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LATINIZATION OF THE KAZAKH ALPHABET: ANALYSIS OF REASONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND THEIR POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

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Abstract

The introduction of Latin alphabet in Kazakh language caused on the one hand great concerns and uproars within the society of Kazakhstan regarding its importance and relevance, while on the other side causing an optimistic outlook at the language policy reforms for the future to be debated. People started actively to discuss this long-term oriented government initiative within the social media outlets as well as on a higher governmental level. It also sparked controversial but interesting discussions concerning sensitive domestic issues such as on topics concerning aspects of national identity, civic identity matters, nation-building processes and socio-political matters that both directly and indirectly affected the process of transition from Cyrillic towards a Latin script. This paper analyzes the importance and relevance of the Latinization process of the Kazakh language in the contemporary time period for the Kazakhstani society and discusses the implementation problems from the orthographic and phonetic aspect; institutionalism and path dependency approach; modernization process; and the financial and socio-political aspects. Moreover, a historical literature review has been provided in this paper, summarizing the different periods of transition of the Kazakh language since the early 19th century up to the contemporary time period. Last but not the least, a list of recommendations was provided with arguments supporting this grand government policy and how to operationalize these potential recommendations to policymakers as well as other stakeholders involved in the process of latinizing the Kazakh language. This paper will serve as a discursive paper for scholars in the field of public policy, philological studies and socio-political science.

Keywords: latinization process; Kazakh language; nation-building process; national identity; language policy.

Introduction

The Kazakh language in Kazakhstan's constitution has a clear status: it is a state language. However, officially the Russian language plays an important role for inter-ethnic communication within the society of Kazakhstan. The Kazakh language has gone through difficult periods of transition due to the colonization period of Kazakh lands by the Russian Empire, and further active Sovietization (or Russification) of Kazakh people during the Soviet era. Coercive immigration of many ethnicities into Kazakh lands was crucial focal point in weakening the status of Kazakh language but has enriched at the same time our multiethnic composition. Some even may go further and argue that paternalistic view from Russia also prevailed and may even prevail to this day. Nowadays, the Kazakh language faces significant problems, as its overall usage is not widespread in Kazakhstan. Even a considerable number of ethnic Kazakh people do not speak their own mother tongue. On the one hand, some speak it partially while on the other some do not speak or understand the language at all. With this linguistic degradation so to speak, it is not only a challenge for Kazakhstan as a

nation, but also for the society to uphold and preserve its ethnic identity. However, there are also other matters at stake that needs to be discussed thoroughly as well. The issue of implementing such a large-scale language reform accompanies also its bottlenecks concerning financing capabilities, social adaptability aspects as well as the implementation issue of preparing language teachers. A language reform is not a simple matter of policy change, taking more than just a simple long-term investment into both human and capital resources. The period of transition from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet should not aggravate existing or non-existing problems and create even more unforeseen complications in the future, be it in terms of political or economic terms. For the time being, the process of implementation is at its early stages and there is still more to look out for if we want to understand how it will be developing over the next challenging years.

Aims & Objectives

The aim of this research article is to describe on the one hand the importance of Latinization process of the Kazakh alphabet in the context of Kazakhstan's

multi-ethnic society, but also at the same time to analyze the challenges of implementation process alongside the reasons for the transition of the Kazakh alphabet in order to understand where the existing problems could lie and where other possible difficulties or opportunities would appear in the future. As such a topic directly affects every Kazakhstani citizen, it touches upon crucial concepts like nation-building process and national identity aspect that directly affect and shape dimensions of political as well as socio-cultural significance. Therefore, its weight of importance is enormous for the whole domestic sector of Kazakhstan and this paper should serve the purpose to enlighten scholars and experts in the field of public policy, political science and linguistic matters for a better understanding of why the Latinization process is important in the context of Kazakhstan as well as for the discussion among the academia.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first section introduces the Kazakh language development from pre-independence periods to post-independence period. Here, a thorough historical literature review is provided. The second section analyzes the different reasons that could have led to the changing of the Kazakh alphabet. Lastly, the third section thoroughly analyzes possible implementation issues concerning the financial and socio-political aspects of the transition period from Cyrillic to Latin script. By the end of the third section, a follow-up section of viable and practical policy recommendations is included.

