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# Kazan Tatar as a dominant language of the Volga-Kama region. A case study of lexical intermediation

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In the first part of the paper, a short overview is given of the emergence of the political, cultural and language dominance of Kazan Tatar (Kipchak) ethnicity in the Volga-Kama region. In the second part, the role of Islam in the Tatar culture is demonstrated. Then, through a historical areal study of the Arabic word sabi 'boy, male child', it is discussed how this lexical element spread among the dominated languages of the Kazan Tatar Khanate: Arab  $\rightarrow$  Kazan Tatar  $\rightarrow$  Middle Chuvash (Viryal dialect)  $\rightarrow$  Mari dialects.

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#### 1. Introduction

As is documented in historical sources, Kazan Tatars had already been present in the Middle Volga Region for several centuries by the 15th century when they gained a political role as a leading ethnicity in their own state.

The medieval political history of the Central Volga Region begins with the founding of the Volga Bulgarian state in the early 10th century (for details, see Zimonyi 1990, and Golden 1992: 253–258). The center of power of the Volga Bulgarian state was built at the confluence of the Volga and Kama rivers, but the state extended considerably to the north and east as well, mostly along the left bank of the Volga, subjugating the various neighboring ethnic groups, most of which were of Finno-Ugric origin. The two and a half century period of prosperity of the Volga Bulgarian empire was brought to an abrupt end by the Mongolian invasion, with the Mongolian army devastating the Bulgarian capital in 1236. The Volga Bulgarian power elite immediately submitted to Mongolian rule, whereas the other ethnic groups of the empire fled their original territory of settlement.

As a result, the ethnic structure of the region changed completely. The conquering Mongolians formed their own state in the region among the newly restructured population, calling it Joči Ulus (Golden 1992: 297–302). One of the main characteristics of this state was that Mongolians were outnumbered in it (limited mostly to the center of power), whereas the majority of the population consisted of the

1 This state thus formed was later called the Golden Horde.

Kipchaks who were the first to submit to the Mongolian rule on the Eastern European steppe at the time of the Batu campaigns. (The first sepulchers to Kipchak Turkic people in the Volga–Kama region date back to the 14th century, with the number of sepulcher inscriptions in Kipchak increasing steadily over time.) The other important characteristic was that this state continued to exercise control over the Finno-Ugric and other ethnic groups which lived on the peripheries of the new geographical arrangement. By the end of the rule of the Golden Horde the Mongolians were Turkified (cf. Golden 1992: 292), and the successor state of the Mongolian empire, the Kazan Khanate (beginning in 1437) was unequivocally dominated by Kipchak Turks.

The ethnogenesis of the Middle Volga Region outlined briefly here can be traced in the changes of the linguistic relations of the people living here. From the 10th until the 16th century, this region always belonged to a single political unit which, however, was ruled by three different elites (Volga Bulgarian, Mongolian, and then Kazan Tatar) over the centuries. This means that the various language groups were not separated by political borders and, thus, that language change could spread freely among the languages of the region.<sup>2</sup>

The discipline of contact linguistics has proposed various typologies for the description of changes of extralinguistic origin (e.g. Thomason & Kaufman 1988, Campbell 1998, Muysken 2000, Hickey 2012). A common characteristic of these is that they differentiate between a dominant language (i.e. the language of the people exercising political power), which is the source of language change, and subordinated languages, whose historical relationship to each other can be formed according to various scenarios.

In the rest of this paper, a case study will be presented tracing the fate of an Arabic word borrowed by the dominant Kipchak (Kazan Tatar) language as a result of the spread of Islam, which then spread (i.e. from the center of the linguistic area) to the Cheremis language, where it completely lost its connection with Islamic culture.

#### 2. The case of Ar. sabi 'boy, male child'

Arabic and Persian loanwords in the languages of the Volga Region were the result of the spread of Islam and Islamic culture. They were borrowed directly into the languages of the region from written language use, but because only a few of the ethnic groups in the Volga Region converted to Islam, the circumstances of borrowing need to be examined in every single case.

