

## Russian Classical Literature in Multi-ethnic Environment: The Issues of Reception and Methodology of Teaching

Alsu Z. Khabibullina<sup>a</sup>, Elvira F. Nagumanova<sup>b</sup>, Oksana Y. Amurskaya<sup>c</sup> \*

\* Corresponding author: Oksana Y. Amurskaya, , oksana.amurskaya@yandex.ru

<sup>a</sup>Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kremlevskaya str., 18 Kazan, Russia, alsu\_zarifovna@mail.ru, 89050266475;

<sup>b</sup>Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kremlevskaya str., 18 Kazan, Russia, ehviran@yandex.ru, 89270413984,

<sup>c</sup>Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kremlevskaya str., 18 Kazan, Russia, oksana.amurskaya@yandex.ru, 89600469717

### Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.07.13>

The problem of the existence of Russian classical literature in the foreign readers' minds is regarded as one of the most fundamental problems in the current period of global changes in the field of inter-correlation of foreign literatures and languages. The article presents an experimental study of the aesthetic interference in the poems "The Prayer" (1839), "I want to live, I crave for sadness" (1832) by M. Lermontov and "When Your So Young and Fairy Years..." (1829) by A. Pushkin. These works have become a part of modern Tatar readers' perception. Based on the key concepts of the theory of aesthetic reception (aesthetic distance, the boundaries of readers' expectations of a literary work, aesthetic experience), the new implications are revealed. These senses are actualized by modern readers, who study national literatures, the traditions of national poetry, its forms and images. The article regards the special pattern of Tatar readers' perception of Russian classical literature, particularly of lyrical poetry by Pushkin and Lermontov. The methodological aspect of this problem is seen as "another" interpretation of Russian literature as a positive side of interference, which reveals global concepts of fiction and the features of national and cultural identity of modern readers.

© 2016 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

**Keywords:** Experiment; Russian classical literature; Tatar literature; aesthetic distance; reader; aesthetic interference.

### 1. Introduction

The problem of interference of Russian classical literature by Tatar readers represents a special field for research in comparative literary studies which dates back to the 1990s. The growing interest in its study was stimulated by the process of globalization, enhanced in modern culture and society.



The problem concerning the peculiarities of the foreign readers' interpretation of Russian classical literature was first raised in the PhD dissertation of A. Z. Khabibullina "Russian literature in the interpretation of Tatar readers" (aesthetic interference), in which one of the chapters contained the experiment description (Khabibullina, 1998). The conducted scientific experiment described the features of a national identity of a Tatar reader and the peculiarities of his type of thinking. The author came to the conclusion of the absence of clear boundaries between ethic and atheistic perceptions of a Tatar reader. The concepts of friendship, love, justice are not regarded as abstract concepts (abstract philosophy is not typical for national literatures) but on the contrary, raise the feelings of admiration, and being emotionally experienced can be seen as the expressions of beauty and high spirits.

The **aim** of the present experiment is to comprehend the way modern Tatar readers interpret Russian literature, to develop the pattern of interpretation of Russian classical literature from the view of foreign minds. The experimental data comprise the poems "Molitva" ("The Prayer") (1839), "Ya zhit' hochu, hochu pechali!" ("I want to live, I crave for sadness") (1832) by M. Lermontov and "Kogda tvoi mladye leta ..." ("When Your So Young and Fairy Years...") (1829) by A. Pushkin.

### 1.1 The experiment participants

The following categories of readers took part in our experiment: 1. 4<sup>th</sup> year students of the department of Tatar Philology of the Institute of Philology, their major is the Tatar language and literature. They are referred to as professional readers (32 students). 2. 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of the department of Tatar Philology who specialize in "Tatar philology and national design" and the students who specialize in "Tatar philology and IT" (20 students). This category is not random. The study of native (Tatar) literature in this category is combined with other (non-philological) subjects. 3. Students in 4<sup>th</sup> year who specialize in national choreography (17 students). We refer to them as non professional readers as they do not specialize in Tatar literature and Tatar language.

