

**İQTELİf**  
**(İdil-Ural-Qırım Tatar Elifbası)<sup>1</sup>**

Aa Bb Cc Çç Dd Ee Ff Gg Ğğ Hh Iı İi Íí Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn Ññ Oo Öö Pp  
Qq Rr Ss Şş Tt Uu Üü Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

This alphabet is based on the following general guidelines:

- 1) Latin alphabet should use conventional symbols to the utmost extent possible;
- 2) It should correctly represent phonetic peculiarities of the language, being subject to pragmatic considerations only;
- 3) Latin-based Tatar alphabet should maximally reflect the closeness to other major Turkic languages, which the language naturally has.

There are 4 letters in this alphabet that are different from those accepted by Tatarstani authorities, and outlawed by Russian Federation authorities:

|                                      |           |           |           |           |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| In İQTELİf                           | <b>Ee</b> | <b>Íí</b> | <b>Ññ</b> | <b>Öö</b> |
| Alphabet that was officially imposed | <b>Әә</b> | <b>Ee</b> | <b>Дд</b> | <b>Өө</b> |
| Cyrillic correspondence              | <b>Әә</b> | <b>Ee</b> | <b>Дд</b> | <b>Өө</b> |

At the same time, both projects reflect the following changes from Jañalif, Latin alphabet accepted in late 1920s, amended a couple of years later, and discarded to impose Cyrillic in 1939, during Stalin years:

**Cc- Çç, Çç-Cc, Ğğ-ǪǪ, Jj-Žž, Iı-bb, Üü-Υγ, Yy-Jj.**

Letter **Jj** in the alphabet discussed designates the same phoneme as in Turkish, which corresponds to **g** in genre. Examples: jimnastik (Turkish), ajdaha (Tatar).

The purpose of this work is to show that the 4 letters above are optimal as defined in İQTELİf.

First of all, letters **Ññ** and **Öö** are preferable to letters **Дд** and **Өө** because they are conventional. Letter **Ññ** is used in such a major language as Spanish, for example. Letter **Öö** is used in such languages as Finnish and German. On the other hand, letters of the official alphabet are not used by any well-known language (to be honest I do not know any single language currently using them). These letters are just clumsy imitations of letters **Ññ** and **Öö**. I am surprised at having had to try to convince the official linguists for 6 years (as of the time of the first writing of this paper) that letters **Ññ** and **Öö** are incomparably preferable to what has been accepted.

The only delicacy inherent in Latin-based Qazan Tatar alphabet is pertinent to letters **Ee** and **Íí**...

A famous European Turkic scientist of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century represented major Turkic vowels, basing his work on the Turkish language, in the form of a cube shown below:

<sup>1</sup> The Phonetically-and-Pragmatically-Optimal Latin-based Alphabet for İdil-Ural (Qazan) Tatar, that ensures similar orthography with Crimean Tatar, and other kindred languages.

In this cube three vowel continuums are represented:

Back: **Aa, Ii, Oo, Uu**

Front: **Ee, Éé, İi, Öö, Üü;**

Narrow (close): **Ii, Uu, Üü, İi;**

Wide (open): **Aa, Oo, Öö, Ee;**

Smooth: **Aa, Ii, İi, Éé, Ee;**

Rounded: **Oo, Uu, Üü, Öö.**

Letter **Éé** here represents a dialectical Turkish vowel, close to  $\epsilon$  in IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet). This vowel is met in the Black Sea dialect and the letter **Éé** is not used officially.

