

Orthographical traditions among the Tatar minority in Finland

Okan Daher

The Turkic community of the Finnish Tatars was formed beginning with the end of the 19th century, when a number of Tatar merchants arrived in Finland from rural villages in the district of Sergach, government of Nizhnii Novgorod in Imperial Russia, of which Finland also was a part. The arriving merchants were first active as peddlers and marketplace dealers. Gradually, their activity was transformed into more localized trading with the focus on fur, textiles, and clothing. To find new trade routes and trading opportunities they settled down in larger cities and towns as well as regional centres, such as Helsinki (Helsingfors), Turku (Åbo), Rauma (Raumo), Pori (Björneborg), Vaasa (Vasa), Kemi, Järvenpää (Träskända), Tampere (Tammerfors), Lappeenranta (Villmanstrand), Varkaus, and Kuopio.¹

The inherited religion, mother tongue, and shared cultural traditions united the Tatars in Finland into a uniform community. Under such circumstances, they created a strong intellectual and material foundation for an identity of their own, which enabled them to preserve their native language and customs. At the same time, they became firmly integrated into the dominant Finnish society and culture. After the separation of Finland from Russia in 1917 and the introduction of freedom of religion by the Finnish Parliament in 1922, they began to organize themselves by establishing in 1925 the Mohammedan Congregation of Finland (*Suomen Muhamettilainen Seurakunta*). In 1963, the name of the congregation was changed to the current Finnish Islam Congregation (*Suomen Islam-seurakunta*, in Tatar *Finlandiya Islam Cemaati*).² Numbering ca. 850 individuals, the Finnish Tatars are today one of the officially recognized national minorities of Finland.

The literary activities of the Finnish Tatars

In view of their relatively small population, the Finnish Tatars have a surprisingly rich literary heritage, which is manifested in a large number of publications in various fields, including religious instruction, musical and cultural education, as well as language teaching. The publications

comprise both separate works (books and booklets) and periodicals (journals and magazines), used in community meetings, public lectures, summer courses, language training, and private literary activities.³ The most intensive period of publishing was in the 1930s to 1950s, but the activities continue up to the present day.

حاله!

ترشساك سين تابارساك ، تاشقا قادات قاغارساك ؛
 ترشايق ، ليل ، توغان ، قارا لونه ر آغارسن .
 هه ر برئشده بول ترش ، ترشي بولماس هيچ برئش ،
 نه له ر ئشله لرئشهك ، بيللني باغلاب لرش .
 ترش بولساك آچياك مول ، قايد بارساك توغري بول ،
 ياقن كورب نه يتاهن : « زنهار ، توغان ترش بول ! »

فلمنا وئا

تامر فودس ۷-۵ ۱۹۳۰ .

Fig. 1. Sample of handwriting from a private guestbook, 1930.

For various reasons, the Finnish Tatars came also to be known as the Finnish Turks, with reference to their Turkic linguistic identity. Although the Tatars were the dominant Turkic group in Finland, occasional individuals from other Turkic peoples also joined them. The common language of the community was always the Mishar dialect of the Tatar language, which was the dialect spoken by most of the Tatar merchants arriving in Finland. In 1935, a cultural society was established under the name *Finlandiya Türkleri Birligi* (Association of the Finnish Turks). A primary school, *Turkkilainen kansakoulu* (Turkic Primary School, in Tatar *Türk Halk Mektebi*) functioned in Helsinki between 1948 and 1969. The school followed the official curriculum set by the Finnish Ministry of Education. Part of the instruction was given in Finnish in order to enable the schoolchildren to continue their study in regular Finnish secondary and high schools.

Development of the orthographical traditions

In the beginning, the Finnish Tatars utilized the Volga Turkic literary language based on Late Chaghatai and written in Arabic letters. This was the language used in private correspondence both within Finland and with relatives remaining in the home villages in the Volga Region. Many individuals produced a cultivated Arabic calligraphy, as is shown by the sample from a private guestbook (Fig. 1), written by Fatima Wafa (Wafin) in Tampere (Tammerfors) in 1930.⁴

- توغان تىل -
ع . ترقاى

أى توغان تىل ، أى ماتور تىل ، ئە تكەم ، ئە نكە منك تىلى !
 د نىادا كۆب نەرسە بىلدىم ، سىن توغان تىل آرقلى .
 ايك ألك بو تىل بىلەن ئە نكەم بىشكەدە كويلەگەن ،
 آننارى تونلەر بويى ئە بىكەم حكايت سويلەگەن .
 أى توغان تىل ! هر وقتدا ياردامك بىلەن سىنك ،
 كچكەن دەن آكلاشلغان شادلغىم ، قاىغىم مىنىم .
 أى توغان تىل ! سىندە بولغان ايك ألك قىلغان دعام :
 « يارلقاغل ، دىب ، اوزم هم ئە تكەم ، ئە نكە منى خدام ! »

Fig. 2. Printed text from *Uku Kitabı*, 1935.

