

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Role of Alphabets in the Formation of Kazakh Written Language*

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Abstract

The Kazakh written language, whose first works were produced in the late 19th century, is a relatively young written language that, until 1940, sporadically used the Arabic, Latin, and Cyrillic alphabets. The formation of the Kazakh written language in the late 19th century was influenced not only by the lifestyle of the Kazakhs at that time but also by the language policies pursued by Tsarist Russia and its practices regarding minority languages. It can be said that Ibray Altınсарin's proximity to N.I. Ilminskiy, who formulated and managed Russia's policies on minority languages, played a role in his publication of the first literary work in Kazakh. The Cyrillic alphabet used in the work undeniably contains phonetic elements that distinguish Kazakh, as an oral-based language of the Turkic family, from other Turkic languages. This alphabet also influenced the development of the Arabic-based Kazakh alphabet prepared by Ahmet Baytursınulı and the Latin-based alphabet adopted in 1926. It is evident that the pressure and imposition of the Soviet Union played a significant role in shaping the modern Kazakh written language, particularly with the adoption of the Russian-based Cyrillic alphabet in 1940.

Keywords

Kazakh written language, Ibray Altınсарin, N. I. Ilminskiy, Ahmet Baytursınulı, Kazakh Latin alphabet, Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet.

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Kazak Yazı Dilinin Oluşmasında Alfabelerin Rolü*

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Öz

Kazak yazı dili, ilk eserleri 19. yüzyılın son çeyreğinde verilen, 1940 yılına kadar yazımında Arap, Latin ve Kiril alfabelerinin zaman zaman gelişi güzel olarak kullanıldığı genç bir yazı dilidir. Kazak yazı dilinin 19. yüzyılın sonlarında oluşmaya başlamasında Kazakların o dönemdeki hayat tarzlarının etkili olması yanında Çarlık Rusyasının takip ettiği dil politikaları ve azınlık dilleri ile ilgili uygulamaları önemli rol oynamıştır. İbray Altınsarin'in Kazakça ilk edebî eseri vermesinde Rusya'nın azınlık dilleri ile ilgili politikalarını oluşturan ve yöneten N.İ. İlminskiy ile yakınlığı etkili olmuştur denilebilir. Eserde kullanılan Kiril alfabesinin Türk dilinin ağız toplulukları özelliğini taşıyan Kazakçayı diğer Türk topluluklarından uzaklaştıran sesler içerdiği inkâr edilemez. Bu alfabe, Ahmet Baytursınlı'nın Kazakçanın yazımı için düzenlediği Arap alfabesi kökenli Kazak alfabesinde ve 1926 yılında kabul edilen Latin temelli alfabenin şekillenmesinde de etkili olmuştur. Bugünkü yazı dilinin şekillenmesinde Sovyetler Birliğinin baskısı ve dayatması yanında 1940 yılında kabul edilen Rus temelli Kiril alfabesinin büyük rolü olduğu bir gerçektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kazak yazı dili, İbray Altınsarin, N. İ. İlminskiy, Ahmet Baytursınlı, Kazak Latin alfabesi, Kazak Kiril alfabesi.

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Introduction

It would not be wrong to assume that the construction of Kazakh identity and its significant role in the establishment of Kazakhstan as a state are attributed to the Kazakh language, which was written in Arabic and Cyrillic scripts before Kazakhstan was officially formed as a state (Şirin User 286-287; Roy 30-33, 100, 166). Many of today's critical issues in Kazakhstan are directly or indirectly related to the Kazakh written language and the formation of the Kazakh language itself. This is because language is at the core of human communities' existence (Porzig 6). The Kazakh language and its written form, which are the primary reasons for Kazakhstan's existence, are also central to the challenges faced today. Porzig (7) emphasizes the importance of the coexistence and influence of linguistic communities as a historical force and highlights the significance of what kind of community constitutes the language and what it means to its members. This is crucial for both the existence and future of the language and the community that uses it.

A written language is formed either through the dominance of one dialect over others or through the opportunities it offers speakers of other dialects. Alternatively, it may be shaped by the preference of state authorities for communication, education, administration, and international relations (Porzig 20-21). The dialect that is accepted as the written language develops within the framework of the language's grammatical rules, which also serve as the foundation for these rules. In scientific research, the language that is discussed and analyzed is generally the written language (Trabant 85), making the written language both a showcase and a scientific aspect of a language.

Since around the 1850s, the Kazakh language, written in different spellings using the Arabic and Cyrillic alphabets, has faced significant challenges in becoming a state and written language. Although the Turks had a common written language in the 13th century, different and distinct written languages had emerged by the 15th century. The formation of a new written language took approximately two hundred years under the conditions of that period when transportation and communication were not as advanced as today, education was not as widespread, the written language was not extensively used at the state level, universities that provided the groundwork for the

formation of scientific terms were scarce, and scientific studies were neither abundant nor widely disseminated. Although the time that has elapsed since the beginning of writing Kazakh should have been sufficient for the development of an advanced Kazakh written language, the recognition of Kazakh as a local language and the use of Russian as the language of education and state affairs in the Soviet Union from 1920 to 1990 hindered its development. Since gaining independence in 1991, thirty years have passed. Considering current conditions and the fact that Kazakh has been written for over a century, it would be expected that the Kazakh written language is now highly developed.

Today, the Kazakh written language faces several challenges. If a language, despite its status as the official language of a sovereign state, is insufficiently utilized within the education system, has not evolved into a language of law, fails to gain recognition as a literary medium, and is not adopted as a scientific language in higher education, its institutional development and social functionality are significantly constrained. If Kazakh children acquire Russian before Kazakh, if the intellectual elite primarily uses Russian, if the state's internal administrative affairs and international diplomatic relations are conducted in Russian, and if the predominantly Kazakh ethnic composition of the state is not proportionally reflected in the use of the Kazakh language, then the structural and sociopolitical causes of this situation must be critically examined and addressed. Without resolving these fundamental issues, it is impossible for Kazakh to develop into a fully functional written language. Consequently, the future of Kazakhstan as a state remains vulnerable to numerous challenges. This is because, for a speaker of a given language, another language is not merely a different set of symbols but also represents an alternative cognitive framework, a distinct way of perceiving and interpreting the world, as well as an alternative means of exercising agency and understanding reality (Porzig 8). Problems arise when a country's official written language coexists with a recognized or imposed secondary language. The alphabet, which constitutes an essential element of the written language-similar to an imposed secondary language-is fundamental to its existence and plays a crucial role in its development.

The development of a written language necessitates a harmonious relationship between the language and its alphabet (Ong 105). Throughout

history, various types of alphabets have been utilized, including conceptual alphabets, puzzle alphabets, and hybrid alphabets, among others (Ong 105-113), most of which have evolved in accordance with the structural characteristics of the language. However, some alphabets have not developed alongside the language but have instead been imposed, thereby hindering its natural progression. Many of these imposed alphabets remain in use today, primarily due to their historical and cultural significance.

The values identified by Porzig (8) as linguistic signs should correspond to the phonemes that constitute words in a language and their potential equivalents in writing. Although written symbols may be identical and their pronunciation similar across languages, the phonetic structures of individual languages differ significantly. Consequently, there is an intrinsic harmony between the sounds of a language and its corresponding alphabet. As a result, the alphabet of a language consists of symbols that represent these sounds. The inclusion and representation of new phonemes in a language and its alphabet over time are linguistic developments that arise from interactions between nations and other cultures and civilizations. However, newly incorporated sounds in a language never retain their original form from the source language; rather, they adapt to the phonetic and structural characteristics of the receiving language. This adaptation typically occurs at the lexical level, where the pronunciation of the borrowed sound conforms to the phonetic patterns of the language rather than maintaining its original articulation. Furthermore, languages generally contain more phonetic elements than those explicitly represented in their alphabets. However, the symbols in an alphabet also represent phonetically similar sounds, thereby simplifying the writing system. This not only facilitates learning the alphabet but also enhances language acquisition. When imperialist nations develop alphabets for other languages, they often introduce additional symbols that complicate spelling, rendering reading and writing more challenging. This, in turn, hinders both the learning and practical use of the language. In such cases, speakers may be directed toward an alternative language that is perceived as simpler and more accessible within the local linguistic context.

