Writing the Nation: The Impact of Latin Alphabet on Kazakh Identity

by

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Abstract

The thesis provides an analysis of the current political discourses and social practices on the socio-linguistic transition in Kazakhstan. The implementation of language policies, i.e. Latinization of Kazakh alphabet, resulted in a lot of criticism and public dissatisfaction over the current government's strategies to realize this initiative. Besides, the transition to the Latin alphabet has been continuously challenging the issue of identification of many young Kazakhstani people up to today. The main contribution of my research is that decree on Latin script was signed in 2017 and there is not much literature about this topic. In order to understand the peculiarity of identification of Kazakhstani citizens, ethnic and national identity should be analyzed in different periods – during the time of the Kazakh Khanate, when Kazakhstan was the part of the Soviet Union and in the times of independent Kazakhstan. The system of boundary-making during Kazakh Khanate, Soviet oppression of Kazakh language, language hierarchy, multiple changes of the Kazakh alphabet – all of which have made a significant impact on the identity of contemporary Kazakhstani citizen and nation-building policies of Kazakhstan. The methodology part is based on triangulation of data: a discourse analysis of language reform and public statements related to Latin shift, survey among young people aged 18-26, and interviews with teachers of Russian and Kazakh languages, state worker, and representative of the quasi-governmental sector. The survey and ten in-depth interviews with randomly chosen volunteers from the survey provide valuable data for the identification struggle of the younger generation.

Key words: Kazakhstan, Latin alphabet, Kazakh identity, Kazakhstani identity, kazakhization, language policy.

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Introduction

The matter of language was always an interesting topic for me. I was born in the central part of Kazakhstan and when I was two years old our family moved to newly assigned capital Astana. I spoke with my family in Russian although both my parents are fluent in Kazakh. I went to Russian kindergarten and my first 6 years of school were completely in Russian too. My whole life I was living in Kazakhstan, but my first words were not in Kazakh, and even my inner voice is in Russian too. My family was not the only case, there are many Russian speaking young people whose parents dominantly speak Kazakh rather than the Russian language. I thought a lot about why that is so, but I did not have one single explanation for this. When my parents started their careers, knowledge of the Russian language was not simply an additional skill, but rather a prerequisite for any white-collar jobs. Therefore, one of the possible reasons for choosing Russian over Kazakh in child upbringing might be a reflection of the socio-linguistic situation of that time, which has resulted in thoughts that with good proficiency of Russian children might have more job or study opportunities later in life.

When I entered university, I met many young people who have the same fate as me – having low or even no proficiency in the Kazakh language. Language is an essential part of identity, which leads us to the question: is it a part of civic or ethnic identity, or both? Can I be Kazakh if I do not speak Kazakh? Can I call Kazakh my mother tongue if I do not speak and do not understand it? Or should I call myself Kazakhstani? What is the difference between them and the peculiarity of each of these terms? Considering oneself Kazakh over Kazakhstani means highlighting ethnic belongingness over civic one. Being Kazakh means having Kazakh ancestry, while Kazakhstani is a more collective term that is used to describe citizenship or national belonging of different ethnicities living on the territory of Kazakhstan (Kesici 2011).

Identity is a very ambiguous term, it can be built, constructed, and changed (Brubaker 2004, 24). Identity could be compared with the sponge that absorbs not only the environment around but also the events which in turn shape and leave marks on it. The identity of modern Kazakhstani citizens faced many challenges on its way. Starting from the fifteenth century, the invasion of the Russian Imperial Empire aimed to colonize the whole Central Asian region. The nation-building policies of the Soviet government were properly designed by Kremlin and then artificially nurtured to the titular republics (Levin 2017, 271). Furthermore, language and migration policies introduced by the Soviet government noticeably affected the demographic, ethnic, and political composition of the Kazakh SSR so as independent Kazakhstan after that. After independence in 1991, the Kazakhstani government deadlocked; they had to decide which way to choose – either promote Kazakhstani national identity and equality of all ethnicities and nationalities living in Kazakhstan by allowing the presence of the Russian language on all levels, i.e. from governmental to societal but alienating Kazakh-speaking population; or promote Kazakh ethnic identity increasing the influence of Kazakh culture and presence of the Kazakh language but alienating Russian-speaking population which was dominant in the urban areas at that moment. Kazakhstani government did not choose any extreme measures and tried to succeed in both. On the one hand, there were more efforts in favor of the ethnic component. On the other hand, the Russian language was and is still more dominant in urban areas, in different contexts and it is more commonly used by the younger generation. The government tried to unite nationalities of Kazakhstan by promoting Kazakhstani identity that is based on neo-Soviet model of identity (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2017). The main argument for Kazakhstani identity was being united under the collective civic term, although having different mother tongues and dominant languages. However, the attempts have failed, and the majority of the representatives identify themselves based on

ethnic affiliation. As a result, the dilemma of identification between Kazakh and Kazakhstani could be observed among young people.

The initiative to replace the Cyrillic alphabet to Latin was introduced in 2017, the decree was signed, but it is still not fully implemented in a practical way on both governmental and social levels. The idea of switching Kazakh writing to Latin touched the issue of self-identification among all Kazakhstani citizens. The problem is that the Cyrillic version of the Kazakh alphabet is known by everyone, but it does not fully reflect the peculiarity of the Kazakh language, it has several phonemes which were borrowed from the Russian language. While the Latin alphabet is expected to increase the level of ethnic belongingness among people, but the approved version of the alphabet was met with critique and dissatisfaction. Some people who do not speak and have only basic knowledge of Kazakh language see new language policy as a new barrier in learning the language, which is becoming a compulsory proficiency at the job market. With the introduction of the Latin alphabet many Kazakhstani young people became less attracted to learn the Kazakh language, less attached to Kazakhstan and Kazakh ethnicity, and as a result struggle with identifying themselves. This trend is especially widespread among those whose native or dominant language is Russian. Afterward, this is the question I am interested in - the effect of language reform, i.e. Latinization of Kazakh alphabet, on Kazakh identity among the younger generation. In my thesis, I analyze the government's attempts to emphasize the revitalization of both ethnic and civic components in the national identity of Kazakhstani citizens. I argue that young ethnic Kazakh people support the idea of Latinization, moreover, it positively affects their ethnic belongingness. The trend is especially observed among the Kazakh-speaking population. While young ethnic Kazakh people who primarily speak the Russian language, support the Latin switch as well but give preference on national belonging rather than ethnic while identifying themselves.

There is a couple of hypotheses I had before starting the research, which claimed that place and region of birth have a direct influence on an individual's preference in terms of mother tongue and the language of strongest proficiency. I also expect that switch to Latin writing would positively reflect on ethnic identification among the Kazakh speaking population, while ethnic Kazakhs who speak predominantly Russian would react negatively or neutrally and might experience a certain level of alienation from their ethnicity, giving preference to national identity instead. Moreover, since signboards and many posts on social media are written in Latin Kazakh, I hypothesize that more than half of the respondents would be satisfied with the approved version of the Latin alphabet.

Latinization in Kazakhstan has just recently started, and it is still an on-going process, therefore, there is not much literature about its effect. The importance of my research is that Kazakhstan was one of the fifteen Soviet states and all of them have the same struggle of nation-building process at the beginning of their independence. For example, language hierarchy in Ukraine and Uzbekistan's failed attempt to switch to the Latin alphabet. Language is an important part of the culture, politics, and economics of state, any change in language policies significantly affects the education system, labor market, level of out-migration, most importantly individuals' self-identification and feeling of belonging. Moreover, the Kazakhstani case is very interesting because the Latinization of the alphabet might show Kazakhstan from different perspectives to the international arena by getting rid of Soviet legacy, transforming from post-Soviet state to modern, independent and competitive country. My research will be a valuable contribution to the study of the language's role in defining identity and in the area of identity building and nation-building in the Post-Soviet countries.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter of the thesis, I give analytical and theoretical background to the concept of identity. I would demonstrate

Kazakhstani case of ethnic and national identity belonging from different periods: during Kazakh Khanate, as part of the Soviet Union, and in the time of independent Kazakhstan. Moreover, I would illustrate the changes of the Kazakh alphabet and the role of language in pre-Soviet, Soviet, and current times. For applying theories of ethnicity and nationalism I will be relying on the works of Rogers Brubaker, Ernest Gellner, Eugen Weber, Zhuldyz Smagulova, Özgecan Kesici, Henryk Jankowski, Bora Kim, and Leila Tanayeva. The second chapter depicts discourse analysis of language policies and public statements about the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet. I would portray the present situation revolving around the Latin switch in governmental and quasi-governmental units based on in-depth interviews with representatives of those sectors. Additionally, the expert interviews with two teachers of Kazakh and Russian languages would be also analyzed. The last chapter of my thesis would be dedicated to the findings I have obtained from the online survey and in-depth interviews with young people. I would evaluate patterns and differences of opinions by young people about Latin switch, their language repertoire, and identification question.

Methodology

The methodology I chose is concentrated around the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet and its effect on young people. I adopt a multimethod approach combining discourse analysis of language policies, survey data analysis, and in-depth interviews. All quotations in the second and third chapters are translated and transcribed by me. For anonymity reasons, I used fake names of the interviewees. The discourse analysis of language policies and public statements touches the issue of Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet and public opinion regarding the following decree "On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" and a cultural project called "Trinity of languages". The content of the decree and its changes are discussed. I try to evaluate the aims, background, and politics behind the decrees. In addition, I compare the initial intentions regarding decree realization and its real implementation that resulted in a negative reaction of the public.

