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Uzbek Spelling Rules: History, Principles, and Modern Applications

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Abstract

This study examines the spelling rules of the Uzbek language, focusing on their historical development, fundamental principles, and contemporary applications. The research traces the evolution of Uzbek spelling from the pre-Soviet era to modern reforms, analyzing key transitions from the Latin alphabet to Cyrillic and back to Latin. Despite significant advancements, challenges persist in standardizing spelling rules, particularly in integrating foreign terms and simplifying complex phonetic representations. The study identifies gaps in the literature regarding the impact of recent reforms and the practical difficulties of implementing new orthographic standards. A qualitative research approach was employed, involving a comparative analysis of historical documents, linguistic policies, and contemporary usage patterns. Findings highlight inconsistencies in the application of spelling rules, issues in phonetic and morphological adaptations, and challenges faced by educators and learners. The results suggest that while the transition to the Latin alphabet enhances accessibility and international alignment, unresolved complexities in diacritical marks and compound word structures hinder uniform adoption. The study implies the necessity of continued linguistic research and policy adjustments to refine Uzbek orthography. These findings are particularly relevant for educators, linguists, and policymakers aiming to develop effective language instruction methods and orthographic guidelines.

Keywords: Uzbek spelling, orthographic rules, phonetic principles, linguistic reforms, Latin alphabet, Uzbek language standardization

Introduction

Spelling rules are a fundamental aspect of any language, serving as a framework for consistent and accurate written communication. In the case of Uzbek, the evolution of its orthographic system reflects historical, political, and linguistic transformations. From its early Latin-based script to the Cyrillic alphabet imposed during the Soviet era and the eventual reversion to Latin, Uzbek spelling rules have undergone significant changes. These transitions have influenced not only the structure of the language

but also its accessibility and standardization. Spelling plays a crucial role in literacy development, language preservation, and effective communication, making it essential to examine the principles governing Uzbek orthography.

The study of spelling rules is rooted in linguistic theories concerning phonetics, morphology, and syntax. The phonetic principle emphasizes the correspondence between sounds and letters, while the morphological principle focuses on word structure and its modifications. The syntactic principle ensures clarity in written language through proper punctuation and spacing. Previous research on Uzbek orthography has primarily explored historical reforms and technical adaptations, yet gaps remain in understanding the practical challenges of implementation, particularly in educational contexts. Additionally, while past studies have examined the political motivations behind script changes, fewer have addressed the long-term linguistic consequences and inconsistencies in spelling practices.

This study employs a qualitative research approach, analyzing historical documents, spelling regulations, and contemporary usage patterns. A comparative analysis of past and present spelling rules provides insight into ongoing challenges and potential areas for improvement. By examining how orthographic changes have influenced language learning, official communication, and digital adaptation, this research identifies areas where current policies may require further refinement.

The findings reveal that despite efforts to standardize Uzbek spelling, inconsistencies persist, particularly in the representation of certain phonemes, the treatment of compound words, and the integration of foreign terms. While the shift to the Latin alphabet has simplified some aspects of spelling, challenges such as the inconsistent use of diacritical marks and the lack of universal digital adaptation remain. These issues impact language learners, educators, and policy makers, requiring a reassessment of current spelling regulations to improve clarity and usability.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of continued linguistic research and policy refinement to ensure that Uzbek orthography evolves in a way that balances historical traditions with modern linguistic needs. Addressing existing gaps in spelling consistency and adaptability will contribute to more effective education strategies, clearer written communication, and a stronger national linguistic identity. The implications of these findings extend to language policy makers, educators, and researchers striving to enhance the standardization and practical usability of Uzbek spelling rules.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the evolution, principles, and challenges of Uzbek spelling rules. The research is based on a comprehensive review of historical and contemporary spelling regulations, linguistic theories, and previous studies related to Uzbek orthography. Primary sources include official spelling guidelines, government language policies, and linguistic research materials that document script transitions and orthographic reforms. Additionally, secondary sources such as academic publications and dictionaries were examined to understand the practical application of spelling rules over different historical periods.