The first crucial step in establishing harmony between a language and its alphabet is ensuring that the alphabet includes symbols that accurately represent the primary vowels and consonants of the language. The

relationship between the alphabet and the phonetic structure of a language is fundamental to its written form. However, these phonemes do not encompass all the sounds found in dialects or spoken variations of the language; rather, they represent the core sounds of the written language while also reflecting phonetic nuances. Languages vary in their phonetic composition, with some being rich in vowels and others in consonants. Based on these phonetic characteristics, languages develop inherent linguistic rules over time. These rules not only differentiate one language from another but also contribute to its linguistic identity. Additionally, these phonological patterns facilitate the assimilation of loanwords, ensuring that they conform to the phonetic structure of the receiving language. This distinctiveness is a fundamental characteristic that sustains the vitality and dynamism of a language.

Kazakh Writing System in the 19th Century

The use of the Cyrillic alphabet for writing Kazakh can be seen as a continuation of the Turkic Christianization and Russification practices initiated by members of the Altai Divine Mission in 1845, known as the “missionary alphabet” (Şirin User 174). Evidence of these Russification and Christianization efforts can be observed in the fact that, out of the 72 books printed in Kazakh by Ilminskiy in Kazan, 42 were entirely dedicated to Christianity, while 20 were Russian language learning guides printed in Cyrillic script. Furthermore, with the exception of the first page, which featured Christian saints and church history, the alphabet books themselves were heavily influenced by Christian themes (Şirin User 287).

Kazakh, spoken in a region encompassing the northern and eastern parts of Greater Turkestan, began to be written in both the Arabic and Cyrillic alphabets during a period when the Chagatai literary language was gradually losing its influence and becoming localized according to the geographical distribution of Turkic communities. The letter written by Ebulhayr Khan to the Russian Tsar in 1732 in the Arabic script is considered the earliest known written example of the Kazakh language (Mamırbekova 43-45). The work *İğlanname Kırgız Halkına*, translated from Russian and describing methods for protection against the plague, is recognized as the first known printed work attributed to the Kazakhs (Şirin User 286). This was followed by Ilminskiy’s publication of Kazakh texts in Arabic script and the introduction

of reading and writing books promoting Christianity in Cyrillic script (Şirin User 286-287). Ibray Altınsarin's work, titled *Kirgizskaya Hrestomatiya*, published in 1879 in Orenburg, was written in the Cyrillic script and is considered the first instance of a Kazakh using the Cyrillic alphabet to write in Kazakh (Tamir 432). However, there is no definitive evidence indicating whether the Cyrillic alphabet used in this work was structured by Altınsarin himself or by Ilminskiy. Additionally, the first Kazakh grammar book, published in 1861 without an identified author or editor, was titled *Kirgızlar [Kazaklar] İçin Kendi Kendine Rusça Öğrenme (Self-Teaching Russian Grammar for Kyrgyz [Kazakhs])*. Zaharenko and Lihman assert that this work was published by N.I. Ilminskiy at the request of Grigoryev (106). This book, prepared in the Arabic script, compares Kazakh phonemes with their Russian counterparts in the introductory section (Ilminskiy 5-10). Although it does not explicitly introduce a Cyrillic orthography for Kazakh, it indirectly provides Cyrillic equivalents for Kazakh phonemes, marking an early attempt to apply the Cyrillic alphabet to the Kazakh dialect, which had not yet been fully standardized as a written language. Rather than being a self-learning book for Russian, this work could more accurately be described as a guide for learning Kazakh using the Cyrillic alphabet. The influence of Ilminskiy's *Self-Teaching Guide for Learning Russian* can be observed in the Cyrillic alphabet employed by Ibray Altınsarin in his 1879 works. Finally, Zaharenko and Lihman substantiate these observations by stating:

“With the encouragement and assistance of Ilminskiy, Altınsarin prepared and published his major works, the Kirgiz Anthology and Teaching Russian to Kyrgyz People at the Beginner Level, in 1879. The Self-Teaching Guide for Learning Russian became a valuable educational resource for Kazakh children and was widely distributed throughout the Orenburg educational region, Turkestan, and Siberia” (106).

Given that Ilminskiy primarily wrote in the Chagatai literary language and employed the Arabic script, Altınsarin's insistence on using Arabic script for his works suggests the possibility that these books were originally composed by Ilminskiy in the Cyrillic alphabet.

In Ilminskiy's published Kazakh literary works, which were written using the Arabic alphabet and the Chagatai literary language script, as well as in the *Kirgizskaya Hrestomatiya*, the nasal *n* sound is represented in the

Cyrillic alphabet as *нз* (*ng*) instead of *н* (*n*), as was the case in the Chagatai script. Additionally, the Cyrillic *у* (*u*) symbol is used to represent multiple phonemes, including *и*, *йи*, and *ө* (e.g., *күремисинг*, *узине*, *тубесине*, *қурип*), as well as *иш*, *йш*, *ш*, *ши*, and *шй* sounds. Similarly, the Cyrillic *о* (*o*) character is used to denote both *о* and *ө* sounds (e.g., *қоб*, *қок*, *шобтей*, *қонғул*; *оқыған*, *тоқылық*), further supporting these observations. It is particularly noteworthy that the vowel *e* is represented by the *э* symbol, specifically for *e*-sounds appearing at the beginning of words in Kazakh. This adaptation serves to prevent the *y* – derivation that typically occurs before *e* in word-initial positions in Russian. However, the irregular occurrence of the *е* symbol with an accent mark, as well as the rationale behind its usage, remains unclear.

However, while imitating the use of the Chagatai literary language with the Arabic alphabet, it is noteworthy that a single *к* (*k*) is used to represent both soft and hard *k* sounds, and similarly, a single *г* (*g*) is used to denote both soft and hard *g* sounds. The symbols used to represent consonants include *л* (*l*) and its variant *ль* (*l'*) with a soft sign following it; however, the distinction between them is not consistently maintained. In fact, the same word is sometimes written with a single *л* (*l*) and at other times with *ль* (*l'*) followed by a soft sign.

The hard sign (*Ъ*), commonly used in Russian words, appears only in a few borrowed Russian terms. However, the soft sign (*Ь*) is occasionally placed after certain instances of *л* (*l*) and *н* (*n*). This usage lacks consistency, as it is applied irregularly, sometimes appearing and sometimes omitted within the same word. Additionally, while the special Russian letter *Ю* is not used in Kazakh words, the letter *Я* is employed in cases where the consonant *y* and the vowels *a* and *e* appear consecutively.

Furthermore, the letters *В*, *Ё*, *Ф*, *Ч*, *Щ*, and *Ц* are exclusively used in borrowed Russian words. Due to the absence of letters representing back-palatal *k* and *g* sounds in the Russian alphabet, it is likely that the letters representing front-palatal *k* and *g* sounds were used to denote both front-palatal and back-palatal *k* and *g* phonemes.

