despite the cultural and linguistic proximity. This also shows the power dynamics between different Oghuzic ethnicities and languages and, to an extent, reveals an arrogant attitude of Azerbaijanis towards the Turkmen and perhaps many other Central Asian Turkic languages.

In general, the exchange of experience and knowledge was very active between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan with many teachers, educators, specialists visiting and working in Turkmenistan’s literacy campaigns. However, these interactions were also a reason for suspecting some sort of a “corruption” happening in the Turkmen language because of the Azerbaijani and Tatar instructors’ linguistic influence. Thus, it can be assumed that there was some sentiment of insecurity or exposedness of a “weaker” culture and language of Turkmens to those of more

powerful Azerbaijanis. We can summarize that there is an ideological clash between pan-Turkism and vernacularization, regional identities.

However, the sentiments of insecurity of assimilation and loss of unique identity seems to have been common not only among Turkmens, Kazakhs, and other small Turkic peoples commonly described as “weak”, “uncultured”, “backward”, but also among Azerbaijanis that were often rather portrayed as the most cultured and the most advanced Turkic people, at least among the Soviet Turkic-speaking populations. For instance, the Party members expressed a concern over borrowing words from the Ottoman Turkish, warning against the “Ottomanization” of the Azerbaijani language (Martin 2001, 193).

It is important to note that one of the main goals of the Congress was the agitation of a common Latin script for all Turkic languages. Agamaly Ogly, an Azerbaijanian scholar and intellectual, was an extremely active promoter of it and was also one of the organizers of the event on the whole (Martin 2001, 188). By many, Latinization had many advantages and was seen as a sign of progress, education, and development. Arabic script was deemed absolutely unsuitable for “unique” Turkic phonologies. An interesting observation could be made on how the speakers of Oghuzic Turkic languages, such as Azerbaijani, Turkish, and Turkmen, seem mostly in favor of Latinization. Meanwhile, it is particularly Kazakhs, Tatars, and Bashkirs, in other words, Kipchak branch speakers, who tend to oppose the Latinization campaign and defend their Arabic-based writing systems adapted into the Turkic phonetics. This might suggest that geographical and respectively linguistic proximities were also important for people in choosing who to side with.

This is an excerpt from Baitursynuly’s words:

“We, Kazakhs, have the most perfect orthography at the moment (laughter in the audience). Can anyone say that our orthography is not perfect? We have the most perfect one. (Laughter). Can anyone try to argue?” (Первый тюркологический съезд 1926, 201).

Later, not only during the speech per se, but also afterwards these words of Baitursynuly are met with harsh criticism and ridicule by the audience that is apparently predominantly in favor of the Latin script:

“That is why, comrades, you understand how amateurish, petit bourgeois sound arguments of our comrades from Tatarstan and Kazakhstan. The former oppose the Latin script pleading five hundred years of antiquity of their culture: but they forget the clerical-feudalist-bourgeois character of it. The latter, such as Baitursynuly, naively take pride on their “perfect” alphabet that endured [only] thirteen years of experimentation” (Первый тюркологический съезд 1926, 223).

This rhetoric might be revealing how the arguments of Kazakh and Tatar delegates were claimed “petit-bourgeois”, suggesting that any discussion whatsoever was happening using Leninist-Marxist paradigms. However, as already mentioned, the peculiar coincidence of positions regarding the Latin script and the linguistic proximity are also to be taken into consideration. In general, based on the interactions and the context, the Latinization campaign, it is safe to assume, seems to have been a very crucial thing particularly for Azerbaijanis, perhaps for strengthening their hegemony over other Turkic-speaking societies and emphasizing its role as the leader and “high culture” with a half a century long history of precedents of Latinization attempts applied to a Turkic language. The Latin alphabet was proclaimed by many as the writing system of the future, universal for all mankind, and it undoubtedly would be flattering to be considered the pioneers of a global shift.

On the whole, considering the number of Turkish candidates who actually gave a speech (one) and considering their contribution to the dialog, it can be assumed that the Turkic-speaking intellectuals of the Soviet Union and of Turkey were not involved in each other's Latinization campaigns as much as it could be expected by some. Moreover, the delegate was an opponent of the Latinization campaign at the moment (Kale 1999, 820).

The Turkological Congress in Baku in 1926 laid the foundation for the development of the Yanalif, a common Latin-based Turkic alphabet, but the details of the design and implementation of the new writing system were still being worked out in the years following the congress.