Research Methodology

For this paper, we will apply a qualitative discourse analysis approach in order to analyze the Latinization process in Kazakhstan from a third-person perspective. For that, all materials were extracted from only official secondary sources of information. In this regard, the paper analyzes only existing sources of information that were provided on the Internet. These for instance include officially published reports, brochures or journal articles. This paper is of high analytical value for those scholars or experts seeking a clearer understanding of possible problems that the Latinization process could bring on to the society and the government, as there is a huge knowledge gap in this field of studies of in-depth contextual country-specific analysis.

Literature Review

The evolution of the Kazakh language script Pre-independence period

Before the 19th century, the writing system of the Kazakh language was absent, while the oral system

of communication had been dominantly present (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 12). With the surge of the Islamic influence among the neighboring countries, Kazakh people started off adopting first an Arab script (Kim, 2018). With the coming of the Russian Imperial Empire and their influence within Central Asia, the gradual period of colonization marked the beginning of neighboring regions getting closer and closer (Ornstein, 1959). However, this surge of foreign influence also meant that changes within aspects of ethnic, political, religious and demographic aspects were inescapable within the region of Central Asia. One of the main changes that the Russian Imperial Empire brought along with it was the opening of Russian schools as well as the process of russification within the society (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 12). During this period, the Russian language, Russian schools and people who spoke Russian were considered as the “elite” and education among Kazakh people were not always open for everyone (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 13).

Years have passed and the Soviet Union being created, Kazakhstan officially had received its “National Territorial Delimitation” zone and the Republic of Kazakhstan had been created (Levin, 2017: 265). While Soviet policymakers had built five new states, in 1927 the Arabic letter had changed for a short period of time to Latin alphabet, which was architected and introduced by the local scholar Akhmet Baitursynuly (Tanayeva, 2007) (Iskhan, Ospanova & Dautova, 2014). This bold move had somewhat alarmed the Soviets as they had viewed the change of the Arab script to Latin in a way to become united with the Turkic-speaking community (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 13). Besides that, the Soviet Union feared that this would also lead to the gradual shift of Kazakh people to become engulfed by the Islamization process in Central Asia (Tanayeva, 2007). To counterbalance it and undertake drastic policy measures, the Soviet Union implemented the policy of *korenizatsiya* in all five republican states by increasing the level of education people have received (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 13). As a result of this policy, the literacy level had increased during the 1920’s and 1930’s (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 14). While the policy had political goals, it though positively fostered the development of national cultures and the popularity of learning the Kazakh language nationwide. Eventually though, the Soviet authorities decided to create a new homogenous identity by institutionalizing the Russian language as compulsory learning in schools of national republics in order to different unify cultures together into one rather than elevating their uniqueness. Hence, the ideal version of the “Soviet Man” speaks Russian and

propagates the values of the Soviet Union (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). This meant that the Soviets had changed their course of policy direction from tolerating linguistic diversity to viewing it later as political threat towards the ideological unity of the Soviet Union (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 16). Following this, the Soviet Union started to become more repressive in nature and used relocation policies to let ethnic Russians emigrate into different Soviet states to remove ethnic boundaries (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 16). To illustrate you the relocation policies success, we will look at how the composition of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan. While the number of ethnic Russians constituted roughly 20% by 1926, this number doubled by 1939 (Tanayeva, 2007). Another policy that was ill famous for the loss of many ethnic Kazakhs was the process of collectivization (Pianciola, 2004) (Bonnenfant, 2012).

The introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet in the late 1930's also meant that the Kazakh language faced some challenges in incorporating new Cyrillic letters and to be influenced by its writing system as well as vocabulary (Tanayeva, 2007). Even if from the start the Kazakh language did not properly correspond phonetically and pronunciation wise (Iskhan, Ospanova & Dautova, 2014), the Kazakh language became more modern followed by massive standardization process and gave many Kazakhs the opportunity to become literate in two languages (Tanayeva, 2007: 79). Such changes in the script also meant that endings of first and last name of Kazakhs holding a person's father's name changed into Russian endings from -kyzy or -uly to -ova (ова), -eva (-ева) or -vna (вна) or -vich (вич) (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 17). The Russian language though became the lingua franca throughout the Soviet Union (Brubaker, 1994: 51). Throughout the years, Kazakh people started to pick up more and use more the Russian language in order to climb up the ladder of societal status within the socialist regime, leaving their mother tongue as a second language, or also known as the titular language (Kim, 2018). The Russian language became the dominant language associated with sophistication, prestige, urbanism and elitism until the end of the Soviet period (Bilaniuk, 2005: 91).

