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# TRANSLATION PRACTICE AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY

N.I. ILMINSKY

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## Abstract

The article briefly reviews the Christianization policy of the Volga-Kama region from the Russian Federation and provides brief historical information about the baptized Tatars. The pedagogical program of the missionary N.I. Ilminsky on education of foreigners has been characterized; its causes and activities of the Translation Commission have been described. Mass Christianization of heterodox peoples of the Volga-Ural region has led to the implementation of the government task to integrate them into the socio-cultural space of Russia on the basis of spiritual unification. But for the Tatar people the Christianization turned into a socio-cultural split-up. As a result of a long-term struggle, the majority of the region inhabitants preserved their former Muslim religion.

*Keywords:* Christianization, baptized Tatars, Translation Commission, translation artefacts

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## 1. Introduction

The territory called the Republic of Tatarstan, a subject of the modern Russian Federation is located in the centre of the European part of Russia on the East European Plain, at the confluence of two rivers –Volga and Kama. Kazan the capital of Tatarstan is located 797 kilometres east of Moscow.

In this territory, since ancient times, lived Turkic peoples – Bulgars, Burtases, Suvars, Sabirs and others [1]. The history of this region is unique. In the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries there was a prosperous state Volga Bulgaria. From the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century till the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century this region became part of the Mongol Empire and acquired the name ‘the state Golden Horde (Juchi Ulusy)’. After its fall in the 15<sup>th</sup> century till the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century there developed the Kazan Khanate, which was conquered by the Russian (Moscow) State in 1552 [2]. Before the socialist Revolution of 1917, this territory was known as the Kazan Governorate, the population of which has

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acquired the ethnonym *Tatars*. In 1920 it was renamed as the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and in 1990 it became the Republic of Tatarstan [3].

Islam has become the religion of the Turkic peoples inhabiting this territory since the tenth century. In 922 AD the Bulgarian Khan Almysh invited ambassadors from the Arab Caliphate (a well-known traveller Ahmed ibn Fadlan was the Secretary of the Ambassador) and officially converted to Islam [4]. In 1320-1321 the Khan of the Golden Horde Uzbek Khan also officially approved Islam as the only religion in the territory and the Arabic alphabet became a sign system of the written language of Volga Turki [5]. It should be noted that in the Volga region the esoteric branch of Islam, called Sufism, was quite widespread. This branch preached austerity and increased spirituality and was one of the main directions of classical Islamic philosophy [6].

After the Kazan Khanate was conquered by the Moscow State in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, where the majority of population adhered to the Orthodox direction of the Christian religion, in the conquered territory they began to destroy the mosques and built churches, because Kazan land was actively distributed among Slavonic (Russian) magistrates and feudal lords. The Russians settled on the noble arable areas. At the same time, attempts were made to convert the Muslim population of the Kazan Khanate to Orthodoxy. Peasant revolts and riots often broke out against forcible conversion to Christianity [7]. The process of Christianization was especially clearly manifested in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period is directly related to the activities of a well-known Christian missionary N.I. Ilminsky. Tatars converted to Christianity became known as baptized Tatars, and the word 'kreshen tatory' from the word 'baptized' was introduced into the Tatar language. For the Tatar people Christianization turned into a socio-cultural split-up. Nowadays baptized Tatars represent an ethnic and confessional group as part of Tatars of Volga and Ural regions. They practice Orthodox Christianity and live mainly in the Republic of Tatarstan, in a small amount in Bashkortostan, Udmurtia, Chelyabinsk region, as well as in Samara and Kirov regions.

In the process of the research a set of methods of historical-comparative and historical-linguistic analysis, methods of information analysis and synthesis have been applied. Elements of the statistical method were required for obtaining quantitative data; the comparative method was applied when considering the borrowed vocabulary of the sources used; some extralinguistic (History, Ethnography, Archaeology, Anthropology, Ethnology, Sociology) data and methods of historical classification have been used.

