

THE LINGUISTIC CONFIGURATION OF TATAR WEDDINGS IN DOBRUJA

Roxana-Alina BĂNAȘU STOJCICI
„Ovidius” University in Constanța
roxana.banasu@yahoo.com

Abstract

The ethnic diversity in Dobruja influences the wedding ceremony and the traditional prop, which varies according to the community we are referring to: Romanians, Lipovans, Turkish, Tatars, Aromanians, etc. In the current study we will highlight some terms related to the specific wedding attire and props of the Tatars in Dobruja, grouped according to extra linguistic criteria: the gender of the person wearing the wedding attire (bride, groom), colors and symbols, types of items that make up the dowry, etc.

Alongside the clothing terminology, we will also take into consideration the elements pertaining to the wedding ceremony: various categories of fabrics and embroideries that make up the bride's dowry in the Tatar community, the collection of gifts that were offered to the bride, to the groom's family, but also to the suitors or to the groomsmen.

This paper's aim is to highlight the linguistic complexity generated by the Tatar wedding ceremony in Dobruja. The language and terms that make up the props of Tatar weddings reveal a mixture of archaisms and ritualistic expressions, loans from Turkish, Romanian, etc. The linguistic elements of Dobrujan Tatar weddings are not mere expressions, but can be considered identity landmarks, which carry on the cultural heritage of the community.

Key-terms

Tatar language lexis, ritual clothing, symbolic gifts, ceremonial objects.

1. The bride's dowry

According to tradition, Tatar girls would get married at the age of 16, and by then their dowry was prepared. Without it, there could be no marriage negotiation. The dowry of Tatar brides in Dobruja reflects both their social status and the cultural heritage of the family they come from. Among the items that make up the dowry we could mention:

- Fabrics and embroideries – *bayerbaş*, *testîmal* ("towels"), *cse* ("wall carpet in vibrant colors"), *câbrâs* ("wall carpet decorated with floral embroidery"), blankets, *şewre/ cevre* ("wedding

handkerchiefs”), *marama*¹ (“long and wide headscarf decorated with floral embroidery”), *şerbentî* (another type of “towel”, but wider), etc. These fabrics and embroideries are frequently displayed inside the house to show the girl’s dowry and the gifts she can offer.²

- Traditional clothing – wedding dresses, veils, scarves, different festive clothes, etc.
- Household objects – kettle, baklava tray, decorated plates, pillows, mattresses, etc.
- Precious jewelry – which were frequently handed down from generation to generation.
- The necklace (*gurdila*), a “neck ornament” made up of several strings of coins (gold coins) offered as dowry to the girl.³

The stages of a Tatar wedding coincide with the Romanian ones: the matchmaking, the proposal, the engagement, and the wedding. After the families got to know each other (*cauşi*), if the boy’s family liked the girl, the intention to propose was revealed. The boy’s family would bring symbolic gifts to the proposal (*kız isteme*). If the girl’s parents accepted the proposal, it was followed by the engagement (*nişan*), a very important event, which took place at the future bride’s home. In this setting, the engagement ring was offered and gifts were brought (clothes, jewelry, carpets). Before the wedding, the bride would display her dowry in front of her relatives to be admired. On the eve of the wedding, a group of young men would come to the groom’s house to stretch ropes to hang the gifts received from the bride. The room prepared for this custom was called *çigip odası*. The bride’s dowry could also be hung from these ropes (*ip gerdirme*).⁴ The expression *ip gerdirme* literally means “stretching a rope” in Turkish. However, in Dobrujan Tatar traditions it takes on a ritualistic meaning.

¹ Cf. rom. *maramă* “headscarf”, actually, “a long strip of thin veil that women in the countryside use to cover their heads when they wear the traditional costume”, cf. DEX, s.v. The headscarf was often very long and its ends were left hanging almost to the ground.

² M. Magiru, 2009, p. 14.

³ I. Dumitrescu, 1920, p. 165.

⁴ C. D. Constantinescu-Mirceşti, 1939, p. 218.

2. Wedding gifts

At the wedding different objects were given to the people who made sure the event ran smoothly:

- Towels (*testîmal/ testîmel*)⁵, which were offered to the masters of ceremony (*sağdıç*), to the help of the bride's and groom's families, to the dancers and to the musicians. They were made of cotton or linen, and could be embroidered with different patterns (floral, geometric). The towel had a symbolic role, and it was tied around the wrist, neck or waist, according to the person's role in the wedding.
- Tobacco pouches (*tütün kisesi*) are embroidered velvet or fabric pouches offered as gifts, which were tied with string or tassels and contained ground tobacco. They were offered as gifts to men. This custom is almost forgotten nowadays, being replaced by modern party favors like bags of sweets or lavender.
- *Basma tastar* (sometimes written *başma tastar* or just *tastar* or *pasma tastar*) was given as a gift to older women who helped with the preparation of the bride (aunts, female neighbors, relatives); it also had a symbolic role standing for the bride's gratitude towards those who were by her side on her wedding day, and for the celebration of the bride's transition to a new stage in her life. It was manually embroidered with floral or geometric motifs and decorated with fringes and beads.
- Wedding handkerchiefs (*şewre/ cevre*) were offered to groomsmen (*sağdıç*, the equivalent of young masters of ceremony). They were made of fine fabrics like cotton or vegetable silk and were embroidered by hand around the edges. In the middle of the handkerchief, they would often sew tobacco pouches, money or a watch. The young men that decorate the groom's room receive two napkins/ handkerchiefs, one is tied to the ceiling of the room, while the other is taken as a gift.⁶

⁵ The Romanian term *testemel* „babushka, kerchief, napkin” is derived from it; a term used especially in Dobruja and in the Danube Plain, cf. DLR, s.v.