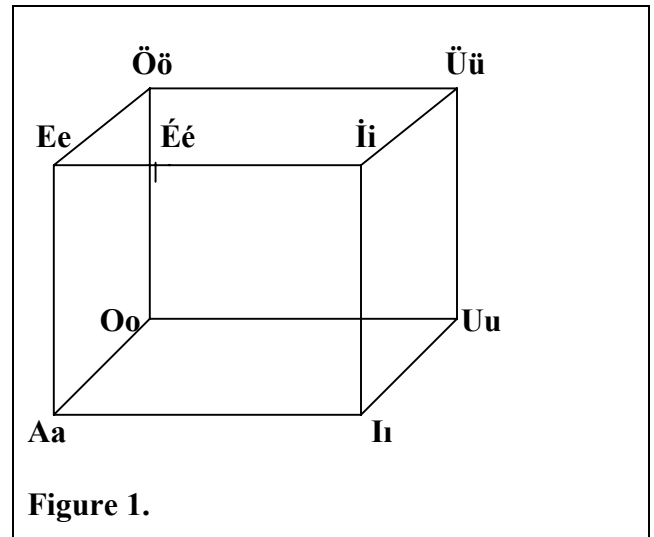
Letter **Ee** represents roughly the same vowel as letter **Ää** in Finnish. This slight misrepresentation is beneficial for Turkish and Azerbaijani due to the fact that vowel **Ää** is the most often used vowel in those languages and usage of letter **Ää** would lead to overcrowded writing and difficulties in perception. This (threat of overcrowded writing) applies to Tatar and Bashqort languages as well. This subject is discussed later on.

Being more precise in the formalities of diacritics and phonetics this cube could be modified as follows:

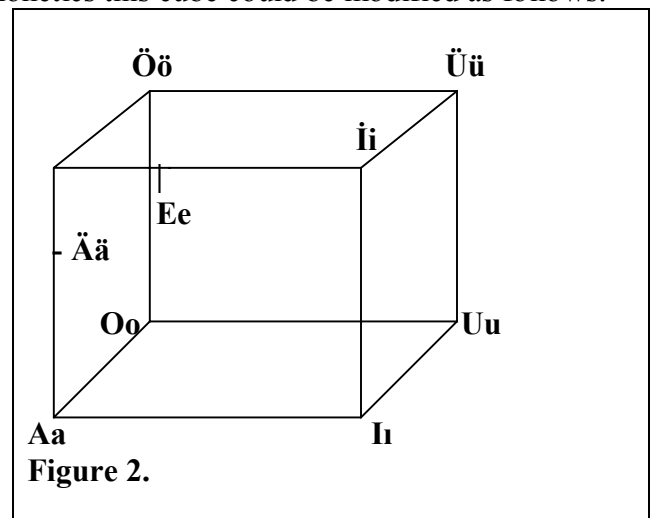
This structure fits Crimean Tatar and Central Asian languages (Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek) perfectly well. Vowel **Ää** of all these languages is met in Kazakh and Turkmen only. Usage of phonetically correct letter **Ää** in Kazakh and Turkmen languages do not entail any negative consequences because in most cases vowel **Ee** is used instead of vowel **Ää**, so that no overcrowding in writing occurs.

In Kyrgyz, and Crimean Tatar vowel **Ää** is not used. Instead of it vowel **Ee** is used. In Uzbek vowel **Ää** is used, along with **Ee**. However, being accustomed to some transcriptional elements since Cyrillic reform, Uzbeks use letter **Aa** to designate vowel **Ää**.

(See examples in the table on page 3.)



**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2.**

Tatar vowels could be represented in this cube as follows below:

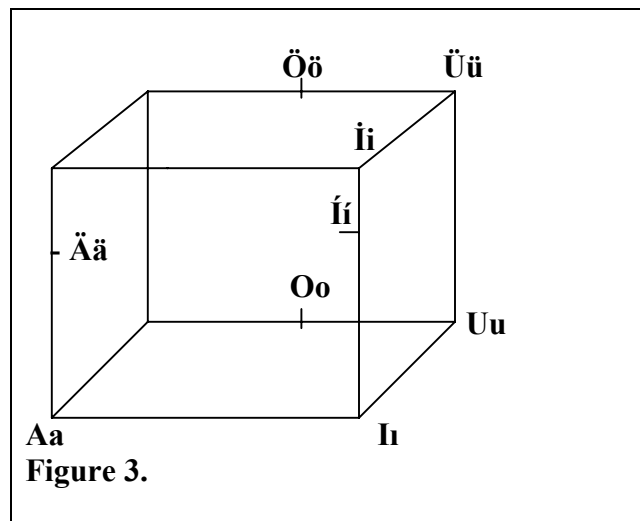
Here letter **Ee** is not shown because there is no such vowel in Tatar language. Letter **Ää** is used although Tatar vowel is somewhat less front-mouth than its Finnish equivalent.