2 The Volga-Kama Region was defined as a linguistic area (Sprachbund) as early as in the 1970s (cf. Serebrennikov 1972), with the relevant linguistic processes (Bereczki 1983, Helimski 2003) and the mechanisms of the Sprachbund (Bereczki 2005, Agyagási 2012, Johanson 2013: 656–657) being described.

#### 2.1. Islam in the Volga-Kama Region

It is a well-known fact that Islam first appeared in the Volga Region in the early 10th century, namely, in 921/922, when the sovereign of the Volga Bulgarians and his court converted to Islam (cf. Ibn Fadlan, Golden 1992: 256–257). Muslim sources report that Volga Bulgarian tribes living along the "bank of the river" all converted to Islam and had mosques, muezzins, imams, and Koranic schools (Golden 1992: 254, Róna-Tas 1982a: 155). At the same time, it is reasonable to assume that Islam did not become the exclusive faith among the peoples of the Volga Bulgarian empire—only among their tribal leaders and those in their immediate circles, and only by the late 10th century. The Chuvash language (which is not descended from a central dialect, but from another Volga Bulgarian dialect, cf. Agyagási 2007) preserves only very few words associated with the early Islamic influence that could have been borrowed directly in Chuvash.

The Arabic and New Persian loanwords in Chuvash were borrowed via Kazan Tatar (Scherner 1977), and well after the 10th century. It is a view generally held among scholars that Islam affected Chuvash only starting from the 16th century, and only in a very cursory fashion (Braslavskij 1997: 16–22). This is also supported by the fact that the very rich traditional belief system has been preserved up to our time, and the folk customs associated with it were still alive in the early 20th century (Mesaroš 2000, Salmin 2007).

The second wave of Islamization reached the Volga-Kama Region under the reign of Özbek Khan (1312–1342). This is the period when Islam prevailed in the Golden Horde as well (Golden 1992: 298, Vásáry 2003), and from which the spread of Islamic culture from dominant Kazan Tatar to the peripheries via various "avenues" is dated.

#### 2.2. Arabic loanwords in Cheremis dialects

The Arabic loanwords in the Cheremis lexicon were first pointed out by Budenz (1864: 398–400). This study uses Cheremis dialect forms from Reguly's Mountain Cheremis lexicon and discusses 17 Cheremis words of Arabic origin, alongside which Reguly systematically presents the Chuvash and Tatar variants of the Arabic borrowings as well. He states that the Arabic words entered the Cheremis lexicon "via Tatar-Chuvash". Budenz's choice of words ("Tatar-Chuvash") is simply a collective designation referring to the Volga Turkic people. A phonologically based analysis of the relationship of source vs. recipient language words was not Budenz's aim in this paper.

- 3 This is a reference to the Volga and Kama rivers, that is, the central region of the empire.
- 4 Relevant loanwords of Arabic origin include  $d\bar{u}nya \to \text{Chuvash } t\bar{e}n\check{c}e$  (Róna-Tas 1982b), and of New Persian origin,  $\chi^w a\check{j}a \to \text{Old Chuvash } \chi u\check{j}a$  (Róna-Tas 1988: 761), and, despite Erdal's claim (Erdal 1993: 139) most likely  $\bar{a}\delta\bar{i}na$  (Agyagási 1982: 11–12).

In his 1923 work, Räsänen discusses the Tatar loanwords of the Cheremis language, 61 words of Arabic origin from all over the entire Cheremis language area which were borrowed into Cheremis via Tatar. In his monograph published three years earlier (Räsänen 1920), he mentioned 13 words which were borrowed from Chuvash into Cheremis. These were borrowings of Arabic origin in Chuvash, and every Chuvash word of Arabic origin has a reflex<sup>5</sup> in Tatar. Räsänen's 1969 Turkic etymological dictionary does not present anything new regarding Arabic loanwords in Cheremis.

Isanbaev (1989: 33–35) presents an evaluative summary of the topic, mostly based on sources by Russian authors. He estimates the number of Arabic loanwords in Cheremis at 200, but does not provide an exhaustive listing. He regards most of the Arabisms to have been borrowed into Cheremis via Tatar.

