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## On the reception and transformation of Russian literature in Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period

In the article some issues of Russian literature reception and transformation in post-Soviet Azerbaijan are covered. The publication was prepared on the basis of observations made by the author while working on the second part of the “History of Russian Literature”, in his scientific and pedagogical activities, as well as the report at “The Golden Age of Russian Literature: the experience of reading” the educational-cultural forum, held in the capital of the Republic of Serbia – Belgrade on 28-29 June 2022. It is dedicated to the problems of reception and transformation of Russian classical literature in Azerbaijan in the post-Soviet period. The problem is considered in two aspects: 1) principles and difficulties of selecting samples of Russian classical literature for inclusion in curricula, textbooks and manuals for schools and universities of the republic, as well as for their translation and publication in Azerbaijan language; 2) reasons of increasing interest to study of Russian literature, necessity of deep studies of creativity of its individual representatives in Azerbaijan in post-Soviet time.

**Keywords:** issues of reception and transformation, history of Russian literature, cultural and historical type, A. Griboyedov, F. Dostoyevsky's “Diary of a Writer”, the oriental question.

### Introduction

The issues of the reception and transformation of Russian literature in post-Soviet Azerbaijan became the subject of our research in connection with the compilation of textbooks on the history of Russian literature. The first volume of the history of Russian literature, covering the Old Russian (medieval) period of its development and the literature of the 18th century has been published [1]. The planned three-volume work on a comprehensive treatment of Russian literature also includes material on the nineteenth and twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The compilation and publication of this comprehensive material on the history of Russian literature is not solely for educational purposes. Its purpose is 1) to create a comprehensive view of the history of Russian literature from ancient times to the present in terms of revising and rethinking the traditional approach to Russian history, its cultural values, and literary heritage; 2) to transform our understanding of Russian literature; 3) to reassess the established methodology for studying Russian literary history, cultural and literary contacts with Azerbaijani literature, the study of the East and West, and the Caucasus in the works of the Russian writers. Therefore, an opinion is formed on the content and nature of the work, which is recommended for educational purposes and at the same time is addressed to the general public as well as specialists – Russians, researchers of Azerbaijani and Russian literature, philologists and methodologists. Some aspects of reception of Russian literature and transformation of our perceptions of it were presented in the report at “The Golden Age of Russian Literature: the experience of reading” the educational and cultural forum. Part of the presentation was also reflected in an article devoted to the problem posed [2].

The work on the part devoted to the history of nineteenth-century literature in the above aspects has provided an opportunity to express some of my observations and considerations and share my opinions with specialists. This is connected also with the fact that recently the problem of reception of the Russian literature becomes a subject of research of many dissertations and monographs. In our opinion, most of them are written by inertia in the spirit of Soviet times and do not correspond to the tasks of *reception*.

Times, generations and perceptions of the cultural mission of foreign-language literatures change. This is particularly evident in relation to the literatures of peoples who for centuries have shared the same fate as

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the people in whose language they are translated and in whose language they are presented as teaching material.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that foreign languages are the medium of instruction for a certain proportion of the country's students. This presupposes a sufficiently profound knowledge of the language, history, literature and culture of the people in whose language all or part of the learning process takes place. In such a learning situation, the language of learning, as well as the cultural and other values of the people or country of the speakers of the language, must be treated with particular care, since, at the present stage, teaching in any language must be based on a linguacultural framework. More precisely, the curriculum and educational process are impossible without their participation and consideration. This is both the content and the quality of those school and university curricula on the basis of which the younger generation is taught.