Letters **Oo** and **Öö** are moved somewhat rightward because they are somewhat narrow in Tatar.

Letter **Íí** is introduced to designate a peculiar Turkic vowel that, of all major Turkic languages, is met in Tatar, Bashqort, and Uzbek languages only. This vowel is situated in vowel continuum between vowels **Ii** and **İi**, closer to the latter. It is identical to vowel **İi** pronounced somewhat toward the back mouth.<sup>2</sup>

This is diacritically perfect structure of Tatar vowels.

However, letter **Ää** here should be re-designated as **Ee** due to the following reasons:



1) Letter **Ää**, just as in case of Azerbaijani and Turkish, would lead to overcrowded writing and difficulties in perception of the written material. The following example is quite representative of the frequent usage of this vowel in Tatar language: “mädüniyätibızgä hälakät kilä”. Azerbaijani language preferred to deal with this problem by adopting letter **Əə** instead of phonetically correct **Ää**. However, letter **Əə** is absolutely not conventional, namely it is not used in other Latin alphabets. Consequently, just as letters **Ŋŋ** and **ƉƉ**, it is an impediment for languages use on the web (although less so today), and especially in handheld devices. In addition, it will prevent correct representation of Tatar words and names in international sources. There is no advantage that letter **Əə** would ensure. At the same time, there is another letter, **Ee**, that has the following advantages:

2) Tatar language, as well as Bashqort, but as opposed to Uzbek, does not have a vowel that could be designated by letter **Ee**, being strict diacritically. So, it is logical to use letter **Ee** to designate vowel **Ää** since it is conventional on keyboards and easier to write. At the same time vowel **Ee** is the closest to vowel **Ää** in the phonetic continuum. (See Figure 2.)

3) Using letter **Ee** for vowel **Ää**, as well as letter **Íí**, ensures compatibility with all other major Turkic languages. Thus, pair of letters **Ee** and **Íí** might help to widen the sphere of usage of the language from present 2 mln. speakers to about 150 mln.

4) Slight misrepresentation of vowel **Ää** as **Ee** is much less misrepresentative than that of vowel **Íí** with letter **Ee**. The latter is worth of F (or, in 5-digit Soviet system, 2) in a college course. If you look at Figure 2 you will see that vowel **Ee** is actually in a different area of the cube (in the wide (open) range of the continuum). Besides, misrepresentation of **Íí** with letter **Ee** in the officially imposed alphabet serves no purpose other than hurting the language by artificially distancing it from other kindred languages. On the other hand, vowel **Ää** has been represented with letter **Ee** in Turkish for over 75 years and there is no criticism in this respect. In fact, Turkish is the most thriving of Turkic languages.

<sup>2</sup> Grave and acute accents over vowels have many different meanings in various Latin alphabets, such as height (open, close), stress, disambiguation, length, palatalization, tone, emphasis, change of pronunciation into that of another vowel, and to denote an entirely different vowel. In IQTELif, accute accent over vowel Ii is used to denote its front pair vowel (Íí), given that letter İi is used for another standard in Western alphabets vowel. The acute accent has been chosen because it is more conventional, being used, for example, in such languages as Portuguese, and Spanish, along with Czech, Hungarian, etc.

Thus, the following structure of letters for Tatar vowels is the most optimal for Tatar language:  
 Here the formal advantage of letter **Ää** has been discarded in favor of multiple practical advantages of letter **Ee**<sup>3</sup>.  
 Thus, letter **Ee** represents the vowel denoted in IPA as æ.  
 In this cube, letter **é** is given as a reference to show the position of the vowel frequently encountered in Western loan words. **Éé** is not a part of İQTElif, although it would not violate any of İQTElif's premises to incorporate it as part of the alphabet. The main reason why İQTElif is not including a letter like **é** as part of the alphabet is because it would be entirely specific to loan words. Thus, in a way it would be foreign to İdil-Ural Tatar<sup>4</sup>.