## **2. Literature review - history of the topic research**

Significant social changes in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries covered all aspects of the life of the state and society of the multinational Russian Empire. During this period the role of the Tatar language both outside and inside the country was enhanced; actually it served as a second state language in the Russian Empire. This led to the need for officials speaking the Tatar language, the need for

training of Tatar-speaking staff [8]. The changes that took place in the cultural development were caused not only by the growth of national consciousness of the Tatar people, the needs of capitalist production, but also by the policy of further Christianization, the activities of missionary organizations. "Orthodoxy held a leading and dominant position in the religious tolerance system of the Russian Empire, which had a direct impact on the status of other denominations. This provision complemented the exclusive right of the Russian Orthodox Church to conduct missionary work among the Russian citizens." [9]

Activation of missionary activities of the Orthodox Church in the Volga-Ural region in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was due to the increased attention to religious problems of public bodies. In 1731, the Synod established in the Kazan diocese the Newly Baptized Affairs Office for christening Muslims and other non-Christian peoples. In 1740, the Empress Anna Ioannovna signed a decree on the conduct of mass Christianization. Ethno-cultural effects and consequences of the state religious policy have been mixed. The efforts of the missionaries had effects. For over thirty years of functioning of the Newly Baptized Affairs Office, 362,420 people from among non-Russian peoples of Volga and Ural regions were converted to Orthodoxy. During mass Christianization 12,699 Tatars were baptized; the overwhelming majority of them – 9,548 people – were converted to Christianity in 1748-1755. Mass Christianization of the whole family of heterodox peoples of the Volga-Ural region has led to the implementation of the government task to integrate them into the socio-cultural space of Russia on the basis of spiritual unification. But for the Tatar people Christianization turned into a socio-cultural split-up. The majority of the region inhabitants preserved their former Muslim religion. An insignificant part of the Muslim Tatars was baptized by force or due to their financial interests – they intended to receive various benefits and privileges. The missionary N.P. Ostroumov indicated the division of the Tatar people on the confessional basis: "The Russians, particularly the inhabitants of the Volga region, know two categories of the Tatar people: Mohammed Tatars and Tatar Christians. The first are better known under the name of 'Muslims' as they call themselves upon their religion Islam. The latter are known as 'baptized Tatars', as they call themselves simply 'kryashens', i.e. baptized. Those and others, Mohammed Tatars and Tatar Christians have the same origin and speak the same language, the Tatar language, the name derived from the noun 'Tatar, Tatarian'." [10] Baptized Tatars ('kryashens') were formed as a subconfessional group of the Volga-Ural Tatars in the process of Christianization of the Turkic peoples of the Volga and Ural regions in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries [11]. 'Kryashens' make part of the Tatar people who speak the same language and live in the common territory. Before adoption of Christianity and for some time after this process, the life and culture of Kryashens used to be formed in the same line with the life and culture of the Kazan Tatars. However, this formation in the pre-revolutionary period occurred in Kryashens within narrow limits, isolated to some extent, from the rest of the Tatar people [12].

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were doubts about the Christianization policy that had been effectively used until that time, because of the mass conversion of Tatars from Orthodoxy back to the traditional Muslim faith. That time the Tatars had an effective system of Muslim schools. By 1868, there were 2.1 million Muslims in the Volga-Ural region, who were united into more than 4 thousand parishes under control of 6.5 thousand clergymen [9, p. 39]. Due to the return of baptized Tatars to Islam, the need to keep and protect them from contact with the Muslim community came to the fore. This period is characterized by enhanced penetration of European culture and borrowed vocabulary from European and Russian languages in the Tatar environment and society [13].

In the new economic and political conditions of Russia in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century more flexible methods of Christianization and Russification designed to consistently implement the policy of the government and the Church replaced the previous ones. One of these steps was the creation of Orthodox Church organizations approved upon 'Basic rules for institutions of the Orthodox Church Brotherhoods' from May 8, 1864. In this period in the Kazan Governorate the 'Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood' at the Chistopol Nicholas Cathedral and the 'Saint Guria Brotherhood' at the Kazan Annunciation Cathedral were opened. Saint Guria Brotherhood with its fifty-year history of existence (1867-1918) played a significant role in the Christianization of non-Russian peoples. The members of Saint Guria Brotherhood prepared and directed teachers-missionaries who spoke non-Russian languages, or provided them with educational and methodical missionary and editorial assistance. This process took place in a particularly active way in 1875, when under control of the Brotherhood the Translation Commission was restructured; it was given wide-ranging powers in the sphere of printing. These institutions represented a qualitatively new approach to the conduct of missionary work. "History shows that translation works of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had to be stored in church libraries and pantries, and, in worst cases, they were used as wrapper. The deplorable results of semi-centenary work of translators can be explained by the fact that at that time translation was just emerging and there were only Russian translators who knew little or were unfamiliar with the spirit of non-Russian languages. Negative results of the started process have made Russian society pause. A number of cases when Muslims converted back to Islam showed the need for fundamental reforms in the translation sphere. Meanwhile, no one probably could say in advance what reforms had to be introduced. Even linguists did not dare to speak favourably." [14]

To understand the cultural and historical situation on this issue in the region in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it is necessary to know the educational program of N.I. Ilminsky for the education of foreigners and the reasons for its formation.