In order to better understand the Latinization process in Kazakhstan, I use target interviews. I have done expert interviews with two schoolteachers of the Kazakh language. Also, I was able to speak to workers of state bureaucracy and the quasi-governmental sector. Target interviews are chosen because the answers of the experts contribute to a bigger picture of the Latin switch inside of the particular institutions. The reason why I decided to talk to teachers is that workers in the education area would be the firsts who are expected to deal with the alphabet shift in practice. Another reason is that the teacher can share his/her opinion on behalf of a philologist, linguist, and pedagogue. Furthermore, one of the teachers teaches both Kazakh and Russian languages, which contributes to better familiarization with the question about the pros and cons of the Cyrillic Kazakh and the Latin Kazakh alphabets. The teachers were asked questions related to their professional opinion regarding the latest version of the alphabet, the Latin switch in general, and its effect on the Russian-speaking population. In

addition, questions related to switching in schools and its effect on the percentage of students in Kazakh schools were also discussed. While for state and Joint-Stock company workers, interview questions were mostly about language use on the workplace and the effect of Latin switch on documentation procedure. Interview with state bureaucrat helps me to evaluate the language situation, i.e. paperwork and informal language used during work time, within the government. While an interview with a quasi-governmental worker facilitates an analysis of the difference in decree realization between state and non-state actors. Their answers complement discourse analysis of language policies and public statements regarding Latinization and language reform in general. All of the interviews were conducted online and lasted for about 30-35 minutes.

Table 1. List of respondents of target interviews

	Name	Age	Gender	Occupation	Specialization
1	Zhuldyz	48	Female	Schoolteacher	Kazakh and Russian languages
2	Dauren	37	Male	Schoolteacher	Kazakh language
3	Daisy	55	Female	State worker	Finance
4	Charlotte	27	Female	Worker of Joint-Stock company	Human Resources

Discourse analysis of language policy helps me to define the vector for the survey questions. A Survey is chosen as one of the methods because it allows asking both open and closed questions, it requires less time to fill in for respondent, and it contributes to better

visualization of the answers if percentage calculation is needed. The designed survey numerically complements methodology as its results might be presented as quantitative data. Survey questions are designed to obtain information about participant's background such as education level, native language, place of birth, occupation, language choice in particular contexts, such as the language person uses the most with family, friends, colleagues, social media, etc., and individual attitude toward Latinization of alphabet and what kind of effect it has on different aspects of their life.

I have designed the survey in three languages: Kazakh, Russian, and English; I distributed it via different social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Vkontakte, Instagram, and Telegram. I shared the survey in different university chats, work chats, Facebook and Vkontakte groups, friends, and friends of friends' chats with an approximately equal percentage of Russian and Kazakh speakers. The total amount of respondents of the survey is 194, however, 72 responses are excluded based on the inconsistency of the requirements for the participants, such as age and city of residence. There are 54% of females and 46% of males from the accepted 112 responses.

The target population for the survey is young people aged 18 to 26 years living in Astana. The reason for this choice is that people of this age were born during independent Kazakhstan and they were witnesses of how society was transformed because by the time they were growing up they experienced language shifts and changes in their language policies themselves. The age of the target population includes students, employed and unemployed individuals. In addition, as was mentioned, one of my hypotheses claims that geographical location in terms of place of birth is expected to have a certain effect on an individual's attitude toward Latinization and self-identification in general.

In-depth interviews are done with randomly chosen participants who agreed to leave their contact information in the survey. The interview method is chosen because there is not much qualitative research done on this topic in Kazakhstan. During the interviews, the participants are asked further questions about the language use, identification of mother tongue, and their attitude toward Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet. The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed me to stick with the core topics and at the same time ask additional questions where it was necessary. All interviews were conducted online and lasted for 30-45 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Kazakh and Russian languages. In total, I conducted 10 interviews.

Table 2. List of respondents of individual interviews

Name	Age	Place and region of birth and	Mother tongue	Most comfortable language	Identify themselves
Jane	23	Not in Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakh
Askar	22	Central Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakh
Sanzhar	22	Central Kazakhstan (Rural area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakh
Kamshat	24	North Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakhstani
Kira	23	East Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakhstani

Alibek	26	East Kazakhstan (Rural area)	Kazakh language	Kazakh language	Kazakh
Mustafa	23	East Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Russian language	Kazakh
Dastan	19	West Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh and Russian languages	Russian language	Kazakhstani
Tomiris	26	South Kazakhstan (Urban area)	Kazakh language	Kazakh language	Kazakh
Bakhtiyar	25	South Kazakhstan (Rural are)	Kazakh language	Kazakh language	Kazakh

Chapter 1. Kazakh identity through the centuries

I wish to start my thesis by making an attempt to outline social processes that shaped the ethnic and national identity of Kazakhstan's citizens and their language use during pre-Soviet, the Soviet times, and after becoming an independent state. The historical background of the Kazakh identity would be analyzed in order to see how Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet affects young people's self-identification in terms of being Kazakh or Kazakhstani. The main difference between the two concepts is that Kazakh is based on ethnic belonging and it could be referred to as ethnic Kazakh nation. While the term "Kazakhstani" is mainly about nationhood or citizenship, it illustrates a civic nation that includes all ethnicities living on the territory of Kazakhstan. The chapter is divided into three subchapters that illustrate major events that affected the Kazakh identity.

1.1. Formation of Kazakh ethnicity during Kazakh Khanate

The dilemma between Kazakh and Kazakhstani has its roots deep in the past. However, in order to understand it more deeply, we should look back to the fifteenth century when there was Kazakh Khanate headed by Khan. Due to military expansion, the Kazakh territory became big; it was difficult to rule by one individual, therefore, the Khanate was divided into three hordes (zhuz) - The Great Horde (*Uly zhuz*), the Middle Horde (*Orta zhuz*) and the Small Horde (*Kishi zhuz*) (Kesici 2011, 36). At that time Kazakhs were the only ethnocultural group living on that territory, so the division was made based on territory and was not followed with any cultural and linguistic differentiation between three hordes.

The idea of belonging to one of three hordes is not only an accepted idea of genealogy among Kazakh people, but it is also the main criteria to have Kazakh ethnicity (Kesici 2011, 37). Knowing to which horde your family belongs helps in identifying ancestors, which is also

an important issue in Kazakh culture. The system of boundary-making among Kazakhs was based not only on shared culture, language, and history but also kinship understood as blood ties. In other words, you are not Kazakh if your ancestors did not fall into one of three hordes.

Furthermore, because back in the fifteenth century, ethnic Kazakhs lived only on the territory of the present-day area of Kazakhstan, and the territory was also one of the main criteria to have to be ethnic Kazakh. Therefore, the state could be considered as a powerful "identifier" because it can create identities, moreover, the state has material and symbolic resources to impose a system of classification (Brubaker 2004; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Rogers Brubaker (2004) argued that ethnicity, race, and nationhood are not things in the world, but perspectives on the world (17). Ethnicity and nationhood provide individuals not only with a sense of belonging, groupness, attachment, but they also shape an individual's way of thinking and interpretation. Belonging to certain ethnic groups shapes an individual's mind in terms of perception, identification, and classification.

Before the 19th century, the Kazakh culture was oral, and the writing system was absent. Because of the influence of Islamic neighbors, Kazakh people adopted the Arabic alphabet in the 19th century (Kim 2018). The division into three hordes brought many advantages for administrative terms, but it also brought many drawbacks. Tsarist Empire used the division of Kazakh Khanate in own purposes. The main goal was to colonize the Central Asian region starting from the regions closer to its border (Ornstein 1959). According to Jonathan Levin (2017), foreign occupation brought demographic, ethnic, political, and religious changes into the Central Asian region (265). The colonizing force of the Russian Imperial Empire has had dramatic consequences that could be observed even today. For example, because of the low literacy level, there was a need for a bigger number of schools. Tsarist colonizers started the russification process by opening Russian schools and spreading Russian culture in Central

Asia. The perception of the Russian language as the language of the "elite" has origins in the 19th century. Language hierarchy is also observed later in Kazakh history, i.e. after joining the Soviet Union, which in turn has its effect on modern Kazakhstani society.

1.2. Kazakh nation during the Soviet Union

Before joining the Soviet Union, there was no "Kazakh nation". In 1924, Joseph Stalin implemented "National Territorial Delimitation" that lead to the emergence of five new republics: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan (Levin 2017, 265). The states were divided via artificially created borders with which the identities of all five states were built and then brought up by the Soviet policymakers. In 1927, Arabic letters were changed to Latin, which was designed by Kazakh scholar Akhmet Baitursynuly (Tanayeva 2007, Iskhan, Ospanova, and Dautova 2014). The decree about the transition to the Latin script was about all Turkic-family languages. According to Iskhan et al (2014), switching from Arabic to Latin sets close ties among them and unite the Turkic-speaking countries. Soviets in their turn aimed to prevent Islamization in Central Asia and changing writing systems was the initial step in entering the modern world and decreasing the influence of Islamic states (Tanayeva 2007).

The Soviet Union was a home for more than 120 ethnicities and nationalities. In order to conceive the idea of one nation in people's minds, the government tried to impose policies that would eventually result in all ethnic groups melting into one Soviet nation (Kesici 2011, 40). One such policy was *"korenizaciya"* that took place in the late 1920s and in -30s. The achievements of *"korenizaciya"* was an increased level of education in all Soviet republics (Kesici 2011, 41). Ernest Gellner's main argument is that nation and nationalism occur in developed industrialized societies in which individuals have a certain degree of education,

particular skills required for labor, and common recognition as members of one culture (Gellner 2008, 34). Following this logic, *"korenizaciya"* policy positively affected the uniqueness and originality of the ethnicities living in the Soviet Union by increasing literacy level and knowledge of titular languages among people of Soviet republics. The subsidizing of republican economies and the fostering of national cultures and languages were pursued in tandem with the homogenizing vision of "Soviet man" (Brubaker 2004). Stalin wrote: "There is no mandatory state language – either in the proceedings or in the school" meaning that each republic has a choice and a right to decide which language(s) would correspond to the composition of its population (Iskhan et al 2014, 45). Therefore, the Kazakh language was strongly promoted on every level on the territory of Kazakh SSR during the period of *"korenizaciya"*.