### 1.2 Problem setting

The ideological potential of Russian literary works was unfolded in its own way in the perception of Tatar poets of the beginning of the XX century. One of the tasks of the current research is to comprehend if it is actualized nowadays. These works include G. Tukay's poems "Tæsser" ("Impression"), "ga ... (Shoma tormysh yulynda)" ("To.." ("On the path of life")), "Kyk berlän min tatu bulmak telim" ("I wish to befriend the sky") by S. Ramiev, which represent free translations of the above mentioned Russian literary works. Their content is renewed, approaching *aesthetic interference*, caused by the influence of national consciousness of the poets on the perception of Russian literature. These works are marked both by narrative and psychological interference determined by the tendency of Tatar poets of the beginning of the XX century to express their attitude to love and friendship in a different way, to reveal "another" comprehension of a human dialogue with God and with the world in general (Amineva et al., 2015).

The experimental research was conducted to test the following key hypothetical statements:

- To what extent will the "new" interfered type of thinking be variable in the consciousness of modern Tatar readers?

- Is there any certain pattern or “matrix” of the perception of Russian literature by a Tatar reader of the XX – the beginning of the XXI century?
- Is this pattern determined by the reader’s national environment, his native language and national literature?

## 2. Literature review

The point of the current research is the interpretation of inter-literary dialogue, which is one of the key notions in modern comparative linguistics. According to Y. Safiullin (2010), “the inter-literary dialogue can be defined as the exchange of ideas, images, forms of fiction and other aesthetic values. One of its main conditions is the motion towards the unity, preserving the differences” (Safiullin, 2010). A dialogue can occur in any of the receiving minds: of a reader, of a researcher, of a critic. Besides, his theory supposes, “the acceptance of each participant as a different entity and common way to knowledge and sense, and not necessarily resulting in reaching an agreement” (Safiullin, 2012). The introduction of a reader in an inter-literary dialogue makes it practically infinite. The appearance of new senses, in which the previous experience of a reader is actualized changes the fiction work, filling it with new ideas and breaking the previous stereotypes about it.

The notions of “one’s own” and “foreign” are represented in an inter-literary dialogue. According to the view of a modern comparative linguist V. Amineva (2014), she outlined in her paper “‘Universal’ and ‘Unique’ as the Categories of Comparative Literature”: “The notions of “one’s own” and “foreign” are the representative essences of universal and unique semantic structures that come into being in inter-literary dialogues. These are the central concepts of culture. They can help to comprehend the basic models of dialogue relations between national literatures. In juxtaposing investigation of national literatures, the “foreign” is a sign of different semantic position. “One’s own” point of view asserts and determinates itself in the dialogue with this position. The texts of other nationalities are considered as “foreign”; and their semiotic homogeneity and general symbolic meaning intensify” (Amineva, 2014). The similar correlation of “one’s own” and “foreign” is one of the most substantial aspects of foreign perception of literature in a reader’s mind.

The concept of the current research is largely supported by the main ideas and notions of receptive aesthetics, outlined in the literature. Among the recent notions are the following: “horizon of expectation of a work and a reader, aesthetic distance, aesthetic experience” (Jauss, 1967; Iser, 1976). Jauss (1967) regarded a notion of aesthetic distance as determining the rate of unexpectedness for a reader and its poetic value. He emphasizes that traditionally *the smooth* perception of classical literature (due to the distance reduction between a work and a recipient) demands extra effort from the latter, who craves it and reads it “against” his established experience, to reveal anew its artistic merit and aesthetic value.

However, from our point of view, the destruction of the ordinary reception of classical texts, its “smooth perception” and as a result the longer aesthetic distance can be produced by a reader, belonging to the world of “another” language and culture, a bearer of other aesthetic, artistic and religious concepts. For instance, such destruction took place in the history of the Tatar literature in the

beginning of the XX century. By establishing connections with the literary works of Russian writers, it approached the “horizon of expectation” of “its reader”.

The most important aspect of our research lies in the field of methodology of teaching literature in a multi-ethnic environment. Many theories support the point of view, that students express difficulties perceiving a foreign literary work (Boranbayeva, 2009; Cherkezova, 2007; Mukhametshina, 2007). It is traditionally regarded that the studies of Russian literature in foreign environment are based on the comparative historical principles of approaching fiction (Boranbayeva, 2009). It is the acceptance of the special unique features, corresponding to the national and cultural identity of a reader that serves as the objective basis to construct a dialogue of a receiving mind with the environment.