It is notable in the text that the back vowel harmony is maintained. However, despite the presence of the letter *ы* representing the *ɯ* sound, the letter *и* is

used to represent both the ı and i sounds, which is a contradiction. Similarly, while the letter *o* represents the o and ö sounds, the *y* letter representing uw/üw, w sounds also represents both o/ö and u/ü sounds, which is another contradiction.

Roy's statement, "*Kazakh İbray Altınsarı (1841–89) wrote the first Kazakh grammar and the first Kazakh-Russian dictionary*" (76), suggests that he neither acknowledged nor considered Ilminskiy's book, *Self-Teaching Guide for Learning Russian for Kyrgyz* (Ilminskiy 1861). Similarly, Roy's assertion that "*In 1879, he was appointed as the inspector of Kazakh schools, supported by the Kazan Russian scientist Ilminskiy. Literary Kazakh began to spread in the 1860s. (Although Altınsarı reluctantly wrote his works in Cyrillic, the majority of Kazakh works, including Altınsarı's works reprinted later, were printed in Kazan with Arabic letters.)*" (76) implies that these works may have been written or published under İbray Altınsarın's name as a condition of his appointment as an inspector. Furthermore, Altınsarın's letter to Katarinski, dated April 1, 1883, in which he mentioned preparing the second volume of the anthology and insisted that these anthologies be printed in the Arabic alphabet (Ayan 31), underscores his reluctance to publish the 1879 works in the Cyrillic alphabet. Following his death, these books were reprinted in the Arabic script, with the stipulation that the letters be reproduced exactly as they had originally appeared (Altınsarın, *Mektubat*).

In addition to the observations discussed above, Ilminskiy further contended that the Arabic alphabet was inadequate for representing Turkish and its dialects. Similarly, the fundamental rationale behind the transition to the Latin alphabet, as discussed at the Turkology Congress held in Baku in 1926, was to adopt an alphabet capable of representing all phonemes produced in spoken language. It is paradoxical that Ilminskiy, who advocated for a phonetic alphabet for Turkish, neither structured the first Kazakh writing system as a phonetic alphabet nor provided guidance in that direction.

Furthermore, it is unclear why the orthography of this work closely mirrors Chagatai spelling. The imitation of Chagatai orthography may have been an attempt to gain the approval of Kazakh intellectuals familiar with the Chagatai literary tradition, as well as a means of assessing whether Kazakh writing in the Cyrillic alphabet would be accepted. Another plausible explanation is that the use of the Cyrillic alphabet was encouraged in schools established

by Ibray Altinsarin, which seems highly probable. The incorporation of Russian-specific characters further supports this hypothesis. Another noteworthy observation is that the revised Arabic alphabet introduced by Ahmet Baytursınlı in 1912 and the Cyrillic alphabet adopted in 1940 exhibit traces of this initial writing system.

Roy's statement, "*Kazakh İbray Altınsarı (1841–89) wrote the first Kazakh grammar and the first Kazakh-Russian dictionary*" (76), may refer to a grammar book, possibly the work that İbray Altınsarin published in 1879 in Orenburg under the title *Naçal'noe Rukovodstvo k obučeniyu Kirgizov Russkomu Yazıku (First Guide to Teaching Russians for Kyrgyz)* in the Cyrillic alphabet. However, this book could be regarded as a condensed version of Ilminskiy's earlier work, originally published in the Arabic alphabet under the title *Self-Teaching Guide for Learning Russian for Kyrgyz* (Ilminskiy), and later republished in the Cyrillic script. Roy's assertion, "*Although Altınsarı reluctantly wrote his works in Cyrillic...*" (76), along with Zaharenko and Lihman's statement that "*Altınsarin prepared and published his main works, the Kyrgyz Anthology and Teaching Russians to Kyrgyz at the Beginner Level, with the encouragement and assistance of Ilminskiy in 1879. These works became teaching aids for Kazakh children for an extended period and were distributed in the Orenburg education district, as well as in the Turkestan and Siberia regions.*" (106), could be interpreted as indicating that these books were, in fact, authored by Ilminskiy. Although it is a weak possibility, it cannot be entirely ruled out that Ilminskiy wrote these works and they were published under the name of Ibray Altinsarin, possibly because Ilminskiy's book did not receive recognition or failed to gain popularity. A supporting argument for this hypothesis is the fact that Altınsarin's books, originally published in the Cyrillic alphabet, were later republished in the Arabic script (Roy 76). Additionally, it is important to note that Altınsarin was appointed as an education inspector the same year these books were published. Zaharenko and Lihman (106) further state: "*As a teacher, Altınsarin used these books and Ilminskiy's 'learning method'... The latter almost always supported Altınsarin and contributed to his appointment as an inspector in the Torgay region state schools. Altınsarin held this position from 1879 to 1889. Throughout his life, he maintained correspondence with Ilminskiy, consistently expressing his respect, gratitude, attention, and need for guidance and assistance.*". This statement reinforces the possibility that Ilminskiy played a central role in

the development and dissemination of these works. Indeed, Altinsarin's *Kirgizskaya Hrestomatiya* was printed twice in Kazan in 1896 and 1899 in the Arabic script following his death at the age of 48 in 1889 (Ayan 28-30).

The first grammar book published by Ilminskiy in 1861, followed by Altinsarin's two other works published in 1879, demonstrates that Ilminskiy systematically implemented a premeditated linguistic plan. Transforming a widely spoken dialect into a standardized written language is an inherently complex process, requiring deliberate effort and strategic planning. Ilminskiy insisted that these books be printed in the Cyrillic alphabet, despite Altinsarin's preference for the Arabic script during his lifetime (Ayan 31). The fact that these works were printed in the Cyrillic alphabet after Altinsarin's death, with discrepancies observed only when comparing the inside covers of two editions printed three years apart, further substantiates this observation. Indeed, when examining the inside covers of the two editions printed three years apart, the most striking discrepancy is found in their linguistic designation. While the 1896 edition includes phrases such as "*In Kyrgyz and Kazakh language*" and "*Translated and arranged by...*", the 1899 edition features the phrases "*In Kazakh language anthology*" and "*This book is compiled by Mirza Altinsarin.*" The phrase "*In Kyrgyz and Kazakh language*" in the 1896 edition raises questions regarding whether it refers to two distinct languages or merely two separate communities. It is possible that the revision to "*In Kazakh language anthology*" in the 1899 edition was intended to emphasize the distinction between the Kyrgyz and Karakyrghyz denominations. A second notable discrepancy is the attribution of authorship. While Ibray Altinsarin's name is entirely absent from the 1896 edition, the phrase "*Translated and arranged by*" is followed by "*jazuuşı*" at the beginning of an extensive honorific. In contrast, the 1899 edition explicitly states that the book was *compiled and written* by Ibray Altinsarin. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the consonant *c* – in Kazakh Turkish was rendered as *j* – at the beginning of words. This is particularly significant, as in previously published texts in the Arabic script by Ilminskiy, this sound (ج) was represented using the letter *cim*.

The fact that *Kirgiz Hrestomatiya* and *First Guide to Teaching Russians for Kyrgyz* were printed in the Cyrillic alphabet despite Ibray Altinsarin's explicit insistence on using the Arabic script (Ayan 31), and that after his

death these works were later converted to the Arabic script and attributed to Ibray Altinsarin under the title *Mektubat* in the 1896 edition-without even mentioning his name-suggests that this may have been a long-term project orchestrated by Ilminskiy and his collaborators. If these books had originally been published in the Arabic script as Altinsarin had intended, the letter *c* in Kazakh would still have been represented by *cim*, and the *c* sounds in Kazakh would not have been systematically converted to *j* sounds. Moreover, if *j* sounds had genuinely replaced *c* sounds in Kazakh, the Arabic alphabet already contained a letter representing the *j* sound, and it would have been used accordingly. It is important to clarify that this does not imply the absence of *j* sounds in Kazakh. There may have been dialectal variations within the Kazakh-speaking regions where *j* sounds were used instead of *c* sounds. However, it would be inaccurate to assert that all *c* sounds were universally converted to *j* sounds during this period. Ilminskiy likely sought to first establish the books in the Cyrillic alphabet to facilitate this phonetic transformation, with the intention of later adapting the same text into the Arabic script.