It is essential to consider the nation as a cultural object. Every nation has its heritage which includes music, literature, language, traditions, and a general notion of what we call "home" (Poole 1999, 12). What is the first feature that helps you to identify that a certain person is the same nation as yours? It is not always phenotypical features such as appearance, race, hair color, stature. A person would understand the connection between themselves and another person when they hear the voice, particularly the language in which the person speaks. Common language may blur the differences between the two strangers. Therefore, language plays a role of a bridge between an individual and the public. With those who we speak the same language, we can be more open, we can share experiences, thoughts, jokes. Our native language opens a door to the outside world. "Linguistic nationalism is simply a particular expression of ethnic nationalism" (Brubaker 2004, 140). Consequently, the cultural unity of the nation is built on the basis of a common language (Poole 1999, 13).

Two people can consider each other as part of their nation only if they recognize that they both belong to the same culture and speak the same language. "As members of the nation recognize each other through the nation, they also recognize themselves" (Poole 1999, 11). Therefore, the term "nation" stands not only for the form of identification it is also a form of self-identification. However, as the promotion of titular languages and cultural heritage of the core nations were developing, ethnic and national minorities were left deprived (Kesici 2011, 41). As a result, the Soviet government's plan to blur ethnic boundaries and to form one Soviet nation was failed, which in turn, gave an origin for a more brutal russification process in the USSR.

Failed attempts to form the "Soviet man" made the government try opposite politics - to form a new identity that would not be the united mix of all ethnicities living in the USSR, but a new homogenous identity. Nationality in the Soviet Union was assigned based on descent, which was determined by ethnic belonging; it did not rely on place of residence and place of birth. Moreover, the titular language was one of the criteria to classify people based on their ethnic ancestry, while Russian was used as a tool to unite people under the constructed nationality of the "Soviet people". The identity of the "Soviet man" nationality was thoughtfully designed from scratch using cultural, linguistic, and ideological tools. Existing customary traditional practices such as folksongs, celebrations, and festivals were modified and institutionalized for the new national purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 6). The decree "On the compulsory learning of Russian language in Schools of National Republics" was signed and implemented in all Soviet republics. Common language, i.e. Russian language, was illustrated as the second mother tongue, which was used as a tool to unite different nationalities and to build visibility of equity among different ethnic groups.

According to Brubaker (2004), identity is a very ambiguous term, it is very fluid, and it could be constructed (29). Identity is a fundamental condition of social being, it is about self-understanding and self-identification. Moreover, identity could be understood as a collective phenomenon of "sameness" with other members of a particular group or category (Brubaker 2004, 34; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Such an emotional sense of belonging to a particular group makes individuals feel sympathy toward a fellow member of that group and feel the difference from people outside of that group. This was a major goal of the Soviet government – sameness among citizens of the USSR that would bring to the united single nation. The ideal version of "Soviet man" speaks Russian and shares all the values propagated by the Soviet Union. Being "Homo Sovieticus" was a lifestyle that could be compared with a set of practices governed by tactically accepted rules which aimed to maintain certain values and norms of behavior (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

Linguistic diversity was supported firstly, but it then became dangerous "when it was perceived as a threat to political that is, ideological-unity" (Weber 2007, 72). The Soviet regime had an antinational and very repressive character (Brubaker 2004, 53). The main aim was to lower the uniqueness of cultures and make them all be the same on the territory of the USSR. The russification of the Soviet republics was achieved due to migration and language policies. According to migration policy, ethnic Russians were relocated to different Soviet states. For example, according to the first Soviet census, in 1926, the percentage of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan was 20%, while in 1939, the amount has doubled (Tanayeva 2007). In 1937, the number of ethnic Kazakhs decreased by 41%, but the reason for that was not the flow of people, in contrast, more than 2 million Kazakh people died during the man-made famine, which had an official name *"collectivization",* making them a minority in own territory (Pianciola 2004; Bonnenfant 2012).

Stalin became worried about possible pan-Turkism and as a result, the Cyrillic alphabet was firstly introduced in Kazakh SSR in the late 1930s (Tanayeva 2007). The main problem was that the Cyrillic alphabet does not correspond to proper phonetic rules and pronunciation of the Kazakh language (Iskhan et al 2014). Among Turkic languages, the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet contains the biggest number of letters (Kim 2018, 13). There are 42 letters and it maintains the whole Russian alphabet in it (see Table 6). In addition, there are many letters which sounds do not exist in the Kazakh language at all. For example, *ч, ц, ф, в, х, щ, э, ю, я, ё, ь,* and *ъ*. The reason why they are presented is that there are a couple of borrowed words from Russian which remained untranslatable and were left in the original version. The question arises, does the Kazakh Cyrillic alphabet reflect Kazakh or Russian languages? (Kim 2018). The Russian language has a big influence on the Kazakh vocabulary and writing system. The switch to the Cyrillic alphabet was a foundation for further Russified policies (Kim 2018). Consequently, with the introduction of the Cyrillic script, the Kazakh language became "standard, modern, literate and Russified" (Tanayeva 2007, 79).

Another important change occurred in the naming system. Initially, a Kazakh name was composed of first name and last name which was a person's father's name with ending *-uly* or *-kyzy*, meaning *his* son or daughter. However, after joining the Soviet Union, the full names of Kazakhs became similar to Russian names (Feldbrugge, Berg, and Simons 1985, 527). Russian suffixes *-ова, -ева, -ев, -ин, -ина* were added at the end of Kazakh last names. Moreover, father's name was no longer used as the last name, it became separate part known as patronymic with Russian endings like *-вна* and *-вич.* The last name became the name of grandfather. Such change builds the wall between an individual and his/her ethnic belongingness. How can a person identify himself Kazakh even if his name is written according to Russian standards?

Migration policies tried to increase the percentage of Russian speakers in other Soviet states, thereby the increase of ethnic Russians resulted in the high demand for the Russian language. Throughout the all Soviet republics, two languages were studied - native and Russian. The Russian language was promoted as *lingua franca* and standard language in the USSR (Brubaker 1994, 51). Those who did not speak Russian are considered to be outsiders. Kazakhstani citizens realized that the knowledge of Russian languages became necessary in order to increase their social and economic status (Kim 2018). This led to a language hierarchy where the Russian language was on top, while other titular languages took secondary places. The Russian language was considered as an urban and elite language, the language of prestige, high culture, science, and power throughout the USSR (Bilaniuk 2005, 91). While other titular languages were thought to be rural, unsophisticated, and less valuable in society. Therefore, Weber's point about teaching people French was an important step in "civilizing" peasants and contributing to their integration into the modern world which could be applied to the Soviet logic in terms of teaching the Russian language (Weber 2007, 73). The major consequences were closing Kazakh schools and oppression of Kazakh language in the 1950s-60s (Smagulova 2008; Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 268). All official documentation was switched to Russian and knowledge of the Russian language became a mandatory qualification for any kind of job. Many Kazakh intellectuals and other people who refused to give up speaking Kazakh were called "national traitors" and were sent to Siberia and other camps.

Institutionalized definition of nationhood during Soviet times that was significantly affected the idea of a nation in the former Soviet republics after gaining independence (Brubaker 1994, 47). The nation-building process was done not by states themselves but by the Kremlin, in other words, histories and identities of the peoples of Central Asian countries were constructed by the third party and "nurtured" in the Soviet states of the Central Asian region

(Levin 2017, 271). As a result, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakh people as well as other citizens of titular republics experienced a crisis of identity in cultural, ethnic, and civic terms.

1.3. Kazakhstan as an independent nation-state

"Nationalism is primarily a political principle which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 2008). From this definition, it is possible to conclude that for Gellner, nationalism is a historical phenomenon on which national relations of contemporary states are based. Individuals are connected through a common history, especially certain important historical events or crises. Such a difficult time for ethnic groups usually results in better attachment to the history and own ethnic belonging. However, in the Kazakhstani case, the situation could not be easily explained following this logic. Kazakhstan was the last republic that left the Soviet Union and declared itself an independent state in 1991. The fall of the Soviet Union resulted in the ethnocultural crystallization of nationhood (Brubaker 1994). The demographic situation in Kazakhstan was more complex than in other post-Soviet republics. Soviet migration policies produced states where multinationalism and ethnic heterogeneity are not passively tolerated, but actively institutionalized (Brubaker 1994, 49). According to last Soviet census from 1989, the percentages of ethnic Russians and ethnic Kazakh living in Kazakh SSR were almost equal – 40% each, while other 20% were made by other nationalities such as Ukrainians, Uyghurs, Uzbeks and so on (Rees and Williams 2017, 816). In addition, the majority of the Kazakh-speaking population, i.e. ethnic Kazakhs, was living in a rural area, and Kazakh-language schools were mostly in the rural areas as well (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2017, 23). While a big proportion of ethnic Russians were living in the cities (Smagulova 2008). Besides, Russian-language schools were mainly located in the cities and many urban Kazakhs attended them (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2017, 23). Therefore,

the Russian language was more urbanely used than Kazakh. Such unequal distribution of the speakers of two different languages significantly affected the sociolinguistic situation in a newly independent country and the government's further steps in the nation-building process.

Kazakhstan faced the dilemma of which strategy of nation-building process to choose. Kazakhstan, as well as Ukraine, decided not to eliminate the Russian language on all levels. The Russian language was chosen to be the "language of civic nationhood to portray these states to domestic and especially international audiences as paragons of civic inclusiveness and tolerance, as states of and for all their citizens, rather than as states of and for a single ethnocultural group" (Brubaker 2004, 134). Promotion of ethnic Kazakh identity might have resulted in forcing non-Kazakhs to melt into a dominant ethnic group and/or alienation of the non-Kazakh population, for example, increase of migration and ethnic conflicts (Kesici 2011, 44). While the promotion of civic Kazakhstani identity might have had more complex consequences such as alienation of the dominant ethnic group on their home territory (Rees and Williams 2017, 816). Kazakhstan did not choose any of these strategies, in contrast, it tried to promote both simultaneously by building a multiethnic civic nation (Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 266). Kazakhstan followed the "Soviet-style concept of "one big family" living in peace and friendship", where Russians are constituted by the titular nation, i.e. Kazakhs (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2017, 26). This eventually resulted in a dilemma of dual identity among Kazakhstani citizens.