There is a vast scope of literature on the issue of the education of a bilingual identity (Gay, 2013; Dagenais, 2013; Xhaferi, B. & Xhaferi, G. 2012). Gay (2013) emphasizes that “students must experience academic success, develop and/or maintain contact and competence with their primary cultural heritages...” (Gay, 2013, p.51). In modern works less attention is being paid to the problem of teaching the representatives of national minorities. For instance the issue of teaching with regard to cultural and ethnic features of the audience was raised by Gay G. in his article (2013). Thomas (1988) stressed that multicultural education encourages not only the cognition of foreign culture but also of one’s own (Thomas, 1988). Russian scholars also address the problem of the development of a student’s personality in multicultural environment of the university (Konopatskaya et.al., 2015) and the challenges in mastering certain subjects (namely, mathematics and physics), experienced by students speaking Russian as non-mother tongue (Gabdulchakov, 2015).

### **3. The main part**

In this part we will regard the content of the poem “The Prayer” by M.Lermontov, which was evaluated by modern Tatar readers as a part of the conducted experiment.

In this poem the Russian poet emphasizes that it is prayer that helps to overcome hardships.

The subject of the prayer in Lermontov’s oeuvre is connected with the idea that the poet, feeling lonely and isolated from the world and light, spontaneously addresses God, looking for peace and understanding. However the religious aspect of this poem is expressed in a different way: Lermontov’s character feels inner enlightenment due to that power of the Word, which makes him perceive deeply not only the point of the prayer, but “living words' accords” as well.

The features of national identity can be traced in G.Tukay’s poem “Impression” (1908), which represents a free translation of Lermontov’s poem analyzed above. This concealed meaning turned out to be the gap, that is, that aspect of the work that caused interference due to its partial definiteness. Referring to the article “G. Tukay’s poetry: the Aspects of National Identity” (Amineva et al., 2014), “this new meaning applied to Lermontov’s poem is a result of notional interference, developing in the process of the reception of Lermontov’s poem by the Tatar poet. It is based on ontological differences: in Lermontov’s poem the ontology of the Word as equal to God refers to Christianity (“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”). This ontology is not

expressed in Tukay's poem; according to the Tatar poet Allah possesses the highest existential status (Amineva et al., 2014).

Thus the idea of the role of the Word in the existence of a human being has transferred into religious one in Tukay's poem: his character, compared to Lermontov's persona, does not only pronounce the soothing words of the prayer. Being completely immersed in it, he displays us the changing state of his soul under the influence of Quran surahs: "*Ocha dildan baten shik-shobhalar, ham acylyj bashlyjm: / Yaçaklarny məkaddəs kyz yashemdə ençeli bashlyjm. /Bötenlaj saflana künlem; ukujm iman, bulam möehmin; Kilə rəhət açihelleklər: həlas bulam avyr jəkdin*" (All the anxiety and doubt / Disappear like the wind – I'm crying: / Sacred tears are like pearls on my cheeks. / And my soul being totally purified, turns to God, I become faithful; / And blessed relief comes: as I am free from heavy burden) (free translation) (Tukay, 2006).

The free translation of Lermontov's poem into Tatar illustrates the most important feature of Eastern mentality – the inner world, kept far from prying eyes.

#### 4. Results and discussion

Let's look at the results of the conducted experiment.

Our analysis confirmed that modern Tatar readers have recognized the common ideas in Tukay's translation, what proves the divergence of their type of thinking from Lermontov's ideas, expressed in his poem. "Aesthetic distance" is evident in such perception: on one hand the Tatar readers have filled the content of Lermontov's poems with their reflections based on their own cultural experiences and particularly values of Tatar literature. On the other hand, the tendency to interpret Lermontov's poem applying the motives and images of Tukay's poetry was clearly noticeable, and as a result it enhanced the tendency to interpret it from their "own" position, not from the "alien" one.

To a great extent it can be explained by the proximity of Lermontov to the Eastern culture, which was intuitively guessed by the Tatar recipients, who have put in the foreground Tukay's images in their reflections, and just as well the morality their literature is fertile in.