Ilminskiy's *Self-Teaching Russian for Kyrgyz [Kazakhs]*, published in 1861, was arguably the first Kazakh grammar book. However, due to its perceived influence among Kazakhs, Ibray Altinsarin's *First Guide to Teaching Russians for Kyrgyz*, published in 1879, may have been regarded-both at the time of publication and in contemporary discourse—as the first grammar book of Kazakh.

In the Cyrillic alphabet, although there are not enough symbols to represent all the phonemes in Kazakh, it is possible to compensate for the missing sounds through the use of additional diacritical marks. This method was commonly employed during the Soviet era when new alphabets were designed for Turkic languages. Despite this possibility, Altinsarin's insistence on printing in the Arabic script-at a time when works such as the *Kyrgyz Anthology* and *First Guide to Teaching Russians for Kyrgyz* were published in the Cyrillic alphabet-suggests the systematic implementation of a project conceived by Ilminskiy. Ilminskiy used the letter *cim* to represent the *c* sound in his *Self-Teaching Russian for Kyrgyz*, which was prepared and printed in the Arabic script in 1861. However, when Altinsarin's books were published, there was no equivalent for the *c* sound in Russian, as the Russian

language lacks this phoneme (Milliyet). Consequently, the closest available sound, *j*, was used instead. However, during the reprinting of these books in the Arabic script following the deaths of both Altunsarin and Ilminskiy, the *j* letter, which had been used in the Cyrillic alphabet to replace the *c* sound, was substituted with the Arabic letter representing the *j* phoneme. This demonstrates that the planned transition of *c* sounds to *j* sounds in Kazakh was successfully implemented. A similar phenomenon can be observed with certain *ç* sounds in Kazakh. Although *ç* was frequently used in Kazakh words in Ilminskiy's 1861 grammar book, these sounds were entirely replaced with *ş* in subsequent reprints using the Arabic script. A detailed examination of these texts would confirm this observation. Furthermore, the linguistic modifications seen in the two books published by Altunsarin in 1879 in the Cyrillic alphabet—produced with the encouragement and support of Ilminskiy—are also reflected in *Musulmanşılıktıñ Tutkısı* (Altunsarin, *Şerayitü'l-İslam*). Although prepared by Altunsarin, this work was first printed in the Arabic script in 1884 and later in the Cyrillic alphabet, further reinforcing these findings. Given that the first edition of *Musulmanşılıktıñ Tutkısı* was published in the Arabic script, if the phonetic shifts of *j* < *c* and *ş* < *ç* were already present in the Arabic-script editions of the books printed in 1879, they should also appear in the 1884 edition of *Musulmanşılıktıñ Tutkısı*. This further substantiates the systematic nature of these linguistic changes. The complete transformation of *c* sounds into *j* sounds in Kazakh is a direct consequence of Kazakh texts being adapted to the Russian Cyrillic alphabet and is entirely a product of Russian language policy, particularly the linguistic engineering strategies implemented by Ilminskiy. Similarly, the shift from the mixed use of *ç* and *ş* in Kazakh to the exclusive use of *ş* can be explained within the same framework.

The observation made by Kyrgyz scholar Osman Ali Sıdıkof in his work—“*There is a clear difference between Kazakh and Kyrgyz. They differ in their languages. In Kazakh, the letter ‘sh’ is used instead of ‘s.’ There is no other distinction. If a Kyrgyz says ‘Kazak jivanrak’ (smart Kazakh), ‘Kyrgyz qatıraq’ (stupid Kyrgyz), and ‘Kazak yumshaqraq’ (kind Kazakh), they will be understood*” (123) can be considered evidence that, at the time this book was written, Kazakh retained the *c* and *ç* sounds, while only the *ş* sounds in Kyrgyz had been replaced with *s*, with no other phonetic distinctions. Sıdıkof's observation is particularly significant in illustrating the extent

to which both the Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages have been influenced by language policies implemented from the early 20th century to the present day.

Ahmet Baytursinuli's Contributions to Kazakh Writing and 20th-Century Developments

One of the most significant steps toward the formalization of Kazakh as a written language was undoubtedly Ahmet Baytursinuli's modifications to the Arabic alphabet and the linguistic rules he established for Kazakh writing (Baytursinuli, *Til-Kural* 33–54). The developments in the last two decades of the 19th century played a crucial role in shaping Baytursinuli's reforms. This is particularly relevant given that by the time Ahmet Baytursinuli was born in 1873 (Biray 17), Kazakh had already been written, and numerous literary works were available. Furthermore, six years after his birth, Ibray Altinsarin's works were published in the Cyrillic alphabet. Growing up reading these texts, Baytursinuli's knowledge and proficiency in Kazakh were influenced by the materials he engaged with. In 1896, he learned from the Chuvash-born missionary O. Alekterov that Russian interest in the Kazakh people and language was driven by motives related to territorial expansion, colonization, and missionary activities (Biray 18).

Prior to Ahmet Baytursinuli's modifications to the alphabet, various articles were published in newspapers and magazines regarding the establishment of spelling rules (Şirin User 287). However, Kazakh was being written without adherence to a standardized orthographic system. Nevertheless, it can be argued that these earlier discussions influenced Baytursinuli's reforms in alphabet and spelling conventions. An article titled "Jazuv Tertibi", published in the 4th and 5th issues of *Aykap* magazine, specifically addresses Baytursinuli's efforts in this regard (84–86; 104–107).

In his writings, Baytursinuli's notes that some Kazakhs read using the *Muslim style*, while others adopted the *Russian style*. In this context, *Muslim style* refers to the use of the Arabic script for Kazakh, whereas *Russian style* denotes education in Russian using the Cyrillic script. He highlights that individuals who studied Russian for six to seven years often failed to achieve fluency in speaking or writing the language, estimating that true mastery of Russian would require 10 to 15 years—an impractical timeline for most

learners. He further emphasizes that learning to read in Kazakh, using the *Muslim style*, would require significantly less time. The article also notes that the difficulties associated with learning to write in both Russian and *Muslim* styles were comparable (Baytursınulı, “Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 84).

Baytursınulı critiques the existing alphabet for its inefficiencies, particularly the fact that certain letters represented multiple phonemes, making it difficult to learn. He advocates for a reorganization of the alphabet to simplify literacy acquisition (Baytursınulı, “Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 85). In his proposed reforms, he asserts that the Kazakh language consists of 24 phonemes and introduces a simplified alphabet by eliminating letters specific to Arabic and Persian from the traditional Arabic script. In his revised alphabet, five letters represent vowels, 17 represent consonants, and two are classified as semi-vowels or mid-vowels (Baytursınulı, “Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 85).

Therefore, letters like interdental or non native phonemes “s (ث),” “*ha* (ح),” “*hı* (خ),” “*zel* (ذ),” “*je* (ج),” “*şın* (ش),” “*sad* (ص),” “*dad* (ض),” “*tı* (ط),” “*zı* (ظ),” “*ayın* (ع),” “*fe* (ف)” were removed from the alphabet to simplify it. This indicates that Baytursınulı understood that having letters for sounds not present in a language’s alphabet hindered the language’s independence and the nationalization of elements from other languages, while also leading to the corruption of the language.

