

Integration and Separation of ‘Language’: Language Policies of Mongolian Peoples in the USSR and Mongolia, 1920–1940

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Introduction

To define what is a language is very difficult. There are many aspects that are relevant to this question. One approach is that a particular language is completely different from others. Another is that a language is similar to adjacent languages but still calls itself a language. There are also some cases in the world where there are debates whether a vernacular in discussion is a language or a dialect.

In this paper, therefore, I would like to discuss a case of Mongolian peoples where three written ‘languages’ came into being from people who had obscure ethnic boundaries but were united in one written language.

There are no studies, which deal with the language policy of all the Mongolian peoples as a whole. But for the whole of the Soviet Union in this period, we can refer to the writings of V.M. Alpatov and M.I. Isaev.¹ For other groups of people like Turks, there are a lot of books and papers which deal with the language policy of that group as a whole like Winner, Smith or Şimşir and books on orthographies of Turkic peoples.² For the creation of alphabets for minority peoples (with populations less than 50,000), a paper by O.A. Kazakevich gives a very useful list that describes which language had (and has) an alphabet, in which script and in which

¹ V.M. Alpatov, *150 iazykov i politika: 1917–2000* (Moscow 2000); M.I. Isaev, *Iazykovoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR* (Moscow, 1979).

² T.G. Winner, ‘Problems of Alphabetic Reform among the Turkic Peoples of Soviet Central Asia, 1920–1941’, *The Slavonic and East European Review* 31:76 (1952); G. Smith, *Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917–1953* (Berlin, 1998); B. Şimşir, *Türk yazı devrimi* (Ankara, 1992); *Voprosy sovershenstvovaniia alfavitov tiurkskikh iazykov SSSR* (Moscow, 1972).

period it was written.³ There are several books and papers which deal with language policies of Mongolian peoples but not as a whole. For the language policy of Buryats, we can refer to the books of Montgomery and L.D. Shagdarov or papers by Ts.B. Tsydendambaev.⁴ For the language policy of Kalmyks, there are several books, for example, those by Ts.-D. Nominkhanov, or D.A. Pavlov.⁵ For the language policy of Mongols in Mongolia, we can refer to books like ‘Mongolian People’s action for eradicating illiteracy’ or ‘Schools in revolutionary democracy period (1921–1940)’ or books of Ts. Shagdarsuren and L. Chuluunbaatar which give us important information from the educational policy aspect or from the linguistic aspect.⁶

The Mongolian Script

There is a script that was commonly used by Mongolic peoples.⁷ It is called the Mongolian script. There are many debates about when this Mongolian script was created. The oldest record of this script is from the 13th century, but in some scholars’ accounts this script was adopted together with Uygurs from Sogdians in the 7th century.

There are several scripts that Mongols used from that time: the Phasgpa script of the Yuan Dynasty, the Todo script of the Oirats

³ O. Kazakevich, ‘Iazyki malochislennykh narodov Rossii’, *Chelovek* 4 (1996).

⁴ R.W. Montgomery, *Buriat Language Policy, 19th c.–1928: A Case Study in Tsarist and Soviet Nationality Practices* (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1994); L.D. Shagdarov, *Stanovlenie edinykh norm buriatskogo literaturnogo iazyka v sovetskuiu epokhu* (Ulan-Ude, 1967); Ts.B. Tsydendambaev, *Itogi i nasushchnye problemy iazykovogo stroitel'stva v Buriatii (Trudy Buriatskogo instituta obshchestvennykh nauk, 19; Ulan-Ude, 1973)*, pp. 61–87.

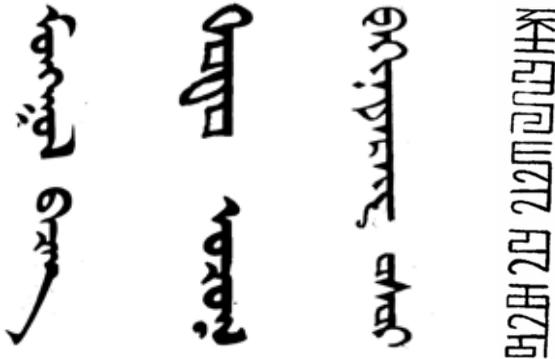
⁵ Ts.-D. Nominkhanov, *Ocherk istorii kalmytskoi pis'mennosti* (Moscow, 1976); D.A. Pavlov, *Voprosy istorii i stroia kalmytskogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Elista, 2000).

⁶ *Mongol ardyn hub'sgalt namaas buh niitiig undesnii bichig usegt surgasan n'* (Ulaanbaatar, 1967); *Hub'sgalyn ardhilsan shatny bolovsrolyn surguul' 1921–1940* (Ulaanbaatar, 1967); Ts. Shagdarsuren, *Mongol useg zui* (Ulaanbaatar, 1981); Ts. Shagdarsuren, *Mongolyn utga soyolyn tovchoo* (Ulaanbaatar, 1992); Ts. Shagdarsuren, *Mongolchuudyn useg bichgiin tovchoon* (Ulaanbaatar, 2001); L. Chuluunbaatar, *Nuudelchin Mongolchuudyn bichig usgiin soyol* (Ulaanbaatar, 2002).

⁷ In this paper, I am going to use the word Mongolian for people who live in what we call Mongolia today. I will use Mongol or Mongolic as a more general term to denote Mongolian peoples living anywhere in the world.

(Western Mongols) in the mid-17th century, the Soyombo script at the end of the 17th century, the character (letter) which is now used as a symbol of independence in Mongolia, the Vagindra script for Northern Mongols (Buryats) at the beginning of the 20th century, and the Latin script for Mongolians (people living in Mongolia now), Kalmyks (Western Mongols living on the western side of the Volga river) and Buryats (Northern Mongols) in the 1930s–1940s. Other than the Todo Script that is still used among Western Mongols in Xinjiang Autonomous Region in China, none of the above-mentioned scripts has survived. But the Mongolian script has survived. Mongols in Inner Mongolia, China, still use this script in their daily lives. The remaining Mongols, Mongolians in Mongolia and Kalmyks and Buryats in the Russian Federation now use Cyrillic for their daily lives.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Mongolian script was widely used by the Buryats, a Mongolic people living near Lake Baikal in the north, to the Khushuuts, a Mongolic people living near Tibet in the south, and by other Mongolic people living in Beijing in the east and the Mongolic Kalmyks living near the River Volga in the west. Even in places where the Todo script was used, namely, western Mongolia or Kalmykia, the Mongolian script was also used to communicate with a wider range of people. Thus at that time this script was written in those four remote places, exchanged between them and read there.