Despite frequently changing historical and political assessments, in this case unreasonable and contradictory opinions are simply not acceptable in the presentation of teaching material. This requires the compilers and creators of learning resources and teachers to be skillful in introducing students to these materials and motivating the interests, quests and aspirations of young people. Unfortunately, at times textbooks that have been developed and methodologically tested over decades take a back seat to the need to create national textbooks that take into account national interests and the realities of the time, which do not always meet the requirements of language and literature teaching methods. These textbooks often recede into the background, becoming inaccessible due to the expansion of the Internet, i.e. young students prefer those resources that are easily accessible. We are certainly not against them. We are in favor of the resources offered as educational ones, which have been created taking into account the experience and traditions of previous generations, the motivation of students' learning activities, the interests of the country and the people, a profound understanding of human values, quality assurance at every level and level of education. In this situation, the problems of reception and transformation of learning materials in a foreign language classroom are acute.

The reception and transformation of foreign cultures and literatures and their presentation in a foreign language environment is one of the frequently discussed issues not only in cultural studies, comparative linguistics, literary studies and translation studies but also in methodology. Notably, many countries are now opting for bilingual and multilingual models of education which imply learning second, third and more languages through the introduction of specific subjects. In our opinion, the process of learning any foreign language should be considered as a means and a way of getting to know another culture and literature, i.e. as a condition of their perception on a foreign national ground. Therefore, the issues of perception and reception of language and literature are transferred from the linguistic and literary field to the methodological one.

#### *Materials and Methods*

Since the educational process and intellectual development of students requires both communicative and informative content in the selection of teaching materials, this actualizes the main principles of the culturological approach to language and culture acquisition (anthropological, activity-based and semiotic). According to the practice and life experience, we observe the possibility of successful implementation of learning standards in a certain context, which are also literary texts that contain information about the history, folklore, way of life, and mores of the people who are speakers of the studied language, its material and spiritual values.

As far as the content of Russian literature resources is concerned, there are also a number of questions. Firstly, literature of any country and any nation, first and foremost, is a reflection of the spirit and sentiments of historical periods, the lives, aspirations and hopes of the people who lived during these periods. Often literature is ideologies and politicized. Russian literature, almost all stages of its development, is also noteworthy in this respect. Is it possible to adequately assess and present Russian classical literature outside the historical and cultural context? Can we imagine 19th-century Russian literature without the Decembrists, without the Slavophil and Westernizing ideas, without the "unnecessary people" of Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenyev, and Dostoevsky, without the "little people" of Pushkin, Gogol, without the Decembrists and ideas in War and Peace, without the writer's Diary, without his thoughts about Jesus Christ? Comprehend the characters and ideas of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky without an appreciation of the significance of Orthodox morality? Who can understand the Decembrist poets, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, Griboyedov, Pushkin and Lermontov without taking into account the political background to the events of this era and the reasons for their stay in the Caucasus?

Due to participation in war with highlanders Bestuzhev-Marlinsky and Lermontov created samples of travel notes on Caucasus, in their works ("Ammalat-Bey", "Mulla Nur", "Hero of our time", etc.) images of

Caucasians have found excellent artistic embodiment. Lermontov, who learned Azerbaijani language, recorded folk tale “Ashig Garib” (the matter concerns his “Turkish tale”, “Ashik Kerib” which is an example of bilingual text). This epos became one of sources of Lermontov's “Hero of our times”. Pushkin is also remembered by Azerbaijan readers for his “Imitations of the Koran” and “Journey to Arzrum”. Interest shown by Ya. Polonsky in mugham and folk songs attracted attention of many literary scholars of Azerbaijan. At present time in our country there is mixed attitude to A. Griboyedov, author of the tragedy “Woe from Wit” and at the same time Russian diplomat who was involved in the conclusion of the Turkmenchay treaty of 1828 on division of lands of Azerbaijani khanates between Persia and Russia as well as in resettlement of Persian Armenians in beneficial lands of Irevan and Nakhichevan khanates. However, the publication of the Russian poet and diplomat's correspondence with Paskevich, then Viceroy of the Caucasus, and archival materials shed light on some of the details of his life and activities as a diplomat. Three letters from the Russian ambassador to the governor of the Caucasus show Griboyedov's serious concern about the possible consequences of the widespread settlement of Armenians in the lands belonging to the Azerbaijani people, especially the khans, who preferred Russian subjection. The resettlement and deployment of Armenians in the Azerbaijani lands was carried out with the direct involvement of the Russian military, who were Armenians by nationality — General Madatov and Colonel Lazarev, who diligently promoted a change in the ethnic composition of the population in favor of Armenians [3; 279–292; 342–352]. This fact gives us an opportunity to reconsider our relationship to the literary legacy of A. Griboyedov, first and foremost his play “Woe from Wit”, which reveals the germ of the golden age of Russian literature.