Baytursınulı stated in his writings that, considering the differentiation between thick and thin consonantal forms in the Arabic alphabet, the Kazakh language comprises 43 phonemes, which would necessitate 43 distinct letters for accurate representation—an impractical solution (Baytursınulı, “Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 85). To address this challenge, he introduced the use of *hamza* at the beginning of words to ensure the correct pronunciation of thin consonants, thereby eliminating the need for a separate letter for each of the 43 phonemes in Kazakh (Baytursınulı, “Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 86). Although the presence of the letter pairs *kaf-kef* and *ğayın-gef* appears to contradict this approach, Baytursınulı’s system ultimately simplified the alphabet, making it more accessible and easier to learn.

The absence of letters representing the sounds *h* and *f* in the alphabet organized by Baytursınulı is a deficiency, especially considering the rapid

development of communication and transportation, the fact that many people went abroad for education, the advancement of science and technology, and the need to keep up with these developments. Another criticism of this alphabet is the presence of the letters *ǵ* (“Cazuv Tertibi” (May) 104), representing the sounds – *uw/-üw*, and *ı* (“Cazuv Tertibi” (May) 105-106), representing the sounds – *ıy/-iy*, which Baytursınulı referred to as semi-vowels (“Cazuv Tertibi” (April) 85). Baytursınulı stated that *ǵ* and *ı* are long vowels, but since the first one ends with a *w* consonant and the second one ends with a *y* consonant, they cannot be considered as single long vowels; it can be said that a consonant comes after a vowel. It is highly likely that Baytursınulı included these letters in the alphabet, influenced by İbray Altınсарın’s *Kirgizskaya Hrestomatiya* book published in 1879 with the Cyrillic alphabet. While other letters in the alphabet represent a single sound, the fact that these two letters represent multiple sounds together has removed the alphabet from being a phonetic alphabet.

Following the publication of Baytursınulı’s article “Jazuv Tertibi” in *Aykap* magazine in 1912, additional articles such as “Jazuv Meselesi” (544–545) and “Kazaksha Soz Jazuvsilargha” (546–551) were published in the *Kazakh* newspaper. These articles elaborated on the topics discussed in “Jazuv Tertibi” and addressed various questions related to spelling. In these articles, Baytursınulı explains the structuring of the alphabet. Furthermore, in his book *Okuv Kuralı* (Biray 36), published in the same year, he demonstrates how he organized the letters within the alphabet, forming syllables and words by combining vowels and consonants (Baytursınulı, *Okuv Kuralı* 3–28). Page 29 of the book presents symbols representing Kazakh phonemes, which are categorized under three headings: *Davıstı Dıbıstar* (voiced sounds), *Davıssız Dıbıstar* (voiceless sounds), and *Dıbıssız Tañbalar* (silent markers). The *Dıbıssız Tañbalar* category includes symbols that do not represent a phoneme but influence pronunciation by distinguishing between thick and thin articulations, such as *hamza* and *alif* (Baytursınulı, *Okuv Kuralı* 29). Additionally, the book introduces everyday vocabulary categorized under various themes, including family relations, clothing, games and toys, food items, body parts, household objects, livestock names (excluding cattle), names of four-legged animals other than cattle, bird species, reptiles and snakes, insects, plant and tree names, and geographical locations. It also contains numerical terms (Baytursınulı, *Okuv Kuralı* 29–35) and presents

certain cultural values of the Kazakh people under specific thematic sections (Baytursınulı, *Okuv Kuralı* 36–40), which may engage children learning to read and write.

Baytursınulı's book, which conceptualizes literacy as both a cultural practice and a way of life, was followed by *Til Kural (Kazakh Tiliniñ Sarfı) 1. Jıldık*, published in 1914. This work systematically structures the Kazakh language within a scientific framework, establishing its grammatical rules. It represents the first volume of the earliest standalone Kazakh grammar book, following a period in which Kazakh grammar was indirectly derived from earlier works, such as Ilminskiy's *Kendi Kendine Rusça Öğrenme (Self-Learning Russian for Kyrgyz)*, published in 1861, and Altınsarin's *Başlangıç Seviyesindeki Kırgızlara Rusça Öğretme (Teaching Russian to Kyrgyz at the Beginner Level)*, published in 1879. The subsequent volume, *Til Kural (Kazak Tiliniñ Sarfı) 2. Jıldık*, serves as the second part of the grammar book, primarily focusing on word classifications in Kazakh. This work, which garnered significant attention and underwent multiple reprints in a short period, not only adapted and simplified the Arabic alphabet to better suit the phonetic characteristics of Kazakh but also played a pivotal role in the development of linguistic terminology—one of the most critical steps in the establishment of a written language. Although the Kazakh alphabet has since undergone two major changes, the grammatical terminology first introduced by Baytursınulı has persisted and remains widely used today.

Approximately eleven years after Ahmet Baytursınulı's alphabet reform, discussions regarding the transition to the Latin alphabet emerged (Şirin User 291). During the 1920s, various drafts of the Latin alphabet were developed. Among those that played a significant role in shaping the adopted version were proposals put forward by figures such as Nazir Törekułow, Haleb Dosmukhameduly, Mukhtar Mirzauly, and Telzhan Shonanuly (Amirjanova 51–60). While these drafts exhibited certain differences, they were fundamentally rooted in the Arabic script system devised by Ahmet Baytursınulı.

The proposal, strongly opposed by intellectuals such as Ahmet Baytursınulı, including Mustafa Çokay, was ultimately resolved by the decision made at the 1926 Baku Turkology Congress. This decision was later formalized in 1928 at the 6th Session of the Kazakhstan Central Committee and was

officially implemented on January 24, 1929, following approval by the Soviet National Committee (Şirin User 292).

The adopted Latin-based alphabet consisted of 29 letters. The preparatory booklet for this transition includes the name “Beyimbet” as its compiler and features the phrase “*Ғаһа әліп кын сьаһьс җсин төһкерис*” (*New alphabet for the dawn of revolution*), attributed to Lenin (Beyimbet 2). The letters in the alphabet booklet and their equivalents are as follows:¹ *Aa* (*a*), *Bә* (*b*), *Cc* (*ç*), *Çç* (*c*), *Dd* (*d*), *Ee* (*e*), *Әә* (*é*), *Gg* (*g*), *Ғғ* (*ğ*), *Hh* (*h*), *Ii* (*i*), *Jj* (*y*), *Kk* (*k*), *Ll* (*l*), *Mm* (*m*), *Nn* (*n*), *Ңң* (*ñ*), *Oo* (*o*), *Өө* (*ö*), *Pp* (*p*), *Qq* (*q*), *Rr* (*r*), *Ss* (*s*), *Tt* (*t*), *Uu* (*u*), *Vv* (*uw*), *Yy* (*ü*), *Zz* (*z*), *Ьь* (*ı*) (Beyimbet 1931).

The alphabet includes nine vowels: *Aa* (*a*), *Ee* (*e*), *Әә* (*é*), *Ii* (*i*), *Oo* (*o*), *Өө* (*ö*), *Uu* (*u*), *Yy* (*ü*), *Ьь* (*ı*), and one semi-vowel accepted by Baytursınlı. The *Әә* (*é*) vowel is an open-mid front unrounded vowel not present in Turkish, similar to an *e* vowel between *a* and *e* in Arabic. The semi-vowel *Vv* (*u/üw*) mentioned by Baytursınlı, is a *u/ü* vowel followed by a double-lipped *w*, representing two sounds, which makes the alphabet not completely phonetic.

