

“Kryashen Language” As One of the Symbols of Kryashen's Front

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Abstract: *The present article analyzes the influence of the symbol “Kryashen language” on the ethnic mobilization of the Kryashens during all stages of development of Kryashens’ sub-ethnic national movement. The author uses an ethno-symbolic approach to the study of nationalism, focusing his attention on the role of symbols in the construction of ethnic identity. Special emphasis is put on the missionary activities of N. Ilminsky and V. Timofeyev as the first stage of Kryashens’ sub-ethnic national movement. The paper points to the fact that the Kryashen alphabet created by N. Ilminsky is based on the Cyrillic alphabet, and this has contributed to the formation of the Kryashen ethnic identity. Particular reference to “Kryashen language” as the historical symbol of the Kryashen sub-ethnic nationalism is according to the author’s classification of the symbols of Kryashens’ sub-ethnic national movement. Historical symbols are necessary first of all for the formation of the internal identity of an ethnic group, and they can be traced throughout all stages of the development of Kryashens’ sub-ethnic national movement. In conclusion, a special function of the symbolic identification of the “Kryashen language” for the modern Kryashen sub-ethnic national movement is singled out.*

Keywords: *the intelligentsia, the Kryashens, N. Ilminsky, symbol, subethnic nationalism, ethnic mobilization, language.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of ethnocultural processes today remains one of the priority tasks of modern humanities since the rate of social, economic, political and cultural changes, compared with even the period of 10 to 20 years ago, has significantly increased. Globalization opens unequal opportunities to those who have become included in it by circumstance, but it also directly affects the modern ethno-confessional structure of the world society. One cannot make a point, for example, whether globalization gives more benefits or does more harm to small peoples, ethnic minorities and sub-ethnic groups. On the one hand, modern development of the media and protection of the human rights allows small ethnic groups to actualize themselves in the modern world, being partly not afraid of undue pressure from the dominant groups, but at the same time there is a significant threat of their complete assimilation. However, it will not be by forcible means. It will be voluntary. In other words, as well-known ethnicity researcher Andreas Wimmer notes, the boundaries of ethnic groups can become so blurred that they will feel like supra-ethnic entities [1; 1044].

All of these issues are especially important for our multinational and multiconfessional country. In addition, it is important to note that now we are already in 2019, and next year there will be an all-Russian census. In this situation, the

issue concerning small nations (including sub-ethnic groups) may again become acute.

In the 2002 census, the so-called “Kryashen issue” was at the extreme point of politicization. We think the controversy surrounding it is meaningless and artificially constructed [2; 329]. One of the arguments (but far from the main one) among the supporters of referring the Kryashens into a separate census category was the presence of their own literary language. In this article, we will consider how the “Kryashen language” has become one of the symbols of maintaining ethnic identity in the Kryashen sub-ethnic group.

Most often, in scientific discourse, it is noted that language is a symbolic presentation of the collective memory of cultural bearers and can in some way serve as its social symbol [3; 43]. But at the same time, not always the very language necessarily becomes the most important element in the construction of ethnic identity. In our opinion, it rarely happens that language becomes a symbol of building of nation. It is more likely an accident. Language can be a definite choice, one of the variants through which a nation can be constructed, but by no means the only variant. Besides, modern research confirms this fact. G. Mu, a well-known specialist in psycholinguistics and semantics, published an article in 2015, where, relying on extensive empirical data, he substantiated that the degree of correlation between language and ethnic identity was not high [4; 251 – 252].

The Kryashen case is just interesting to us in the fact that many of the symbols used to legitimize the recognition of the Kryashens as a separate ethnic group for the 2002 population census and after it are closely intertwined. In this case, the symbol of the Kryashen language is inextricably linked with “Orthodoxy” and “the activity of N. Ilminsky”.

II. METHODS

I build my research according to the ethno-symbolic structure presented in the works by J. Armstrong [5], E. Smith [6] and J. Hutchinson [7]. This approach aims at a median explanation of the nature of nations and nationalism, combining opposing primordialist and constructivist approaches. Ethnosymbolists consider nations after the 18th century as new types of ethnic groups, whose formation can be represented as a process extended in time and taking its origin long before the start of the New Time, which means, in their opinion, it should be considered through the concept “longue durée” (long-duration time) [8; 298].

The peculiarity of the ethnosymbolic approach is that the concepts “ethnic community” - “ethnos” and “nation” are differentiated. E. Smith understands “ethnos” as self-identifying communities of the population, whose

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members have common myths about their origin, a common historical memory, elements of a common culture, are connected with historical territory and have some degree of solidarity between elites [6; 27].

Ethnic characters emphasize the importance of the formation of ethnic groups and nations for a long time, which is the result of the “embeddedness” of many features of a collective identity from which general self-awareness can develop.