Post-independence developments

With the emergence of Kazakhstan as an independent state in 1991, the country faced an identity crisis right from the start (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 19). By that time, most ethnic Kazakhs lived in rural areas with most Russians living in urban cities (Burkhanov, 2017: 23) (Smagulova, 2008). With the aftereffects of

the Soviet migration policy, Kazakhstan was socio-demographically as well as ethnoculturally complex in nature with multinationalism and ethnic heterogeneity being institutionalized (Brubaker, 1994: 49). With the breakup of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's national sentiments having been rising, from the very early on Kazakh nationals have demanded to remove any ties left with the country's Soviet past (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 24). This concerned not only the aspects of language itself, but also touched upon other matters. Having considered these demands, the First President Nursultan Nazarbayev decided to approach this issue from a more diplomatic way by adopting a more civic identity-based policy rather than an ethnic identity-based policy (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 24). Unlike Kazakhstan, other post-soviet states were rather not so tolerant in institutionalizing a civic identity policy and have rather de-russified their approach (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 25). Since then, the country promotes a civic identity-based domestic approach with the principles of multi-ethnic tolerance and mutual co-existence and harmony. However, this civic identity-based policy path has been already laid out during the 1970's when Dinmuhammad Kunayev introduced the "Kazakhstanets" identity based of a non-ethnic connotation approach (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 25).

As a result of this civic identity-based strategy of a nation-building process, the Russian language stayed as the language of "civic nationhood", where ethnocultural groups could live together (Brubaker, 2004: 134). This strategy was similar that of the Soviet Union with the "one big family" vision, leaving Kazakhstan to continue the path of dual identity (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 20) (Burkhanov, 2017: 26). Despite these efforts to preserve a civic identity, the government of Kazakhstan has tried since then to revive the lost artifacts of the pieces of what constituted being Kazakh. This concerned aspects such as the kazakhization of history, promoting folklore dances and music, national gastronomy as well as introduction of national holidays (Kesici, 2011) (Smagulova, 2008). This also meant that the language reforms were similarly introduced, especially what concerned awareness rising initiatives of Kazakh cultural heritages and the education sphere (Kesici, 2011) (Smagulova, 2008) (Melich & Adibayeva, 2013: 271). For example, in the education sphere more grants were available for Universities teaching their programs in Kazakh language (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 21). Despite that, Kazakhstan even today is heavily influenced by the Russian language. This concerns not only the demographic composition of Kazakhstan, where one-

fifth of the population make up of ethnic Russians, but also the way how the russification process had ingrained in the Kazakhstani society a new identity of Kazakhs speaking Russian as good as or better than their mother tongue (Blackburn, 2019).

The discussions concerning the proposal to change from Cyrillic to Latin script have emerged during the early 1990's at the summit of Turkic-speaking countries (Tanayeva, 2007: 80). As a result of the summit, countries such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan or Azerbaijan have adopted the Latin script (Tanayeva, 2007: 80). Even if the fall of the Soviet Union at the beginning has pushed a strong bond to be formed among Turkic countries, the sociolinguistic alongside the demographic situation has halted the language reform to the Latin script (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 25). If otherwise done, according to Blackburn, it would have caused a negative effect on the non-Kazakh speaking group of people via emigration issues and possible multi-ethnic strife (Blackburn, 2019). The government will thaw this matter only in the case when the Kazakh-speaking population will become urbanized and increase in number in the future (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 25).

In 2007 a new project was launched that was called the "trinity of languages" that had its main goal to form a trilingual language development in Russian, Kazakh and English in Kazakhstan (Smagulova, 2008: 455). It also served the purpose to increase the overall level of language proficiency and lay down the basics for future projects what concerned the Latinization project (Smagulova, 2008: 455) (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 28). However, the initial responses towards this project by the society were somewhat skeptical and even critical, especially what concerned the older generation (Melich & Adibayeva, 2013: 271). They believed that this project would undermine the Kazakh language development among the younger generation, and as a result the project became ill famous (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 28).