As is clear from the above overview, in studying Arabic loanwords in Cheremis dialects, researchers have always recognized the fact that these were borrowed via Tatar, but they did not connect it with the mechanisms at work in the Volga-Kama linguistic area, and did not analyze the phonological details of this intermediary stage of borrowing regarding the specific forms either.

# 2.3. Arabic şabi $\rightarrow$ Kazan Tatar sabiy $\rightarrow$ Cheremis šu $\beta o \sim \delta i \beta \hat{\sigma}$ . The issue of intermediation

The Cheremis word which I will associate with the Arabic form sabi 'young boy, young child' below is not used by itself in Cheremis, but only as the second member of coordinate structures (for details, see the etymological database below). The first element of this structure also means 'boy' ( $er\gamma e$  and  $i\gamma e$ ) and is part of the basic Finno-Ugric vocabulary preserved in the Cheremis lexicon (cf. Bereczki & Agyagási 2013: 17, 20).

Of the Volga-Kama Turkic languages, only Kazan Tatar has the Arabic word. The sound correspondences between the Arabic and the Kazan Tatar variants can easily be established, since the Arabic word is part of the Classical Arabic language and thus is found in the Koran (for details, again, see the etymological database below), where the diacritics needed to reproduce the exact pronunciation are included. This unequivocally shows that the Arabic word had to be pronounced [sabi]. This form was likely borrowed through written language use, after the wider spread of Islam began around the 14th century (at the time of Middle Kipchak), by one of the Kipchak dialects which relocated to the Volga Region; this was the dialect that

5 The Chuvash forms quoted here (and some others as well) were later shown, by Scherner, to have been borrowed into Chuvash from Tatar (for a full listing, see Scherner 1977: 195), which had borrowed them from Arabic.

later served as the basis for the central dialect of Kazan Tatar: Arabic  $sabi \rightarrow Middle Kipchak sabiy$ .

The Middle Kipchak form, however, could not have been the direct source of the Cheremis form, since in the history of Cheremis dialects following the breakup of the Proto-Cheremis language there was never a sound change a > u, or a > i in the initial syllable that could have affected the Middle Kipchak word (Räsänen 1923: 14). Also, the borrowed (i.e. foreign origin) word-final cluster -iy never underwent a  $-iy > o \sim \hat{o}$  change in loanwords in Cheremis dialects (cf. Agyagási 2013a: 205).

The sound changes a > u and a > i are, however, well-known in the history of Chuvash. They affected the phoneme /a/ of the Oghur variety of Western Old Turkic. Oghur /a/ was realized as either an illabial [å] or a labial [å] allophone already before the Mongol invasion of Europe, which can be demonstrated by the Old Turkic loanwords in Hungarian (Róna-Tas & Berta 2011: 1114–1117), and also by the Old Russian loanword in Volga Bulgarian (Agyagási 2005: 68–69). The two allophones developed into separate phonemes in the Middle Chuvash period, following the Mongol invasion of Europe—phonemes that can be described by different distinctive features:  $[\dot{a}] > /\bar{\imath}/$ ,  $[\ddot{a}] > /o/$  -/u/. The Middle Chuvash timeline of the early stages of the process is traceable in the Middle Mongol loanwords in the Chuvash language, e.g. Middle Mongol malayai 'cap'  $\rightarrow$  Middle Chuvash \*målaxay > molaxay > mulaxay (Róna-Tas 1982b: 99–100, 117). The change  $[\dot{a}] > /\bar{\imath}/$  occurred later and affected fewer words.

The phonological difference between the two allophones of the phoneme /a/ became, in the Middle Chuvash period, a feature serving as a basis for the classification of further dialects of the Chuvash variety of Volga Bulgarian; the  $[\mathring{a}] > /o/ -/u/$  change characterized the Northern (or Viryal) dialect, whereas the  $[\mathring{a}] > /\ddot{i}/$  change, the Southern (or Anatri) dialect.