CHANGES IN THE KAZAKH ORTHOGRAPHY IN THE 1930s

Although the Latinization of Kazakh was opposed by some influential political actors, such as Baitursynuly, the Latin-based alphabet was eventually adopted in 1929.

“New Kazakh Orthography”

Arguably the first ever orthography for the general public written in the new Yanalif script was *Kazak Jana Emlesі* “New Kazakh Orthography” published in Kyzylorda in 1929. Kazakh was not among the first Turkic languages to switch to Latin, compared to Azerbaijan, Turkmen or Uzbek, which makes it plausible that the booklet from 1929 is truly the first orthography for the “brand new” Kazakh Yanalif.

The booklet starts with the decree of the Central Executive Committee of Kazakhstan signed by its chairman Auezuly (of whom I tried to find the biography but couldn't) narrating the reasons and motivations behind the alphabet change:

“The Arabic alphabet was difficult for the masses to recognize letters, was incompatible with technology, could not correctly mark the sounds of the Kazakh language, and the Arabic alphabet was associated with religion. That's why the Arabic alphabet was inaccessible to the majority and only for the minority. These shortcomings of the Arabic alphabet also affected the spelling of the Kazakh language. All the shortcomings of the previous spelling, which were not felt during the time of the Arabic alphabet, became obvious after the transition to the new alphabet” (*Kazak jana emlesi* 1929, 3).

The text does not mention the fact that historically, in Kazakhstan, there were no precedents of mass campaigns against illiteracy before and associates the illiteracy among Kazakhs with the Arabic script per se and its implied inherent unsuitability. Connecting the Arabic alphabet to the “backwardness” of Kazakhs, the

lack of technologies and technological advancements, pointing out its unsuitability with the Kazakh sound system seem to be quite banal: this is something to be expected. However, it is interesting that the Kazakh orthography or orthographic conventions per se are criticized as well. These “shortcomings” apparently were somehow concealed by the Arabic-based script and now with the new alphabet, they can be clearly spotted.

Meanwhile, it is hard to support the argument that the Arabic-based script was inherently insufficient or unsuitable for Kazakh. Although Arabic as well as Arabic-based writing systems of other languages are famous for their reluctance to clearly indicate vowels, its variant reformed by Baitursynuly was able to reflect all the vowels in Kazakh. He indicated the 9 vowels of Kazakh with 5 symbols (some of them being diacritics), by grouping 4 front and 4 back vowels into “pairs”, which are distinguishable either by the consonants within the word (if the word contains *q* or *gh*, then it’s a back vowel environment, if it contains *k* or *g*, it’s a front vowel environment), or the vowel for *e* which did have its own separate symbol indicating a front vowel environment, or by a special symbol at the beginning of the word in certain words that don’t have the “necessary” or “relevant” consonants or the vowel *e*. It does seem to follow a similar logic as in the Old Turkic writing system but that was probably just a coincidence based on the overall similarity between the Old Turkic language and its contemporary relatives rather than any continuity of the long-established writing tradition.

It might seem complicated but as any other writing system, it was serving its main purpose: it was used, and it still can be used, it was readable and typable. Moreover, in different conferences and discussions, arguing in favor of the Arabic-based script, Baitursynuly was providing almost the same, mirrored arguments as his

pro-Latin colleagues were persuading: he would also speak of the technical aspects of the question, for instance, comparing the Latin-based and Arabic-based typing machines, and he would also compare the suitability of the writing system to the language system.

Then, the text goes on to mention even more and greater reasons to change the writing system that are related to the social changes happening in Kazakhstan in those years:

“After the October revolution, the great culture, the interests of the large number of Kazakh workers who began to do economic work with their own hands, the sound laws of the agglutinative-synharmonic Kazakh language, and the special properties of the alphabet all combined to make the spelling change necessary. After that, the spelling should be changed according to the state of socialist construction, according to the direction of language development. After summarizing all of the above, the Kazakh spelling should be built on the basis of sound systematic spelling, which is considered the easiest among the spellings; It is necessary to create a single spelling for both native Kazakh words and foreign words” (4).