Mongolian script

Todo script

Vagindra script

Pagspa script

By then, however, the Mongolian script was no longer similar to any of the spoken vernaculars of the Mongolic people. Furthermore, literacy in the Mongolian script was very low. So in order to enlighten their people, the idea of language and script reform was thought up by intellectuals.

Buryats before World War I

The Buryats, a Mongolic people living in Siberia came under the dominance of the Russian Empire as a result of the Nerchinsk Treaty in 1689, the subordination of Khalkha (which occupies almost the same territory as Mongolia occupies today) to the Qing Dynasty in 1691, and the Kiakhta Treaty in 1727. In 1822, Buryats were given autonomy by the reform of Speranskii, the General-Governor of Siberia. But from the middle of the 19th century on, a huge amount of land that belonged to the Buryats (especially in the west) was taken on many occasions by immigrants that came to Siberia as a result of the liberation of serfs in 1860, the opening of the Trans-Siberian Railway, and the promotion of immigrants at the time of the Russo-Japanese War and the reform of Stolypin.

From this land question, Buryats started to be aware of their groups and nationality. That awareness gradually turned into national consciousness. To make this consciousness into a movement, intellectuals played the key role.

At the end of the 19th century, groups of Buryat intellectuals were formed mainly in St. Petersburg and Irkutsk. Petr Badmaev, a Buryat and a social activist, played a special role in the formation of Buryat intellectuals by establishing a school in St. Petersburg for Buryat pupils. Many Buryats who studied in this school later worked in various fields in the 1920s–1940s, like Tseveen Jamtsarano or Bazar Baradin.

One of those Buryat intellectuals, G. Tsybikov stated:

For those of us who believe in the possibility of cultural revitalisation for our people and all the Mongolic people, Buryats in Irkutsk are a very small number of people compared with Mongols who number up to about 4 million. We are like a small dot in a thousand dots for accomplishing what we think with all our might. But we Buryats in

Zabaikalia or North Baikal make up the avant-garde of awakening Mongols.⁸

Just as with other national movements, it was one of the important themes for intellectuals to modernise their people and to revitalise their cultural strength at the same time. And for that, Buryat intellectuals started to enlighten their people.

'To enlighten people, language must be modernised, so that it could be easily learned by people', Such an opinion could be heard not only from Mongols but also from Turkish or Persian intellectuals or people of other countries. Like in China, some people insisted on the abolition of Chinese characters and the use of another script for the Chinese language.⁹ Or in Japan, where one intellectual even insisted on using English instead of Japanese as the official language. All of these suggestions derive from the idea that their languages and scripts have been left behind by modern civilisation. Actually the adoption of the Latin script in place of Arabic in Turkey in 1928 was one of the results of these arguments.¹⁰

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the help of Professor Kotvich of St. Petersburg University, Buryats established a publisher called Naran and started to publish books in Mongolian or the other scripts. What they published were books on Buddhism and various kinds of books to enlighten people. Among those books published in Naran, two books were relevant to script reform. One is 'Mirror of Heart' (1905) by a Buddhist monk, Agvan Dorjiev and the other was 'Selected writings of Buryat Folk Literature' (1910) by Bazar Baradin. The former introduced a newly created Vagindra script. This script made necessary changes to the Mongolian script to bring it closer to actual speech.¹¹ The latter insisted on introducing the Latin script for Buryats, showing that by using the Latin script, they could write down their folk tales in various Buryat dialects.¹²

⁸ TANAKA Katsuhiko, *Sogen no Kakumeika tachi* (rev. edn., Tokyo, 1990), p. 201.

⁹ TAKEDA Masaya, *Soketsu tachi no Utage: Kanji no Shinwa to Yutopia* (Tokyo, 1994), pp. 191–317.

¹⁰ Şimşir, *Türk yazı devrimi*.

¹¹ D.-N.D. Dorzhiev, 'Ob orfografii staroburiatskogo iazyka', in B.V. Bazarov and M.I. Tulokhonov (eds.), *Filologicheskii sbornik* (Ulan-Ude, 1998), p. 251.

¹² B. Baraadiiin, *Buriaad zonoï uran eugeiïn deej* [in Russian: B. Baradin, *Otryvki iz buriatskii narodnoi literatury*] (St. Petersburg, 1910), pp. 37–38.

But both of these authors insisted that their scripts would be used as intermediate scripts between people and the Mongolian script so that people could easily master the Mongolian script with help of these intermediary writing forms. This was because it is too difficult for Buryats to learn the Mongolian script since the orthography was very difficult for them to learn and the usage is markedly different from that of their vernaculars.

I am not certain why they chose to put their plans in this way. Probably, simply because they would have been criticised if they had insisted on other scripts replacing the Mongolian script. But from those plans, we can ascertain that it is important to maintain the Mongolian script for Buryats, because this is the important medium that binds Buryats with other Mongolic people.

But the arguments of both Agvan Dorjiev and Baradin were disrupted by the outbreak of World War I and the Russian Revolution.

Kalmyks before 1930

When the Kalmyks moved into the Lower Volga region at the beginning of the 17th century, there were many non-Russians, mostly Turkic and Caucasian peoples, living around them. Thus the Kalmyks needed to struggle with all of those peoples to survive in this area. For this reason, they became strongly conscious of themselves as Mongols. The Kalmyks are also the only people in the region who believe in Buddhism and this makes a sharp contrast between the Kalmyks and the surrounding people. From the end of the 17th through the beginning of the 18th century, Khan Ayuki rose up and made a strong Kalmyk Khanate in this area. This was the high point for Kalmyk society. After Khan Ayuki's death, Kalmyks started to lose their strength. And in 1771, when most aristocrats with their herdsmen left for Xinjiang, where they were originally from, their territory was put under the direct control of the Russian government. From that point on, their territory shrank year by year, as a result of the expropriation of their lands by the government and the immigration of Russian and German peasants. From the time when Kostenkov had made the first thorough study of Kalmyks in 1860, many predictions appeared that the Kalmyks would soon disappear.