After independence in 1991 Kazakhstani government put many efforts to decrease the weight of the Russian language and culture. The history of the group as well as the sense of solidarity and shared worldviews build up the nation (Smith, 1991, 3). Therefore, nationalizing policies such as *kazakhization* of history, positive advocacy of national dances, traditional cousin, big celebrations of national holidays, implementation of various language reforms that

promote learning the Kazakh language aimed to increase awareness of Kazakh cultural heritage among young people and their national as well as an ethnic attachment (Kesici 2011, Smagulova 2008).

In addition, *kazakhization* process plays an important role in the education sphere (Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 271). More grants for education in universities and colleges are now available for the programs taught in the Kazakh language. Nowadays, besides Kazakh and Russian groups many universities offer at least one group in every department where classes are taught in English. While grants for groups taught in Russian is decreasing every year. Consequently, studying in Kazakh and at some universities in English is becoming economically beneficial, rather than in Russian. Comparing with Soviet times when education in higher education institutions was available in Russian only, Kazakhstan succeeded in promoting learning in Kazakh by helping students with funding.

However, in comparison with all post-Soviet states except Russia, the presence of the Russian language in Kazakhstan is very strong. There is a great number of citizens, who are ethnic Kazakhs or individuals of other nationalities, who do not speak Kazakh at all or have only basic knowledge of it (Jankowski 2012, 63). The reason for noticeable Russian presence is not only the geographical location of Kazakhstan since the two countries are neighbors but also because of the language hierarchy established during the russification process in both Soviet and Tsarist times. The knowledge of the Russian language opened the horizon for better opportunities, to find a job in Moscow, which was considered as an ultimate dream not only among titular republics but among Russia as well. It was thought that white-collar jobs would be taken only by those who can speak Russian. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the changes in the social perception of the Russian language has been minimal – many

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people still think that for a better job opportunity, the knowledge of Russian is more pragmatic choice than Kazakh.

David Laitin (1986) predicted that ethnic Russians who live on the territory of other post-Soviet states, would assimilate and learn the language of the titular republics (144). Andrey Shcherbak (2015) also support the importance of learning a titular language by members of a non-titular nation (5). However, in the case of Kazakhstan, the ethnic group of Russian people makes up about one-fifth of the total population (Blackburn 2019). Both Jankowski and Laitin concluded that Kazakhstani Russians are comparatively less open to assimilating in the Kazakh cultural environment (Jankowski 2012, Laitin 1986). Kazakhstani citizens are tolerant of the Russian language (Jankowski 2012). Moreover, the president, prime minister, and other government servants often do statements in Russian. The reason for that is the fact that the Kazakh elite were Communist Party officials whose fluency of Russian language was one of the important criteria for their positions (Tanayeva 2007). A good example of that could be the first president Nazarbayev, who learned Kazakh while in office. Kazakhstan is the only post-Soviet state where presidents, prime minister, and some other highly ranked public servants make statements in Russian and/or code-mixing Kazakh and Russian languages (Jankowski, 2012, 63). As a result, the Russian language is still common in Kazakhstan not only because of the people but because of the government as well.

To sum up, existing literature does not provide the main focus of my research – the origin of civic and ethnic components of the hybrid identity of Kazakhstani citizens. The Kazakhstani government tried to increase ethnic belongingness among Kazakhstani citizens by promoting Kazakh culture, including dances, songs, traditions, and language. On the other hand, the government did not exclude the Russian language because of the high risk of alienation of almost half of the citizens and the huge outflow of the Russian-speaking

population. As a result, the Russian language is the language of interethnic communication and is more commonly used than Kazakh in many contexts. All presented events affect the modern identity of Kazakhstani citizens and are the origin of the dilemma of Kazakh and Kazakhstani identity.

Chapter 2: Challenges of the switch

In this chapter, I will portray the current situation revolving around the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet. This involves how the switch was planned to be implemented and how it is realized in practice. In addition, the public reaction on the Latin switch is also an important issue as it affects people's identification. The discourse analysis of the decree "On the transition of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" and public statements about Latinization would be done, moreover, the politics behind the switch would be analyzed. The experience of government and quasi-government workers will be discussed based on the interviews about Latin switch on workplaces. Moreover, the interviews with teachers of Kazakh and Russian languages will illustrate the professional opinions of philologists on the issue of the Latin switch and how the transition takes place in schools.

2.1. Politics behind the decree

According to Leila Tanayeva (2007), the idea of moving from the Cyrillic to Latin was firstly discussed in the 1990s on the summit of the Turkic-speaking countries organized by Turkish president (80). The collapse of the Soviet Union was considered as a good start to strengthening the bond between Turkic countries by promoting a common Turkic alphabet. As a result, the summit influenced Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan's decision to adopt Latin scripts (Tanayeva 2007, 80). Turkey has been invested in Kazakhstan's education system since its independence. For example, there are 29 Kazakh-Turkish High Schools almost in more than 20 cities of Kazakhstan, which started functioning in 1992. Also, there are two Turkic universities in Almaty and Turkistan (Bolatova 2019). However, the Turkish side lacked resources to support their unspoken intention to unite with all Turkic countries, and Kazakhstan stayed in close relations with Russia (Tanayeva 2007, 80). The Russian culture and the Russian

language were more familiar to Kazakhstani citizens. Furthermore, based on the demographic and sociolinguistic situations in the country – almost half of the population were not ethnic Kazakhs and the Russian language was predominantly spoken in the cities, while the Kazakh language was used in the rural areas. As a result, the initiative took a back seat and the switch to the Latin script has been left untouched for over 20 years.

According to Rogers Brubaker (2004), "both Kazakhstan and Ukraine used Cyrillic writing purposefully, meaning that they have self-consciously used the language of civic nationhood to present their states to domestic and especially international audiences as paragons of civic inclusiveness and tolerance, as states of and for all their citizens, rather than as states of and for a single ethnocultural group" (134). Adoption of the Latin alphabet would have highlighted the contrast between the Kazakh and the Russian languages, promoting the first one and decreasing the influence and importance of the second. This scenario did not happen because the government kept in mind the possibility of a huge out-migration and alienation of the non-Kazakh-speaking population because of the multiethnic and multinational composition of Kazakhstan in the 1990s (Blackburn 2019). The government delayed switching to the Latin alphabet to the moment when the rural Kazakh-speaking population would become urbanized and the demographic situation of ethnic Kazakhs would be increased.

Kazakhstan is in a very close-knit relationship with Russia, which has been supporting Kazakhstan since its independence, and it is currently one of the most important economic partners of Kazakhstan. Besides the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan joined Russia in the Eurasian Economic Union (Levin 2017). In addition, Russian culture, as well as the Russian language, is widespread in Kazakhstan. Many people associate the Cyrillic alphabet with the Russian language. As a result, when the idea about the Latin switch was publicized, many Kazakhstani citizens started to associate the adoption of the

Latin alphabet with the breakaway from Russian influence (Tanayeva 2007, 81). One of the goals of the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet is to highlight the cultural and political identity of the nation overcoming Russian present influence and possible Turkic impact (Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 273). Consequently, the refusal from the Cyrillic alphabet in Kazakhstan can also be considered as an attempt to move away from Russian influence (Shervin and Gunkel 2019, Buchko 2019). When I was doing in-depth interviews, phrases such as "Russo-centric mentality" and "post-Soviet mentality" were mentioned a couple of times. People claim that both Russian influence and Soviet legacy would be present in Kazakhstan as long as the Russian language and the Cyrillic script would be commonly used by the public. Consequently, people realize that the adoption of the Latin script would gradually remove Cyrillic Kazakh and eventually decrease the prevalence of the Russian language.

Adopting a new script might mean not only stepping aside from Russia, but it also might mean stepping to Turkic countries. According to Alisher Maksudov (2019), some Russian experts are considering Latin switch in Kazakhstan as a turn towards the West and seek support from the Turkic-speaking world. In other words, Kazakhstan might have been thinking about uniting with "Turkic brothers" by emphasizing similarities in culture, scripts, and similarities in phonological features of all Turkic-family languages. Also, two of the interviewees and three respondents of the survey suggested adopting the Turkish alphabet as it corresponds to the Kazakh language as well. The following claim is taken from one of the interviews I conducted: "*Latin alphabet definitely makes Kazakhstan and ethnic Kazakhs (and probably other Turkic populations) culturally closer to the stronger established nations such as Turkey. It also separates the Kazakhs from the post-Soviet mentality or becomes one of the steps towards the separation*" (Dastan, 19). People do not have any interest in

becoming closer to Turkic countries, what they prioritize is getting rid of "Soviet mentality" and stepping further away from Russian presence within the country.

Mass media highlights the complexity of Kazakhstan and Russia's past especially in terms of using language as a political tool during the period of the Russian Empire and Soviet times. While Nursultan Nazarbayev kept saying that the "revised Latin alphabet is not intended to completely remove Russian from Kazakh" (Kim 2018, 18). The administration of the president denies geopolitical factors in making a decision about Latinization (Maksudov 2019). Nazarbayev thinks that the switch to the Latin alphabet is an important part of the modernization of the Kazakh language and nation identity in Kazakhstan (Kim 2018). An important fact here is since the Latin alphabet is considered to be one of the most commonly used in the world, it would positively affect the development of the economy, trade, and technology in Kazakhstan (Kim 2018). In other words, Latinization is also considered as the symbol of leaving the Soviet shell behind and stepping into a globalized world (Alpatov 2002).

2.2. The decree on paper: from background to public opinion

I assume that the government predicted that since the public would not be able to adopt the Latin script immediately, the government intended to gradually set the stage by advocating the cultural project "Trinity of languages". According to Zhuldyz Smagulova (2008), the "Trinity of languages" project was introduced in July 2007 and its main goal was to develop the trilingualism of Kazakh, Russian and English languages among Kazakhstani citizens (Smagulova 2008, 455). The project aimed not only to increase the proficiency level of the languages among school and university students, but it might have been also designed for political purposes such as gaining voices of non-Kazakh voters during parliamentary elections in 2007 (Smagulova 2008, 455). The reason why I have mentioned this project is that it might

have been designed in order to lay the foundation for the further switch to the Latin script by an increase of the hours for English lessons among students. However, the project was not met warmly by the pro-Kazakh population, especially among people of older age (Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 271). They claimed that by promoting the learning of three languages at the same time, there is a high risk that the Kazakh language will not take the top place among the non-Kazakh speaking population (Smagulova 2008). Moreover, there was a fear that with an increase in the English language, the younger generation would move away from the Kazakh language and become estranged to own ethnicity. The project was not promoted a lot and did not receive corresponding funding. As a result, based on the finding of the survey I conducted, many young people know little or nothing about this project. In spite of the fact that the majority of the respondents were not aware of the project at all, they claimed that they see the connection between trilingualism and Latinization. By advocating the English language in schools, the Latin script would be familiar to the growing generation, in other words, learning of English would facilitate the perception of the Latin alphabet and would make it easier to adopt it later.