Such facts of the personal and creative biography of Russian writers have influenced the extent to which they have been included in school and university curricula in Azerbaijan, in anthologies of Russian literature over the last three decades, and in the translation and study of their works.

As co-authors of school programmes and textbooks on literature since 2005 and with experience of compiling them (in Russian-speaking classes and schools), we have tried to create teaching resources that include the best examples of Russian, Azerbaijan and foreign literature, through which students develop skills in reading, analysis, creative writing and oral expression, and become familiar with the universal spiritual values of the culture, way of life and thinking and the understanding of the world. Our group has so far completed a textbook-study for the 7th grade. This textbook as well as the textbooks for grades 5-6, which are based on the “ladder” principle, adhere to the experience of previous generations, serve the literary education of the young pupils, cultivate in them the most valuable human qualities and a tolerant attitude towards the culture, behavior and spiritual values of other peoples.

### *Results and Discussion*

The last two decades have been marked by the editing of the existing translations of art, creation of new translations and publication of 25 thousand copies in the Russian alphabet. The translations of the Russian literature in 150 volumes constitute a significant part of the “World literature library” series. Many authors and works have been translated for the first time. During the years 2005–2014 three anthologies of Russian literature, including prose and poetry, were prepared and published. Notably, following Samed Vurgun's excellent translation of Eugene Onegin, a philological translation (Professor Aidyn Alekberli) and a second poetic translation (Eivaz Borchaly) of this novel in verse by Pushkin were carried out in recent years. In the post-Soviet period, Dostoevsky's artistic, philosophical and journalistic works have gained particular popularity in our country. Two aspects of the reception of Dostoevsky's creative heritage in Azerbaijan should be highlighted: 1) two novels have been translated from Dostoevsky's Five Books: “The Possessed” and “The Brothers Karamazov” (the latter has been translated twice), and also “The Writer's Diary”, which will be discussed separately; 2) since the early 90's the school of Azerbaijan Dostoevskology is formed, which includes four doctoral and about ten candidate dissertations; the logical conclusion is the 2007 publication of the founder of this school, Professor Mamed Gojaev's the “Characters and Ideas of F. Dostoevsky” fundamental monograph. Two monographs by Mahrug Tagieva, published in 2019, are devoted to questions of the reception of the Russian writer's work. The interest in Dostoevsky was justified not only by the profound psychologism and religious content of his prose, the interesting judgments of the author and his characters on the fate of Russia, but also by the controversial statements about the place and role of his homeland in Europe, about the special position of Russia between Europe and Asia, largely in tune with the postulates and thoughts of philosopher N. Danilevsky, author of “Russia and Europe” [4], in which he didn't single out Turks as a separate cultural-historical type, but listed them among the peoples-destroyers of world civilizations. In our opinion, Dostoevsky's reasoning (enticing idea of “all-Slavic unity” and “acquiring Constanti-