Ten years later, in September of the year 2017 the first version of the Latin script has been introduced to the public but has received several backlashes and harsh criticisms (Kim, 2018). First and foremost, problems were noticed with the orthographical and phonological aspects of diagraphs (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 28). Secondly, many also started to publicly criticize and discuss this matter on a more political dimension, asking themselves whether the Latinization process is crucial for the time being or whether it had political connotations with it (Mamashuly, 2017). Despite these reactions, the First President Nursultan

Nazarbayev signed the decree "On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin Script" on October 2017 and the following months the proposed Latin script underwent several updates (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 30). Besides that, just five months after the initial introduction of the first Latin script, a follow-up decree was signed urging the government to form a National Commission and adopt changes in the legislation regarding this matter and achieve by 2025 a smooth transition towards the Latin script (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 30). However, the decree was also met with doubts, as many citizens asked themselves how the process would look like, how successful the transition will be and what kind of methods and resources will be applied and needed for the transition (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 30). According to Shingaliyeva's survey on this matter, many Kazakhstani citizens claimed the "step-by-step" Latinization process to be disorganized and the public perception of tolerance towards such transitional changes to be not ready yet for complete acceptance (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 30). For instance, according to Sputniknews, by the end of the year 2020 around 8 Latin script versions were developed, but only 3 of them have been shown to the public (Sputniknews, 2020). She also argued that the second follow-up decree that was signed contained very little and ambiguous information on who would be exactly in charge of the process (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 32). This also touched upon matters such as the changing of ID cards, publishing of books or translations of official documents (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 32). Hence, the little-informative second decree that was signed leaves on the one hand much room for further additional improvements and changes, but also at the same time caused much confusion and lacked accurate direction for citizens to properly adopt and prepare themselves mentally for the upcoming language reform (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 37).

As of end of January and April 2021, two new versions of Latin-based Kazakh alphabet have been proposed after more than forty versions had been reviewed (Tengrinews, 2021) (Kudrenok, 2021: para. 3). The latest new version from 22nd of April 2021 did not include in their script the digraphs and the public discussion regarding the version has been extended until the 6th of May 2021 (Tengrinews, 2021: para. 4 and 6). Besides that, it is expected that the implementation phase will likely start from 2023 on through the years 2031 (Kudrenok, 2021: para. 5). Thus, there is a high likelihood that the Latinization process will be further extended than initially planned.

Results & Discussions Section

Reasons for changing to Latin script Institutionalism and Path Dependency Approach

It might be interesting to know that institutions also evolve over time and respond to the changing environment surrounding them, meaning that they must maneuver their own trajectories around the ongoing socio-political development in the country with considerations of past events and experiences (Thelen, 1999: 19). This concept is called the path dependency approach (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 26). In other words, it is explained as the situation when the developmental path of a state in terms of socio-political, economic or any other aspect are dependent on the past formed experiences and events. This can also be considered as one of the reasons why Kazakhstan tries to transition towards the Latin alphabet. And here again, the idea of nation-building process of the national identity can be incorporated as arguments for justification of that concept (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 27). By that understanding, it is logical and rational that a developing country like Kazakhstan pursues a path dependency approach in order to reconcile oneself with the ongoing changes within and beyond the country, while at the same time keeping past experiences incorporated. As a result of the process of trying to rebuild the national identity in Kazakhstan, the country understood that the path dependency approach is inevitably an important element of national identity building policies (Zabortseva, 2016: 25) (Fierman, 2009) (Miles, 2015).

The same viewpoint was also shared by Bhavna in the 2007 study on Kazakhstan's aspects of ethnicity, language and power (Bhavna, 2007). The author stated that Kazakhstan's survival as a nation is directly intertwined and dependent on the question of the development of the Kazakh language, considering that in the context of past events with the dictation of the Soviet language policies being very strong during the Soviet era (Bhavna, 2007: 99). Hence, the language planning policies within the entire post-Soviet space is of immense importance, especially for Kazakhstan (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 27). Since Kazakhstan and other post-soviet states such as Uzbekistan or Ukraine to a certain degree carry alongside with them Soviet legislative and socio-political legacies, they must choose their own path dependent approach policies (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 27).

The same idea can be applied to "policy transfers" and "policy convergence" examples from developing countries imitating the best practices of developed countries in various spheres of the economy and attempting to inject some ideas or entire projects into

their own domestic domain. This is also probably the reason why the idea of Latinization process in making Kazakh language more popular around the world had been raised, especially bringing Kazakhstan closer to western part of Europe.