At the same time, it is important to note that ethnosymbolists point to the subjective dimension of ethnic and national consciousness, which is presented in myths about the origin, historical memory and various kinds of other symbols that have independent power and are able to unite the population [7; 14-15]. Ethnicity, according to the ethno-symbolic approach, if not being a natural characteristic but its elements can be found in all historical periods. The research on ethnosymbolists is aimed at explaining the role of myths, symbols, values and historical memory in the process of formation, preservation and change of collective identities.

We can conclude that the ethno-symbolic approach will be useful to us when studying sub-ethnic nationalism. It will make it possible to understand the little-known aspects of the formation of new small nations (where, in our opinion, sub-ethnic groups may well be included) through competing ideas about the national heritage and a series of internal conflicts.

To explain the importance of the census of the symbol “Kryashen language” for this movement, we will use the theory of “recognition”, which has been still developed by G. Hegel. He distinguished “double consciousness” [9; 98]. Double consciousness is needed when one can observe a lack of self-identification of an ethnic group. Usually it is possible with a certain historical trauma of an ethnic group (in the case of the Kryashens, this is the Soviet period and the policy of “enlarging ethnic groups”). Thus, for a complete and holistic consciousness, the ethnic group seeks to find additional legitimization in the external environment, in particular through external recognition.

On this occasion G. Hegel distinguishes another self-consciousness from the position of existing self-consciousness, which turned out to be beyond the first [9; 98]. The first consciousness (internal) strives for harmony and desires the reunion of a fragment of consciousness being at the external level. Thus, in the post-Soviet period, the Kryashen ethnic identity was undermined, it became blurred to the extent that we cannot say their exact size [10; 55]. Because of that there were great hopes for the census since it could serve as the basis for a integral ethnic identity.

The very concept of recognition is an important aspect of the ethical side of life. To truly recognize a person (in our case, an ethnic group) is to treat him with dignity and respect. Modern political philosopher C. Taylor following G. Hegel notes that recognition creates a space of a common language and values, and non-recognition degrades and denies human dignity (more broadly – the dignity of the entire ethnic group) [11; 28].

In this article, we rely on the theory of recognition by C. Taylor. Like most researchers of identity, C. Taylor understands the formation of identity and self as a constant ongoing dialogue and struggle with the significant others. Personal recognition is not only a harmonious process in which our personality, our identity is formed. It is rather the result of a certain relationship between subjects (internal and

external). For an original (genuine, authentic) identity, recognition is always necessary. When the subject does not receive recognition from his personal significant other, then, according to the famous researcher of recognition theories, Simon Thomson, he begins to demand this recognition, fight for it, or it is quite possible that he can refuse recognition and try to live without it [12; 24]. In any case, this choice will profoundly affect his personal recognition and the idea of who he is. It turns out that the self-consciousness of the subject, his identity is the result of a struggle with significant others, their interpretations of the reflection of the subject. Or, as Jessica Benjamin called it, “my identity is partly shaped by false recognition or lack of it from others” [13; 367].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In passing from theory immediately to the national movement we should definitely note that there is a need for a number of significant symbols which should form the initial (internal) identity within the ethnic group. The national movement, by and large, will reflect these symbols in front of significant others in the hope of external recognition.

In table 1, we attempted to classify the symbols of Kryashens’ national movement and divided all possible symbols into 2 large categories: primary and secondary (synthesized). In our opinion, the first category should be divided into two more parts: historical and “new” symbols. The symbol “Kryashen language” must be referred to the category of primary historical symbols.

Table 1: Symbols of Kryashens' National Movement

Source		N. Ilminsky’s missionary activity
Primary symbols	Historical symbols	Orthodoxy, “Kryashen” language and others.
	“New” symbols	Myth of origin, discourse about the time of the adoption of Christianity and others
Secondary (synthesized) symbols		2002 All-Russia population census

The first stage of Kryashens’ sub-ethnic national movement began with the activities of Orthodox missionaries from the mid-19th century [10,21]. The merit of N. Ilminsky and his closest assistant V. Timofeyev in the formation of the Kryashen identity was in the fact that the first educational institutions were opened where people could study in their native language. This, of course, is Kryashen-Tatar school, first created as a circle for fellow villagers by V. Timofeyev, and later became the cultural center of Kryashens’ movement. But, probably, above all, N. Ilminsky was remembered in Kryashen’s milieu not so much for solving the problem of education, but for creating the literary Kryashen language.