In September 2017 the first testing version of the Latin script was introduced. It was met with a negative reaction of the public and was highly criticized in mass media (Kim 2018). The problem was caused by introduced diagraphs that resulted in orthographical and phonological difficulties in particular words. In October 2017 the alphabet was updated, the diagraphs were excluded, and the number of letters was decreased (see Table 7). When I asked teacher Zhuldyz, who teaches Kazakh and Russian languages to high-school students in Oskemen city located in the East Kazakhstan Region, her professional opinion about the latest version of the alphabet, she claimed that it is correct and successful. Moreover, Mrs. Zhuldyz thinks that the alphabet reflects the phonological peculiarity of Kazakh consonants and vowels

as it is partially based on the pre-1930's Latin version designed by Kazakh scholar Akhmet Baitursynuly (Iskhan, Ospanova, and Dautova 2014, 45). However, the public still expressed a lot of critiques, many people refused to use the proposed alphabet, and they openly expressed their opinions on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Based on the survey and interviews, the reason for discontent was that the updated version contained apostrophes for a number of phonemes, which makes writing confusing. Many people were wondering why this "under-developed" version was approved so fast. Sherubay Kurmanbayuly, the former director of the Institute of Linguistics, argues that there is a direct link between quick adoption of the Latin alphabet and certain political context, which is unknown by the public (Mamashuly 2017). Although, the background, which could be escaping from Russian influence and/or becoming closer with Turkic countries, might be simply unspoken widely by the public.

A revised version of the Latin alphabet is presented without a certain number of Russian phonemes. There are some Cyrillic letters, such as *Э, Ю, Я, Ё, Щ, Ъ, Ь* that were removed because there are no Kazakh words with those letters used. According to Kim (2018), exclusion of the Russian phonemes from the Latin alphabet is intended to use Kazakh vocabulary, leaving out words coming from the Russian language (18). Moreover, the question of whether there should be or not letter *C* in the Kazakh alphabet appeared. And if yes, what kind of phoneme it would represent – Cyrillic *К* or *Ц*? ("Discussion of the Kazakh alphabet in Latin was held in Nur-Sultan" 2020). The issue is complicated because the inclusion of phonemes such as *Ц* (for the Latin alphabet C) and *Ч* (for the Latin CH) is still under the question. It is interesting that linguists and policymakers decided to include them in the first version of the Latin alphabet but exclude afterward. The reason for their exclusion is that phonemes are considered to be alien to the Kazakh phonological system. However, according to the candidate of Philological Sciences, Anar Fazylzhan, scholars insist on keeping phoneme *Ц*, as well as *Ч* and *Щ,* because

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they have calculated more than 1500 words with Cyrillic *Ц* in Kazakh language ("Discussion of the Kazakh alphabet in Latin was held in Nur-Sultan" 2020). For example, the word *полиция* (eng. police) is the same in both Russian and Kazakh language and removing phoneme *Ц* would result in changing the pronunciation of the whole word.

Regardless of the negative reaction, the decree "On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" was signed by the first president Nursultan Nazarbayev in October 2017. However, after four months and a big portion of the negative reaction by the public, a couple of changes were done in the approved version of the alphabet. The changes included the replacement of apostrophes with diacritic marks, and the amendment to the decree was signed on 19 of February 2018 (see Table 8). The execution of the decree is assigned to be controlled by the Administration of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the decree came into force starting from 27 of October 2017. The decree states that the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan have multiple tasks to complete: the first one is to form a National Commission for the translation of the Kazakh language alphabet into the Latin script, the second one is to ensure a step-by-step transition to the Latin script by 2025 and, lastly, to take other measures to implement this decree, including organizational and legislative ones ("On the transition of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" 2017).

The decree leaves too much uncertainty and confusion. For example, "step-by-step transition" is a very ambiguous term and could be interpreted differently. The majority (80%) of the people I spoke with during the interviews are not fully satisfied with the way the decree is being realized, especially the tactics and the pace. Public perception might have been different if the government had started the process of Latinization deliberately. They indicated in the survey that it is very disorganized and too fast to be handled and perceived by the public, especially among those who are not familiar with the Latin script at all. Furthermore, the decree

lacks explanation about which methods exactly could be implemented and it lacks any additional and more concrete errands. There is a graphic of what kind of changes would occur in 2020, 2021, and so on. However, there is no mentioning of it in the decree itself, in addition, there is no official document where those dates (years) could be found. I was able to find approximate dates in public speeches of ministers and other state officials on news websites and news articles, but many of them showed different data. For example, one news website claims that switch to Latin among primary schools would start in 2020, while another website indicated 2022. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the dates and the whole graphic might be changed, but there is no official announcement for this yet.

The decree states that the National Commission for the translation of the Kazakh language alphabet into the Latin script should be formed. The new president, Qasim-Zhomart Tokayev, wrote in his Twitter that even if the decision to switch to Latin script was made about two years ago, there are still minor drawbacks that are assigned to be controlled by the minister of Culture and Sports, Aktota Raimkulova (Yuranec 2019). According to Sputniknews, there are 8 versions of the Latin alphabet that are examined by the Commission, but only three of them were seen by the public ("New Kazakh alphabet in Latin is being chosen among 8 versions" 2020). For example, in November 2019, Baitursynov Institute of Linguistics has presented the new version of the Latin script which is also under consideration. All of the suggested versions have different numbers of letters, one version includes diagraphs, one of them is designed with apostrophes, while another is with diacritic marks. Neither of the suggested alphabets was unanimously supported by the government, linguists, programmers, and public.

Officially the decree has already come into force, therefore, many signboards and private enterprises have already switched to Latin writing. The problem is that many of them

firstly switched to the version approved in October 2017, but when it was changed in February 2018, some of them just left signboards with apostrophes from the old version, while others started to use the new one with the diacritic mark ("On amendments to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 26, 2017 No. 569 "On the translation of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" 2018). This resulted in a mess on the streets where distorted words and phrases written in two different ways which confuse people. In addition, when I was analyzing survey results, I found that 22% of the respondents are either not familiar with the approved version at all or think that the version with apostrophes is the latest one. According to the president's decree, scholars are still working on improvements to the approved version. Therefore, any changes in the latest version would definitely result in a bigger tangle on the streets. Furthermore, when I asked respondents' opinions about how Latinization affected their daily life, many people were wondering why signboards are rewritten into Latin script. More than a quarter of respondents thought that the question of Latinization is still in the stage of negotiations and some of them were not aware that the decree had already been signed and implemented for almost 3 years.

The decree "On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" is very short in terms of length and in terms of information. It contains only general instructions and appointment of who would be in charge of what and, unfortunately, lacks any explanatory points. The dates of the switching process, such as changing ID cards and birth certificates into Latin, publishing books, newspapers, and other literature in Latin Kazakh, are absent from official documents as well. In addition, linguists are still working on the alphabet, but the approved version is not taken seriously by the public.

2.3. The decree on practice

According to the decree, a complete switch to the Latin alphabet would be done by 2025. The government workers and teachers would be on the front line of this transition. I had a chance to interview two schoolteachers of the Kazakh language and the worker of state apparatus (*akimat*) of the regional level (of Astana city). Furthermore, in order to observe the difference in language practice and Latin switch on the workplaces between state and non-state actors, the interview with the worker of the quasi-governmental sector, i.e. the worker of the Joint-Stock Company, was taken. For the teachers, I prepared a couple of questions related to the switch in schools, their opinion about the latest version, and the whole initiative of switching. Moreover, there are a couple of questions about their own experience of teaching the Kazakh language in Russian schools where students of different ethnic groups study. While for bureaucrats, interview questions were mostly about documentation procedures within the department on the city level and outside of the departmental unit, i.e. on the country level. Moreover, I have asked questions about courses designed for the workers to teach them to write in the Latin alphabet.

When the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted in Kazakh SSR, the entire Russian alphabet was simply taken for the basis with nine specific letters of the Kazakh language *ә, ғ, қ, ң, ө, ұ, ү, h, i* added into it. Mr. Dauren mentioned the letter of Nadezhda Krupskaya, Russian revolutionary, an ideologist of the Soviet education and wife of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, written by her after the October Revolution. In the letter, she proposed to unify the writing and alphabets of the Soviet republics, as it was economically beneficial for the Soviet Union since the unification of the alphabets simplified the activities of printing offices, publishing newspapers, and magazines. In other words, there would have been no need to create machines for different alphabets and the process of training specialists and teaching children in schools

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would be easier and more cost-effective. However, the main reason, according to Teacher Dauren, was to deprive the people of independence and self-identity.

Both Mrs. Zhuldyz and Mr. Dauren welcome the transition of Kazakh writing to the Latin script. Since the Cyrillic alphabet does not fully reflect the nature of the Kazakh language. As it was mentioned previously, *Э, Ю, Я, Ё, Щ, Ъ, Ь* phonemes were excluded from the latest version of the alphabet. Inclusion of phoneme *Ц* is still questionable, while phoneme *Ч* is included and is written as digraph *Ch* ("Discussion of the Kazakh alphabet in Latin was held in Nur-Sultan" 2020). Borrowed words that contain these phonemes were not changed orthographically based on features of the Kazakh language. Mr. Dauren gave an interesting example of the words with *Э, В, Ф, Ё* phonemes. The words with these phonemes are also borrowed words from the Russian language. Mr. Dauren claimed that borrowed words should be adapted to the phonetic features of the language, but not vice versa. In other words, the Cyrillic alphabet does not correspond to the Kazakh language because there cannot be letters, whose sounds are not characteristic of that language. In addition, Mrs. Zhuldyz pointed out the same argument by providing an example of stress. In the Kazakh language, the stress is always on the last syllable of the word. Following this logic, the same rule should be applied to borrowed words as well. However, Russian loan words were left not only orthographically unchanged but also pronunciations were left the same. Although if we take other Turkic languages, for instance, Turkish, the stress in the borrowed words changes there: the Turks pronounce the word *psychologist* stressing the last syllable which is different from the original word.