Another argument why Kazakhstan has chosen to change and adapt the language to the modern state in accordance with the path dependence approach could also be explained by the fact that the country tries to experiment in their own way to see what works out in their contextual societal public discourse and what should rather be taken cautiously into consideration. This way, they can draw lessons for future public policy implementations in planning governmental programs and initiate public discourse discussions to test the limits and potential opportunities. The same analogy can be given to how environmental awareness campaigns raise environmental concerns and ecological problems in the country. Things do not have to change right away, as they may take time

and often the country needs to strike a right balance between what works out for them, what can be challenged and what must be postponed or completely left out. If we for instance look at how Turkey had moved towards a latinized alphabet with the initiative of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who sought to Europeanize along that way Turkey, it can be argued that the removal of an Arabic script had made passed the process successfully. However, in the context of a post-soviet country like Kazakhstan, the conditions and factors might be different.

Any change that comes along as quite radical will have to be compensated by other means that would incur huge costs and consequences. This is also why certain "policy transfer" or "policy convergence" of best practices, as exemplified with the pension reform from developed countries, were not effectively implemented in Kazakhstan. Eventually having caused huge an ineffective pension system reform in Kazakhstan. With these things said, the decision in postponing the entire Latinization process to the year 2025 and even to 2031 is without any question the right way to go about it, as it gives the government, policymakers and the people the necessary amount of time and resources to properly sit down "on the table" altogether and ponder critically but wisely about the shortcomings, limitations and opportunities in changing a language.

Latinize to Modernize?

According to the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the need for

modernization is one of the main driving factors that will push and had pushed the Kazakh language to be reformed completely (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 38). Besides that, the modernization of the language is also inevitably correlated to the ongoing global changes in the economic market, which would mean that the vision for changes in the Kazakh language would advance the nation's presence in the global arena (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 38). This statement has also been supported by Dotton's research on Language Policy and Language Planning in Kazakhstan (2017), where she outlined the rationality of the Kazakh language change to be associated with modernity of the West (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 38). According to her, the dominance of the English language and its alphabet among the global community makes it for other states quite appealing to emulate a language reform (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 38). Hence, modernization is attributed to the notion of what represents the West and getting closer to its path of development in terms of the economy, trade or technological advancements (Yergaliyeva, 2018: 38) (Maksudov, 2019) (Alpatov, 2002). The same viewpoint has also shared the first President Nursultan Nazarbayev, emphasizing the importance of modernization process with the Latinization script, which will positively impact the national identity formation of Kazakh and Kazakhstani people (Kim, 2018). Nowadays, in Kazakhstan many street signs and businesses have started to use the Latin alphabet to become more 'western' so to say. Another viewpoint argues that Latinization process itself is a way for Kazakhstan to rewrite history by distancing themselves from Russian influence and coming closer to Turkic community (Melich & Adibayeva, 2013: 273) (Shervin & Gunkel, 2019) (Buchko, 2019) (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 26).

Any concept of "modernization" accompanies questions like these: What does modernization firstly mean and how can we distinguish it from what not a modernization would be? The same question also applies to ideas of reformation or globalization. How they are understood may vary for different countries. Their interpretation is as controversial as much as there are differences and similarities among countries around the world. In the context of Kazakhstan, modernization applies to the comprehension of the Kazakh language in need for an "evolution". In other words, it means the drive for a change to a more modern version, which would be a latinized form of alphabet. However, for what purpose are we really modernizing the alphabet? Is it for the sake of "modernization" or is there something else that probably is a long-term oriented plan with its goals and visions, which

the society may not understand? To answer such questions, one must understand not only Kazakhstan's history and its political structure, but also be able to disseminate socio-cultural characteristics of past and present time periods. However, then another question lies ahead: How a "society" is shaped and what it is for Kazakhstan?