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Oghur *saγ (c. EOT sāġ 'sound, healthy', Clauson 1972: 803) > VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *såw ~ *såw 
VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *såw > Middle Chuvash sov > V suv(ă) (Ašmarin 11: 163)
VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *såw > Late Middle Chuvash *sïv(ă) > A sïv(ă) (c. sïvă 'zdorovyj' 
Ašmarin 11: 105)
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- 6 In the Tatar form, the secondary word-final -y was added in order to avoid morphological ambiguity; in Middle Kipchak dialects word final i~i functioned as a third person possessive marker.
- 7 In the Cheremis dialect data documented by Beke at the JO V and K collection points, the word underwent regular reduction of the *u* in the initial syllable (cf. Agyagási 2002).
- 8 The term Western Old Turkic was introduced by Róna-Tas (1998); for descriptions of the characteristics of *i* in the Oghur variety (called Bulgarian-Turkic earlier) on the basis of Old Turkic loanwords in Hungarian, see Róna-Tas & Berta (2011), as well as Agyagási (2013b).

Since it was the Viryal dialect that participated in Chuvash-Cheremis contacts, it is natural that words containing initial syllable Middle Chuvash /a/ had the labial allophone of /a/, and when these words were borrowed, Cheremis dialects typically borrowed them with the labial reflex (o) of [å]. Thus, Cheremis dialects often preserved this initial syllable labial sound of the Viryal type after the illabial variants of the Anatri based literary language forced them out of use in the Modern Chuvash period, cf.:

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Oghur *talkiy 'hemp breaker' (c. EOT talku, Róna-Tas & Berta 2011: 906) > VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *tàli ~tåli'
VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *tåli' > Middle Chuvash tolô > V *tulă → Cher. P B M UP tole, UJ C Č tule, V K tule 'Hanfbreche' (Beke 8: 2788)
VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *tàli' > Late Middle Chuvash tilă > A tilă 'mjalka' (Ašmarin 13: 315), lit. tilă
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It is a well-known fact, however, that in the Sundyr and Morgaush-Yadrin sub-dialects of the Viryal dialect, that is, in the area of contact between Chuvash and Cheremis, alongside the normative Viryal  $\mathring{a} > u$  change, the  $\dot{a} > \ddot{\imath}$  change also occurred next to labial consonants (Sergeev 2007: 353–356)—which can be regarded as a secondary dissimilation phenomenon.

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Oghur *bar- (c. EOT bar- 'to go', Clauson 1972: 354) ) > VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *bår- ~ *bàr- >*pår- ~ *pår- ~ *pår- VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *pår- > Late Middle Chuvash *pïr- > A pïr- 'idti, xodit' (Buinsk, Samara, Ašmarin 9: 184) 
VB<sub>Chuv</sub> *pår- Middle Chuvash *por > V pur- 'prixodit' (Ašmarin 9: 293) ~ pïr- (Abaševo, Čeboksarskij rajon, Ašmarin 9: 185)
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With regard to all these facts, in the further history of Arabic  $sabi \rightarrow Middle$  Kipchak sabiy, it is plausible to posit that the Tatar word was borrowed from Kazan Tatar into the Northern dialect of the Middle Chuvash language area, where its initial syllable vowel became labial, and its word-final -iy diphthong participated in the Middle Chuvash -iy > i change. Since, in the Middle Chuvash variety, b no longer occurred intervocalically (for details, see Agyagási 2010: 207–208), word internal b was replaced by a voiceless lenis in Middle Chuvash: Middle Kipchak  $sabiy \rightarrow Middle$  Chuvash sabi. After this, the form sabi underwent the able ble ble

9 The monophthongization of diphthongs was a general tendency in the Middle Chuvash variety. In native words the diphthong -ay occurred word finally, changing into i in Middle Chuvash. The results of this change are visible in Cheremis in Middle Chuvash loanwords, cf. Oghur \*buyδay 'wheat' (EOT bugday) > Middle Chuvash \*puray > pŏri → Mountain Cheremis (Kozmodemjansk) pŏri 'spelt' (Róna-Tas & Berta 2011: 186, Räsänen 1920: 177).

racteristic of the Viryal dialect  $(s\mathring{a}Bi > soBj > suBj)$ . Since the change happened in a labial environment, the delabialization of u in the Sundyr variety of the Viryal dialect produced the variant  $s\ddot{i}Bi$ . The Mari dialects likely borrowed both variants of this form from here at the time when Proto Mari broke up and the split into eastern and western dialects occurred (both groups of dialects having the word-initial s > s change). (This change began before the breakup of Proto Mari and ended in the first half of the 17th century, cf. Bereczki 1965: 73.)<sup>10</sup> The Viryal (Sundyr) dialect variants were later lost from the lexicon of this dialect.