Based on Mrs. Zhuldyz's experience, she was sure that the main difficulties in the Latinization process would be mostly financial, such as publishing books and all the literature in Latin, and training of the teachers. In addition, the psychological resistance of the older

generation might be observed as well. While children and youth are more likely to adapt to innovations since many of them have been studying English since childhood and are familiar with Latin graphics. According to Shervin and Gunkel (2019), Kazakh schools are expected to experience an outflow of students. Many parents help their children with homework or new material, and an upcoming switch to Latin script might result in giving preference to Russian schools among Kazakhstani parents in order to avoid possible difficulties with the learning process. However, in Teacher Zhuldyz's opinion, there is a small chance that Latinization would lead to the outflow of children from Kazakh schools. In contrast, she thinks that the switch to the Latin script would have a positive effect on the Kazakh language and Kazakh ethnicity in general. She is sure that the Latin script corresponds better to the nature of the Kazakh language than Cyrillic. Therefore, with the Latin script, the process of learning the grammar and the process of writing in Kazakh would become easier for the Russian-speaking population including ethnic Kazakhs. Furthermore, attitude toward learning the Kazakh language among the Russian-speaking population has changed with time. Nowadays children as well as their parents express more interest in learning Kazakh than it was 10 years ago. Therefore, she argues that the most difficult period in the teaching of the Kazakh language has passed, and Latinization will have a positive outcome. She is sure that nowadays the level of national identity has increased, and people do not want to lose their roots. After all, any new modernization requires time for understanding and awareness.

Educational work would be done not only with the students and teachers but also with the state workers. To begin with, I have found that on the city level, documentation procedure and all the letters are written in the Russian language. However, while interacting with different ministries (country level) documents are written in Kazakh, but in most of the cases, Russian translations are attached. The Russian language is dominantly spoken within the department in

both professional and non-professional contexts, such as leisure time or chatting with colleagues. An almost identical situation could be observed in the quasi-governmental sector. The person I spoke to works in the Human Resources department, so she was well aware of the language atmosphere in both professional and non-working situations. All paperwork is done in the Russian language, the only exception is when documents are needed to be sent to governmental institutions, such as *akimat,* they attach Kazakh translation. But in fact, the translation is usually done by the translator, not workers themselves. An interesting fact is that in order to apply for both places, the Kazakh language test is one of the steps in the application, however, if other qualifications would suit, the candidate would be hired even with low scores. In addition, there were no cases when one of the workers was fired or asked to leave because of the low proficiency or even lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language.

According to *Akimat* of Astana city's website, all state workers would have training seminars of Latin Kazakh ("Civil servants will be trained to Kazakh chart based on the Latin alphabet" 2018). My interviewee from a state institution shared that they have already taken classes of the Latin Kazakh, which were organized by the Department for the Development of Languages and Archival Affairs in conjunction with the *"Руханият"* cultural center (astana.gov.kz). There was about a 10-hour-long course designed to teach workers how to write and read in a new script. Unfortunately, when I asked the interviewee if it was helpful, she said that she did not fully remember it and explained it with the age factor (she is 55+ years old) and low proficiency in both Kazakh and English languages. While a respondent from Joint-Stock Company claimed that as the decree is not signed (but in reality, it is), there is no even mentioning of it in the workplace.

To sum up, the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet sounds very promising in theory. It definitely has geopolitical, economic, and nationalizing goals. However, the deadline for a

complete switch, 2025, is indicated by the first president, forces the government to make decisions very fast without realizing possible outcomes of their actions. The little-informative decree gives freedom for the authorities who are in charge of the switch and at the same time limits them as it lacks more accurate directions. The resulted mess negatively reflected on people's perception of the Latin Kazakh and their attitude toward the whole Latinization process in the country. Schools and teachers are not prepared, and books have not been republished in Latin yet. From the interviews and surveys, I found that the Russian language is the dominant and commonly used language in workplaces. In terms of Latinization, state workers have the advantage in comparison with non-state workers as many departments have already started educational work, i.e. Latin Kazakh classes, while in quasi-governmental workplaces, the topic is not on the surface yet.

Chapter 3: Discussion

The last chapter of my thesis is dedicated to the findings I have obtained from the online survey and in-depth interviews. It is important to mention that before starting a research my initial hypothesizes were:

1) Young people who were born in rural areas are more likely to consider the Kazakh language as their mother tongue as well as the language they are the most comfortable with.

2) Young people who were born in South and West Kazakhstan are more likely to consider the Kazakh language as their mother tongue as well as the language they are the most comfortable with.

3) About half of the respondents would find the latest version of the Latin alphabet correct and satisfying. Moreover, at least third has already started using Latin along with the Cyrillic on a daily basis while corresponding with friends and writing on social media.

4) Kazakh speaking population would positively react to Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet, while Russian-speaking neutrally or negatively. Switching to Latin script would positively reflect on ethnic identification among the Kazakh speaking population, while ethnic Kazakhs, who speak predominantly Russian, would experience a certain level of alienation from their ethnicity, giving preference to national identity instead.

The chapter is divided into three parts where I am going to discuss my findings of contextual language use, respondents' attitude toward Latinization, and its effect on self-identification.

3.1. Language use and the question of the mother tongue

I argue that despite the government's attempts to increase the usage of the Kazakh language, the Russian language is still prevailing among the younger generation. In other words, the question of the language hierarchy can still be observed among young people. In total 194 people took the survey - 26 people answered in Kazakh, 27 did survey in English, and more than 72%, i.e. 141 people, choose the Russian version of the survey. What first stands out is the choice in which language respondents have answered the survey. An important factor is that survey was sent in language-neutral groups with approximately the same amount of Russian and Kazakh speaking individuals. Furthermore, when the survey was shared in a message box, the link for the survey in the Kazakh language was written before Russian, meaning that people would have seen a suggestion to fill the survey in Kazakh first and only after that in Russian and then in English. Although, more than 70% of the respondents were comfortable taking the survey in the Russian language.

When it came to the survey analysis, 72 respondents were excluded because of not meeting sample requirements – age and city of residence. My first hypothesis was built around the difference of language repertoire based on place of birth - rural and urban and region of birth – North, East, West, South, and Central Kazakhstan. However, I have found that these factors have little effect on respondents' language preference. For example, the majority of the respondents (92%) consider Kazakh as their mother tongue, regardless of place and region of birth. However, an unexpected trend was observed for the question about the language they are the most comfortable with or the language of the strongest proficiency – less than a quarter of respondents answer Kazakh, while 77% of respondents consider Russian as the language of strongest proficiency. Consequently, the Russian language is more dominant on a daily basis and young people feel more comfortable and confident while using Russian than Kazakh. Also,

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almost all of the interviewees were from different regions and places of birth, thus, based on

their answers, it is possible to conclude that there is no direct correlation between the place of

birth and language preference (see Table 2). The choice of the mother tongue is closely

connected with the ethnic belonging in Kazakhstan. One of my interviewees, Kamshat, said:

"The mother tongue does not have to be your dominant language, it is mostly about your

history, it shows your roots". The question of the mother tongue is independent of an

individual's language proficiency, meaning that no matter how fluent in Kazakh an individual

is, he/she would probably consider Kazakh as a mother tongue. People base their answers on

ethnic belongingness and associate the concept of mother tongue with the place they were born

in.

Table 3. Percentage of respondents who consider Kazakh or Russian as their mother tongue and
language of strongest proficiency

	Mother tongue	Strongest language proficiency
Kazakh language	92%	23%
Russian language	8%	77%

The results showed that the language of instruction in school and university has little

effect on language practices. *"It does not matter in which language you have studied, the most*

important factor in an individual's future language preference and practice is the environment,

especially in which language the person speaks with his/her family" (Jane, 23). The survey

showed that people who studied in school and/or university in Kazakh use Russian in daily life

with family and friends almost as often as those who were studying in Russian. I found that

almost an equal number of respondents studied in Kazakh and Russian in school, while for

undergraduate studies the choice was dominated by Russian and English languages. For example, one of my interviewees, who is from Kazakh-speaking family, studied in Kazakh in school. However, she decided to apply for the Russian group for bachelor studies. The main motivation she said was the fact that a bigger number of sources are written in Russian than in Kazakh. In addition, since she was fluent in Kazakh, she wanted to improve her academic Russian. Her parents were very surprised but raised no objection. Besides, among those who have studied in graduate school, 86% of respondents study or studied in English, 12% in Russian, and only 2% in Kazakh. Even if the number of scholarships and grants has been increased for programs taught in Kazakh, the younger generation gives preference to study in Russian or English. The choice of language of instruction for undergraduate and graduate studies shows that education in Kazakh in terms of books, available literature, professors and academics in general, has lower status than in Russian and English.

