

Language symbols for conveying culture

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Abstract

Recent studies have addressed the possibilities of adopting the Latin alphabet in the Kazakh script. However, little attention has been given to the investigation of the role of the script as a set of language symbols in transferring national cultural values. This paper seeks to lend insight into the historical and cultural dimensions of the Kazakh national script. We take a holistic approach to analyze the semiotic processes in Kazakhstan over time by unifying linguistic, cultural and historical perspectives. We highlight the role of language symbols in expanding cultural and spiritual heritage and passing down national cultural values through generations. The emergence of the Kazakh script, the alphabet and their preservation in written monuments, inscriptions of religious content, and publications served as the main means of distributing the national spiritual values, identity and socio-historical treasures. The complex study enabled us to conclude that the transfer of the Kazakh script to the Latin alphabet helps preserve national values, expand the scope of use of the Kazakh language in accordance with the needs of the society and flexibly transmit all modern scientific and technical achievements. The study contributes to the research of language policies in Central Asian countries.

Key words: language symbols, script, culture, graphics, spiritual values

Introduction

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Kazakhstan has faced a dilemma of integrating into the global culture while preserving its traditional cultural values (Sharipova, 2020). Primarily, this is manifested in opposing views on the language policy and particularly on the transfer of the Kazakh script from Cyrillic characters to a Latin-based alphabet, which was proposed by the Nazarbayev government within the development strategy “Kazakhstan 2050”. Some scholars support this proposal, regarding the Cyrillic alphabet as a distance from global cultural values (Batyrbekkyzy et al., 2018) and treating the transfer to Latin characters as “one of the most effective solutions in modernity” and “an indication of national identity achievement” (Yermekova et al., 2018, p. 98). On the other hand, some researchers maintain that the activities conducted to translate the Kazakh script into the Latin alphabet are ill-conceived due to a significant discrepancy between the ways Kazakh sounds are represented through Cyrillic and Latin characters (Ybyraimzhanov et al., 2019). Although the transfer to the Kazakh Latin alphabet is supposed to considerably avoid Russian influences, there still remain some letters that do not follow the one-to-one correspondence (Kim, 2018).

Although a considerable amount of research has been devoted to the possibility of adopting the Roman script in the Kazakh language, few attempts have been made to investigate the role of the script as a set of language symbols in transferring national cultural values. In this paper, we seek to lend insight into the historical and cultural dimensions of how the national Kazakh language is written. We take a holistic approach to analyzing the semiotic processes in Kazakhstan by unifying language, culture and history (Faudree & Hansen, 2014). We add more evidence to the discussion of the language policy in Kazakhstan by bringing to the fore the cultural and historical heritage, which is in great part realized through language (Levin, 2017).

The dissemination of cultural and social experience is achieved through communication, interaction, delivery and perception of certain information by means of language. Expanding, creating, storing and processing information in nature and society are realized through the use of symbols and symbolic systems. Thus, using various types of symbols, different information can be transmitted by an imam through the Quran, a composer through their music, a choreographer through dance or an artist through an artistic image. Symbols serve as simple carriers of information, and character systems serve as a base for elementary data. From ancient scripts to today's online chats, language symbols are known to affect culture.

Language is not only a system of symbols; it is a whole culture that conveys this system, a great heritage of each nation, a historical achievement of the nation. Culture is embodied in texts, proverbs, and phraseological units, which are passed down from generation to generation. Through the language of each nation, it is possible to find out information about its spiritual essence and cultural wealth because language can absorb and pass down the nation's realities, worldview and customs through generations as a heritage and treasure (Khaidarov, 1998). Language is a powerful social weapon that forms an ethnic group, a nation from a group of people, preserving and transmitting the social consciousness, traditions, and culture of the collective (Ter-Minasova, 2018). It also actively participates in all stages of the nation's spiritual development, from producing and storing spiritual values to their dissemination and acceptance by individual speakers (Tektigul et al., 2020).

Culture manifests itself as a unity of the material and spiritual. Indeed, the symbol is a material object perceived by the senses, and its meaning is a product of the spiritual activity of people. Symbols appear as a material shell of human thoughts, feelings, and desires. In order for the products of human spiritual activity to be preserved in culture, delivered and received through other people, they must be encoded and reflected in this symbolic shell. The relationship between the meaning and the symbol determines the inseparable unity of the spiritual and material aspects of the culture. Thus, culture is a certain complex system uniting spiritual and material products, which are produced, perceived and used by the members of society, and which is passed down from generation to generation (Idang, 2015).