The Russification tendency was especially very strong for Kalmyks living in the Derbet Ulus area. Professor Kotvich of St. Petersburg University gave a helping hand to teachers of this area. In 1915, he wrote a textbook of Kalmyk language and invited Kalmyks to St. Petersburg to give a lecture so that they could teach Kalmyk to their pupils in school.¹³

As I have mentioned already, the script they used was the Todo script. The Todo script was created in 1648 by Zaya Pandita to distinguish some phonemes that cannot be distinguished in the Mongolian script.

This script spread among Western Mongols and it was said that the language written in this script was very close to their speech in the mid-17th century. But as time went on, the difference between script and speech widened and by the beginning of the 20th century, the difference became so wide that some people blamed the Todo script as the very reason that Kalmyks were left behind by modern civilisation. For this reason, Professor Kotvich made a draft of orthography reform for the Todo Script, and wrote a textbook with this orthography. This reformed Todo script seems to have been quickly accepted among the Kalmyks, as a primer of the Kalmyk language written by two Kalmyk authors, Nikolai Narmaev, and Nomto Ochirov, was published in this reformed Todo script in the same year (1915) and the first Kalmyk newspaper published from 1917 to 1918 was also written in this same orthography.¹⁴

But again this does not mean that people did not use the Mongolian script. The word ‘Todo’ means ‘clear’ and that, of course, meant that this script clearly distinguished some of the phonemes that the Mongolian script writes in the same way. Western Mongols named the Mongolian script the ‘Khudam’ script. It presumably means ‘wide’ or ‘widely used’ and they really used it as a means of wider communication.

1917 brought with it the Russian Revolution and the region where the Kalmyks lived turned into a furious battlefield of the Red and White Armies. Both sides tried to attract the Kalmyks to their side. Lenin once offered autonomy to the Kalmyks if they would be on his side. So in June 1920, the Kalmyk Autonomous Province (Oblast’) was formed by the Soviet Government. And from Orenburg to the North Caucasus, many

¹³ V. Kotvich, *Opyt grammatiki kalmytskogo razgovornogo iazyka*, 2nd edn. (Prague, 1929).

¹⁴ Nikolai Narmaev and Nomto Ochirov, *Bukvar*’ (1915, Petrograd); *Eeretiyyin Zenggi* 1–5 (1917–1918).

Kalmyks came and settled in this Autonomous Province (Autonomous Republic after 1935).

In December 1923, three years after the formation of the Province, the adoption of the Cyrillic script in place of the reformed Todo script was suddenly proposed. On January 6th the following year, a conference on the script was held and Nomto Ochirov delivered a speech on it, after which a vote was called. The result was 145 for and 5 against, so Cyrillic was adopted.¹⁵

Strangely enough, the presenter of the speech, Nomto Ochirov, was one of the authors who published the reformed Todo Script Primer in 1915. The reason why he changed his mind for Cyrillic is unknown. But it seems that resistance against the reform was still strong. So in the resolution adopted after this conference they had to include something about the Todo script, besides the adoption of Cyrillic. The resolution said that the Todo script would be kept for academic use so that the Kalmyks' past did not fall into oblivion.¹⁶

Also the newly adopted Cyrillic was never called an alphabet but a transcription in the resolution. It was very strange to use this term, because it sounds like Cyrillic is a transcription of another script.

If we interpret this word in respect of the Japanese script system, it might be something like the relation between Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji, the Chinese characters. The scripts called Hiragana and Katakana, syllabic letters, both include the word 'Kana' which can be translated as 'tentative letters'. So both 'Kana' formerly existed for transcribing the only real script, Kanji, the Chinese characters.

We already have discussed script reform of the Buryats and seen that they had introduced a new script that mediated between the people and the Mongolian script. And it seems that the idea of the word transcription is exactly the same as the idea of script reform among the Buryats. If we go back to the beginning of the 20th century, when we find the name Ochirov among the founders of the publisher Naran, we may guess that he might have thought of the same idea for the Kalmyks, probably because reformed Todo script is still difficult for people to learn.¹⁷ It is just an

¹⁵ Natsional'nyi arkhiv Respubliki Kalmykiia (hereafter: NARK), f. R113, op. 1, d. 33, l. 28.

¹⁶ NARK, f. R113, op. 1, d. 33, l. 28.

¹⁷ A.A. Vigin, A.N. Khokhlov and P.M. Shastitko (eds.), *Istoriia otechestvennogo vostokovedeniia s serediny XIX veka do 1917* (Moscow, 1997).

assumption and this does not mean all the people shared the same idea; it just happened that a group of people, with a variety of thoughts, had one aim to accomplish, that was to change that script. And Ochirov was one of them. He didn't participate in the linguistic conferences of later years. Probably his ideas and those of other scholars were already different.

Anyway, this reform stagnated as many scholars contributed ideas for the alphabet and orthography of the Kalmyk language.

In February 1928, a guest was invited to solve this entangled problem. It was B.Ia. Vladimirtsov. He was an academician, a professor of Leningrad University and a very influential scholar of Mongolian studies at that time. But against the expectations of the Kalmyks, Professor Vladimirtsov gave a speech against introducing Cyrillic and expressing the unity of the Mongolic world. His speech was said to have invited frowns of disgust among the Kalmyks.

The problems were settled after the conference. And a month later, newspapers, journals and so on, started to publish in the way that was resolved at this conference.

But at the very same conference, N. Tiuriakulov participated from Moscow. He said that many ethnic people living in the Soviet Union were now adopting the Latin script and that the Kalmyks had to follow this trend. So another wave of reform had already reached Kalmykia. In January 1930, the Kalmyks abolished the use of Cyrillic and adopted the Latin alphabet in its place. And the newly adopted script was not called a transcription anymore.

Buryats after the Russian Revolution until 1929

After the Revolution, the intervention of the armies of the United States, Japan and other countries occurred in Siberia and the Far East and it became very difficult to establish a Bolshevik regime there. So the Bolsheviks decided to separate the eastern side of Lake Baikal from the rest of Russia and created a buffer state called the Far Eastern Republic. For this reason, Buryat people living on both sides of Lake Baikal had to live separately in the two countries. But soon after the withdrawal of the Japanese Army in October 1922, this Far Eastern Republic was quickly absorbed by the Soviets. The Buryats got together again as one and

formed the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR hereafter) in 1923.¹⁸

But this is not the end of the problem for the Buryats. Buryats in the east and west of Lake Baikal are culturally very different. Some archeological and historical findings tell us that the Buryats in the east were related to the Mongols of the East, while the Buryats in the west were said to have come from the West and to be culturally and linguistically related to Western Mongolic people.