All materials published in the 1920s and early 1930s also used Arabic letters. The texts were set with Tatar help in regular Finnish printing houses, such as the Sana («Word») Typography in Helsinki. The sample of printed text above (Fig. 2) shows the poem titled *Tugan tıl* (Mother tongue) by the Tatar national poet Abdulla Tukay, as published in the textbook *Uku Kitabı* in 1935. This textbook, like many other similar tools, was prepared by the educational committee (*Derislikler hazırləü heyeti*) of the Finnish Islam Congregation.⁵

From the 1930s, under the impact of the language reform of Turkey and the simultaneous Latinization movement (*Yanalif*) in the Turkic areas of the Soviet Union, Roman letters were increasingly used also

among the Finnish Tatars. Often, a single publication included the same text both in Arabic and Roman letters, so that the different generations were equally well able to understand it. As an early step in this direction, the ABC book (*Alifba*) published by the Finnish Islam Congregation in 1935 may be mentioned (Fig. 3).⁶

E, e

ه ء ه هـ



ه تي هني هبي هلن هرسز
 هرهه اولهن اوسه بوله بولمه توره
 تيشه كيسه ايشه شهه هم هته چ ايلهك
 پيلمهن كوبه لهك ايشكهك .

Fig. 3. Sample from ABC Book, 1935.

The gradual change of the orthographical basis from Arabic to Roman is well illustrated by the periodical publication *Mahalle Haberleri* (Congregational News, in Finnish *Seurakunnan tiedotuksia*), issued irregularly (mainly bimonthly) between 1949 and 1970. The first issues in 1949 were published completely in the Arabic script, but already in 1950 a second titlepage in Roman letters was included, and beginning with 1952 articles in Roman letters were regularly present, as shown in the sample below (Fig. 4). In the last issues from 1970 only a small portion of the contents was published in Arabic letters.

From the 1940s onwards, it became increasingly difficult to produce Arabic letters in typeset form. Many publications, including *Mahalle*

Haberleri therefore used mimeographed handwriting for their Arabic sections. A small manual printing house with Arabic types was, however, operated by Hasan Hamidulla in Kemi and Helsinki. Among the numerous publications of this printing house there are, for instance, several editions of a Finnish Tatar telephone book (1971–1980), as well as belletristic works of Hamidulla himself. At the same time, Sadri Hamid published in handwritten Arabic letters a private periodical titled *Ak Yul* (White Road), issued in Oulu and Helsinki (1967–1977).

H e l s i n k i d e 1 9 5 2 y ı l g ı O l y m p i a .

Olympia münasebetile türlü İslam memleketlerinden Helsinkiye kilgen millettaş ve dındaşlerimiz şerefine Finlandiye Cemaatı İslamiyesi tarafından 28.7.52 de Helsinki injinir yurtunun zur zalında bir çay ziyafeti birildi. Mecliste Türkiye, İran, Mısır, Pakistan, Libnan, Suriye, Marok, Cezairden kilgen dındaşlerimiz, barsı 400 den artık kişi hazır buldılar. Kunaklar arasında İran Şahinin biraderi Prins Rıza Pehlevi Hazretleri de hazır bulıp meclisni şereflendirdi.

Mütevelliler reisi Zuhur Tahir kunaklarını selamlep meclisni uspu sözler ile açtı:

Pek sayın Prins Rıza Pehlevi Hazretleri,

Aziz misafirlerimiz,

hepinizi, Finlandiye Türk İslam Kolonisi namına samimiyetle selamlerim. Hoş geldiniz, safa geldiniz.

Fig. 4. Roman orthography from *Mahalle Haberleri*, No. 4, 1952.

The Roman alphabet of the Finnish Tatars was originally based on the Latin alphabet of Turkish, comprising the following 28 letters of the regular Turkish alphabet: **a b c ç d e f g h i j k l m n o ö p r s ş t u ü v y z**. The Turkish letter **ğ** was used only occasionally, while the letters **q w x å ä** of the Swedish-Finnish alphabet occurred in non-Turkic words and names. Generally, the prestige of the Turkish language was strong, and even the orthography of individual words and sounds tended in the beginning to follow Turkish norms, although these do not always correspond to the structure of the Tatar language. This led to considerable inconsistency and vacillation in the orthography.

It must be noted that after 1917 the language of the Finnish Tatars had developed almost independently, with little contact with the Tatar language and dialects spoken in the Volga Region. However, starting with the late 1960s contacts increased with the Kazan Tatar literary language, as used in Tatarstan. As a result, the normative Kazan Tatar orthography, though based on the use of the Cyrillic alphabet, started to influence the orthographical practice of the Finnish Tatars.

The two sounds for which it has been most difficult to find a suitable orthographical representation are the unrounded front vowels [e] and [ä]. Since these two vowels are not distinguished in the normative Turkish language, they were initially written by the single letter *e* also by the Finnish Tatars. Gradually, however, the letter *e* was restricted to denote only the low vowel [ä], while the mid-high vowel [e] is today written by the letter *ı* (*i* without dot). Unfortunately, the letter *ı* also denotes the corresponding back vowel [ë], which means that it has two values (front and back), etymologically corresponding to the high vowels *ı* *ı* (*i *ı) of Turkish.