### **3. Discussion - translation practice and educational activities of N.I. Ilminsky**

In 1854, the only Russian missionary Anti-Muslim Department was established in the Kazan Theological Academy. This department had a special purpose – to train missionaries-experts in oriental languages. N.I. Ilminsky, A.A. Bobrovnikov, E.A. Malov, M.A. Mashanov, N.P. Ostroumov and others were the most famous first graduates of this department. The knowledge of Arabic and Turkic languages made them prominent turkologists in the scientific world. Their initiative has contributed to the fact that they have devoted all their lives to ‘education of foreigners’. After graduation in 1846 N.I. Ilminsky stayed at the Theological Academy as a teacher of Natural sciences and as a Tatar teacher. Contemporaries described him like that: “In addition to his intelligence and profound education, God gave him the simple soul which allowed him to freely communicate with ordinary people among whom he lived and worked; he attracted everyone with his love. Thanks to his loving heart he recognized the mystery of spiritual aspiration of a foreigner’s soul.” [14, p. 4]

Translation and educational activities of the Anti-Muslim Department under the guidance and with the participation of N.I. Ilminsky underwent noticeable changes – “the literary Tatar language that dominated in the department before was replaced by the living popular Tatar language” [15]. N.I. Ilminsky was the first to realize that a foreigner should be educated only with the use of his/her native language. A century and a half ago education of many peoples of the Russian Empire was directly connected with an ideological task to christen these peoples, and therefore – with translation of doctrinal literature into their native languages, as well as with civilized tasks in general. Thus, according to N.V. Nikolsky, in 1863 N.I. Ilminsky wrote: “‘Foreigners’ children should be taught so that they can easily assimilate knowledge. The best way is to prepare textbooks, useful and instructive to ordinary people, written in their native language. Textbooks should be written in a pure spoken language that is expressed not only in separate words, grammar and word order, but also in logical formulation of thoughts, close to common people to the extent possible.” [14, p. 4] N.I. Ilminsky preferred translation to be simple and understandable, he also suggested taking into account the characteristics of the native language when translating. A remarkable article ‘On education of foreigners through the books translated into their native language’ written in 1863 [16] became the first one in a series of “his articles on Tatar translations and the way education of foreigners should be organized”.

The Translation Commission worked upon the officially recognized system created by N.I. Ilminsky. The system was based on primary education of children with the use of their native language. When translating and publishing books, the Translation Commission adhered to two principles: to translate using the understandable popular language and print in Russian letters, as subsequently amended due to phonetic peculiarities of the language. To implement the translation task N.I. Ilminsky created written systems based on the Russian

alphabet, only some letters were changed due to their twofold pronunciation in a particular foreigner's dialect – minor changes in the form of dots above vowels, a little hook or tail to two or three consonants. Thus, the baptized Tatar primer was created and then printed in 1862. Its full name was the “Primer with a brief sacred history and an abridged version of catechism, containing sermons and prayers intended for the baptized Tatars in their native language” [17]. The first four pages contained the alphabet with Russian letters, while the rest of pages consisted of Christian, faith, prayer texts.

From 1862 to 1867, i.e. before the establishment of the Saint Guria Brotherhood, N.I. Ilminsky published seven books in the Tatar language, as well as two editions of the primer ‘Zhazyu beldereu’ [18-19], ‘The Book of Sirach’ (Akyl birya torgan knyagya) [20], ‘The elementary Russian textbook for the Tatars’ [21] containing stories about the lives of the saints. These translations were written in Russian font and in the living spoken Tatar language. N.I. Ilminsky explained his work on changing the object of linguistic study: “It worth noting that even in 1847 there were cases when baptized Tatars converted back to Islam. Such cases were caused and officially explained predominantly by lack of knowledge of the Orthodox Faith and lack of understanding of the Church service. In connection therewith, the Supreme Order on translation of major liturgical books into the Tatar language was issued. Thus, the following works have been translated: the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, the Prayer Book and the Gospel. These books were translated into the literary Tatar language and printed in Arabic letters. I was a member of the Translation Commission too, however, as a minor person, and I fully shared the Mohammedan-scientific view of the Tatar language and alphabet and found the mentioned translations thorough and satisfactory. Upon completion of this work in 1856 I had to inquire about its suitability for the baptized Tatars and found out that our translations were completely incomprehensible and therefore useless. The direct acquaintance with the baptized Tatars, the Kyrgyz and Turkmen cooled my previous jealousy to the literary Tatar language and fostered in me a strong respect for the living popular speech as the only true artefact. When drawing up a primer in 1862, I tried to use the popular Tatar language spoken by the old-baptized Tatars of the Mamadyshsky County of the Kazan Governorate; I translated the primer with their help.” [22] In the fall of 1864, thanks to the efforts of N.I. Ilminsky the school for the baptized Tatars was opened in Kazan. This school applied in practice a set of methodological techniques developed by the scientist.