Religion is also different. Buddhism was widely spread among the Eastern Buryats from the 17th century; while the Buryats of the west have been strongly influenced by Shamanism and Christianity since Nikolai I prohibited the propagation of Buddhism in 1853.

This difference in religions also is reflected in the difference in scripts and vocabularies. The Mongolian script was used officially or religiously for Eastern Buryats, while no script was officially adopted for Western Buryats. But Cyrillic was more familiar to Western Buryats than the Mongolian script since Cyrillic is used in administration and in schools. Differences in vocabulary appeared especially in the vocabulary of administration, as Eastern Buryats use Buddhist terms for this, while Western Buryats use Russian loan words.

So on both sides of Lake Baikal lived people called Buryats but their culture was so different as we have seen above. Thus intellectuals had to try to create a new written language for Buryats on both sides, so that they could overcome their cultural differences.

Some of the intellectuals wanted to unite Buryats with the Mongolian script. Others, especially some Western Buryat intellectuals, wanted to adopt Cyrillic for the new written language. And others, like Bazar Baradin, wanted to adopt the Latin script. But throughout the 1920s, the Mongolian script was the strongest. This was probably because there were a lot of materials available in this script, not only for Buryats but also from other areas where people used the same script. So Buryats still had a medium to communicate in writing with the rest of the Mongolic world.

Though the Latin script was officially adopted in 1931, some books and journals were published in the Mongolian script until 1937.

¹⁸ The name Buryat-Mongol is the official name to call Buryats until 1958; since 1958, they are called Buryat. But I am going to use the term Buryat in my text for convenience.

Mongolia before 1930

The main part of what is now called Mongolia belongs to the Khalkha Mongols. These Khalkhas preserved their independence until the end of the 17th century, when the Western Mongols invaded and drove them out of their country, so that they had to come under the dominance of the Qing Dynasty for help in 1691. But their language and culture were somewhat the same as before except that they had to train some of their servants to read and write in Manchurian. The first time they mentioned the necessity of learning Chinese was in 1898.¹⁹

Among the Mongols under the domination of the Qing Dynasty, the first attempt at making language reform appeared from those who lived closer to China. This probably was because they learned the idea of language reform from the arguments of Chinese language reform. But such arguments did not seem to reach the place where the Khalkhas lived.

After the Chinese Revolution and the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the momentum for independence grew among Mongolians. They organised an army and fought against the Chinese Army and succeeded in occupying the territory of what is now called Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. But as a result of the Kiakhta Treaty between Russia, China, and Mongolia in 1915, Mongolia was given autonomy and had to stay within the Republic of China.²⁰

From 1911 until the Russian Revolution, many Buryats were invited to Mongolia to work for them to build the nation. One of such cases is Tseveen Jamtsarano who drafted an educational plan for Mongolians. Soon after the Russian Revolution, the Chinese government rescinded Mongolia's autonomy. But in 1921, a revolution occurred in Mongolia and finally they succeeded in attaining independence. Many Buryats were also devoted to this revolution.

For this independent Mongolia, a lot of Buryats again came to work. Especially in the field of education, all the Ministers were Buryats after the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1924 until 1932.²¹

¹⁹ *Manjiin daranguillyn ueiin Mongolyn surguul' (1776–1911)* (Ulaanbaatar, 1965), pp. 45–46.

²⁰ Enhσαιhan (ed.), *Hyatad, Oros, Mongolyn gурvan улсын 1915 онь Hyagtyn geree* (Ulaanbaatar, 1999).

²¹ Sh. Shagdar Ambagait, *Mongol улсын болovsролын тууhiin товчоон* (Ulaanbaatar, 2000).

Jamtsarano also played an important role in the Mongolian Science Committee (later the Mongolian Academy of Sciences).

It might be the influence of these Buryat intellectuals that they started to be aware of the need for reform of the Mongolian script and their written language, which was, for Mongolians too, quite different from the language they spoke. This argument came under discussion for the first time at the Fourth Party Conference of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party in 1925. But no real action took place until 1930.

Latinisation in the USSR

In March 1922, a Committee on the New Turkic Alphabet was created under the leadership of S. Agamaly-Ogly in Azerbaijan to promote the Latin script in place of the Arabic script.²²

This movement extended its scale when the Congress of Turkology in February 1926 officially acknowledged use of the Latin script for all languages of the Turkic peoples in the USSR. This movement expanded again to a nation-wide level, when the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union resolved to create an All-Union Central Committee for a New Turkic Alphabet (hereafter Central Committee of NTA), headed by S. Agamaly-Ogly, the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan. In August 1929, the Soviet Central Executive Committee and the Soviet of People's Commissars adopted a resolution 'On newly latinised alphabet of Arabic-script-using nations in the Soviet Union' and latinisation expanded to all the peoples who used the Arabic script. Furthermore, their activities also expanded to create scripts for other peoples who did not have any script to write their own vernaculars. N. Ia. Iakovlev, one of the linguists who played the main role in this latinisation movement, reported in a journal of the Committee of New Turkic Alphabets 'Revolution and Script' in 1932 that 66 nations had already adopted the Latin script and 7 were under consideration.²³ Surprisingly,

²² N.A. Baskakov (ed.), *Voprosy sovershenstvovaniia alfavitov tiurkskikh iazykov SSSR* (Moscow, 1972).

²³ N. Iakovlev, 'Nekotorye itogi latinizatsii i unifikatsii alfavitov v SSSR', *Revoliutsiia i pis'mennost'* 4-5 (14-15) (1932), p. 34.

some of those are languages spoken by less than 50,000 people. So, tremendous efforts were made to realise latinisation in the Soviet Union.

Of course, the number that Iakovlev mentioned here also includes the cases of Kalmyks and Buryats, and of Mongolians. But as already discussed, the Mongolic people in some way or another had their own ideas about reforming their language. So we would next like to look at how they reacted to the latinisation movement in its formative stages.