Consonants include: *Bә* (*b*), *Cc* (*ç*), *Çç* (*c*), *Dd* (*d*), *Gg* (*g*), *Ғғ* (*ğ*), *Hh* (*h*), *Jj* (*y*), *Kk* (*k*), *Ll* (*l*), *Mm* (*m*), *Nn* (*n*), *Ңң* (*ñ*), *Pp* (*p*), *Qq* (*q*), *Rr* (*r*), *Ss* (*s*), *Tt* (*t*), *Zz* (*z*). It is notable that there is no letter for the *j* sound in the alphabet. The *j* sound in Kazakh texts was first seen in Cyrillic after the publication of İbray Altınсарın’s book in 1879, following his death (Altınсарın, *Mektubat*). The alphabet organized by Ahmet Baytursınlı using the Arabic alphabet also did not include the *j* sound.

The alphabet does not include the consonants *ç*, *f*, *h*, *x*, and *v*, reflecting a deliberate attempt to exclude phonemes considered non-native or unnecessary for the phonological structure of the language. Instead, the system incorporates distinct letters to represent both the back (thick) and front (thin) variants of the velar consonants *k* and *g*, thereby ensuring greater phonetic precision. In addition, the inclusion of a separate letter for the *ñ* sound demonstrates an effort to accurately reflect nasal articulation specific to Turkic phonology. Taken together, these features indicate that the alphabet was designed not merely as a graphic reform but as a phonologically

motivated system aimed at aligning written representation more closely with spoken language.

The Latin-based Kazakh alphabet, originally adopted in 1929, underwent a revision in 1938 by the Kazakhstan Central Implementation Committee and the Soviet National Commissariat (Şirin User 292). The most significant modification in this revision was the reordering of the alphabet and the addition of three consonants. The new sequence of letters was structured based on the order used in the Cyrillic alphabet. As a result of these changes, the revised alphabet followed the sequence: *a* (*a*), *б* (*b*), *в* (*w*), *г* (*g*), *д* (*d*), *е* (*e*), *с* (*c*), *з* (*z*), *и* (*i*), *й* (*i*), *к* (*k*), *л* (*l*), *м* (*m*), *н* (*n*), *о* (*o*), *п* (*p*), *р* (*r*), *с* (*s*), *т* (*t*), *у* (*ü*), *ф* (*f*), *х* (*h*), *қ* (*ğ*), *қ* (*k*), *с* (*ş*), *һ* (*h*), *ң* (*ñ*), *ө* (*ö*), *ү* (*ü*), *ь* (*i*)² (Tölebayev and Medetov 39-40).

The booklet identifies a total of eleven vowels, represented by the symbols *a* (*a*), *е* (*e*), *и* (*i*), *й* (*i*), *о* (*o*), *у* (*ü*), *ө* (*ö*), *ү* (*ü*), and *ь* (*i*), indicating a deliberate effort to capture vowel harmony and vocalic distinctions characteristic of Turkic languages. In addition, the system comprises twenty-one consonants, represented by *б* (*b*), *в* (*w*), *г* (*g*), *д* (*d*), *с* (*c*), *з* (*z*), *к* (*k*), *л* (*l*), *м* (*m*), *н* (*n*), *п* (*p*), *р* (*r*), *с* (*s*), *т* (*t*), *ф* (*f*), *х* (*h*), *қ* (*ğ*), *қ* (*k*), *с* (*ş*), *һ* (*h*), and *ң* (*ñ*). This distribution reflects a phonologically oriented design in which both vowel quality and consonantal articulation are systematically represented, underscoring the reformers' intention to align orthography closely with spoken usage.

The revised Latin-based alphabet can be regarded as a transitional script in the process of shifting to the Cyrillic alphabet, as this transition is evident from both the arrangement of letters and their phonetic values. This is further supported by the fact that, at the beginning of the year when the reform of the Latin-based Kazakh alphabet took place, conferences were held among Kazakh intellectuals in April and May 1938 to discuss the transition to the Cyrillic script (Şirin User 294). Following these conferences, S.A. Amancolov, director of the Kazakh Language Institute, developed a proposal for the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet. This proposal was subsequently published in the *Sotsialistik Kazakstan* newspaper on August 8, 1939. Shortly thereafter, another conference on alphabet reform and orthography was convened on August 27, 1940, during which the official adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet was announced. On November 10, 1940, during the

fifth session of the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, the law titled “*Transition from the Latinized Kazakh Script to the New Alphabet Based on the Russian Script*” was ratified, finalizing the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet (Şirin User 294). As a result, Kazakhstan became the tenth Turkic community to adopt the Cyrillic script. Kazakhstan holds particular significance due to its vast geographical expanse, which links it to the Siberian Turkic communities, the Idel-Ural region, and the densely populated Turkic communities residing in cultural centers to the south. Given this geopolitical context, Kazakhstan’s position in the broader Turkic linguistic and cultural landscape became even more prominent.

In the Cyrillic alphabet accepted by Kazakhstan, the arrangement and phonetic values of letters are as follows: *Aa* (*a*), *Бб* (*b*), *Вв* (*v*), *Гг* (*g*), *Дд* (*d*), *Ее* (*ye*), *Жж* (*j*), *Зз* (*z*), *Ии* (*i, iy*), *Йй* (*y*), *Кк* (*k*), *Лл* (*l*), *Мм* (*m*), *Нн* (*n*), *Оо* (*o*), *Пп* (*p*), *Рр* (*r*), *Сс* (*s*), *Тт* (*t*), *Уу* (*u*), *Фф* (*f*), *Хх* (*h*), *Цц* (*ts*), *Чч* (*ç*), *Шш* (*ş*), *Щщ* (*şç*), *Ъъ* (*hard sign*), *Ыы* (*ı*), *Ьь* (*soft sign*), *Ээ* (*e*), *Юю* (*yü*), *Яя* (*ya*), *Іі* (*i*), *Ққ* (*q*), *Ғғ* (*ğ*), *Ңң* (*ñ*), *Әә* (*ä*), *Өө* (*ö*), *Үү* (*uw*), *Үү* (*ü*), *Һһ* (*h*) (Kazak SSR 3).

It is important to note the explanations regarding the classification and usage of letters in the alphabet, which increased the number of letters to forty-one (41) (Kazak SSR 3). The booklet categorizes the alphabet’s symbols into four main headings: vowels, semi-vowels, consonants, and symbols without phonetic value. Fourteen (14) letters are identified as vowels, namely: *Aa* (*a*), *Ee* (*ye*), *Ии* (*i*), *Оо* (*o*), *Уу* (*ü*), *Ыы* (*ı*), *Ээ* (*e*), *Юю* (*yü*), *Яя* (*ya*), *Іі* (*i*), *Әә* (*ä*), *Өө* (*ö*), *Үү* (*u*), *Үү* (*ü*) (Kazak SSR 4). While the letter *Йй* is classified as a semi-vowel, *Ъъ* (hard sign) and *Ьь* (soft sign) are given as symbols without phonetic value. There are twenty-four consonants, namely: *Бб* (*b*), *Вв* (*v*), *Гг* (*g*), *Дд* (*d*), *Жж* (*j*), *Зз* (*z*), *Кк* (*k*), *Лл* (*l*), *Мм* (*m*), *Нн* (*n*), *Пп* (*p*), *Рр* (*r*), *Сс* (*s*), *Тт* (*t*), *Хх* (*h*), *Фф* (*f*), *Цц* (*ts*), *Шш* (*ş*), *Щщ* (*şç*), *Чч* (*ç*), *Ққ* (*q*), *Ғғ* (*ğ*), *Ңң* (*ñ*), *Һһ* (*h*) (Kazak SSR 4).