What concerns the Latinization process, there were many reasons for its implementation. For instance, first concerns the rebuilding of the national identity, by which the concept of modernization accompanies the process of latinization like a socially accepted "dogma". But would that "dogma" really justify its real purpose? In a sense it can be argued that the so-called "national identity" serves like a mantra for the revival of Kazakh language, as the language itself has lost to a certain degree its popularity and importance within a multiethnic society as explained by the path dependency approach. This argument might be too far-fetched as both the Russian and Kazakh languages are official state languages according to the constitution. However, a language is a powerful societal and governmental tool to characterize a nation, lead it towards its future as well as control it. The Kazakh language in Kazakhstan can be considered as a building block of the Kazakh national identity. Without the language, there would be no ethnic national identity. Hence, any change that comes along with the language policies will directly impact and shape the way how the ethnic national identity in Kazakhstan will be formed and developed.

Another argument suggested is that it would bring Kazakhstan closer to the Western World and stimulate a breakthrough in its political image internationally. But these are just assumptions that are presumed to result out of the transition process as by-products. However, it is arguable whether it will eventually bring us more positive outcomes that will outweigh the costs and unintended consequences. But all those arguments seem still not to justify the process of Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet, as they are normative statements that help to understand why it was implemented in the first place. It is not enough to have just a political will for a policy, even if it is well intentioned. In fact, street-level bureaucrats will be the ones to implement the process for a successful and full transition. How the street-level bureaucrats will implement the process and how it will adapt to the contextual socio-political environment will play even more an important role and from our understanding this thing could also be one of the possible theoretical reasons why the Latinization process could fail. Even if the blueprint for the language transition process is well- designed

and well thought out, its effectiveness can be lost at the street-level bureaucratic level.

Implementation Challenges

The new Kazakh Alphabet

The transition to Latin alphabet in Kazakh language is not and will not be an easy task for the government. First, Kazakhstan's government should carefully identify potential policy problems that may occur during the transition process and effectively cope with them. The first policy problems concern the creation of an alphabet that will be comfortable to use not only in everyday life, but also for professional and academic purposes. In this regard, users of new Kazakh alphabet should be able to use it in a convenient way while writing and reading. Phonetic, phonological and orthographic laws of Kazakh language must be carefully implemented while introducing Latin alphabet (Bazarbayeva, Zhunisbek & Malbakov, 2014). For example, during the last four years since 2017, several options of Latinized Kazakh alphabet were proposed (Shingaliyeva, 2020). In September 2017, Kazakh alphabets with digraphs were presented, where some sounds were represented by combinations of two characters. However, this alphabet was not accepted by the society (Zheksenbekov, 2017) (Shingaliyeva, 2020). In order to avoid writing double characters, other options were presented with specific sounds in Kazakh language by apostrophes. This version also could not stand criticism because it was both inconvenient to read and write with apostrophes (Kudaibergenova, 2018). Eventually, the next version was an alphabet with acute labels (RFE/RL's Kazakh Service, 2018). In this version characters such as 'и' 'й' 'і' were merged from Kazakh- Cyrillic alphabet into one character 'i', and two sounds 'ш' and 'ч' are represented by double characters 'sh' and 'ch'. Unlike the first two versions, Kazakhstan's society was satisfied with the last version, but problems had emerged. For instance, recently Kazakhstan's government conducted a nationwide dictation of the last proposed alphabet. Complaints about confusion in writing characters 'и' 'й' 'і' were evident since it was merged into one character 'i'. Furthermore, people had difficulties in distinguishing sounds 'sh' and 'ch' because these combinations of characters also may represent two separate sounds. For example, in Kazakh the word 'Ashana', characters 's' and 'h' represent two sounds, not one 'sh'.

Despite these problems, Kazakhstan's government keeps updating the Latin script and gradually started to move towards implementation phase. One of the

first steps towards integration of new alphabet was changing the word 'Қазақстан' (kaz. Kazakhstan) in the national emblem into Latin characters 'Qazaqstan' (Abramovskaya, 2018). This means that the implementation process has started but it's unclear how the society will cope with the last version of Latinized Kazakh alphabet. But will the implementation of Latin alphabet be successful? From one side, it is good that the government attempts to negotiate with the society on selection of the right alphabet. Bringing the issue to public discussions signifies a collective action of the government and citizens. As a result, it shows a mutual interest towards changes in Kazakh alphabet since it influenced government's decision to change it twice. Therefore, government is on the right path in policy implementation. However, as previously mentioned, the nationwide dictation revealed some specific issues. In order to avoid difficulties in implementation process, Kazakhstan should refer to experiences of international practices that were successful. Among Turkic group countries successful transition policies were in Turkey and Azerbaijan. The reverse pattern can be observed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where transition process to Latin alphabet could not be accomplished entirely and can be labeled as having failed to some degree to be properly implemented.