Mongolic Peoples and the Beginning of Latinisation

For Mongolians, the latinisation movement was officially adopted in 1930, by a resolution of the Eighth Party Congress of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party and also by a resolution of the Sixth Parliament Meeting of People's Republic of Mongolia.²⁴ In the same year, a Committee for Latin Mongolian Script was formed in the Ministry of Education and the Committee drafted a plan to use Latin officially by January 1933.²⁵

For Buryats, Bazar Baradin, who had already insisted on the adoption of the Latin script since 1910, took the lead in the latinisation movement. In 1929, he published a paper called 'Problems on improving the language culture of Buryats' in the journal of the Central Committee of NTA 'Culture and Script of the East' (the former name of 'Revolution and Script') on the latinisation of their language.²⁶ After two years of discussion, latinisation was officially adopted in 1931 by a resolution of the Third Province Committee Board Meeting of the Buryat-Mongol Communist Party.²⁷

At the beginning of the latinisation period, Buryats planned to make their new written language not based on any Buryat dialects but on the Khalkha dialect of Mongolia. This shows that Buryats wanted to have one new written language with the people in Mongolia like they did when they used the Mongolian script. But the Buryat Government adopted the

²⁴ *Mongol ardyn.*

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ B.B. Baradin, 'Voprosy povysheniia buriat-mongol'skoi iazykovoi kul'tury', *Kul'tura i pis'mennost' Vostoka*, kniga 5 (1929).

²⁷ 'O kul'turno-natsional'nom stroitel'stve', *Vestnik Instituta kul'tury Buriat-Mongol'skoi ASSR* 2–3 (1931), p. 16.

Selenge dialect as the basis of the new written language in the same meeting that adopted a resolution of the Latin script in 1931.²⁸ The reason for this change could be explained in two ways. One is direction from Moscow since the central government feared foreign influences on its ethnic minorities. Second is resistance from some Buryats since the Khalkha dialect is not a dialect of Buryats. But the newly adopted Selenge dialect is the southernmost dialect spoken by only 10 per cent of the whole population. It is not a major dialect for Buryats. The main reason for adopting the Selenge dialect was that this dialect is very close to the Khalkha dialect, and by adopting this dialect, Buryats still can form one written language for Mongolians. But some Eastern Buryats, especially speakers of the Khori dialect, were not happy to see their dialect ignored.

Kalmyks were accused of acting against latinisation and making arguments in newspapers in favor of ‘russification’ at the conference of New Turkic Alphabets in the Lower Volga region held in Saratov in November 1929.²⁹ Two months later in January 1930, the Central Executive Committee in Kalmyk Province adopted the latinisation policy and all the publications started to be published in the Latin script from 28 September 1930.

Conference on Problems of Writing and Language for Mongolic Peoples (10–17 January 1931)³⁰

On 10–17 January 1931, a conference was held in Moscow. The conference was called ‘Conference on problems of writing and Language for Mongolic People’. Here, Mongolians, Buryats and Kalmyks got together in one place for the first and last time to discuss the unification of their newly adopted script and orthography.

Speeches delivered at this conference were as follows:

²⁸ ‘O kul’turno-natsional’nom’, p. 16.

²⁹ Aitov-gil’, ‘Novyi alfavit v Nizhne-volzskom krae’, *Revoliutsiia i pis'mennost'* 3 (1932), p. 63.

³⁰ The material I used in this chapter is: ‘Konferentsiia mongol'skikh narodov po voprosam pis'mennosti i iazyka’, *Revoliutsiia i pis'mennost'* 3 (1932), pp. 66–77.

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| O. Aliev | On the latinisation of the peoples of the East in the Soviet Union and the unification of alphabets. |
| I. Khabaev | On the latinisation of the alphabet in the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Republic and the unification of alphabets for Mongolian peoples. |
| B. Dugarjav | On latinisation in the Mongolian People's Republic. |
| B. Badmaev | On latinisation and unification in the Kalmyk Autonomous Province. |
| G. Danilov | Written language and dialects. |
| B. Baradin | Forming the new Mongolian written language. |
| I. Ilishkin | On the Kalmyk written language. |
| N. Iakovlev | On the principles of making orthographies. |
| Baradin and Poppe | On the orthography of the new Mongolian written language. |
| Ts.-D. Nominkhanov | On the new Kalmyk written language. |
| N. Iakovlev | On the principles of creating terminology in ethnic languages. |
| Rinchino and Rinchine | On Mongolian terminology. |
| N. Manjiev | On Kalmyk terminology |
| Khadiev | On the activities of the Soviet Central Publishing House. |
| Togmitov | On the activities of Buryat-Mongol National Publishing House |
| B. Dugarjav | On the publishing activities of the Mongolian People's Republic. |
| Teljnikov | On the activities of the Central Asian Research Association. |

In a resolution of the conference, the Unified Mongolian Alphabet consisting of 27 letters (a, b, c, ç, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, ø, p, r, s, ş, t, u, v, y, z, ž) with three additional letters for Kalmyk (ə, ı, x) were adopted. The resolution requested Kalmyks to change some phonetic values of letters (c and ç) in their alphabet.

For dialects, which the new written language should be based on, Buryats and Mongolians adopted the Khalkha dialect, and Kalmyks adopted the Torgut dialect (one of the two major dialects of the Kalmyks). But a resolution also noted that the heritages of the other dialects, the Mongolian script, and other international languages should not be neglected.

For orthography, the most problematic point was how to write schwa (obscure vowel) after a second syllable. Mongolians and Buryats created orthography to write them, while Kalmyks created orthography not to write them entirely except for long vowels. The resolution in this conference adopted an orthography that writes schwas after the second syllable and requested Kalmyks to change their orthography.

For terminology, the adopted resolution suggested writing according to the phonetical system of that language, and not writing in the way words were spelt in the language of origin.

For publication, a resolution was suggested to create a Mongolian Section of the Central Publishing Bureau in Moscow, to make the necessary adjustments to publishing activities between the Buryat-Mongol ASSR and the Mongolian People's Republic and to reintroduce printing machines for the Buryat-Mongol ASSR and the Kalmyk Autonomous Province.

Finally, it was suggested to make a standing committee to promote the development of language and script for Mongolian peoples in Moscow.

As we have seen above, at this conference, Buryats and Mongolians had the same opinions in almost every respect. Actually, all the speakers who delivered speeches on Mongolian language were Buryats, except for Poppe (Dujarjav was the minister of Education in Mongolia then). So this clearly shows that the language policies of both Mongolia and Buryats really went hand in hand at this point. But for the Kalmyks, in contrast, the policy was always different and the resolution requested Kalmyks to change their ways in many respects.