We would like to point out several fragments of the Tatar readers' reflections, illustrating this tendency of perception:

1. "Lermontov's poem has favourably impressed me. The title supposes its connection with the prayer. And I felt that prayer. It made me remember my prayer. It seemed to me bright and beautiful, connecting me with the Prophet".
2. "Lermontov's poem can be compared with the Quran, because of the similar, assonant motives"
3. "My heart feels lightened after the prayer, all the doubts fade. This signifies that the main character of the poem believes in God. If you don't believe in God, the prayers don't make you feel so purified and light at heart"
4. "This poem shows us the deep sufferings of the poet. Only in God he finds peace. It happens with the help of the prayer and with the help of the words which come from the bottom of his heart,

simple words. It seems to me that this is a warmhearted, cordial poem, which contains a message to God”.

5. “The author describes a prayer as a miracle in this poem. He states that a prayer is powerful and assonant with live words. The prayer is living for the author, it can even breathe. <...> In his work the author displayed the power of prayer, of belief and God”.

6. “This poem can be compared with Tukay’s poem “Kichke telək” (“Evening Wish”), in which the poet also observes the great power of a prayer”.

7. “This poem inspires a person with hope, as it is about a prayer. The prayer contains a healing and miraculous force. Just repeat it, believe in its power and be grateful to God for everything”

Concerning Tatar literature, this work can be compared with Tukay’s poem “Ana dogasy” (“Mother’s Prayer”) and “Kader kich” (“Predestination night”).

Although the responses are similar, there is one which stands out and which proves the reduction of the aesthetic distance of the reader with the perceived text. It contains the idea of the influence of the blessed Word in general (mother’s words, teacher’s words) and not just a prayer as the way to God. Besides, the reader pointed out the similarities of this poem with Tukay’s work “Tugan tel” (“My native language”). As this reader stated, “the native language is just as precious for Tukay as a prayer for the Russian poet”.

Thus the responses of the Tatar readers, who are specializing in the studies of the native language and its literature, corresponded to their national identity. They interpreted the poem by Lermontov in the light of the values of their national literature and primarily of Tukay’s poetry. This extends the “aesthetic boundaries” of the comprehension of Lermontov’s poems “The Prayer” beyond its being purely Russian.

The evaluation of Lermontov’s poem “The Prayer” was different among the Tatar readers, who don’t specialize in philology and nonprofessional readers. Only 4 responses out of 27 demonstrate the tendency to interpret the poem in a different way, which contradicts its original content.

The analysis of the results show that the readers, belonging to this group, interpret this work according to the “the horizon of its expectations”. The leveling of the readers and “the horizon of its expectations” did not allow the readers to interpret it in a different way, to recognize other senses in it. Their interpretation of Lermontov’s poem “The Prayer” only slightly outlined “crossing the borders”, breaking the stereotypes of it, which could have been formed in the light of the cultural and national bases of Tatar literature.

The experimentally received results of the perception of the analyzed works of Russian literature “Ya zhit' hochu, hochu pechali!” (“I want to live, I crave for sadness”) (1832) by M.Lermontov and “Kogda tvoï mladye leta ...” (“When Your So Young and Fairy Years...”) (1829) by A. Pushkin by the modern Tatar readers are similar.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results we received we discovered a certain pattern (“matrix”) of perception of Russian classical literature, particularly the poems by A.Pushkin and M.Lermotov, by non-native readers.

Similar to rings in the water, the difference between the aesthetic consciousness of a reader and the works of Russian classical literature will be more noticeable in case if the reader is a bearer of the values of his native literature, if his mind is constructed by the comprehension of masterpieces by G.Tukay, S.Ramiev, Dardmend, Musa Jalil etc. In this case his interpretation of Russian lyrics will be completely different, breaking the common “horizon of its expectations”.

And vice versa, if the mastery of literature is superficial and incomplete in a reader’s perception (or will be absent in it) of the point of view of its main ideas, images, forms, then the comprehension of Russian classical poetry will correspond to its values and ideas.