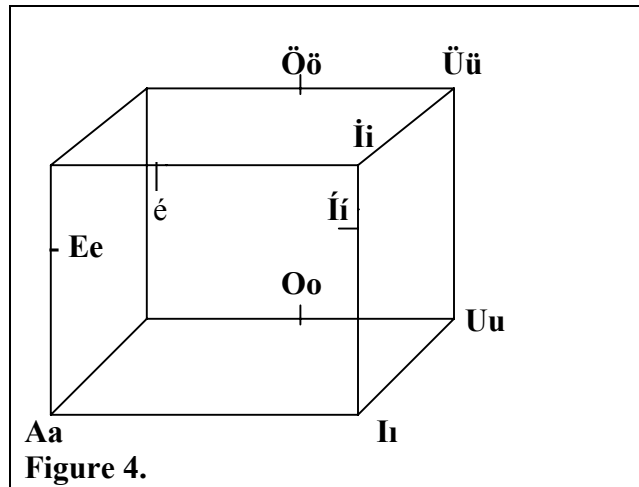


Figure 4.

This structure is characterized by:

- 1) Maximum possible conventionality (transnational usage);
- 2) Maximum phonetic correctness subject to pragmatic considerations;
- 3) Maximal reflection of consistency with all other major Turkic languages, which the language naturally has.

The extent of consistency ensured can be seen in the following tables which show several simple phrases meaning “of our old literatures” and “of our motherlands”/” of our states”. The seeming meaninglessness of the phrases does not impede the illustrative effect.

| Tatar   | Uzbek   | Kazakh*                                       | Kyrgyz*                                       |
|---|---|---|---|
| İskı edebiyatlarıbızniñ<br>Memleketlerıbızniñ | Eski adabiyotlorimizning<br>Mamlakatlorimizning | Eski ädebiyattarıbızdıñ<br>Mamleketteribizdiñ | İski adabiyatlarıbızniñ<br>Mamleketleribizniñ |

In official alphabet it would be: İske ədəbiyatlarıbızniñ; Məmləkətlərebezneñ

| Tatar            | Turkish       | Azerbaijani     | Turkmen          |
|------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Dewletlerıbızniñ | Devletlerimiz | Dəwlətlərimiziñ | Döwletlerimizniñ |

Compare with the product of the official alphabet: Dəwlətlərebezneñ.

Thus, if we are to evaluate the two alphabets we have the following:

<sup>3</sup> Letter Ee in Western terms used in Tatar is supposed to be preserved in Latin alphabet. Pronunciation may be adjusted to Tatar vowel Ää, or, alternatively, stay the same. Examples: İnternet, sistem, element etc.

<sup>4</sup> While diacritics that are not an intrinsic part of a language are usually allowed in Latin-based languages when using loan words, they are optional. Tatar language would benefit more from preserving letter **Ee** in Western loan words, and pronouncing it the same as İQTElif's **Ee** in Tatar words: edebiyat, element (which in this case, using IPA, would be pronounced as ædəbijɑt, æləmənt). In many cases, such pronunciation would in fact be closer to English, the language used most frequently for international communication. Most importantly, however, it would Tatarize such loan words, and contribute to making their pronunciation more natural in İdil-Ural Tatar.

The alternative of not changing the pronunciation of such loan words is also acceptable, however. In fact, this is already the case for **Oo** encountered in loan words, which is pronounced much wider (more open), than İdil-Ural Tatar **Oo**. For instance, **Oo** in Western loan word “ozon” is pronounced very differently from **Oo** in İdil-Ural Tatar word “on”.

While it might be tempting to assign a letter to the top left corner in this cube, there is currently no such vowel registered, be it in Tatar or another language.

\* Very likely projections of the future Latin alphabets that are yet to be accepted.

|   | Phonetic correctness | Conventionality | Consistency |
|---|----------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| <b>İQTElif</b>                              | <b>BA</b>            | <b>BA</b>       | <b>AA</b>   |
| <i>Alphabet that was officially imposed</i> | <b>F</b>             | <b>F</b>        | <b>F</b>    |

Here, AA stands for Perfect, BA stands for Excellent, and F means Failing.