It is still not clear who first proposed organizing this conference. But if we look around at what was going on at that time, we can see that other peoples speaking similar languages or peoples living in the same territory were also holding similar conferences. As a matter of fact, this was one trend at that time, after the leaders of the Central Committee of NTA found it impossible to unify all the languages of the USSR, as they had

dreamed at the beginning of latinisation. But still, it is possible to suppose that the Buryats played an important role in organizing this conference from the conditions we have seen above.

We also need to point out here that there were two people who were in charge of latinisation in the Center. One was N. Poppe, professor of Leningrad University and the other was Ts. Nominkhanov, a Kalmyk who had graduated from Leningrad University only recently. Poppe was in charge of Buryats and Mongolia and Nominkhanov was in charge of Kalmyks. Probably there was also a power relationship between those two and that worked beneficially toward unifying the alphabet, orthography and so on in favor of the Buryat and Mongolian sides.

Although not everything was unified by this conference, basically they reached a resolution to unify the written language to a certain degree. Now we need to examine how the resolution was put into practice.

Kalmyks after the Conference

In short, the Kalmyks basically rejected changing the policy as requested at the Conference in Moscow.

In May 1931, 4 months after the conference, they did adopt a resolution to change some phonetic values of letters (c and ç) in their alphabet, responding to what was requested at the Conference.³¹ But that was the only change made. They did not change the principle of orthography, i.e. not writing schwas after the second syllable.

There is a reason why they did not make further changes. The Kalmyk primer, published in 1915 by Narmaev and Ochirov, was written in reformed Todo Script with a transcription in Cyrillic. In this textbook we find that Cyrillic transcriptions are almost the same as those that were planned to be used after 1924. It was also said that a Finnish Mongolist, G. Ramstedt, had a significant influence on this transcription. Ramstedt carried out an experiment to analyze the phonetic system of Kalmyk speech at the beginning of the 1900s.³² He noted a small circle on the top of consonants after which he heard schwas. Ochirov was one of the

³¹ Ts.-D. Nominkhanov, *Ocherk istorii kalmytskoi pis'mennosti*.

³² The rest of the story in this paragraph was heard from Prof. P. Bitkeev of the State University of Kalmykia, during my stay there in 2000–2001.

Additional letters to Cyrillic and Latin Alphabets in Kalmyk (1924-1941)

IPA ³³	æ	ö	Ü	ү	џ	η	ʃ	ʂ	
1924	ä	ö	у	г	Ж	ң	-	-	(Cyrillic)
1926	d	v	ю	h	дж	нг	-	-	
1928	я	э	ю	г	ж	нг	-	-	
1930	ə	е	у	h	з	η	с	ç	(Latin)
1931	ə	е	у	h	з	η	ç	с	
1938	ä	ö	ÿ	Гь	дж	Нь	-	-	(Cyrillic)
1941	ə	е	ү	h	ж	ң	-	-	

persons who were being tested in Ramdstedt's experiment. So if Ochirov knew the result and understood that not to write the schwa is 'scientific', then it is understandable why they did not change this orthography. Although Ochirov did not play the main role in the latinisation period, the belief of what is 'scientific' remained in people's minds.

In 1934, the 4th Linguistic conference was held in Elista, the capital city of Kalmykia. Here Kalmyks adopted a new way of writing the present progressive form of the verb, and also settled the problem of how to write one syllable nouns with a short vowel which turns into a long vowel when suffixes are added.³⁴ Again as with other rules, those new rules served to make the orthography of the Kalmyk language quite different from that of Mongolians and Buryats.

In December 1937, they decided to adopt Cyrillic instead of Latin. But the orthography stayed the same as when they used the Latin script.³⁵

There are two Cyrillic alphabets drafted to the Kalmyk language. The first one was drafted in 1938³⁶ and the second in 1941.³⁷ But war with Germany broke out in June 1941, and the German army occupied Elista for a while. Shortly after the withdrawal of the German army in December 1943, Kalmyks were deported to Siberia and Central Asia as citizens of an enemy nation who cooperated with the Germans. So these two alphabets

³³ International Phonetic Alphabet.

³⁴ *Халыг кел тохлһна IV-гҗ конференц* (Elst, 1935), p. 105.

³⁵ NARK, Partiinyi arkhiv Kalmytskoi Oblasti (PAKO), f. 1, op. 3, d. 43, l. 35.

³⁶ NARK, PAKO, f. 1, op. 3, d. 102, l. 15.

³⁷ NARK, f. R131, op. 1, d. 910, l. 10–11.

coexisted until 1959, two years after they were finally allowed to go back home and reestablish their Autonomous Republic in 1957.

Comparing those two alphabets of Kalmyks, we know that the 1941 alphabet is rather closer to the alphabet the Buryats adopted in 1938, from which fact we can presume that there might have been some influence of the Buryat alphabet on the Kalmyk one in 1941. As a matter of fact, Professor Sanjeev, a Buryat working at Moscow University, published a book on Kalmyk grammar in 1940.³⁸ It is still uncertain if he was involved in drafting the alphabet for the Kalmyks. But anyhow, the alphabets of the Kalmyks and Buryats are not completely the same, and the orthography and way of forming new terms are also different. In this way, a language called the Kalmyk language was developed, a language that is different from both Mongolian and Buryat and from the Mongolian or Todo scripts.

Buryats after the Conference

After the conference things became complicated for the Buryats since their language policy became contested between two trends, intrinsic and extrinsic.

On the alphabet, as I have already mentioned, Bazar Baradin, a Buryat, published an article in the journal 'Culture and Script of the East' in 1929. But in the very same issue, N. Poppe, professor of Leningrad University, also published an article on latinisation.³⁹

There is a letter of Poppe to Baradin left in the archives of the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences (Ulan-Ude).⁴⁰ The letter was probably sent sometime in February 1929. Poppe was surprised to find out that Baradin (head of the Buryat Science Committee, later the Siberian Branch of the Academy of Sciences) was working on a plan of the Latin alphabet on his own, because Poppe was appointed as the man in charge of that by the Committee of New Turkic Alphabets, saying that this was

³⁸ G.D. Sanzheev, *Grammatika kalmyktskogo iazyka* (Moscow, 1940).