In 1868, N.I. Ilminsky became the head of the newly established Standing Translation Commission of the Saint Guria Brotherhood. The Commission addressed the issue of quality and necessity of those or other translations. Translations into the Tatar language served as a kind of scripts for translations into other foreign languages. That is why the Translation Commission paid special attention to translations into Tatar, because the errors of understanding of the sacred texts made in Tatar translation could easily be repeated in the translations into other foreign languages. Each translation prepared by any

person used to be sent for reading and correcting to the persons who were proficient in the native language. Only after it became perfect in terms of the language, accuracy and edification, the manuscript was recommended for publication. Preliminary translation was performed by the Commission members P.A. Yungerov, I.O. Vasilev and V.T. Timofeev with the participation of a teacher of the Central Baptized Tatar School T.E. Egorov and the Academy librarian F.I. Troitsky. Words absent in the language were replaced by Greek or Russian terms [23]. Some translations were performed by the students of the Kazan Seminary and the Baptized Tatar School [23, p. 9]. To implement the translation task, N.I. Ilminsky drew up written systems based on the Russian alphabet; according to his plan, this should have contributed to more accurate fixing of living languages and dialects. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than anyone else, he was fully aware that foreign languages of the Kazan region were so different by their structure from Russian. As an expert in the Turkic languages, he applied the scientific approach to the study of popular languages. In comparison with other Turkic languages, this approach allows to thoroughly examine the language material.

Speaking about a number of issues relating to the application and adaptation of the Russian alphabet to the Tatar language, let us consider, for example, the transliteration of the consonant *ǰ* [*j*]. “This consonant sound in different dialects is pronounced in a different way, but it is always very soft or palatalized. Some Tatars pronounce this sound like *ð* [*d*], others – like *ðʒ* [*dz*] or *ʒ* [*z*], the Kirghiz pronounce it like *ж* [*zh*], the Altay – *м* [*t*], the Shors (also in Altai) – *ч* [*ch*], the Chuvash – *с* [*s*]. There are a lot of words beginning with a consonant *d* in the ancient Turkic language that still exist in all spoken languages and dialects. Nowadays they are diversified with the explained pronunciation of the initial sound. If I started to write my translations for the baptized Tatars, for example, in the Menzelinsky County, where this sound is pronounced like *ʒ* [*z*], I could not transliterate it with the Russian letter *з* [*z*] as it is often found in the Tatar language in its proper Russian pronunciation, and I must have indicated its palatalized meaning with some sign. It would be much more convenient to transliterate it with a Latin letter *j*, which would provide similar words with the same lettering, but it would be pronounced in its own way in each dialect and, as a foreign sign, would not confuse foreigners when reading Russian books.” [22, p. 8]

Solving problems of foreigners’ education, N.I. Ilminsky could formulate the direction of dialectological research. “In an effort to provide national schools with textbooks, we printed translations both into dialects of the Kazan region and any another dialects, for example, Mordovian dialects. National schools were also provided with religious and doctrinal books, dictionaries, grammar books and sometimes authentic examples of folk literature of the foreigners.” [24]

#### 4. Conclusions

Thus, missionary departments established in pre-revolutionary Russia were kind of centres where ethnography, history, religious beliefs and languages of non-Russian peoples of the Volga region, the Cisurals and Siberia were studied. Translation practice and educational activities of the linguist N.I. Ilminsky deserves attention of ethnologists, theologians and philologists-linguists. The method of the primary education of children with the use of their native language is the basis for his missionary books.

The missionary-scientist urged to translate Christian books in the understandable popular language and print it in Russian letters, making necessary amendments due to phonetic peculiarities of the language. Ilminsky preferred translation to be simple and understandable. He also suggested taking into account the characteristics of the native language when translating.

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