The discovered tendency in the perception of Russian classical literature raises the problem of the necessity of broadening the cultural, historical and literary context of the readers, tending to overcome aesthetic interference. This approach, leading to the juxtaposition of spiritual bases of Russian and Tatar literatures is considered to be basic in the modern conception of studying Russian literature in multicultural environment (Cherkezova, 2006). Alongside with that, aesthetic interference reveals positive aspects, contributing to the actualization of hidden senses of classical literature. The broadening of the aesthetic distance objectively emerging in the reception of “the foreign” and aesthetic interference leads to the comprehension of the concepts “love”, “happiness”, “friendship” as well as the confirmation of their national identity. The unique view on Russian classical literature, included in the dichotomy of “one’s own” and “foreign”, can involve a reader in an inter-literary dialogue, which does not necessarily result in acceptance or agreement.

## References

- Amineva, V., Ibragimov, M., Nagumanova, E., Khabibullina, A., & Yuzmukhametova, L. (2015). Aesthetic Interference and Untranslatability as Concepts of Comparative Literary Studies. *The Social Sciences*, 10(7), 1868-1872.
- Amineva, V., Ibragimov, M., Khabibullina, A., & Nagumanova, E. (2015). G.Tukay’s Poetry: The Aspects of National Identity. *XLinguae European Scientific Language Journal*, 8(1), 79-87.
- Amineva V. (2014). ‘Universal’ and ‘Unique’ as the Categories of Comparative Literature. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 2094-2098.
- Boranbayeva, Z. (2009). Shkola dialoga russkoy i rodnoy literatur. *Russkaya Slovesnost'*, (3), 76-80.
- Cherkezova, M. (2006). V poiskakh novykh podkhodov k sozdaniyu uchebnikov po literature. Na materiale uchebnikov po russkoy literature dlya natsional'nykh shkoly. *Literatura v Shkole*, (5), 23-27.
- Dagenais, D. (2013). Multilingualism in Canada: Policy and Education in Applied Linguistics Research. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33, 286-301.
- Dagenais, D., Day, E., & Toohey, K. (2006). Multilingual Child’s Literacy Practices and Contrasting Identities in the Figured Worlds of French Immersion Classrooms. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9(2), 205-218.
- Gabdulchakov, V. (2015). The Technology of Activation of Theoretical and Creative Thinking of Bilingual Students. *Review of European Studies*, 5(7), 72-78.
- Gay, G. (2013). Teaching To and Through Cultural Diversity. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 43(1), 48-70.
- Iser, W. (1976). *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung*. München.
- Jauss, H. (1967). *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*. Konstanz.
- Khabibullina, A. (1998). *Russkaya literatura v vospriyatii tatarskikh chitateley (esteticheskaya interferentsiya)* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Kazan State University.
- Konopatskaya, E, Abdrafikova, A, & Yarmakeev, I. (2015). Professional Evolution of Student's Personality in Conditions of Poly-cultural Educational University Space. *Social Sciences*, 10(5), 556-561.
- Mukhametshina, R. (2007). *Dialog russkoy i tatarskoy kul'tur v sisteme literaturnogo obrazovaniya (na materiale shk. Resp. Tatarstan)*. Kazan: Magarif.
- Safiullin, Y. (2010). Mezhliteraturnyy dialog. In *Teoriya literatury: Slovar' dlya studentov, spetsializiruyushchikhsya po sravnitel'noy i sopostavitel'noy filologii* (pp. 53-55). Kazan.
- Safiullin, Y. (2012). Kommunikatsiya v literature. In *Mezhdunarodnaya kommunikatsiya: Filologichesky aspect. Slovar-spravochnik* Kazan: Otechestvo, 15-31.

- Thomas, H. (1988). *Interkulturelles Lernen im Schüleraustausch*. Saarbrücken: FortLauderdale.
- Tukay, G. (2006). *Izbrannyye proizvedeniya: V 2 tomakh* (Vol. 1). Kazan, Tatar. kn. izdatelstvovo.
- Cherkezova, M. (2006). V poiskakh novykh podkhodov k sozdaniyu uchebnikov po literature. Na materiale uchebnikov po russkoy literature dlya natsional'nykh shkoly. *Literatura v Shkole*, 5, 23-27.
- Cherkezova M. (2000). *Problemy prepodavaniya russkoy literatury v inokul'turnoy srede: Metodicheskoye posobiye* [Brochure]. Moscow.
- Xhaferi, B., & Xhaferi, G. (2012). Teachers' Perceptions of Multilingual Education and Teaching in a Multilingual Classroom. *Jezikoslovlje*, 13(2), 679-696.