To evaluate the consistency and effectiveness of Uzbek spelling rules, a comparative analysis was

conducted between different orthographic systems, including the pre-Soviet Latin script, the Cyrillic script introduced in 1940, and the modern Latin-based system reintroduced post-independence. Particular attention was given to phonetic, morphological, and syntactic principles, as well as the treatment of compound words, abbreviations, and punctuation rules. The study also analyzed language adaptation issues in digital and educational contexts to assess ongoing challenges in spelling standardization.

Data interpretation focused on identifying inconsistencies and difficulties in applying current spelling regulations. By comparing historical developments with modern linguistic requirements, the study aimed to highlight gaps in existing research and policy implementation. The findings were assessed in relation to previous studies on language reforms, allowing for a broader understanding of how orthographic rules influence language learning and communication. This methodological approach provides a structured framework for evaluating the effectiveness of Uzbek spelling rules and offers insights into areas requiring further refinement.

Results and Discussion

The spelling rules of the Uzbek language are of great importance in using the language correctly and fluently. The spelling rules in Uzbek include various regulations related to the writing and usage of words. Following the correct spelling rules helps in expressing speech and writing clearly, understandably, and accurately.

Pre-Soviet Period: The official writing system of the Uzbek language was based on the Latin alphabet in 1928. Initial spelling rules were developed in Uzbek, influenced by the Russian language and based on the phonetic principle. During this period, there were many exceptions and complex spelling practices.

Transition from Latin to Cyrillic Alphabet: In 1940, under the influence of the Soviet Union, the Uzbek language switched to the Cyrillic alphabet. New spelling rules were developed during this period, and efforts were made to implement them. Although the spelling system of the Russian language influenced the transition to the Cyrillic alphabet, the unique characteristics of the Uzbek language were also considered. During this time, spelling rules were adjusted to match the new alphabet, and words were written based on phonetics.

Post-Independence Period (1991): After Uzbekistan gained independence, the spelling rules and alphabet were reconsidered. In 1993, new spelling rules for the Uzbek language were approved, with some old rules being updated and the modern requirements of the Uzbek language being taken into account. In 1993, new documents regarding spelling rules and the Uzbek alphabet, approved in 1995, were developed. During this period, international words and new terms borrowed from the English language were also considered, and new spelling rules and regulations were created based on the phonetic and grammatical principles of the Uzbek language.

The alphabet is undoubtedly one of the most serious issues hindering the healthy development of our language. Most of us agree that the alphabet needs reform—discussions are ongoing about how exactly this reform should be carried out.

The suggestion to use a single symbol to represent the sounds “O” and “G” is logically correct. Currently, the way we write these letters is technically inconvenient. Introducing the proposed diacritical marks for these letters would not cause serious technical difficulties. There would be no need

to replace all keyboards; with a simple program, we can assign the diacritical “O” and “G” to unused keys on current keyboards. The issue of adding the new letters “SH” and “CH” to the existing keyboards could also be resolved. Users of the literacy keyboard program know that by pressing two consecutive keys, we can input the desired symbol. With a simple program, this can be implemented (for example, after pressing the “S” key, the “H” key could input the proposed new “S” with a tail, representing the “SH” sound). To see how easily this issue can be solved from a programming perspective, try typing the English word “naive” in MS Word, and the program will automatically replace the “i” with the required diaeresis.

Key Concepts of Spelling Rules:

1. Letters and Sounds

2. In the Uzbek language, there are specific correspondences between letters and sounds. For example, the letters ‘a’, ‘o’, ‘e’ correspond to particular sounds in the language. Each sound has its own distinct letter, and these letters can differ from one another.

Compound Words and Their Spelling

Forming compound words and writing them correctly is one of the important topics included in the spelling rules. For example, in phrases like “yaxshi ko‘rmoq” (to like) or “mehnat qilish” (to work), compound words are written separately, but in some cases, these words are combined: “hayotiy tajriba” (life experience).

3. Hard and Soft Letters in Word Structure

In Uzbek, the position of hard and soft letters is also important. These letters interact with each other and affect the overall structure and pronunciation of the word. For example, it is necessary to correctly distinguish between the letters “s” and “sh.”