nople”, along with the Marmara Sea coast and access to the Mediterranean) does not stem from the real historical relations between Russia and the Turkic world, but embodies the Russian Orthodox Church's thesis of returning Istanbul and is in close contact with Peter the Great's will be regarding this issue. The contradiction and vulnerability of the great writer's thoughts is that he puts Europe, hostile to Russia, on the same scales with the Turkic world. Since Chaadayev's Philosophical Letters, Russia has searched for its own path of development, its purpose and mission among world civilizations. The historical past and the experience of historical coexistence of Russia and the Turkic world have shown that Russia was destined to build a Eurasian house together with the Turkic world. It is known that Eurasianism, as a scientific-theoretical and historical platform, rests on a cultural dominant. It allows us to consider the cultural and historical habitat of the Slavic and Turkic ethnos and peoples, the individual stages of their coexistence in the perspective of identifying commonalities and opportunities for future cooperation. We are well aware of the truth voiced by the brilliant representative of Eurasianism L. Gumilyov: “I will tell you in confidence that if Russia is saved, then only as a Eurasian power and thanks to Eurasian ideas” [5]. It is interesting that Dostoevsky's views on the so-called “Eastern Question” and his negative attitude to Turkey do not affect the adequate perception of him as a great novelist and master of psychological analysis in the Turkic world. His warnings about a “state of slugs”, “ruiners and killers of their own country” do not hurt the national feelings of modern Turks; today Dostoevsky is one of the favorite, deeply researched writers in the whole Turkic world. In this respect, we are impressed by the article of Doctor of Philology Tasanbek Satbay (Kazakhstan) in the “Literaturnaya Gazeta” (Moscow), which emphasizes the importance of studying Dostoevsky's position on the Eastern Question in the context of clarifying relations between the current Slavic peoples [6]. It is thought that the latest studies by Russian scholars need to illuminate the work of Dostoevsky and other internationally significant authors in a way that also meets the interests of the local national audience.

Translation of Mikhail Bakhtin's huge work “The Poetics of Dostoevsky” into Azerbaijan language increased interest in the work of the writer, contributed to a deeper understanding of his polyphonic novel, revived interest in the novel genre in Azerbaijan literary studies, stimulated the appearance of new studies on Russian literature, on comparative literature, and new translations.

However, we would like to draw attention to the fact that studies of Russian literature in Azerbaijan literary studies are not limited to the study of literary relations and translation of literatures of our peoples. A number of monographs and dissertations were devoted to the analysis of the thematic content, poetics, and the concept of man in Russian literature. Professor Mammad Kojayev, the founder of Dostoevsky studies in Azerbaijan, who educated more than one generation of researchers in Azerbaijan, Russian, and world literature, emphasized that “authentic artistic creations should be regarded without an axiological and utilitarian approach to them” and that, as “a self-regulating spiritual organism”, literature and art evoke the images and ideals that society needs. Their birth is quite a natural and necessary phenomenon. Having analyzed the actions of Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's characters and drawing parallels in contemporary Azerbaijan prose, Kojayev stresses that “an artistic phenomenon should be treated as objectively and dispassionately as a natural phenomenon” [7]. This conceptual approach to understanding the literary process creates a favourable ground for an adequate understanding of artistic creations not only of one's own national, but also of foreign-language literature and determines the correct methodology for their study in a specific cultural and historical context and area.

### *Conclusion*

In contrast to Dostoevsky, Tolstoy's works became popular in Azerbaijan during his lifetime. The Azerbaijan intelligentsia and young people were always very interested in Leo Tolstoy's works and letters. His works were always present in school and university curricula. Today the school and university curricula include not only “War and Peace”, “Anna Karenina”, but also “Hadji Murat” and the writer's tales. This concerns both Azerbaijan and Russian language classes and groups. In recent years, the story “Ilyas” has become popular in secondary schools, indicating the author's sympathy for Islam. When examining the list of papers on “World literature” and “History of Azerbaijani literature” (the curricula of philological and pedagogical majors), we discovered that teachers and students of higher educational institutions prefer such themes as “Shakespeare and Leo Tolstoy”, “Tolstoy and Rabindranath Tagore”, “Shakespeare and Dostoevsky”, “Dostoevsky and Gusein Javid”, etc. These topics are also included in special courses. The famous Azerbaijan scholar, orientalist, author of “Shamil and Muridism”, Mirza Kazymbek was a teacher of Leo Tolstoy. Many members of the Azerbaijan intelligentsia, including the first translators of the writer's works,

corresponded with him. The stories and tales of the writer have been actively included in the textbooks for Azerbaijani children since the 80s of the century before last.