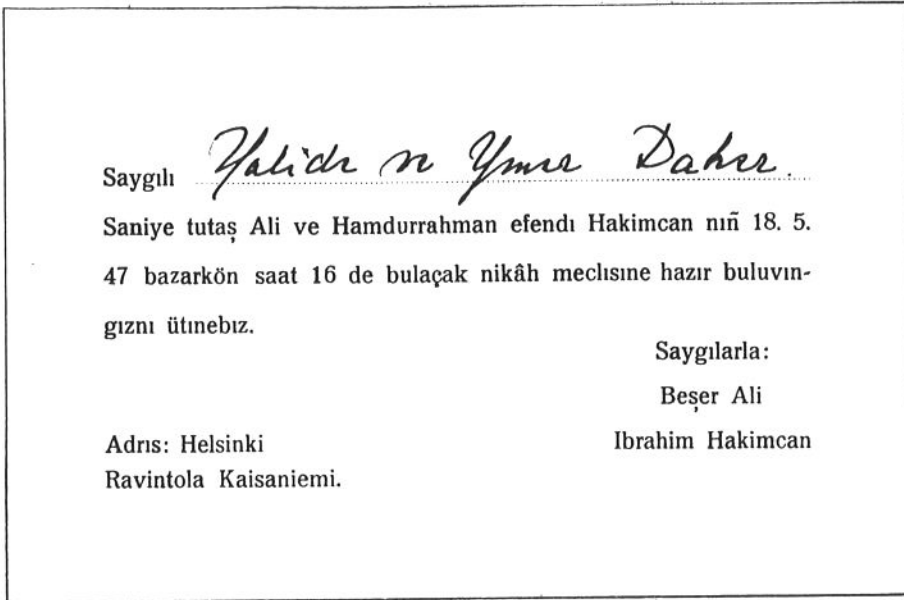


Fig. 5. Wedding invitation, 1947.

Early examples of the dual use of the letter *ı* can already be encountered in Finnish Tatar texts written in the 1940s, as in the sample consisting of a wedding invitation (Fig. 5).⁷ during the 1970s, there were occasional attempts to distinguish *ı* (back vowel) and *ı̇* (front vowel) in writing, as in *cır kiçesi* 'song evening'. For practical reasons, this usage never gained permanent ground, and the current orthography again applies a dual value for *ı*, as in the sample taken from a modern song book (Fig. 6).⁸ As a possible alternative, the Finnish letter *ä* has also been used for [ä] in language teaching, leaving the letter *e* to denote [e], as in *täröz* 'window', *äle* 'now'.

There continue to be specific features which distinguish the Finnish Tatar orthography from both the Turkish literary norm and the Cyrillic

standard of Kazan Tatar. In particular, in difference from Turkish, the special letter **ñ** (or its variants) is often used for the velar nasal sound [ŋ] present in Tatar but absent in Turkish. On the other hand, in difference from Kazan Tatar, the letter **g** is not used in certain Arabic names and loanwords, such as **seat** 'watch' (Kazan Tatar *sägat*, Turkish *saat*), **omır** 'life' (Kazan Tatar *gomer*), **Ali** [name] (Kazan Tatar *Gali*). Since there exists no definitive Roman standard for the Tatar language, the Finnish Tatars remain waiting for the results of the planned orthographic reform of the Kazan Tatar language.

TUGAN TIL

A. Tukay süz.

Halık köyü

i tu - gan til, i ma - tur til,
 et - kem - en - kem - niñ ti - li !
 Dön - ya - da küp ner - se bil - dim
 sin tu - gan til ar - ki - li .

1. I tujan tıl, i matur tıl, etkem-enkemniñ tılı!
Dönyada küp nerse bildim sin tujan tıl arkılı.
2. İñ kıl bu tıl bulen enkem bişikte köylegen,
Annarı tönner buyı ebkem hikayet söylegen.
3. İ tujan tıl! Hervakıtta yerdemniñ burlen sinniñ,
Kıçkınenen añlaşılğan şatlıgım, kaygım minim.
4. İ tujan tıl! Sinde bulgan iñ kıl bu kılğan doam:
Yarlıkagıl, dip, üzüm hem etkem-enkemni, hodam.

Fig. 6. «Tugan tıl» in the current orthography, 1980.

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 - 5 *Uku kitabı* (1). [Book for reading.] Helsinki: Finlandiye Törık neşriyat cemiyeti, 1935.
 - 6 *Alifba*. [ABC Book]. Helsinki: Finlandiye Törık neşriyat cemiyeti, 1935.
 - 7 From the private family archives of the author.
 - 8 *Bızniñ cırlar*. [Our songs.] Şeüket Bikmohammetov, ed. Helsinki: Finlandiya Türkleri Birliği r.y., 1980.