³⁹ N.N. Poppe, 'K voprosu o sozdanii novogo mongol'skogo alfavita', *Kul'tura i pis'mennost' Vostoka* 5 (1929), pp. 28–33.

⁴⁰ Tsentr vostochnykh rukopisei i ksilografov Instituta mongolovedeniia, buddologii i tibetologii Sibirskogo otdeleniia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk (TsVRK IMBT SO RAN), f. 471, op. 1, d. 64, l. 69.

requested by the Buryat Science Committee. That was the reason Poppe sent a letter to Baradin. Baradin replied that his Committee never asked the Committee of the New Turkic Alphabet about it. But it seems that this misunderstanding was never settled and they both published articles in the same journal.

Baradin's alphabet had a different principle from that of the Central Committee of the NTA. The basic idea of the New Turkic Alphabet was to give one letter for one phoneme, so there were a lot of letters with diacritic marks in its alphabets. However, Baradin tried to limit the number of letters to 26, like English, and use two or more letters to express a phoneme, like 'ch' instead of 'ç' or 'zh' instead of 'з'. The Central Committee criticised the alphabet he planned. The alphabet for the Buryats, finally adopted in 1931, had the principle of one letter for one phoneme, which presumably was drafted by N. Poppe.

From 1932, the atmosphere that surrounded ethnic minorities in the Soviet Union gradually changed. Some activists who seem to have had nationalist tendencies were caught and removed from the stage of policy making. Baradin was also one of them, being arrested and executed in 1938. And attitudes toward Mongolia also shifted in this wind of change. Some people started to argue that their written language was not understandable to a wider range of people since it was written in the Selenge dialect, a dialect which was spoken by only 10 per cent of people and was grammatically different from most other Buryat dialects. Thus a language conference was held in June 1936, and a resolution was adopted to change the dialect that the written language should be based on from Selenge to Khori, the most populous dialect spoken around the capital city of the Buryat ASSR. The Khori dialect has personal suffixes and the phoneme /h/ that most Buryat dialects have but which Khalkha or Selenge Dialect do not.

In 1938, the Buryats also decided to adopt Cyrillic but the orthography basically stayed the same. So Buryats also went in a different direction from that resolved at the conference of 1931.

**АЛФАВИТ И ОСНОВЫ ПРАВОПИСАНИЯ
БУРЯТ-МОНГОЛЬСКОГО ЯЗЫКА.**

Бурят-монгольский алфавит состоит из следующих
36 букв:

Аа	Бб	Вв	Гг	Дд	Ее	Ёё	Жж	Зз	Ии	Йй	Кк
а	ба	ва	га	да	е	ё	жа	за	и	йе- говое я	ка
Лл	Мм	Нн	Оо	Өө	Пп	Рр	Сс	Тт	Уу	Үү	Фф
аль	м	н	о	ө	пэ	эр	эс	тэ	у	ү	эф
Хх	Һһ	Цц	Чч	Шш	Щщ	Ъ	Ы	Ь	Ээ	Юю	Яя
ха	һа	ца	ча	ша	ща	тсёр- дэй знак	ы	ь мэг- хэй знак	э	ю	я

Buryat alphabet adopted in 1938

Mongols after the Conference

There was already a plan of action in Mongolia to use the Latin script by January 1933 as I mentioned earlier. But in 1932, there rose an objection that the orthography of Mongolian is a ‘Buryatised’ orthography and does not really reflect the Mongolian language based on the Khalkha dialect.⁴¹ The Mongolian government recognised this idea and the plans were made up in that year, so there was just about a year of latinisation in Mongolia after the conference in 1931. As we can easily imagine, not so many things were accomplished in that very short period of time, other than some publications and some articles in newspapers.

In the latter half of the 1930s came the Great Terror. Many Buryats who worked in the fields of education, science, law and so on were caught and sentenced to long term imprisonment or execution on charges of being Pan-Mongolists or counter-revolutionaries, since many of them came to Mongolia during World War I or in the Civil War period.

⁴¹ Chuluunbaatar, *Nuudelchin Mongolchuidyn*, pp. 93–94.

In 1937, after the Mongolian government substantially wiped out the influence of the Buryats, latinisation was again proposed.⁴² But it was not until 1940 that the government seriously considered latinisation. In 1940, the 10th Party Congress of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party gave a direction to use the Latin script.⁴³ In July that year, a Latin Alphabet Committee was formed, headed by Yu. Tsendenbal, Secretary General of the State, with Mashlai, Minister of Education as vice chairman.⁴⁴ The person who played the main role in this latinisation was Ts. Damdinsuren, who was born in Mongolia and had studied in Leningrad.

In February 1941, the draft of the Latin alphabet by the Latin Alphabet Committee was acknowledged by a joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Mongolian Revolutionary Party and the Council of ministers.⁴⁵ As we have already seen, Buryats and Kalmyks had already renounced latinisation and adopted Cyrillic at this point. But the Mongolians moved toward latinisation again.

But this move was stopped. In March 1941, just a month after their acknowledgement of the Latin alphabet, they decided to adopt Cyrillic in the very same joint meeting.⁴⁶ An Alphabet Committee was again formed, this time for Cyrillic; however the members did not change.⁴⁷ In May, the Cyrillic alphabet, which consisted of 35 letters, was acknowledged. And in November, the Committee resolved an orthography based on the speech Damdinsuren made the same day.⁴⁸

Changing the policy of a government is not an easy thing. As the members of both committees were the same, we can presume that this change did not come from within, but from somewhere outside.

Either way, the orthography of Cyrillic became different from that of Latin. There were some rules added to this new orthography. The most complicated of those rules is the rule of dropping the vowel in the stem of the word when suffixes are added to it.⁴⁹ This certainly reflects real

⁴² Chuluunbaatar, *Nuudelchin Mongolchuudyn*, p. 95.

⁴³ *Huv'sgalyn ardchilsan shatny bolovsrolyn surguul' 1921–1940* (Ulaanbaatar, 1967), p. 49.

⁴⁴ Chuluunbaatar, *Nuudelchin Mongolchuudyn*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ Shagdarsuren, *Mongolyn utga soyolyn tovchoo*, p. 128.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ D. Damdinsuren, *Shine usegiin duren* (Ulaanbaatar, 1942), p. 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 1–5.