N.I. Ilminsky is primarily famous for translating many Orthodox sacred texts into the native language of the Kryashen population. But it was forgotten that translations did exist before his activity as a Kryashen educator. True, the translations were made into the literary Tatar language. This seemed paradoxical, but the Kryashen population did not apprehend these translations, often simply understand them. While working at the Theological Academy in Kazan, N. Ilminsky discovered that the literary language of the Tatars in many places did not coincide with the folk dialect of the Kryashens. The Orthodox enlightener found the reason that the literary Tatar language was formed as the language of Islam [14,20].

As a result, it turned out that the only the Tatars who understood the translation of the Bible and other Sacred texts into the literary language were the Muslims. It was absolutely not the target audience that was originally planned.

As a result, in order to translate the Liturgy and the Holy Scriptures N.I. Ilminsky created the Kryashen alphabet based on the Cyrillic alphabet (unlike the Muslim Tatars, whose alphabet was based on Arabic graphics). This greatly contributed to the emergence of the nascent ethnic identity of the Kryashens. This was followed by the development of national literature and culture on the whole.

As a result of this, Kryashen activists often note that in addition to religious differences, there are other features of the Kryashen culture (this embraces the Kryashen language). So in the early 1990s, veteran of Kryashens' movement A. Fokin argued that Kryashen could not be considered simply the Tatars of a different faith (Orthodox Tatars). In his opinion, the Kryashens are the carriers of other historical customs, rites and traditions, a different type of mental make-up [15; 19].

In fact, A. Fokin is in many ways right. The Kryashens have distinctive characteristics in culture. This, on the one hand, can be explained by the adoption of Orthodoxy and the translation of some cultural traditions from the Russian migrant population. True, on the other hand, there are the entire layers in the Kryashen rural household, which directly indicate that their source was the influence of Finno-Ugric tribes and paganism. Even if we cast a cursory glance at the Kryashen national costume, we will immediately see that it is radically different from Russian and Tatar. It is more similar, for example, to Udmurt and Mordovian.

Concerning the very "Kryashen language," it is a dialect of the Tatar language with certain features (fewer Arabisms). It should be noted that the written "Kryashen language", created by N. Ilminsky, was almost completely lost in the Soviet period and remained only in religious books ("church-Kryashen").

This feature is common to many small nations. Over time, in our modern conditions of globalization, ethnic minorities lose their languages, taking the languages of the dominant groups as their mother tongue. This is explained by many reasons, but, in general, they are reduced to purely everyday ones – the language of the dominant group is the most widespread in this territory and the knowledge of it becomes obligatory if a person wants to progress up the career ladder, get an education and integrate seamlessly into the existing society. It is important to note that the representatives of ethnic minorities often preserve their original language as a certain symbol, which does not allow them to fully assimilate with the external environment [16; 21].

IV. SUMMARY

The Kryashen movement went the same way. Despite the fact that modern Kryashens speak the Tatar language, they continue to hold their written literary language sacred, which has been preserved only in religious literature. Despite the fact that this language can no longer be used as an active means of communication, this language can still perform a symbolic identification function. And as modern scholars point out, these languages can be designated as "heritage" languages; they should be considered as "public goods" and even those who do not speak these languages have an idea about their importance for national identity [17; 929].

These words can be confirmed by an event of exceptional significance for the Kryashen community of Tatarstan, which occurred in November 2018 in Chistopol. On November 27, 2018, the Kryashen Parish was inaugurated in Chistopol. However, in December the Bishop of Chistopol and Nizhnekamsk Parmenas gathered all the clergy of the Eparchy and offered to vote for changing its status to a "simple", general parish, the service in which will be conducted in Russian.

On this occasion, a hot discussion began in the Kryashen groups of the social network VKontakte.

Community members accused Bishop Parmenas of his deliberate distancing from the Kryashens.

V. CONCLUSION

At first sight, we can think that the reaction to changes in the status of the Orthodox parish of the Kryashens is at least strange, but this is not so. The history of Kryashens' movement from the middle of the 19th century makes it clear to us that the religious (Orthodox) identity of the Kryashens is dominant even with the fact that a person may not consider himself a believer [18, 22]. The "Kryashen language" is an inheritance of the missionary activity of N. Ilminsky and he continues to live only in religion. Because of that, the Kryashen parishes in Tatarstan become significant symbols of the special "Kryashen Orthodoxy" since church services in them are conducted in the church-Kryashen language, which distinguishes them from the general ("Russian") parishes. This allows the Kryashens to be demarcated from the Orthodox Russian population and thereby prevents the inevitable assimilation processes. Therefore, "Kryashen parish" is the symbol that the Kryashen community will uphold with particular bitterness. With the loss of the special status of a church organization, there is an almost complete likelihood of losing the "Kryashen" language. This once again confirms that "Kryashen language" is one of the important symbols of sub-ethnic nationalism.

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