The system of cultural distribution includes the following elements: subjects of cultural distribution, carriers of socialized culture (language, the carrier of information itself), transport and special technical means (radio, television, satellites), cultural institutions (special education systems, publishing houses, mass media, museums, libraries, cinemas, theaters (previously it was temples and churches), education. The main task of education is the socialization and inculturation of the individual in the process of spreading cultural values.

Language is important for people to communicate with each other. After all, by living together, people can create different cultures according to their own preferences. If this is the case, the different content and meanings conveyed by language symbols represent the culture of a particular social group. According to Temirbekov (2005), culture formation starts with the fact that a person is a person, with simple norms, rules, prohibitions, and orders necessary for communication between people, elements such as language, literature, art, religion, mass media, clothing, values are the main factors that bind people to each other.

Language has cultural and historical dimensions (Campbell, 1998; Trudgill, 2010). It is a product of the historical and cultural development of society, determining the stages of the history of each ethnic group. Language, as a cultural component of the communicative space of an ethnic group, performs a number of socially important functions. It combines and multiplies the values that contribute to the acquisition of experience, which is necessary for the formation of a person. A language develops in the communicative space of an ethnic group, it is a carrier of ethnocultural values, a

regulator and coordinator of the social processes and mechanism of modernization of sociality itself. It records models of civilization, and features characteristics of ethnic culture, national mentality and communicative behavior. Moreover, language provides a connection between past and present, thereby allowing ethnic groups to project the development of their culture in the future. The features of language determine its ability to store and spread information, consolidate and reproduce socio-cultural experiences in generations, and thus provide communicative contacts synchronically and diachronically.

Materials, methods and research results

In this study, the process of transferring the Kazakh script to a Latin-based alphabet is seen holistically as a unifying language, culture and history. We base our approach on Faudree and Hansen's "language–society–history" nexus (2014), which is based on understanding relations between sets of signs over time. The scholars suggest taking research to a higher level by "emphasizing the pursuit of history as a kind of fact-finding mission, where engagement with linguistic and cultural context provides access to information otherwise unavailable" (p. 239). Thus, we combined descriptive and historical comparative methods to analyze the process both synchronically and diachronically. In this way, it was possible to determine the influence of the language symbols and script (graphics) on the spiritual worldview in Kazakhstan at various stages of its historical development. Drawing on written monuments and other language data related to various periods in the history of Kazakhstan, we focused on the system of language symbols as an integral component of the written national culture is an abstract reflection of the spiritual reality and social life of the people.

A historical perspective is of great significance in the study of language policy in Kazakhstan. Historically speaking, the Kazakh scripts underwent several reforms that could not but affect the nation's cultural and social development. Since ancient times, the Kazakhs have used the Arabic script. Then in the first half of the 20th century, under the influence of the Soviet Union, they experienced two alphabet reforms: the Arabic script was replaced by the Latin alphabet in 1929, which in its turn was changed to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940. The former process was caused by the Soviet government's intention to weaken the religious knowledge of people, while the latter was similar to the processes in all the other parts of the Soviet Union (Batyrbekkyzy et al., 2018). The transfer to a 32-character Latin alphabet will be an essential shift away from the 42-character Cyrillic alphabet.

With the advent of the ability to record information, the process of exchanging information began to be delivered not only by mouth or gestures but also by reading and script. The ability to read and write thoughts has become a sign of human literacy. Written thoughts gave people an opportunity not only to exchange information but also to pass down the good treasures of humanity through descendants.

Mechkovskaya (2009) described three information revolutions. The first revolution took place about 3000 BC, about 5 thousand years ago, in Southern Dvurechye (modern Iraq), when ancient Sumerians created cunei form script that conveyed sounds of speech. The second revolution happened when book printing began in Germany in 1453 and quickly became widespread in Europe. The third revolution took place in the early 1970s when small personal computers were created in the United States to be used by one person. Over the next two decades, a centralized multilateral system was created, and the new connection reached the level of the Internet, which unites millions of personal computers. The first information revolution can be attributed to the oldest social semiotics, in other words, rituals. From this ritual developed the semiotics of proto-art, which merged with magic and cult, followed by the sound language of words, as well as many characters in the semiotics of behavior.