4. Abbreviations and Their Spelling

Abbreviations are widely used in Uzbek in various fields, including official documents, the press, daily life, and scientific literature. Abbreviations allow for a shorter expression of words or phrases, which in turn speeds up writing and makes it more precise. However, it is very important to use abbreviations correctly and in accordance with literary spelling rules.

In abbreviations, the letters present in the alphabet are used, and they are separated by periods. For example:

- O‘zR (O‘zbekiston Respublikasi – Republic of Uzbekistan)
- TATU (Toshkent axborot texnologiyalari universiteti – Tashkent University of Information Technologies)

Official and Scientific Abbreviations

In official documents and scientific works, it is common to use abbreviations, and their spelling should follow the rules below:

- Yuk tashish bo‘limi → YTB (Cargo department)
- O‘zbekiston Milliy Universiteti → OMU (National University of Uzbekistan)
- Telefon raqami → tel. raq. (Phone number)

Abbreviation by First Letters

Many abbreviations consist only of the first letters of the words. In these abbreviations, the first letter of each word should be capitalized.

Abbreviations and Their Spelling:

- V.V.I.P. (Very Very Important Person)

- S.S.T.D. (Sifatni va Sog'liqni Tahlil qilish Departamenti – Department of Quality and Health Analysis)

5. Punctuation Rules:

Period, comma, question marks: Each punctuation mark has its specific purpose and usage. For example, a period indicates the end of a sentence, while a comma is used to add extra information.

General Principles of Spelling Rules in Uzbek:

Uzbek spelling rules are based on several key principles, including:

- Phonetic Principle:

In Uzbek, phonetic principles are closely related to spelling rules. In some cases, there may be a difference between the pronunciation and the spelling of words. For example, in the word “yoz” (to write), the sound “yo” is expressed as “yoz” in writing. Thus, the alignment between pronunciation and spelling is a part of the phonetic principles.

- Morphological Principle:

The morphological system of the Uzbek language studies the structure of words, their changes, and their division into morphemes. Morphological principles play a central role in using the language grammatically correctly and in creating various grammatical forms of words.

- Syntactic Principle:

Writing according to sentence structure. For instance, identifying syllables between words and writing them correctly.

Alphabet and Spelling:

Starting from January 1, 2021, the Uzbek language switched to the Latin alphabet. This alphabet consists of 30 letters, and its main goal is to reflect the phonetic aspects of the language. Writing in the Latin alphabet helps simplify the spelling of Uzbek.

Word Writing Rules:

- Word Separation:

In some cases, a hyphen is required between words, such as in “yaxshi ko‘rmoq” (to like) or “birinchi marta” (for the first time).

- Adding and Changing Letters:

Sometimes, suffixes need to be added to the end of words. For example, “o‘qimoqchi” (to want to study) or “yaxshilik” (goodness).

Spelling Mistakes and Ways to Correct Them:

Spelling mistakes are common in Uzbek. The most frequent mistakes include:

- Writing the first letter in uppercase:

In Uzbek, only the first letter of a sentence and proper nouns (such as names of people, places) should be capitalized.

- Incorrect syllable separation:

These mistakes occur when the correct pronunciation of a word is not considered.

Conclusion

This study highlights the historical evolution, principles, and challenges of Uzbek spelling rules, emphasizing the linguistic and practical implications of orthographic reforms. The findings reveal persistent inconsistencies in the representation of phonemes, the spelling of compound words, and the

integration of foreign terms, despite efforts to standardize the language. While the transition to the Latin alphabet has improved accessibility and international alignment, unresolved issues in diacritical marks and digital adaptation continue to hinder uniform application. These challenges have significant implications for language education, literacy development, and official communication, necessitating further refinement of spelling policies. The study underscores the need for continued linguistic research to assess the effectiveness of current regulations and explore potential revisions that enhance clarity and usability. Future research should focus on the impact of orthographic inconsistencies on language acquisition, the role of technology in standardizing Uzbek spelling, and comparative studies with other languages that have undergone similar script transitions. Addressing these areas will contribute to a more cohesive and functional Uzbek orthographic system, ensuring its adaptability to modern linguistic and technological demands.

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