I see only one reason why these mistakes have been done during the last century: politics, to be exact perverted political games. The influence of Moscow authorities can still be felt even in non-political decisions made in Tatarstan. The eventual outlawing of all but Cyrillic alphabets, shows that the Tatar alphabet issue is still being played with today, after 4 alphabets have already decimated most of the sense of cultural heritage that Tatar and other Turkic nations of former Soviet Union had, and after alphabets dividing kindred nations have been imposed with the Cyrillic reform of the late 1930s.

P.S. And the final remark, regarding conventionality in electronic sense. Although this alphabet is incomparably more conventional than the officially imposed one, some adjustments might be necessary for smooth usage on the web and on devices with limited keyboard layout support. These adjustments are likely to be unnecessary in the long run, however, for the time being, the following table can be suggested:

|                             |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |           |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Essential letter</b>     | <b>Çç</b> | <b>Ğğ</b> | <b>Іı</b> | <b>İi</b> | <b>Íí</b> | <b>Ññ</b> | <b>Öö</b> | <b>Şş</b> | <b>Üü</b> |
| <i>Simple adjustment</i>    | <b>Cc</b> | <b>Gg</b> | <b>Ii</b> | <b>Ii</b> | <b>Ii</b> | <b>Nn</b> | <b>Oo</b> | <b>Ss</b> | <b>Uu</b> |
| <i>Elaborate adjustment</i> | Ch-ch     | Gh-gh     | Yy        | Ii        | Ii        | Ng-ng     | Oo        | Sh-sh     | Uu        |

It can be seen from the sample texts below that simple-adjustment text is more legible than elaborate-adjustment text. The simple adjustments are also consistent with international practice of using base letters without diacritics when diacritics are not available, such as due to technical reasons. Thus, the elaborate adjustments are suggested for exceptional circumstances only.

#### **Essential text:**

Yigirmi birinchi gasirniñ busağasında, Fransızca we Almanca kibik tillerniñ 50-100 yıl içinde yuq bulaçağı xaqında farazlar urtağa çıqqanda, gömumen de tiller milliyetäşä qırlarğa açılırğa mecbur qalğanda, xetta milliyetçi qırlarnı taraytırğa tırışu, til qarşısında ğafu itilmes bir cinayet.

#### **Simple-adjustment text:**

Yigirmi birinci gasirnin busağasında, Fransızca we Almanca kibik tillernin 50-100 yıl icinde yuq bulacağı xaqında farazlar urtağa çıqqanda, gömumen de tiller milliyetäşä qırlarğa açılırğa mecbur qalğanda, xetta milliyetçi qırlarnı taraytırğa tırışu, til qarşısında ğafu itilmes bir cinayet.

#### **Elaborate-adjustment text:**

Yigirmi birinchi ghasyrnyng busağasynda, Fransızca we Almanca kibik tillerning 50-100 yıl içinde yuq bulachaghy xaqynda farazlar urtağa çıqqanda, gömumen de tiller milliyetäşä qırlarğa açılırğa mecbur qalğanda, xetta milliyetçi qırlarnı taraytırğa tırışu, til qarşısında ğafu itilmes bir cinayet.

#### **Turkish translation:**

Yirmi birinci asrın eşiğinde, Fransızca ve Almanca gibi dillerin 50-100 yıl içerisinde yok olacağı hakkında tahminler ortaya çıkarken, umumen de diller milliyetötesi boyutlara açılmaya mecbur kalırken, milliyetçi boyutları bile daraltmaya çalışmak, dil karşısında affedilmez bir cinayettir.

#### **English translation:**

On the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when forecasts appear that such languages as French and German will get extinct within 50-100 years, and generally when languages have to open to trans-ethnic dimensions, trying to narrow even intra-ethnic dimensions is an unforgivable crime against the language.

Please feel free to email your comments to: [qaharman@gmail.com](mailto:qaharman@gmail.com)