Ancient Turkic symbols and symbolic signs that have attracted the attention of researchers for several centuries are also an integral part of the unified Indigenous Turkic cultural complex. The art of script first appeared in the Kazakh land, and its earliest versions date back to the Stone Age. As clear proof of this, we can mention symbols drawn in the form of carved grooves and patterns on working tools. Alimbayev et al. (2020) refer to these ancient Turkic inscriptions as the first graphics of Turkic peoples. Turkologist scholars called the inscriptions on the monuments “rune script”. “Rune” means “secret” or “unknown”. The stone images and monuments prove that ancient rune inscriptions were used on the territory of Kazakhstan during the 7-9th centuries. According to scholars, these inscriptions were the first alphabet used by ancient Turkic people (Alimbayev et al., 2020).

A striking example of the work of a human being is the conscious sketching of figures, marking the smooth surface of the monument to Koskuduk on the coast of the Caspian Sea. The next stage of work, which continued over time via visual arts, marking, cutting images, and leaving patterns of drawing and script symbols using paints, is the exchange of samples of ancient Turkic symbols and signs. The analysis of their ethnocultural nature and definition of their identity is becoming the main object of research for scientists around the world.

A clear proof of the cultural achievements of indigenous Turkic people on a Eurasian scale is the presence of inscribed cultural monuments from the East of the country, in sacred and sacred mountains of Altai, Tarbagatai, Ulytau and Alatau, along the Rivers Irtysh, Syrdarya, Talas, Zhem. Among them are two 26-digit lines written on the outside of a silver bowl from the Tomb of the "Golden Man" near the city of Issyk. These inscriptions are similar to the ancient Turkic inscriptions and, secondly, to the ancient alphabetic symbols common in the countries of the Mediterranean coast, especially Greek and Aramaic letters. Having read the inscription on the door from right to left, like in the ancient Turkic language, Amanzholov (1978) concluded that the inscription on this monument of the Saka's era was written in the Turkic language, that is more than 2,500 years ago, and that the Turkic-speaking Saka tribes knew how to write (Amanzholov, 1978).

The art of script is one of the greatest contributions of humanity to world culture as a whole, and indigenous Turks invented and used one of the symbolic inscriptions – rune. Over the past two hundred years, the range of distribution of Indigenous Turkic runic inscriptions has significantly expanded. Epitaphic inscriptions are found in the form of rune inscriptions on the rocks and Saka mounds of Central Asia in Kazakhstan. According to it, with the expansion of the distribution area of these monuments, the names “Orkhon”, “Talastyk” or “Orkhon-Yenisei” runes appeared. The original version of rune inscriptions is mainly concentrated in three countries of the world: Russia (Sayan-Altai), Mongolia and China (Gertman, 1998).

In many cultures, the script as an elite, esoteric means of communication arose within the framework of ritual and religious communication. People have seen a miracle in script for a long time, so many peoples believed that script was created by the gods. At the same time, the myth of the creators of the script is the last myth with which the mythopoeic tradition ends. After the appearance of the script, the mythological period in the development of peoples ended.

The history of the script was associated with the increase in the area of written communication in geographical and social spaces. This led to the democratization of script relations. The “revolutionary” activity of script (in all types – pictography, hieroglyphic, letter-sound script) consists of the ability to convey information between time and space. In fact, the beneficial factors of these opportunities for humanity are incalculable.

Letter-sound (alphabetical) script showed people that with the help of only a small number of primary non-semantic elements (letters), it is possible to create any type of combination of elements (infinitely large and diverse) that can have a lot of content

(semantics). The suitability of letters for any message gives rise to the idea of the independence of script from the situation, from reality, and from the tribe (McLuhan, 2003).

The alphabetical script, taking the inscription out of context, demonstrates its suitability for delivering any necessary message of the content. Thanks to the alphabet, humanity has developed a cliched model of thinking (McLuhan, 2003) and desacralized their way of life (McLuhan, 2004). The dissemination of script has strengthened the objective and the rational principles in communication and cognition. According to Castel (2000), the script made it possible to distinguish what the speaker said. The alphabet has created a cumulative mental infrastructure based on communication knowledge in the West. Such conceptual technology has become the basis for the development of modern Western philosophy and science as we know it. This, in turn, made it possible to overcome the gap between spoken language and language, separating what is said by the speaker and making the conceptual discourse possible (Castels, 2000).