The above is a conclusion that the question of the reception and transformation of Russian literature is closely linked to the historical role and mission of Russia in Europe and Eurasia, in the fate of our people. Love and interest in any literature and its demand in a foreign language environment are dictated by its objective attitude and spiritual closeness to the language and culture of the perceiving party. Azerbaijan's attitude to the Russian language, the rest of Russian literature and other values of the Russian world should be considered in this respect.

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## Посткеңестік уақытта Әзірбайжандағы орыс әдебиетін қабылдау және трансформациялау проблемаларына

Мақалада посткеңестік кезеңдегі Әзірбайжандағы орыс әдебиетін қабылдау мен трансформациялаудың кейбір проблемалары қамтылған. Жарияланым сол кезеңде орыс әдебиетін зерттеген автордың ғылыми-педагогикалық қызметіндегі «Орыс әдебиеті тарихының» екінші бөлімімен жұмыс істеу кезіндегі бақылаулары; сондай-ақ 2022 жылғы 28-29 маусымда Сербия Республикасының астанасы — Белградта өткен «Орыс әдебиетінің алтын ғасыры: оқу тәжірибесі» атты білім беру-мәдени форумында жасаған баяндамасы негізінде дайындалды. Ол посткеңестік кезеңдегі Әзірбайжандағы орыс классикалық әдебиетін қабылдау және трансформациялау проблемаларына арналған. Мәселе екі аспектіде қарастырылады: 1) республиканың мектептері мен жоғары оқу орындарына арналған оқу бағдарламаларына, оқулықтар мен оқу құралдарына енгізу, сондай-ақ оларды әзірбайжан тілінде аудару және басып шығару үшін орыс классикалық әдебиетінің үлгілерін іріктеудің принциптері мен күрделілігі; 2) орыс әдебиетін зерттеуге деген қызығушылықтың арту себептері, оның жекелеген өкілдерінің шығармашылығын Әзірбайжандағы кеңестік дәуірден кейінгі кезеңде тереңдетіп зерттеудің қажеттілігі.

*Кілт сөздер:* қабылдау және трансформациялау проблемалары, орыс әдебиетінің тарихы, мәдени-тарихи түрі, А.С. Грибоедов, Ф.М. Достоевскийдің «Жазушы күнделігі», «шығыс» мәселесі.

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## К проблемам рецепции и трансформации русской литературы в Азербайджане в постсоветское время

В статье охвачены некоторые вопросы рецепции и трансформации русской литературы в постсоветском Азербайджане. Публикация подготовлена на основе наблюдений автора при работе над второй частью «Истории русской литературы» в его научно-педагогической деятельности, а также доклада на образовательно-культурном форуме «Золотой век русской литературы: опыт прочтения», проходившем в столице Республики Сербия — Белграде 28–29 июня 2022 года. Она посвящена проблемам ре-

цепции и трансформации русской классической литературы в Азербайджане в постсоветское время. Проблема рассматривается в двух аспектах: 1) принципы и сложности отбора образцов русской классической литературы для включения в учебные программы, учебники и пособия для школ и вузов республики, а также для перевода и издания их на азербайджанском языке; 2) причины возрастания интереса к изучению русской литературы, обусловленность проведения глубоких исследований творчества отдельных её представителей в Азербайджане в постсоветское время.

*Ключевые слова:* вопросы рецепции и трансформации, история русской литературы, культурно-исторический тип, А.С. Грибоедов, «Дневник писателя» Ф.М. Достоевского, «восточный» вопрос.

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