The language practice with family members is illustrated in the table below. As it could be observed the Russian language is dominated in the communication with parents - 41% with fathers and 50% with mothers. An almost equal percentage of the respondents (23% - 25%) speak with both parents either in Kazakh or mixing Russian and Kazakh. In contrast, young people tend to speak in Kazakh with the older generation – 60%, 20% use a mix of Kazakh and Russian, while 16% use the Russian language. Nine out of ten interviewees said that they speak in Kazakh with grandparents, moreover, four of them shared that grandparents insisted on their studying in Kazakh in school. *"My grandmother was ignoring me when I spoke Russian with her. For me it was difficult not because I did not know Kazakh, I did, but because everyone was speaking Russian and it was difficult for me to code-switch all the time. And even now I think she gets upset whenever I use Russian more often than Kazakh"* (Kira, 23). One of the interviewees, Bakhtiyar, shared that he speaks with grandparents and all people older 50 in

Kazakh as a sign of respect. Another responder, Askar, said that he has only limited proficiency in Kazakh, however, he still tries to speak with grandparents in Kazakh, at least basic phrases of thanking, welcoming and farewelling. He also claimed that speaking in Kazakh, or at least attempts to do so, with the older generation is not only a matter of respect but mostly the linguistic norm in Kazakh society. While communicating, the younger generation draws an age line, which indicates with whom you can speak in Russian and with who it is preferably to speak in Kazakh. Interviewees were calling it as an unspoken rule, the sign of respect, the social norm, the expected model of behavior. This illustrates that many young people try to follow imposed model of communication, but this does not mean that they are doing it because they want to, in contrast, it represents the efforts and conscious choice.

Table 4. Language use while communicating with family members (father, mother and grandparents)

	With father	With mother	With grandparents
Kazakh language	25%	24%	60%
Russian language	41%	50%	16%
Mix of Kazakh and Russian	23%	24%	20%
Not applicable	11%	1%	4%

Based on the survey findings, the majority of respondents use the Russian language while communicating with friends and colleagues - 54% and 45% respectively. The use of English with friends and colleagues is explained by the fact that 30% of respondents are

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employed and 69% are students, moreover, many respondents have studied in English during undergraduate (60%) and graduate studies (86%). The Kazakh language is less popular in these contexts, but many people (28%) codemix Kazakh and Russian in communication with friends and 13% of respondents do the same at work. Also, Russian languages are more prevalent among young people on social media and while watching TV - 55% and 46% respectively. Kazakh languages in these contexts showed a minimum percentage – only 1% on social media and 3% while watching TV. This phenomenon could be explained by the fact that there are fewer entertainment sources and films translated into the Kazakh language. Many young people codemix Kazakh with Russian, Russian with English, and all three languages in the following four situations (see Table 5). An interesting phenomenon is that while a mix of Russian and Kazakh and, a mix of Russian and English are common among the younger generation, there is no mix of Kazakh and English at all. In other words, when young people codemix, the Russian language is present in all contexts, while Kazakh is used only when codemixed with Russian and when three languages are used. This could be justified with the bigger number of respondents who consider Russian as the most comfortable language.

Table 5. Contextual language use while communicating with friends, colleagues, in social media and while watching TV

	With friends	At work	In social media	Watching TV
Kazakh language	3%	1.5%	1%	3%
Russian language	54%	45%	55%	46%
English language	-	9.5%	5%	10%

Mix of Kazakh and Russian	28%	13%	8%	7%
Mix of Kazakh and English	-	-	-	-
Mix of Russian and English	4%	10.5%	18%	9%
Multiple (three languages – Kazakh, Russian, English)	10%	5%	13%	4%
Not applicable	-	15.5%	-	21%

3.2. Attitude toward Latinization

"My first impression was negative. The main problem is that people do not use the Kazakh language on a daily basis as the government wants them to. However, when you think about the background of the whole initiative, you understand that it is necessary. For example, for Uzbekistan, Latin switch was a part of de-russification, while for Kazakhstan it might be a part of modernization where Kazakhstan has separated from Russia" (Kira, 23). Many people associate Latinization with modernization, but they do not exclude the political context of the switch, moreover, people perceive it not as an attempt to get closer with the Turkic world, in contrast, to separate from Russia. In addition, Alibek and Mustafa claimed that the Latin switch is part of the plan to move away from the Russian language and Russian influence in general. However, opponents of the Latinization claim that the Cyrillic script is more familiar and the Latin script would be associated with foreign language especially by the older generation (Melich and Adibayeva 2013, 273). Two of the respondents mentioned that the Latinization process might lead to a bigger problem in the future arguing that Latinization seems as the boundary in learning Kazakh for the Russian-speaking population. This opinion

has its roots in poor usage of the Kazakh language by the public. The survey results about contextual use of languages demonstrate that the Kazakh language is not used as often as the government wants people to use it. As a result, people's perception of the Latinization as a new obstacle in a learning process puts the switch further from society.

The survey indicated that 78% of respondents are familiar with the Latin alphabet, while 22% responded negatively. Almost a quarter of the respondents reveal themselves apolitical in regard to the language modernization policy as they are not familiar at all or do not know which version is the approved one. From the interviews, I found out that the majority, almost all of the interviewees, support the idea of Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet. However, all of the interviewees are not satisfied either with the latest version of the alphabet or with the way the government realizes the switch. *"The implementation of the decree is going behind closed doors. People do not see a clear plan of the transition. Unfortunately, there is no systematic approach to this question and no dialog with the people" (Kira, 23).* People feel powerless because the government has approved the version which the public did not like and helpless because no one knows how the transition actually goes. What is left for people is to observe how signboards are being changed and humbly keep up with "modernizations".

One of my initial hypotheses stated that approximately half of the respondents would be satisfied with the latest version of the Latin alphabet, meaning that Kazakhstani citizens would think that the approved version corresponds phonetic and orthographic systems of the Kazakh language. However, on practice the results showed different picture - only 11% of respondents are satisfied with the latest version, 41% marked "struggle to answer" and almost half – 48% are not satisfied. As it was mentioned in the second chapter, teachers Zhuldyz and Dauren found the latest version of the alphabet correct and successful. In reality, the public finds approved version very confusing, uncomfortable and some of the respondents claimed

that the diacritic mark is not always seen on the distance. In addition, 63% answered that they experience difficulties while reading in Kazakh with Latin script. *"My eyes do not perceive Latin script, even though I am fluent in Kazakh, I need more time to understand what is written"* (Tomiris, 26). Proficiency in the Kazakh language and basic knowledge of Latin script from the English language would not guarantee a full understanding of the Latin Kazakh script. *"In practice, it sounds awkward because it is written in a confusing way"* (Bakhtiyar, 25). This means that more than half of the respondents are not able to read fluently, which might also result in problems with writing and speaking.

The decree "On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" was signed in 2017 and theoretically, the implementation process should have been already started. Therefore, I expected that at least a third of the respondents have already started using Latin along with the Cyrillic daily while corresponding with friends and writing on social media. However, according to the survey results, the quarter of the respondents use the Latin alphabet sometimes but not as often as the Cyrillic, less than 10% use along with the Cyrillic, and only 1% use the Latin alphabet more often that the Cyrillic. Consequently, more than half of the respondents either do not use the Latin alphabet or do not write in Kazakh at all. Poor perception of the public is a direct consequence of the poor implementation of the decree in practice. More than half of the respondents are not satisfied with the latest version, experience difficulties while reading, and do not use the Latin Kazakh script in daily life.

3.3. The question of identification

My final hypothesis states that the Kazakh-speaking population would positively react to the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet, while Russian-speaking neutrally or negatively. The switch to the Latin script would positively reflect on the ethnic identification among the Kazakh

speaking population, while ethnic Kazakhs who speak predominantly Russian would experience a certain level of alienation from Kazakh ethnicity, giving preference to national identity while identifying themselves. From Table 2 it is possible to observe the answers of interviewees. Nine of interviewees indicated Kazakh as their mother tongue and one chose both Kazakh and Russian. However, only three out of ten respondents said that Kazakh is their comfort language. *"Poor knowledge of Kazakh language does not make individual less Kazakh"* (Bakhtiyar, 25). Despite speaking Russian majority of the respondents identify themselves as Kazakh. The interviewees see a direct link between ethnic identity and the mother tongue, while dominant language does not have to match with the native language. In other words, being Kazakh does not have to include knowledge of the Kazakh language, it is mainly about inner sense and blood ties.

Interviewee Sanzhar claimed that the word "Kazakhstani" was intentionally spread to rally people of different nationalities living in Kazakhstan. *"However, in practice, the concept did not work effectively. It is not enough to call people Kazakhstani; to make this concept work government should have tried to inculcate values of unity among all Kazakhstani citizens"* (Sanzhar, 22). The concept of nationality is understood slightly differently in post-Soviet countries. Usually, nationality represents an individual's citizenship, while in many countries, including Kazakhstan, nationality might represent ethnic belongingness (Burkhanov and Sharipova 2017, 29). The person might have different nationality but still, be the citizen of Kazakhstan. For example, an ethnic Russian living in Kazakhstan has Russian nationality. The government's attempts to unite nationalities of Kazakhstan by promoting Kazakhstani identity are pushed off from the idea that having different mother tongues and dominant languages it is still possible to be united under the collective civic term. However, the attempts have failed, and the majority of the representatives identify themselves based on ethnic affiliation.

According to Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova (2017), the primordial vision of identification in the face of ethnic Kazakh belongingness is dominated in Kazakhstan as civic national identity has not emerged (21). Seven of the respondents said that they identify themselves as Kazakhs. Almost all of the respondents explained it with the fact that they are Kazakhs by blood. *"Latinization is designed to boost the feeling of ethnic belongingness among Kazakh people. There are more than 100 nationalities and ethnicities living in Kazakhstan and feeling like the part of your ethnic groups is very important"* (Mustafa, 23). There are both Russian and Kazakh speaking respondents among those who refer to ethnic identity and all of them are in favor of the Latin switch highlighting the political background of the Latinization and its effect on Kazakh culture, language, and ethnicity in general.

Three interviewees answered Kazakhstani over Kazakh arguing that the Latinization initiative is a nationalizing idea, but it aims not to raise ethnic identification among people, but to increase Kazakhstan's opportunities in terms of global communication outside of the country. Kamshat shared her opinion that nowadays it is necessary to be both Kazakh and Kazakhstani, but it would be more correct to identify people based on their citizenship, rather than ethnic groups. While the number of ethnic Kazakhs has grown since Kazakhstan's independence, the Russian-speaking population, including ethnic Kazakhs, has also risen (Melich and Adibayeva. 2013, 265). This might be another possible explanation for their answers, meaning that differences in mother tongue choice and comfortable language result in hybrid identity. Responders shared that they feel less attached to Kazakh identity not only because of low proficiency in the Kazakh language but because of the political correctness toward other ethnic groups and nationalities.