On the basis of the above, the history of Arabic *şabi* in the Volga-Kama Region language area can be reconstructed as follows:

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Ar. sabi \rightarrow Kazan Tatar sabiy \rightarrow Middle Chuvash V såBi > soBD > suBD \rightarrow Cher. dial su\betao
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 $V_{Sundyr}$   $suBD > s\ddot{\imath}Bi \rightarrow Cher. dial. \check{s}i\beta\varsigma$ .

The fact that this word forms coordinate structures with elements of Finno-Ugric origin in Cheremis dialects demonstrates that, at the time when it was borrowed, Chuvash-Cheremis bilingualism already existed.

#### Etymological database

#### Arabic data:

1. 'a youth, boy or male child; a young male child'; 2. 'a young woman, girl or female child' (Lane 1968: 1650); صَبِيّ 'page, jeune homme servant auprés d'un prince' (Dozy 1881: 817)<sup>11</sup>

### Turkic data:

Osm. *sabi* 'Kind, Knabe', Krč. *sabi* 'Säugling', Trkm. *saby* 'mladenec', Kzk. *sÁbi* 'ein kleines Kind' (Räsänen 1969: 391)

Tat. sabðy 'mladenec, ditja, rebenok; nezrelyj, zelenyj, ne dostigšij soveršennoletija' (TRSl 459); صبى 'kečkenä ir bala' [young male child] (Khamzin & Makhmutov & Sayfullin 1965: 493).

#### Cheremis data:

- P B M UJ *iye* C Č JT *i·γe*, MK JO V K *i·γa*, UP *i·γâ* 'Kind, Junge eines Tieres' (Beke 1997: 304.)
- UJ èrγè-šuβo 'Knabe, männlicher Nachfolge', P B M UJ ίγε-šuβo, MK ίγε-šiβô, UP ίγε-šuβô, JO V ίγε-šøβø, JP ίγε-šŭβŭ, B ikšuβo, CÜ CK Č ik-xšôβe, K ik-xšôβe, JT ίγε-šøγo 'Nachkommen, Kind' (Beke 2001: 2517).
- Ob<sub>1</sub> ik- $\check{s}u\beta o$ , OB<sub>2</sub>  $i\gamma \hat{o}$ - $\check{s}u\beta o$ , Okr.  $\dot{i}\gamma e$ - $\check{s}u\beta o$ ,  $\dot{i}\gamma \hat{o}\check{s}u\beta o$ , (MalK)  $\dot{i}$ - $\gamma_i$ - $\check{s}i\beta \hat{o}$ ,  $\dot{i}$ - $\gamma_i$ - $\check{s}u\beta o$ ,
- 10 This was a change that occurred generally in the Chuvash and Volga Bulgarian loanwords in Cheremis dialects.
- 11 I am grateful to István Zimonyi for his help in accessing Arabic sources.

Ok  $i \cdot \gamma_l - \check{s}i\beta \partial$ , Ms  $i : \gamma_{\partial} - \check{s}\hat{u} \cdot \beta \check{\partial} \sim \check{s}\hat{u} \cdot \gamma \check{\partial}$ , Mm<sub>1</sub>  $i \cdot k - \check{s}\check{\partial}\beta \check{\partial}$ ,  $i \cdot k^{\chi}\check{s}\check{\partial}\beta \check{\partial}$ , Mm<sub>2</sub>  $i \cdot k - \check{s}\check{\partial}\beta \check{\partial}$ , ikš $\check{\partial}\beta \check{\partial}$ , Mmu  $i \cdot k\check{s}\partial\beta e$  'Kinder' (Moisio & Saarinen 2008: 149).

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