An interesting point here is that it mentions the “socialist construction” and the “language development”. This seems to be referring to the “scientific” paradigms of those times constructed by Nikolai Marr, whose ideas were very influential during the Yanalif era and reforms, and his ideas often included some Marxist “flavor”, grouping the languages into different categories that somehow match the socioeconomic stage of development of a people. According to Marr or Marrism, languages appeared in different places but in similar situations: from the roots *sal*, *ber*, *yon*, *rosh*, which reportedly were used initially for “magical” purposes and did not convey any meaning but ultimately became roots of all the existing words in all the contemporary languages. Marr proposed there was a group of languages called Japhetic, after the name of one of Noah’s sons, which included Georgian, Cartvelian,

and even Basque. Later, his theory extended to include Semitic languages, and eventually he proposed that all the languages in the world share Japhetic features and thus illustrate the importance of class in languages that was outweighing, as Marr believed, the importance of the national identity behind language differentiation. He believed that different economic systems, such as “primitive” societal structures, feudalism, capitalism, define and construct the language and he found the idea of a communist system having its own linguistic paradigms as the logical continuation of history.

One important aspect of Marrism that, to a great extent, explains its “success” is that it postulated that the languages, as time passes, are not diverging, rather, quite the opposite, they are slowly merging into each other and will eventually merge into one language of all the humankind. We can assume that it was a viewpoint that was very useful for promoting the Latinization campaign and later the Cyrillization campaign. Although his ideas were harshly criticized and even ridiculed by the scientific community, the Soviet government started supporting him in the late 1920s in a very explicit way. The “support” also included suppressing alternative viewpoints — people who could afford to criticize the Marr theory were demonized, persecuted, prosecuted, arrested. The fact that the linguist Polivanov had to go through all of the abovementioned actions for criticizing the Marr theory in 1929 was an important signal for Soviet society and the scientific community. His idea was also part of this reported urge for novelties often mentioned as characteristic of the decade: in science, in art, in literature – everywhere. He would often refer to traditional linguistic theories and paradigms as bourgeois theories. His ideas are considered pseudoscientific nowadays, however, in the 1930s, they were dogmatically promoted

by the government. Marr's theory and the story behind his theory reveal how the Soviet government was deliberately supporting ideologies in scientific fields.

However, on the other hand, in 1929, Stalin argues that for the "merging of peoples" foretold by Lenin what needs to be attained is reaching socialism all around the world and bringing equality to all the oppressed peoples, so: not very soon:

"The period of the victory of socialism on a world scale differs primarily from the period of the victory of socialism in one country in that it liquidates imperialism in all countries, destroys both the striving to conquer foreign nations and the fear of the threat of national enslavement, and fundamentally undermines national distrust and national enmity, unites nations in a single system of the world socialist economy and thus creates the real conditions necessary for the gradual merging of all nations into one whole...

...the process of the withering away of national differences and the merging of nations, Lenin refers not to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, but exclusively to the period after the implementation of the dictatorship of the proletariat on a world scale, that is, to the period of the victory of socialism in all countries, when the foundations of the world socialist economy will already be laid... ...an attempt to attribute the process of the withering away of national differences to the period of the victory of socialism in one country, in our country, Lenin qualifies as a "nonsense dream." (Stalin 1929).

Therefore, we also cannot be so certain in assuming that Marr's particular appeal on the "merging" was his trump card. Rather, the overall appeal to Marxist ideology could have played the main role. Later, however, Stalin openly refutes Marr's theories in 1950 and Marrist ideas stop being promoted as before.

Although the ideas promoted by Marr were becoming the new norm and thus his perspective on future "merging" were the new paradigm, some traces of "pro-indigenization" perspectives were still persistent. For instance, an important part of

the discussion that was also touched upon by the *New Kazakh Orthography* is where it says that the borrowings should be adapted into the phonotactic rules of Kazakh:

“When the correct spelling rules for foreign words are made, those words should be easily understood by the masses, and should not be a problem for learning to recognize and write quickly, and for the general literacy of the people. For this purpose, the spelling of foreign words must not contradict the laws of the Kazakh language” (24).

However, the reasoning behind this is said to be purely functional, pragmatic. The loanwords are to follow the rules of Kazakh so that they are easily “digested” by the newly literate masses. For instance, words that contain [f] would be written with [p] instead: *pizike* for ‘Physics’ or *pilme* for ‘film’; or [g] would be written as either [g], as in *gybirne* (from Russian *gubernia* ‘province, governorship’) or as [ɣ] as in *ɣaz* ‘gas’ following the logic of allophones in front-vowel and back-vowel environments, that is, the borrowings were changed to correspond to vowel harmony rules that usually allows the words to have either only back vowels or only front vowels. Some words seem to have gone some visually radical changes: it is advised to write *abaq̣ṭ* for *зауптвахта* ‘guard house’, *kẹŋse* for *канцелярия* ‘office’ and *kẹkine* for *кухня* ‘kitchen’.