Financial & Socio-political Issues

Undoubtedly, the change of the alphabet is a complicated issue that needs incentives and responsibilities by the government as well as society (Landau, 2010). The huge problem that could occur during implementation of Latinization program is in transferring all the database and educational materials from Cyrillic to Latin script (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 32). First, there will be necessity in significant funding, as large number of documents, books, manuscripts or publications needs to be replaced (Landau, 2010) (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 32 and 34). And here, of course the question is how long that process would last and with what issues ahead. Additional funding is also necessary for retraining the teachers and reorganizing education system (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 34). The main reason of criticism of this process relates to these inevitable funding's (Dotton, 2016).

Besides the financial aspect, transition of database and education system to Latin script is a time-consuming process. Additionally, we need qualified specialists in philology for correctly rewriting all the available data in Latin alphabet (Landau, 2010). From a psychological perspective, community with strong educational basis and traditional way of thinking

will hardly translate into a completely new mentality (Alpatov, 2002). In other words, adults will unlikely learn a new alphabet. Thus, from a psychological point of view, those people who have been used to the way it was “before”, they will find a change difficult to accept in a “new” reality, as the “fear of the unknown” has always been and will always be a factor that will accompany them alongside the society and the government (Shingaliyeva, 2020: 34). We can also say that humans have survived throughout the evolution as they stayed out of the fear of the unknown or anything, they deem to radically change their habit and co-existence. However, here the question concerns the issues of to what degree the “change” will instigate in people the “fear of the unknown” and whether the society with its people accepts a new reality.

There is also another risk of the transition of the scripts leading to a decrease in average literacy of population due to shortage in learning materials, as cultural-linguistic customs will be eliminated (Kosmarskii, 2007). Besides, reading habits of Kazakhstani people might be affected at the same degree most likely. For instance, people reading in traditional way will hardly get used to read in Latin script, so they may lose interest in Kazakh literature and the language eventually entirely. In addition, as Russians will likely continue using majorly in Cyrillic, it causes confusion in daily reading. Also, due to shortage of materials, citizens will have limited access to books, articles and database. Politically, Kazakhstan is somehow undertaking a safe policy towards Russia by removing Cyrillic from national alphabet (Alpatov, 2002). Although government officials refuse that it has geopolitical purpose, most of citizens, also even Russian authorities, realize that shift from Cyrillic script will decrease Russian influence on Kazakhstan. Here, we must be careful not to over-politicize the issue, where it snowballs like domino effect a chain reaction of dissident social movements resulting in social strife and ethnic conflicts. Moreover, dissatisfaction with this policy may strengthen migration mood of ethnic minorities or let parents change their preference from Kazakh schools to Russian (Yergaliyeva, 2018) (Dotton, 2016). However, such speculations are not empirically based and how realistic such an occasion would be quite doubtful and should be left on a theoretical matter, but not forgotten or totally dismissed as something fictitious. In any case, the Latinization of the Kazakh script has no purpose directly or indirectly affecting the Russian speaking population in the country. Thus, a multiethnic Kazakhstan has not to fear a schism of an ethnic tension even if there is always a possibility. The only thing that needs to be

ensured is the safe, smooth and proper transition at the right time with the right methods, resources and more importantly with its people as human capital. Of course, the interplay between human capital and the contextual politico-administrative system Kazakhstan operates with will matter as well. However, one must understand the following phrase: Understand your fears, but do not fear them. Instead, challenge them in your own way like we have challenged ourselves as humans to evolve over the many centuries as a modern society. Consider the “fear of the unknown” or a “change” like something that is inevitable and will likely come in one way or another at a time one can expect or not expect it. Hence, facing the Latinization process head on is probably better than doing nothing about it.

Policy Recommendations

The following policy recommendations for the proper transition of the Latinization project in the context of our research question are proposed:

- Keep the status quo of the implementation process until 2031. There is no need to extend it further than that.

- Revision of the alphabet should continue to be discussed in the social media among the public society. Alongside this, a strong marketing approach needs to create wide-reaching public awareness of the project via mass media outlets.

- The Ministry of Education shall create a special committee responsible for an impact assessment of Latinization implementation process of every region in Kazakhstan with their own evaluation criteria on the successfulness of the project. Such special committees should provide monthly reports on the situation with the Latinization process in all spheres of the economy.