⁴⁹ This rule can be also seen in Russian, as in the case of a word like 'otets' (father) which

speech in Mongolia, but this rule is very complicated and not easy to learn.

Thus the Mongolian written language also failed to follow the resolution of the 1931 conference.

Professor Vladimirtsov and the Fate of Mongolian Script

In 1928, a prominent scholar of Mongolian studies, Professor Boris Iakovlevich Vladimirtsov, stated that the Mongolic world was united by one thing, the Mongolian script.⁵⁰ At that time, other Russian scholars also insisted that Written Mongolian, written in the Mongolian script, is the only Mongol language and that the other vernaculars that Mongolic ethnic groups speak are merely dialects ('narechie' or 'govor' in Russian).

But already by then, Kalmyks were moving away from the Mongolic world. The Kalmyks decided to adopt the Cyrillic script for their new written language in 1924. It was in front of these very Kalmyks that Vladimirtsov delivered his 1928 speech mentioned above, hoping that his words could stop these people moving away from the world they lived in. He could not stop this trend, but actually, there were chances for them to come together in one written language like Arabic, either by the Mongolian or Latin script.

Professor Vladimirtsov seems to have dreamed of unifying Mongolic peoples in the Mongolian script. He said in the same speech in 1928, that he had found an interesting phenomenon in Mongolia: a mixture of written and colloquial language in the speech of Mongolians. He first reported on this phenomenon in his report of the expedition in the Khentii region and Urga (Ulaanbaatar), Mongolia in 1927.⁵¹ A Buryat scholar also

changes to 'otssa' in the genitive case, dropping the 'e' in the middle of the word. But in Mongolia, it is not only the 'e' that is dropped and the consonants at the front and back of the vowel will decide whether that vowel is dropped or not when suffixes are added.

⁵⁰ If there is no annotation, the material I used here on Vladimirtsov is: NARK, f. R3, op. 2, d. 1144.

⁵¹ B.Ia. Vladimirtsov, 'Etnologo-lingvisticheskie issledovaniia v Urge, Urginskom i Kenteiskom raionakh', *Predvaritel'nye otchety lingvisticheskoi i arkheologicheskoi ekspeditsii o rabotakh, proizvedennykh v 1925 godu* (Severnaia Mongoliiia 2; Leningrad, 1927), p. 10.

observed the same phenomenon among Buryats in the 1920s.⁵² Vladimirtsov said in the speech of 1928 that this was ‘democratisation of language’ since this phenomenon could bring the colloquial language closer to the written, and could open a way to the possibility of making Mongolic peoples unified in the Mongolian written language rather than in a loose-link fashion. But that only happened in Mongolia. The Kalmyks did not entirely follow his idea and this process seemed to stop for Buryats sometime during the latinisation period.

In May 1931, several months before his sudden death, Vladimirtsov wrote an essay called ‘Mongolian written languages—toward latinisation of the Mongolian and Kalmyk scripts’.⁵³ This essay described the scripts that the Mongolic people used in history. There were no phrases written to praise what had been achieved by adopting the Latin script. This is what he said regarding the Latin script in this essay: ‘For Mongolians, Buryats and Kalmyks, changing to the Latin script does not mean only to replace scripts but it means a great change to their languages themselves’, A change of script was, after all, really the cause of great change, as he pointed out.

Conclusion

During the 17 years from 1924, when Kalmyks first started to adopt Cyrillic, until 1941, when Mongolians adopted Cyrillic, there were many attempts to reform and modernise their language and script by Mongolic peoples, namely Mongolians, Buryats and Kalmyks. And there was a time, in 1931, when all of these peoples met in one place to discuss the unification of their alphabet, orthography and ways of making new terms. However, this did not come to fruition. After 10 years, all of these peoples adopted Cyrillic but each of them made different alphabets and orthographies. So, three new written languages came into being for Mongolic peoples. Now most Buryats and Kalmyks think of themselves

⁵² L.D. Shagdarov, ‘Sataropis’mennyi mongol’skii iazyk i formirovanie buriatskogo literaturnogo iazyka’, in *Vladimirtsovskie chleniia, II Vsesoiuznaia konferentsiia mongolovedov: Tezisy dokladov i soobshchenii* (Moscow, 1989), p. 122.

⁵³ B.Ia. Vladimirtsov, ‘Mongol’skie literaturnye iazyki’, *Zapiski Instituta vostokovedeniia* 1 (1931), pp. 1–17.

not as Mongolic people but as Buryat or Kalmyk nationals. For these people, Mongolian is a foreign language and Mongolians are people of a different nation.

If we read written texts of each language aloud then we will know that each of those languages sound very similar. In fact, in Mongolia, there are people who speak those dialects, which the written languages of the Kalmyks and Buryats are based on. Those dialects are regarded as dialects of Mongolian in Mongolia, but once you cross over the Mongolian border, the dialects that they speak are called the Kalmyk or Buryat language.

In this paper I am not arguing that their consciousness is wrong or that they must be united in one. I want to suggest that consciousness is not stable and not made up naturally as some people have proposed, and I have shown that the separation of those Mongolic languages really was the result of language policy that their ancestors took only in the recent past. Scripts and orthographies surely contribute a lot to forming and reconfirming identity, but if the political situation goes in a different direction, these might also undergo change.

It is probably true that national consciousness is greatly inspired by education. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out, print capitalism made a tremendous contribution to the formation of a nation state by making people imagine that what they are reading could be read in remote areas of the same nation. Alphabets and orthography and terminology might be important contents of print capitalism that accommodate people within a certain boundary to imagine a nation state.

Speech is comprised of sounds. And sometimes it is very hard to tell whether it is a language or a dialect since the difference is obscure. But it is very easy to distinguish one language from another when it is written since the script visually tells us what language we are using. So this visualisation of speech defines boundaries between languages. It clearly gives us the idea that it is a language, even if there are some very similar languages, because you can see the difference between them in alphabet and orthography, etc.⁵⁴ There are many reasons for changing alphabets,

⁵⁴ There are some cases where a language has two or more way of writing like Korean in the north and south (orthographically) or Mongolian in Mongolia and in China (by script). But in these cases, differences in written languages play a role of strengthening solidarity within a state and excluding (or sometimes attracting) people outside of the state boundary.

orthography and so on, not only linguistic reasons but also political ones. For Mongols living in Mongolia and Russia (formerly the Soviet Union), this process started in 1924 and ended in 1941.