“New Alphabet and New Orthography and Our Phonetics”

In 1932, another rulebook was published authored by Basymuly that explains the rules of Kazakh and its new orthography. In the beginning chapters, it mentions the so-called “Old Orthography”, which is the Arabic-based one attributed, in the text, fully to Baitursynuly. It starts with the discussion of whether the old alphabet was really a “Kazakh” alphabet and concludes that it was hardly an “Arabic” alphabet to begin with, since it turns out to trace back its roots to the Coptic writing systems, and then to Phoenicians. (It’s interesting that it, either purposefully or not, fails to mention that the newly accepted Latin alphabet is derived ultimately from the same

Phoenician alphabet). It goes on to criticize the fact that in Arabic script, one must connect one letter to the next one and that one symbol essentially has four variations based on its positions within the word. It describes it as a historically overly complicated writing system that was complicated even worse by Arabs. It should be noted that there are words that explicitly convey negative connotations, such as *botches* or *scribbles*. The connection of the Arabic script to the religion is noted as well:

“The Arab people added many more botches and problems to the already existing ones, they did not make it easier. Various dots and commas are a legacy from Arabic. Arabic people add and increase 6 letters after the previous 22 letters for their sounds are missing... Here we are with the 28 letters of Arabic with all the dots and dashes and scribbles that came to us through religion” (1932, 6).

Although the text at first seems to discuss technical details of the Arabic alphabet, it still manages to mention how exactly it was introduced to Kazakhs, thus by referring to its “inherently destructive” nature.

Then, it mentions how the idea of switching to the Latin script was discussed in 1924 but despite all the disadvantages of the Arabic script, the debate was won by the “traditionalists” and “reactionaries”, by “Arabophiles” and “nationalists”. The text criticizes the old alphabet for being not standardized enough or not standardized in a proper manner: “The old spelling contradicted the wishes of the peasant society born after the revolution” (9).

One highlighted point seems to be, once again, the way the language should deal with European borrowings. The author implies that in the older alphabet, people had this “disease” of writing one and the same borrowing in a variety of ways, with no regular standard orthography. This, once again, shows one important aspect of the Latinization campaign being presented as a tool of modernization,

industrialization, and better intertranslatability with Russian that was the main transmitter of modernization and industrialization.

However, something that comes as a surprise is that it makes an appeal in favor of representing “true” Kazakh “better” and being fitting particularly into Kazakh phonology:

“The strong disadvantage of our previous spelling was that the construction of the language was complicated by confusing Arabic and Kazakh words. All changes in the laws of words in the Kazakh language are now taken into account, and the Kazakh spelling is now suited only for the pure Kazakh language. Our old spelling was shaky and erratic. Many parts were obscure... The structure of the language plays a big role in spelling. The natural, external pronunciation, changes can never be mixed with those of another language. Each language is spelled according to its own structure” (12).

This paragraph seems interesting because since the late 1930s, the borrowings from Russian would be spelled exactly as they were spelled in Russian, so this point about “each language [being] spelled according to its own structure” was apparently omitted.

The author discusses agglutinative, fusional, and analytical languages, and insists on how the morphological nature of fusional Arabic makes the Arabic writing system unsuitable for agglutinative Kazakh. It then discusses different phonetic and phonological aspects of Kazakh and provides rules for writing different consonant clusters, sound combinations. It examines the classification of phonemes in Kazakh and their articulations and explains their differences. The remaining part of the 37-page text seems to be mostly “technical”: about Kazakh and its phonology.

Overall, the work reveals the author's ideological inclinations. The criticisms of the Arabic-based script and its implied “inherent” disadvantages (that apparently hampers the development of Arabic itself), as well as the negative connotations associated with it, indicate a clear inclination towards promoting a break from Islamic religious influence. The appeal for representing “true” Kazakh and aligning spelling

with Kazakh phonology reflects a nationalist sentiment, emphasizing the relevance of pro-indigenization attitudes. Additionally, the critique of the old alphabet for its lack of standardization and difficulties in dealing with European borrowings aligns with the ideological goal of modernization and industrialization, seeking closer integration with Russian as the main driver of progress.