A similar point about citizenship was said by Kira. Moreover, she added that unfortunately the term Kazakhstani is not used often. *"But I use (Kazakhstani) while identifying*

myself because I think this term is more comprehensive and has a broader meaning which is actually an important criterion in a globalized world. I would say that modern Kazakhstani identity has many layers. The first one is post-Soviet, then ethnic Kazakh, and now there is a new one – global western layer". Jane calls herself Kazakh but "*while choosing between identifying myself as Kazakh and as Post-Soviet Kazakh or CIS-ian, I would choose the second option because I see similarities in cultures among states of CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States)*". The historic and cultural heritage of Kazakhstani past in the face of the Soviet legacy is still present not only in Kazakhstan's political system, education, culture but also in the people. Kazakhstani citizens feel a post-Soviet presence as well as the presence of both ethnic Kazakh and civic Kazakhstani identities. In other words, one does not exclude the other, meaning that both ethnic and national factors coexist for many respondents. This mixture of affiliation results in not literal alienation from Kazakh identity but mainly a step toward collective "Kazakhstani" term.

In addition, I have found a gender difference among the interviewees. From Table 2 it is possible to observe that males tend to identify themselves Kazakh more often than females. One of the interviewees said that he is going to learn the Kazakh language and the Latin script because he feels responsible for not letting the Kazakh language disappear in the future. Traditional Kazakh society is patriarchic; therefore, men tend to see themselves as a progenitor of the family and own ethnicity. For example, in mixed families where parents are of different nationalities (or ethnicities), the child inherits the father's ethnic affiliation. Such construction of the gender roles in the Kazakh society contributes to men's reference to ethnic identity, while women are less likely to do so, and female interviewees' answers varied between Kazakh and Kazakhstani.

To sum up the chapter, I would like to point out that the first two hypotheses are rejected. Place and region of birth have little effect on respondents' language preference in terms of the mother tongue and the most comfortable language. Secondly, I have found that poor perception and negative reaction to the Latin Kazakh alphabet is the result of the government's poor implementation of the decree about the Latin switch and public dissatisfaction with the approved version. Lastly, individuals' choice of the mother tongue is connected with ethnic affiliation, while the preference of the comfortable language is independent of ethnicity. Both Kazakh and Russian speaking respondents are in favor of the Latin switch and think that it positively affects ethnic identification among Kazakhstani citizens. While those who identified themselves as Kazakhstani have low language proficiency in Kazakh and prefer Russian as their dominant language. The majority of them also positively react to the Latinization arguing that it would increase Kazakhstani civic affiliation among its citizens as well. Furthermore, the gender factor has a role in the identification question. Males as a progenitor of ethnicity tend to identify themselves as Kazakh more often than females.

Conclusion

The main aim of the thesis was to analyze the question of self-identification and how 2017's language decree on the transition to the Latin alphabet affects it. The analysis is built on the discourse analysis of this decree, survey findings, and in-depth interviews with two schoolteachers of the Kazakh language, state bureaucrat, worker of the quasi-governmental sector, and ten young people. The thesis has come up with the finding of the positive perceptions of the Latinization of the Kazakh alphabet since the majority of the respondents argued that it would separate Kazakhstan from the Russian influence and would be an important step in its nation-building process. However, I have found that more than 80% of the respondents experience a negative attitude toward the way the decree has been implemented. *"The implementation goes behind closed doors,"* people say feeling powerless and unheard in the dialog between the state. Furthermore, the approved version of the alphabet was negatively met by the public. The negative reaction of the people resulted in low use of the Latin script for the past three years, which significantly slows down the government's initial plan for the transition.

The majority of the people make big difference between the mother tongue and the dominant language, arguing that they consider the Kazakh language as the mother tongue based on an ethnic factor, while the language of the strongest proficiency does not have to be the native language. Based on the surveys and online interviews, the Russian language is the dominant language among young people; it has little effect on people's identification question. I found that in Kazakhstan, ethnic identification is stronger than the civic. My main argument is that young ethnic Kazakh people support the idea of Latinization, moreover, it positively affects their ethnic belongingness. The trend is observed among both the Kazakh and the Russian-speaking population. While young ethnic Kazakh people who consider Kazakh as the

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mother tongue but primarily speak the Russian language, support the Latin switch as well but give preference on national belonging rather than ethnic while identifying themselves. In addition, the gender factor has a role in the identification question. Men tend to identify themselves as Kazakh more often than women, arguing that they consider themselves as the progenitor of the family and fell responsible for the continuity of ethnicity.

I acknowledge that there are some limitations to the methodology I used. The first one is the sample choice – young people living in Astana. The sample is chosen to stay focused on one particular group of population. City preference was made in favor of Astana because it is located in the center of Kazakhstan and since it is the capital, there are more job opportunities available than in other regions so many young people move to Astana to start their career path. Moreover, the age of the target population corresponds to the average age of students in Kazakhstan, Astana has one of the biggest number of universities located there. Therefore, the research findings could not be generalized to all young people living in Kazakhstan. Further research might be done in other cities.

In addition, because of the COVID 19 outbreak, my research travel was canceled, so all of the interviews were conducted online. The main concern was the inability to reach as many people as it was planned initially for both surveys and interviews. Unfortunately, I could not contact any policymakers or teachers for target interviews, so I had to redesign settle on the respondents based on availability. Another limitation connected with the online switch was the weak internet connection of some respondents who initially agreed for interviews. Moreover, by choosing an online method for both survey and interviews automatically excluded those who do not have internet access in the time surveys were spread. Further research needs to be done later when the effects and consequences of the decree would be more tangible and more data for the evaluation would be provided.

The main contribution of my research is that decree on Latin script was signed in 2017 and there is not much literature about this topic, moreover, there is none about its effect on identification among the younger generation. The research is also useful because there is not much qualitative research done on this topic in Kazakhstan. Starting from independence, the issue of self-identification in Kazakhstan has been very complex and the narratives of ethnic and national belonging have produced many challenges. This work shows that even after 29 years of independence, there are still struggles both on the institutional and societal level to consolidate a strong sense of belonging. The process of Latinization might become a considerable step to achieve a strong national identity among Kazakhstani citizens. The thesis contributes to the research of language policies in Central Asian countries and the identity formation in the post-Soviet space. The research also contributes to the study of the relation between language practice, mother tongue, and self-identification, in addition, it facilitates the overall understanding of the concepts of civic and ethnic identity.

Annex

Table 6. Comparison of Russian and Kazakh Cyrillic alphabets. Source: Kim 2018, 13.

Russian Cyrillic	А [a]		Б [b]	В [v]	Г [g]		Д [d]	Е [(j)e]	Ё [(j)o]	Ж [ʒ]	З [z]	И [i]	Й [j]	К [k]	
Kazakh Cyrillic	А [a]	Ә [æ]	Б [b]	В [v]	Г [g]	Ғ [ʁ]	Д [d]	Е [je]	Ё [jo]	Ж [dʒ]	З [z]	И [ıj]	Й [j]	К [k]	Қ [q]

Russian Cyrillic	Л [l]	М [m]	Н [n]		О [o]		П [p]	Р [r]	С [s]	Т [t]	У [u]			Ф [f]
Kazakh Cyrillic	Л [l]	М [m]	Н [n]	Ң [ŋ]	О [o]	Ө [ö]	П [p]	Р [r]	С [s]	Т [t]	У [uw/yw/w]	Ұ [u]	Ү [ü]	Ф [f]

Russian Cyrillic	Х [x]		Ц [ts]	Ч [tʃ]	Ш [ʃ]	Щ [ʃʃ]	Ъ	Ы [ɪ]		Ь	Э [e]	Ю [(j)u]	Я [(j)a]
Kazakh Cyrillic	Х [x]	Һ [h]	Ц [ts]	Ч [tʃ]	Ш [ʃ]	Щ [ʃʃ]	Ъ	Ы [ɪ]	І [i]	Ь	Э [e]	Ю [ju]	Я [ja]

Table 7. Kazakh Latin alphabet that was approved in October 2017. Source: "On the transition of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" 2017.

№	Написание	Звук	№	Написание	Звук
1	A a	[a]	17	N' n'	[н], [нг]
2	A' a'	[ə]	18	O o	[o]
3	B b	[б]	19	O' o'	[ө]
4	D d	[д]	20	P p	[п]
5	E e	[e]	21	Q q	[қ]
6	F f	[ф]	22	R r	[р]
7	G g	[г]	23	S s	[с]
8	G' g'	[ғ]	24	S' s'	[ш]
9	H h	[x], [h]	25	C' c'	[ч]
10	I i	[i]	26	T t	[т]
11	I' i'	[и], [й]	27	U u	[ұ]
12	J j	[ж]	28	U' u'	[ү]
13	K k	[к]	29	V v	[в]
14	L l	[л]	30	Y y	[ы]
15	M m	[м]	31	Y' y'	[у]
16	N n	[н]	32	Z z	[з]

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Table 8. Kazakh Latin alphabet that was approved in February 2018. Source: "On amendments to the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated October 26, 2017 No. 569 "On the translation of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script" 2018.

№	Написание	Звук	№	Написание	Звук
1	A a	[а]	17	Ń ń	[ң]
2	Á á	[ә]	18	O o	[о]
3	B b	[б]	19	Ó ó	[ө]
4	D d	[д]	20	P p	[п]
5	E e	[е]	21	Q q	[қ]
6	F f	[ф]	22	R r	[р]
7	G g	[г]	23	S s	[с]
8	Ǵ ǵ	[ғ]	24	T t	[т]
9	H h	[х], [h]	25	U u	[ұ]
10	I i	[i]	26	Ú ú	[ү]
11	I ı	[и], [й]	27	V v	[в]
12	J j	[ж]	28	Y y	[ы]
13	K k	[к]	29	Ý ý	[у]
14	L l	[л]	30	Z z	[з]
15	M m	[м]	31	Sh sh	[ш]
16	N n	[н]	32	Ch ch	[ч]

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