The Challenges of Azerbaijani Transliteration on the Multilingual Internet

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ABSTRACT

Several scripts have been adopted so far in Azerbaijan in different periods. Literary manuscripts and political documents developed in each of the adopted scripts are of great importance and have to be transliterated for the next generation. However, adoption of different scripts and their frequent changes lead to the emergence and dissemination of various transliteration versions on the web. This article touches upon the challenges of Azerbaijani-English transliteration process in real life and online. In this regard, the significance and dominating status of the English language on the Internet and throughout the globe is explored. Adoption of a unique transliteration standard for Azerbaijani language may contribute to the solution to this problem. The standards for the transliteration of the Azerbaijani language with others are analyzed, and the inevitability of a new approach to Azerbaijani-English transliteration is emphasized. Moreover, the article underlines future contribution of the proposed transliteration system for machine translation system of Azerbaijani-English language pair.

KEYWORDS

Conversion, Conversion Table, Lingua Franca, Machine Translation, Romanization, Transformation, Translation, Transliteration

INTRODUCTION

Mail, instant messaging, real-time chat protocols, asynchronous discussion forums and Web pages, which perform the textual exchanges, establish Computer-Mediated Conversation. ‘Conversation’, in general, refers to the spoken word, and voice communication such as Skype and other forms of Voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) transmission and has recently become very famous. However, text-based Computer-Mediated communication (CMC) has been historically practiced for a long time, and it is more widespread than VoIP. The first mail was sent over networked computers in 1972 (Hafner, & Lyon, 1996). Although it was previously limited to the users in the military, government, universities, and businesses, textual CMC became well-known in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after Internet Service Providers ensured users to connect online space without leaving their homes. Text messaging on mobile phones, instant messaging, weblogs, and wikis are the most recent widespread CMC modes. On multimedia platforms, such as media sharing and social network sites, textual interactions remain important (Herring, 2004; Herring, 2009). Hence text exchange is the most typical kind of computer-mediated ‘conversations.’ Therefore, unlike the knowledge of any specific

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language, the knowledge of at least the script of most frequently spoken languages is vital in these ‘conversations.’ In this case, transliteration of the scripts is used.

This article deals with the transliteration issues of the Azerbaijani scripts with the scripts of English. Transliteration in real life and online is becoming more relevant when so many new technologies emerge daily and require technological and respective communication skills (messaging, typing etc.). The goal of this article is to describe the importance of transliteration in the communication, preservation of the national identity of languages through transliteration and the need for update of available conversion (Romanization) tables.

BACKGROUND

Abovementioned ‘conversations’ realized in the global network are mainly performed in English. This is due to different factors, as the recently emerged notion ‘English as a lingua franca’ (ELF). In this communication, the key participants are the speakers whose second or third language is English. Crystal (2003) points out that only one out of every four users of English is a native speaker of this language around the world. Consequently, the largest share of ELF communications is performed among ‘non-native’ speakers of English. And, in many cases, this language is regarded as ‘a ‘contact language’ among the people whose native tongue or (national) culture significantly differ, and who choose English as a foreign language of communication’ (Firth, 1996).

English has been defined by several scholars so far, as ‘English as an international language’ (Jenkins, 2000) EIL, ‘English as a global language’ (Crystal, 2003; Gnutzmann, 1999), ‘English as a world language’ (Mair, 2003). These definitions have been used as broad terms for the usage of English within and across Kachru’s ‘Circles’. Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle contexts (Kachru, 1992). Consequently, EIL traditionally means the use of English for international communication. Nevertheless, the term ‘English as a lingua franca’ is preferred more when English is used as the means of communication among non-native speakers coming from linguistic and cultural boundaries (House, 1999; Seidlohofer, 2001). In addition, English is used as a medium of intercultural communication (Meierkord, 1996) and as an international language (Jenkins, 2000), which is more explicit.

Undeniably English serves as a global lingua franca. Nonetheless, as a result of its international use, nonnative speakers are forming English at least as much as by its native speakers.

The term “international language” is commonly accepted as a language used by the people from different backgrounds or nations. In this regard, many international languages have been used so far throughout the world, from Spanish and Chinese to Latin and Classical Persian, including locally constrained dialects and lingua francas.

The term “international language” can also be referred to artificial or deliberate languages such as Esperanto. These are developed unambiguously to ease international communications and understanding often being called international auxiliary languages. These languages do not have native speakers from any nation or country unlike the languages that have been spread worldwide such as English, French and Spanish.

The dominance of any language depends on several factors such as invasions, economic exploitation, military and political conquests. Language plays a role of a crucial component in the extension of authoritative governments and in the process of Europeanization of the world.

In this regard, BASIC English (BASIC = British American Scientific International Commercial), which was a constrained form of English, was supported in the period between the end of the First and the beginning of the Second World War. The creators of this project believed that minor languages would be reduced: “What the world needs is about 1000 more dead languages - and one more alive” (Ogden, 1934.). The international attitude here was that the languages other than English would be eliminated and rejected through the simplification of this language.
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