The influence of script on language communication processes has been determined by a number of trends. A written community understands itself and the world around it better than a tribe without a script. The development of human intelligence has contributed to a sharp increase in the number of pieces of information in public circulation, as well as the development of the content of information of a diverse nature. The centuries-old sources of information of the tribes that do not have an inscription have been preserved in their language (in the image of the linguistic world of the same tribe), mythology and folklore-epics (Kissa, Psalms), historical legends, fairy tales, Proverbs, rituals, songs.

At the origins of script culture, the most important victory in the transition to a written form of delivering information is not in quantity but in the quality of the information delivered (Ivanov, 1978). Scripts have the ability to preserve texts that are unique to the author, unlike all texts accepted in this society. If oral literature is equally understandable to all members of the tribe, that is, to everyone, and the first written texts that appear can only be familiar, known, and understandable to a certain group of people. That is why the emergence of script contributed to the information and intellectual classification of society and created conditions for the development of creative opportunities of its individual members.

Ancient scripts are linked in nature with the language and style of folk oral literature, with the most effective creative approach, which is called the tradition of the folklore of a person from infancy. It is known that the written monuments of ancient times were an example of an artificial literary language of their time. Most of them did not know the language of the script. No one spoke it; it lived only in scripts.

According to Vinogradov (1967), under feudalism, as a rule, there was no natural unity in the literary language due to feudal fragmentation. From the context, it is possible to clearly see the bright colors of various territorial dialects. This language was used only by a small part of feudal society or only by certain feudal groups and clergy.

According to Bogdanova (1974), the first written literature was permanently linked with folklore, especially its lyrical genre, and as a result, samples of oral literature were born through creative processing. It is believed that the Orkhon-Yenisei scripts later influenced the epic genre. Since these inscriptions are works of an advanced time in terms of the era, the heroic epics of the people have become the core and formed epic forms with a complex structure, that is, the way of development of their art: first folklore (lyrics), then written literature (monument with runes), then heroic epics "Manas". In other words, the emergence of the "writing machine" does not contribute to the growing understanding of the epics, but rather, the emergence of script becomes a brake on the epic genre of poetry. Because the former tradition of the oral epic was

replaced by written literature, which initially included many examples of oral literature, including the artistic techniques of epic, but gradually the script style in adulthood almost completely reproduces the use of words characteristic of oral style and passes to a new quality in accordance with the conditions of written language (Bogdanova, 1947).

Moreover, turkological works written in Arabic graphics of the 11-15th centuries have become an integral part of the spiritual wealth of the Kazakh people. Since the 10-11th centuries, due to the spread of Islam, the Turkic peoples have used the Arabic script – Kadim, based on the sound system and grammatical structure of the Arabic language. As a result of A. Baitursynov's reformation, it was turned into "Tote zhazy", supplemented with symbols representing native Kazakh sounds. Written monuments of the Middle Ages, written in Arabic script, include "Zhami-at-tawarih" by K. Zhalairi, "Muhabbatnama" by H. Ravani, "Diwani Hikmet" by Kh. A. Yasawi, "Hibatul Haqayyk" by A. Yugineki, "Kabusnama" by Keikaus, "Diwani lugat-it-Turk", "Kudatgu Bilik" by Zh. Balasagun. These are symbols of the moral development of Turkic peoples, including the Kazakh people, which had a significant impact on their intellectual and cultural progress. Furthermore, the stories in the Book of the Quran have become one of the aesthetic, educational foundations for development of world art of speech and the heritage of Kazakh literature on the path of humanistic ideals. A particularly influential place in their cultural development was occupied by the Islamic enlightenment.