Although the alphabet table presents a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, the explanatory section on the letters clarifies that some letters represent multiple phonemes. This statement regarding the multiple phonetic values of certain letters reveals the underlying intentions of the alphabet’s creators. This can also be inferred from the section titled “*Alphabet Arrangement*”. Furthermore, the title “*Qazaq Edebiyet Tiliniñ*

Jaña Orfografiyası” (*The New Orthography of the Kazakh Literary Language*) suggests the deliberate construction of a new literary language distinct from the one that had existed up to that point.

As stated under the section titled as “*Alphabet Arrangement*”, in the booklet: “The arrangement of Russian letters in the alphabet is preserved as in Russian, because: to ensure consistency in document ordering (such as the date of the Constitution) and in item classification in both Kazakh and Russian, and to maintain the same alphabetical order in Kazakh and Russian dictionaries” and additionally, Kazakh letters are placed after Russian letters, and their order is determined based on frequency of usage: *І, Қ, Ғ, Ң, Ә, Ө, Ы, У, Һ*” (Kazak SSR 4) explanations are provided.

After this clarification, the usage of vowels is explained through examples. Although the table presents a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, it is observed that this correspondence is Following this clarification, the booklet explains the use of vowels through illustrative examples. Although the accompanying table suggests a one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds, this principle is not consistently observed in actual usage. In the section entitled “Phonetics”, it is stated that the letters *a*, *o*, and *u* are written in all syllables; however, examples such as *Украина*, *Ауда*, and *кино* demonstrate that the letter *Ии* represents not only the vowel – *i* but also the sequences – *iy* and *y*. This discrepancy between the prescriptive model presented in the table and the practical application observed in the examples reveals a degree of flexibility in orthographic practice and highlights the challenges inherent in standardizing vowel representation within the alphabet (Kazak SSR 4). In the “*phonetics*” section of the book, it is emphasized that the letters *a*, *o*, and *u* will be written in all syllables. Examples like *Украина*, *Ауда*, *кино* show that the letter *Ии* represents not only – *i* but also – *iy* and *y* (Kazak SSR 4) sounds.

After mentioning that *У* is written in all syllables, a reminder is given that “*the letter will turn into a semi-vowel when it comes after vowels*” and “*will be pronounced as a thin sound after thin vowels, and as a thick sound after thick vowels*” (Kazak SSR 4). From the examples given, it can be understood that the letter changes into a long *u* and *ü* sounds or a combination of a vowel and a consonant – *uw/-üw* when it comes after vowels.

Similarly, after mentioning that the letter *e* will be written in all syllables, it is stated that it will be pronounced as *ye* in Russian words and will be written at the beginning of words borrowed from Russian (Kazak SSR 4). While this letter is pronounced as a *y* – derivative at the beginning of words in Russian, it is pronounced as *e* within words (Fono Yayınları). However, it is observed over time that this letter is also used in Turkish words and its pronunciation evolves with a *y* – derivative in words starting with *e* – vowels.

It is stated that the letter *Я* represents a combination of the sounds *ü* and *a* and that, in Russian words, it is pronounced as *ə* following consonants. In the case of Russian loanwords, however, the sound *я* is described as being realized as a palatalized *ə* when it occurs after consonants, indicating a contextual variation in pronunciation (Kazak SSR 4).

Although it is stated that the sound represented by the letter *Ә* is the thin version of the *a* vowel at the beginning of words, the rule that *a* will be written when the *ə* sound is not fully heard or is doubtful in subsequent syllables raises the suspicion that it was introduced to maintain the thickness-thinness harmony in Kazakh.

It is stated that the letter *Я* represents a combination of the sounds *ü* and *a* and that, in Russian words, it is pronounced as *ə* following consonants. In the case of Russian loanwords, however, the sound *я* is described as being realized as a palatalized *ə* when it occurs after consonants, indicating a contextual variation in pronunciation (Kazak SSR 5). A reminder is given about the letter *Ю*, stating that it will be pronounced as a thick sound after thick vowels and as a soft sound after soft vowels, and in words borrowed from Russian; its vowel will be pronounced as *u* only (Kazak SSR 5). The fact that its usage in Russian is only with *u* indicates that the letter can be pronounced as both a thick and a soft sound in Kazakh words.

The letter *Й* is described as a semi-vowel and is written both before and after vowels except in the first syllable. In the first reminder, it is emphasized that this letter is written after *и* in borrowed words and simple nouns. In the second reminder, it is mentioned that when added to verb bases like кейі, байы, it is abbreviated as кеиді, кеиды and баиды, баиды (Kazak SSR 6), which implies that the letter *и* also represents the *y* and *yı/yi* sounds in this case.

The usage of consonants is explained as follows: after stating that the letters *б, з, д, ж, 3, к, л, м, н, п, с, м, х, и* are written everywhere, it is emphasized that *ч, ц, ф, в* are used in words borrowed from Russian into Kazakh, and it is reminded that *в* is written after surnames (Kazak SSR 6). However, it is also highlighted that some letters specified for usage in Russian borrowed words will also be used in certain external Kazakh words, with the example of the word *аҫқұ* (*chef*) among these words (Kazak SSR 6).

It is noted that the letters *қ, Һ, and Ұ* are used specifically in Kazakh words, indicating that these graphemes were retained to represent phonemes distinctive to Kazakh phonology (Kazak SSR 5). In addition, the letter *Һ*, which was also present in the previous alphabet, is explicitly stated to be written wherever its corresponding sound is articulated, reflecting a continuity in orthographic practice and an emphasis on phonetic transparency within the writing system (Kazak SSR 6).

Under the heading “*Symbols Without Sound Correspondence*,” it is reminded that the symbols *Ѣ* and *Ѥ* are used in words borrowed from Russian into Kazakh, with the *Ѣ* indicating a separation between two sounds, and the *Ѥ* softening the preceding consonant. However, it is stated that if there is a softening symbol after a consonant and a thin vowel follows this symbol, the symbol is omitted (Kazak SSR 6).

The Morphology section of the book examines the orthographic conventions governing the spelling of foreign-origin words incorporated into Kazakh. Under the section titled “*Tilimizge basqa tilden engen sözder orfografiyası*” (*Orthography of Words Borrowed from Other Languages*), it is stated: “*Recently introduced international words, adopted into Kazakh through Russian, are written as they appear in Russian.*” (Kazak SSR 6) This is immediately followed by the statement: “*Words that entered Kazakh from other languages (Arabic and Persian) prior to the reform are written as they have been used in literary texts. Their spelling is provided in the Spelling Dictionary.*” (Kazak SSR 6). These orthographic regulations, implemented alongside the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet, significantly contributed to the divergence of Kazakh from other Turkic written languages—arguably even more so than the script change itself. By mandating that foreign words be transcribed according to Russian phonetic and orthographic norms rather than being adapted to Kazakh phonology and structural conventions, these rules hindered

the natural assimilation of loanwords into Kazakh, thereby reinforcing the influence of Russian linguistic structures.

Under the title “Singarmonizm Zańı” (Harmony Law), the section “Davıstılardıń Ündesüvi” (Harmony of Vowels) explains the harmony of vowels in Turkish. However, a rule is mentioned that even if the vowel in the second syllable of a word with a narrow round vowel in the first syllable is pronounced differently, it should still be pronounced as a narrow flat vowel (Kazak SSR 9), which disrupts the flatness-roundness harmony. The emphasis on this rule actually shows that there is a flatness-roundness harmony in Kazakh. Under the title “Davıssızdar Ündestigi” (Harmony without Vowels), changes in suffixes attached to roots are discussed, but it is noted that some place names, despite ending in a vowel, take a suffix beginning with a hard consonant like – tı (not – tlı), which are important examples showing that the spelling guide was prepared in line with the regime’s desires, and this explains why the place name formerly known as Almalık (as seen in older sources like Togan 102, 112, 536) is now Almatı. This change of many well-known place names has also disconnected geography from its history.

The introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet was intended to facilitate literacy and promote the adoption of a standardized writing system. However, the preferential treatment given to Russian in the orthography of Russian loanwords reflects the strong influence and pressure exerted by Russia on the Kazakh language reform process leading up to 1940. It is evident that the successive changes in the alphabet played a pivotal role in shaping the Kazakh written language.

One notable linguistic transformation was the substitution of the *j* sound for the *c* sound in Kazakh—a phonetic shift not originally present in the Turkic written tradition. This change began with the publication of *Kirgizskaya Hrestomatiya* in Cyrillic by Ibray Altınсарın in 1879, where the *j* sound was introduced in Turkish-origin words. Over time, this modification evolved into the complete replacement of the *c* sound with *j*. This phonetic transformation, alongside the shifts in Kazakh orthography and successive changes to the alphabet, contributed to the increasing divergence of the Kazakh language from both historical and contemporary Turkic written traditions.

Rather than establishing a written language based on a single dialect, linguistic variations found in different dialects were generalized, and efforts were made to standardize them. However, with the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940, numerous concessions were made to Russian, leading to the replacement of well-established linguistic forms used by native speakers with exceptional usages. These sporadic modifications disrupted the historical, geographical, and cultural continuity of future generations, disconnecting them from their linguistic roots.

One of the primary privileges granted in the orthographic adaptation of Russian words was the inclusion of letters representing phonemes unique to Russian. This was followed by the adoption of the original form and pronunciation of Russian loanwords. Over time, these Russian-specific letters began to be applied to the spelling of native Kazakh words as well. For instance, in Russian, the letter *e* is pronounced with a *y* – glide at the beginning of words, and this practice was subsequently extended to Kazakh. As a result, the insertion of a *y* – glide before all Turkic-origin words beginning with *e* vowels became widespread. This development illustrates how the orthographic conventions applied to Russian words influenced both the spelling and pronunciation of Kazakh words. Additionally, the decision to write Arabic and Persian loanwords according to their colloquial pronunciation resulted in inconsistent spelling conventions across newly emerging Turkic written languages, particularly concerning religious terminology. Consequently, the spelling and pronunciation of commonly shared Arabic and Persian loanwords diverged significantly. Furthermore, the regulation that Arabic and Persian words should be transcribed based on popular usage—alongside the enforced application of a broad *e* sound between *a* and *e* in Arabic and Persian borrowings—led to the adoption of an *ä* (ә) vowel. This vowel, absent from previous Turkic written languages, was formally incorporated into the alphabet, further differentiating Kazakh orthography from historical Turkic script traditions.

Suffixes, which have historically varied in vowel harmony—adapting as thick or thin depending on the root word since the Old Turkic period—began to undergo consonantal changes as well, influenced by the final sound of the base word. This development led to the emergence of multiple suffixal variations.

Today's Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet contains a total of 41 symbols, with *Aa* (*a*), *Ee* (*ye*), *Iiu* (*i*), *Oo* (*o*), *Yy* (*ü*), *By* (*ı*), *Əə* (*e*), *Юю* (*yü*), *Яя* (*ya*), *Іі* (*i*), *Әә* (*ä*), *Өө* (*ö*), *Үү* (*u*), *Үү* (*ü*) being considered vowels, although among these, *Ee* (*ye*) represents two sounds with a *y* – consonant before it at the beginning of words, namely *Юю* (*yü*) and *Яя* (*ya*). These symbols can be used both with thin and thick vowels in Turkic-origin words, despite being pronounced with a single vowel in Russian words. Although these letters were included in the alphabet under the pretext of representing the *y* sound and the vowels following the *y* sound only in Russian words, they are also used in many Turkic-origin words.

The symbol **Yy** (**ü**) represents the pronunciation of – *uw/-üw* at the end of words; however, it is sometimes used interchangeably with **w** in certain contexts, while in others, it exclusively denotes a long **u** sound. Similarly, the letter **Ии** (**i**, **iy**), which is considered a semivowel, serves multiple functions: it represents a long **i** in some cases, acts as a **y** glide following an **i** in others, and functions as a **y** consonant in different contexts. Moreover, the usage of these two symbols in Russian loanwords further complicates their application. Despite the existence of distinct symbols for both vowel and consonant groups represented by these letters, their inconsistent usage raises questions about underlying motivations.

The inclusion of the letters **Ии** (**ts**) and **Шш** (**şç**)—which represent multiple consonants—into the alphabet could be considered appropriate. However, although separate symbols already exist for the phonemes represented by these letters, their incorporation into the alphabet exclusively for use in Russian loanwords raises concerns about the underlying motivations behind this decision.

Since the Old Turkic period, there has been a tradition of using “thick” forms of certain consonants in writing. However, these instances primarily stem from the limited availability of vowel symbols and serve as indicators of the thick pronunciation of vowels. The usage of certain consonants in their thick forms during the era of Arabic script can be viewed as a continuation of this tradition. Consequently, the normalization of a similar phenomenon in the modern Kazakh alphabet is to be expected. Nevertheless, in Russian and Western-origin words, even when the syllabic vowel is phonetically “thick” the practice of using a single consonant provides an advantage to

Russian and Western-origin languages while simultaneously complicating the writing system for Kazakh.

Conclusion

The Kazakh written language, as a branch of the Turkic language family with a long-established literary tradition, has diverged from its status as a literary language and has increasingly taken on the characteristics of a regional language due to various historical and linguistic factors. The incorporation of consonants and vowels absent from the broader Turkic linguistic tradition, along with inconsistencies in orthographic rules outlined in spelling guides designed for alphabet use, are critical issues that have shaped the development of modern Kazakh written language. These challenges, which have significantly influenced the evolution of Kazakh orthography, continue to pose major obstacles to its further development.

On one hand, this situation has complicated the acquisition of Kazakh as a native language, while on the other, it has caused the language to remain subordinate to Russian, leading to a gradual erosion of linguistic identity until Kazakhstan's independence. As a result, despite Kazakh being the official language, Russian-language educational institutions have continued to dominate, with Russian being widely used in official correspondence and various levels of government. Consequently, Kazakh has persisted primarily as a spoken language in everyday communication rather than being fully institutionalized as a written administrative and scholarly language.

Contribution Rate Statement

The authors' contribution rates are as follows:

1. Author – 60% (The acquisition of sources published in Russia and Kazakhstan, and the identification, analysis, and translation into English of the data related to the subject of the article contained in these sources)
2. Author – 40% (The acquisition and analysis of sources published in Türkiye)

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study. There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

Notes

- ¹ Şirin User mentioned that this alphabet consists of thirty (30) letters and also added the letter «x,» which is not in the alphabet (292). The equivalents of the letters in terms of sound in the alphabet are given based on the corresponding Arabic letters (Beyimbet).
- ² In the sequence provided by Şirin User, the letter ö comes before the letter h (292), while in the alphabet teaching book by Tölebayev and Medetov, the letter ħ comes after the letter h, and then the letter ö (39). Additionally, in Şirin User's alphabet, there is the letter ı which is not present in the alphabet provided by Tölebayev and Medetov (292, 39). Tölebayev and Medetov provided the sequence of letters by placing a number indicating the order of each letter on the left side of the letter and giving the pronunciation or name of the letter on the right side (39). The sound equivalents of the letters in the Latin-based alphabet, which were revised in 1938, are given based on the examples provided in Tölebayev and Medetov's book (3-40).

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