Kudaibergen Zhubanov's proposals

In 1934-35, Kudaibergen Zhubanov, Kazakh Soviet Turkologist and linguist, made several proposals on how to standardize the orthography in general and the spelling of terminology in Kazakh. Prior to that, Baitursynuly started to be persecuted by the Soviet government⁴.

Zhubanov, unlike Baitursynuly and many other intellectuals of the time, was not, in any way, affiliated with the Alash movement. In his proposals, he seems to have regularly demonized the Alash movement and its ex-members for being reactionary, traditionalist, opponents of the progress (241, 261). He also denies and does not recognize the importance of Baitursynuly's contributions and argues that his merits in reforming and adapting the Arabic script to the Kazakh language are few, that he owes everything to Russian ethnographers and missionaries from the 19th century (246–247). For the problems of low rates of literacy and slow pace of literacy campaigns, he blamed the Arabic script, the “traces” of Arabic-based orthographic conventions, and those who were clinging to those “vestiges of the past”.

⁴ He was arrested by the NKVD in 1929 and was released in 1934. In 1937, he was arrested again and sentenced to death as “the enemy of the people”.

In one of his reports, he talked about the existing conventions of Kazakh orthography, namely “writing two letters instead of one”. He argued that it is problematic to write words like *suv* ‘water’, *juv* ‘to wash’, *tuv* ‘flag’ with both “Uu” and “Vv”, unlike in Russian, where it is just one letter. He stated that this spelling could not be justified with etymology or morphology, and that it is necessary to use the logic of the Russian phonological system and replace certain letters. Russian and Kazakh phonologies are different though: Kazakh does not indeed have the same vowel [u] as in Russian, or at least phonologically, it does not usually act as a vowel. Rather, it is the glide consonant “Vv” [w] that in combination with the vowels “Uu” [ʊ] and “Yy” [ɣ] may sound as the Russian [u]. Morphologically, it requires the same suffixes, as a word ending with consonants would: words ending with vowels, such as *ana* ‘mother’, *ene* ‘mother-in-law’, *dəri* ‘medicine’, would require the possessive suffix *-si* or accusative case suffix *-ni*, unlike words that end with consonants, such as *bal* ‘honey’, *nan* ‘bread’, *tav* ‘mountain’ which would require different allomorphs of the same morphological categories, *-i* and *-di*, respectively⁵. Also, etymologically, it does truly reflect the evolved variant of the Old Turkic [ɰ] sound, which systematically evolved into [w] in Kipchak languages. The same was discussed with regards to spelling of the words like *kij* [kɪj, ki] ‘to wear’, *bij* [bɪj, bi] ‘dance’, where he argued that one letter was sufficient because in Russian the sound [ɪ] is represented by just one letter. However, the same morphophonological counter arguments as with “Uu” can be applied.

He argued that the solution to this inconsistency of Kazakh phonology with his proposal was a matter of time, and that Kazakh was on its way of evolving.

⁵ Compare it to *suv*, *juv*, *tuv*: *suvɞb*, *tuvɞb*, *suvɞ*, *tuvɞ*, and **not** *suvnɞ*, *tuvnɞ*, *suvɞɞ*, *tuvɞɞ*.

Eventually, in 1937, his proposal was indeed accepted and many Kazakh words started to be written with basically the logic of Russian phonology. However, even nowadays, after 86 years of this change into Kazakh orthography, the scholarly consensus on Kazakh phonology seems to suggest that Kazakh does not have the same vowel [u] as in Russian, rather it has lax vowels [ʊ] and [ɤ] and a separate glide consonant [w]⁶ (Abish 2022, 337–339; Muhamedowa 2016, 273–280).

Another one of his proposals was to spell Russian loanwords the way they are spelled in Russian:

“International terms are accepted in the form in which they are written in the Russian literary language. In the event that there are no sounds in the Kazakh language (to convey these terms), they are represented by letters within the Kazakh alphabet” (281)⁷.