- Create a more target-oriented blueprint for the procedural approach of what exactly shall be achieved regionally as well as nationally in the context of all spheres of the economy. For instance, set targeted goals in numbers of teachers capable of teaching Kazakh to older generations.

- Concerning the facilitation of the process for informational delivery: Now, there is an expert group that is concerned about the development of Kazakh alphabet. Many philologists, experts from various fields, representatives of IT community and public figures were involved in this process. Besides that, several meetings of the National Commission for the transition of the alphabet of Kazakh language into Latin script; conferences and round tables held; serious discussions were launched in the media and

social networks (Borisova, 2018). Nevertheless, there is no unified institution that considers all aspects of realization. It is necessary to create a separate committee on implementation aspect. Such a specialized Committee will help to take control over the process and provide enough transparent information to the public.

The recommendations mentioned above will have to be carefully chosen as each one of them may be used in different intensities, situations or time frames. It is recommended to devise a target-oriented blueprint in order to have specific goals for specific purposes to achieve by 2031 the full transition into Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet in Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Latinization process in Kazakhstan has still a long way to go before we can see its real positive empirical and practical results. It is still in its early stages to introduce their Latinization project, but as ambitious and well intentioned it is, challenges still exist that tests how well this project progresses. In terms of socio-political acceptability, the Latinization project caused debates among citizens on its implementation issues but have also spurred mutual understanding between the society and government to reach a consensus on considering the project as a crucial matter to be resolved. The government from its side attempted and still attempts to this day to actively engage with the society, which shows a positive sign of reciprocating to criticisms and concerns. While on the other side of the coin, the society starts to shift its attitude from passive to active movements of engagement in a form civil society. This means that both the society with its people and the government must mutually cooperate to reach a favorable consensus for both sides.

Throughout the last two centuries, Kazakhstan has undergone several changes with the Kazakh alphabet. From the Arab script to Latin and then to Cyrillic script have changed the way how Kazakhstani people think, view and understand the world. This has of course been also heavily influenced by the historical past and the legacy that it left behind as of today. As of now, around forty versions of Latin script for the Kazakh alphabet have been proposed and there is a high likelihood that the Latinization process will proceed further up until 2031 before it is fully implemented. However, whether this implementation process will be successfully ingrained in the society is another story to be discussed for later.

When having discussed the question concerning the reasons for change to Latin script, the paper analyzed two main reasons. The first reason concerned the reason of the so-called institutionalism or path-dependency approach, where it was explained that Kazakhstan follows, builds and complements its developmental trajectories based on past events, experiences and formations on par with current patterns and needs. This explains also why Kazakhstan tries to rewrite its historical past of belonging to the Soviet Union by re-modeling an own trajectory path of a new Latin alphabet based on new realities and demands of its citizens. The second reason that was discussed in this paper concerned the idea of the fact that the Latinization initiative was implemented as a result and for the purpose of the modernization process. Here, the principal ideas lied in the fact that languages evolve over time and must become modern to adapt to new changes. This also concerned the aspect of becoming closer to the West and the Latin alphabet using countries.

Implementation problems discussed in this paper, as such as those of the potential orthographic and phonetic issues, might be as important as to be discussed as the reasons for the Latinization process to be implemented. Other factors such as the problem with preparation of the street-level bureaucrats, social risks of decrease in popularity of the language and possible tendencies for social and ethnic conflicts to occur are not fictitious ideas. Instead, they can happen and must be taken also into consideration when devising a plan. Other implementation problems were also analyzed. These also included the financial aspects of the budgetary and possible funding problems, decrease in average literacy among Kazakh-speaking population or the societal acceptability and adaptability concerns by the public.

Having considered the reasons for the Latinization process to be implemented and their implementation problems, in the context of a multiethnic society, Kazakhstan must form a more concrete and well-elaborated blueprint of their Latinization project in order to move step by step to their desired goals and have a crystal-clear vision of what lies ahead of them. Thus, when the process of transition to the Latin alphabet will start, Kazakhstan should be more confidently moving forward with stepping-stones of progression. Kazakhstan should not fear the change but fear the fact that it cannot change, as a change in every aspect could be both good and bad or positive and negative, but necessary and inevitable without a question.

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