The two reforms carried out by the Soviet government are of utmost significance, for they allow raising questions regarding the role of the language in Kazakh culture. The issue of transferring Turkic-speaking peoples of the Soviet territory to the Latin alphabet was discussed at the Constituent Assembly in Baku in 1926. The introduction of Latin graphics in the countries closest to Eastern countries covers the period from 1924 to 1932. But in 1940, a Kazakh script based on Russian graphics was adopted. Sauranbayev (1950) explained the importance of raising questions about the language through the spiritual abilities, political consciousness and desire of the Kazakh people due to their strong connection with the Kazakh culture. Two different approaches to the issue of making changes in the Kazakh alphabet were a reflection of two different directions in the spiritual life of the Kazakh people. One of them was the western direction led by Shokan, Ibrai, Abay, Babazhanov. Supporters of this direction noted the great importance for the future of Kazakhs to master the culture of the West, which is rapidly developing in technological progress through knowledge of the Russian language, mastering the art of script, overtaking the East and leading new changes in the world. In this regard, they preached the pursuit of World Culture by mastering the Russian language, graphics, and art knowledge. In this way, the Kazakh – Russian cultural and spiritual relations were opened.

Script also contributed to the enrichment of the lexical and phraseological funds of the folk language. Cumulative processes have played a major role in the development of the vocabulary of written languages, and accordingly, the intensity of lexical substitutions has decreased.

The development of the script also complicated the syntax of written speech. Of all the linguistic means of thinking, the syntax is the "net of rationality" (McLuhan, 2003). This syntax teaches a modern child to distinguish between meanings that are embedded in the "ProLogic" thinking of a person before school script, that is, "after" and "for that reason". Depending on the level of development of the script, explicit expression tools were developed in new languages, which led to the formation of differentiated and complex syntactic constructions. Therefore, written communication is distinguished by the average duration of the pronunciation, the depth of subordinate connections, the breadth of the range of connecting and related connections in comparison with the structural and quantitative parameters of the spoken language.

The language is a universal character system of the open type, capable of constant development and improvement. Impulses that stimulate the evolution of the language system arise in an ethnosocial collective that uses language as a means of communication, regulated by its social order. Kartsevsky (1965) maintains that the richness of the means of information expression of the language character system is combined with their internal compactness, the ability to supplement existing characters with the content as capacious as possible. According to the scholar, this is possible due to the asymmetric dualism of the language sign, which is very important for the media because it allows for complicating the information, optimally complementing and activating the communication channels.

Scripts strengthen people's metalingual reflection and make conditions for the creation of a literary language. Usually, the development of script leads to the formation of a literary language (normalized). Written communication strengthens people's attention to language, and in the process of script, people attach great importance to how correctly, clearly or "culturally" they write.

Scripts normalize the language and slow down the pace of the language changes. Script and normative and stylistic constraints that arise in the culture of the script, over time, prevent rapid changes in the language. Thanks to the predominance of cumulative currents (not lexical substitutions) in the development of vocabulary, script become the basis of the external memory of humanity.

Conclusion

Considering the course of development of language characters from a historical point of view makes it possible to determine that written characters, as a social phenomenon, have passed several stages of development and undergone major changes. This is evidenced by the process of gradual transformation of the symbols and drawings used in the ancient stone age into letter script. The "revolutionary" activity of script in all its types in the cultural and social life of a person and society consists in the ability to convey information between time and space and transmit this information to descendants in continuity with the spiritual worldview of the people. The system of linguistic symbols with the advent of the script had emerged, the mythological period in the development of the population ended, and the range of distribution of written communication in geographical and social space expanded. This, in turn, led to the democratization of written communication, internal interethnic and other interethnic spiritual and cultural exchanges.

The ancient Turkic Orkhon-Yenisei written monuments and turkological works written in Arabic graphics of the 11-15th centuries became an integral part of the spiritual wealth of the Kazakh people, and later the introduction of Latin and Cyrillic graphics significantly influenced the sound system of the Kazakh language, its vocabulary and grammatical structure. Thus, the Kazakh script culture, which originated from the ancient Turkic runic script, developed on the basis of ancient Uyghur, Arabic, and Latin graphics, which were used at different times, and continues with the Kazakh alphabet based on the modern Cyrillic alphabet, has become a national script tradition that fully covers the sound features of our language.

Nowadays, due to the fact that the language of the peoples of Europe, based on Latin as the language of world science and technology, brought about the transition of the peoples of Turkic origin to a single Latin alphabet, the same idea of the formation of the Kazakh national script on the basis of Latin graphics is also relevant. The transfer to the Latin alphabet is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive study and deep assessment of the political, social, cultural and spiritual aspects. Nevertheless, it enables preserving national values, expanding the scope of use of the Kazakh language in accordance with the needs of the society and flexibly transmitting all modern scientific and technical achievements.

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