He criticized another prominent Alash member Khalel Dosmukhameduly for his earlier proposal to analyze how Kazakh adapted Arabo-Persian loanwords into its phonology and to apply the same principles to Russian loanwords as well (268). His proposal was to add suffixes, such as -ist, -ism and prefixes, such as re-, de-, pro-, anti- and to “return” terms like *diktatura*, *revolyutsiya*, *sovet*, *teoriya*, *praktika*, *kontrrevolyutsiya*, *militarizm*, which had become obsolete earlier.

In general, some of the very evident differences in spellings of Russian loanwords could be noticed even from the covers of books and newspapers. For example, on the cover of *Satsʔjaldʔ Qazaqʔstan* “Socialist Kazakhstan” of 1932, the word “proletarian” in the main slogan of the communist revolution was spelled as *пуьltar* (from Russian *пролетариум*, *proletariat*). In 1933, as *puroletar*, in 1934, as

⁶ which morphophonologically still acts as a sonorant consonant in the same environments exemplified above.

⁷ later, after the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940, they would be written with the Russian letters, and Russian letters that were not present in Kazakh and were not in any way necessary for Kazakh to function were added to its alphabet

proletar, and in 1937, as *proletar*. Gradually, it came to be spelled as it is spelled in Russian, even though it did contradict the phonological rules of Kazakh, such as vowel harmony and the syllable structure (Kazakh normally cannot have syllables that start with onsets, such as [pr], unlike Russian). In 1937, the name of the newspaper per se changed first in spelling from *Satsbjaldь* to *Sotsijaldь*, and then morphologically as well, to *Sotsijalistik*. Moreover, even the spellings of Kazakh words changed systematically, as now some letters were swapped because of the Russian “example” promoted by Zhubanov mentioned above.

All these changes in the orthography that made Kazakh visually closer to Russian also “rhyme” with later policies, such as the introduction of mandatory Russian classes in schools in 1938 and the switch to the Cyrillic script in 1940. The intelligentsia which was often seen as the main enemy of the policies of the Party was, to a great extent, cleansed in 1937-1938. The role of Russian as an important symbol of consolidation was emphasized again and again. Zhubanov's demonization of the Alash movement and his dismissal of Baitursynuly's contributions serve as clear examples of Soviet attempts to suppress and discredit Kazakh intellectuals who held traditionalist or nationalist views. By attributing reforms to Russian ethnographers and missionaries, Zhubanov undermines the agency and importance of Kazakh scholars in shaping their own language.

Conclusion

The changes in the orthography of Kazakh in 1929-1940 reflected the political changes happening in Kazakhstan. The abandonment of the practice of adapting loanwords into Kazakh phonology and spelling them in the same way as Russian does seems to reflect the symbolic prevalence of the Russian phonology over indigenous phonology. Moreover, the spelling of Kazakh words, too, systematically changed because of the switched letters for the sake of following the logic of Russian phonology.

The main actors promoting certain changes and opposing them seem to have more or less clear political and ideological backgrounds. The prominent linguist who was responsible for introducing the above-mentioned reforms into the orthography of Kazakh was affiliated only with the Bolshevik movement, unlike his opponents, who he repeatedly demonized in his reports and proposals and who were the members of the Alash movement. This suggested that there were clear ideological motivations behind the changes.

Different arguments were used by different actors: they usually reaffirmed the arguments discussed in the theoretical material of the thesis, that is, they normally do mostly appeal or appear to be appealing on scientific grounds, while masking certain ideological motivations.

Kazakh orthography was subject to different changes during the Yanalif era as well. These chapters analyzed the rhetoric in justifying one or another orthographic change and claims that would later be contradicted by the reality in the late 1930s. Kazakh orthographies of the late 1920s and the early 1930s make an appeal on being better suited for “pure Kazakh”, for technologies, and for having less

irregularities than the earlier orthographies that were based on the Arabic-based script. These texts (rule books, newspapers, reports, proposals) also label the opponents of, first, the Latin alphabet and, later, the orthographic reforms in favor of Russification as conservatives, nationalists, and Arabophiles.

The Arabic script was described as inherently unsuitable for Kazakh. It is also described as something that cannot be considered Kazakh or heritage of Kazakhs and not even that of Arabs because it derives from the Coptic writing system which, on its own, derives from the Phoenician writing system. It mentions that it is not even well suited to Arabic itself. However, in doing so, the same texts also compare the morphological structure of Arabic to that of Kazakh and conclude that, since they are morphologically different, the Arabic script is incompatible with Kazakh, which seems to contradict the previous point.

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