⁶ *Ibidem*

- *Tokîz/ tocâz* – word derived from Turkish and used in various Turkish communities; it refers to a collection of gifts offered to the groom or to her mother-in-law by the bride. It consisted mainly in clothing items or accessories. Specific to Tatars in Dobruja is the fact that on their way from the bride's house to the groom's the groomsmen would dance the *tokîz*, which means that there has been an extension of meaning, common in historical semantics, from one referent to another, from the same sphere of interest. This collection of gifts counted 9 or 11 items, which could be woven onto a garment, a shirt, for example. The items that make up the *tokîz* are: *ştan* (tights), *ilec* (shirt), *şewre* (handkerchiefs), *kîse* (pouches for watches or tobacco), *şerbentî*, *şerîk* (napkins), *şorap-baw* (groom's garters). As for the gift for the mother-in-law, the *tokîz* also contained nine items, tied and sewn together: one *cevre*, one *cse*, one headscarf, one *serbenti*, one shirt (*colec*) and the carpet (*cbras*).⁷
- *Condra* – boots offered to the girl and to his parents-in-law by the groom.⁸

3. Wedding attire

The wedding attire has a unique significance because it reflects not only the social status of the newlyweds and the beginning of a new stage in their lives, but also the cultural values of the community.

A Tatar bride's outfit is an elegant one, richly decorated, which combines both local tradition and Ottoman influences. Among the clothing items that make up her attire we are going to mention: the wedding dress (*kelîn paşalı*) made from a variety of special fabrics (silk, velvet), which can be decorated with golden or silver embroidery; the veil (*yasmak*), which covers the bride's head and face, and can be accessorized with embroidery, beads or gold threads; jewelry (*takı*) frequently handed down from generation to generation.

Wedding dresses called *kelîn paşalı* or *bindallı* ("the dress with one thousand branches") were meant for certain social categories and were

⁷ I. Dumitrescu, 1920, p. 162.

⁸ M. Magiru, 2009, p. 19.

designed in specialized urban tailor shops. They were to be found in Turkish communities in Romania.⁹

Yasmak has two totally different meanings of different origins, although it is written and pronounced the same. On the one hand, it refers to “veil”, “headscarf” (word derived from Turkish which means “to cover”), and on the other hand to “rosin”/ “glue”/ “natural resin”. During the beautification process the bride went through, they used *yasmak* – a mix of melted rosin and lemon salt, which, once hardened, removed facial hair.¹⁰ The word was borrowed in Romanian in the form *iaşmac*, meaning “veil that Turkish women covered their faces with”.

The traditional dress in rural communities in Dobruja contains a wide variety of items that women used to cover their heads, such as: *şember*¹¹, *crep*¹², *tastar*, *pasma*, *şal*, *şalışal*, *kıyıkşa*¹³, *baş cawlık*, *marama*¹⁴, *dolanma*, *bayırbaş*¹⁵. In Tatar wedding folklore (*şın*) we find the velvet fez hat associated with the *şember* (“*kadipe peşin töbesi şember*”), which suggests the fact that it was used to decorate the young girls’ heads. This hat, an item of Turkish influence widely spread both in Romania and in vast Balkan regions, was integrated in the bride’s ceremonial dress and in the specific attire of girls coming from rich families in Bucovina, Suceava, Neamţ, Ramnicu-Sarat, Teleorman, Gorj, Dobrogea¹⁶

Also related to beauty practices, as describes above, they applied a white liquid called *düzghin* on the bride’s face, which replaces setting powder and stretches the skin. The lips and cheeks are painted using *kirmizilik*¹⁷, while for the eyebrows they use a black mixture called *kaş*. To contour the eyes the *sürme* is used. The bride wore a forehead decoration named

⁹ *Idem*, p. 56.

¹⁰ C. D. Constantinescu-Mirceşti, 1939, p. 220.

¹¹ Headscarf used by women of all ages adopted from Turkish fashion.

¹² Babushka, with a common denominative in Turkish, refers to the type of fabric it was made of (silk), being a more precious variant of *şember*.

¹³ Triangular babushka, which can be worn as a belt.

¹⁴ The denominative word *marama*, derived from Turkish (*mahrma*), can refer to three different types of objects: “headscarf made of Dobrujan vegetable silk”, *şerbentî* type embroidered decoration (“rustic country embroidery”), “embroidered decoration made using narrow triangle stitches” (covering the forehead).

¹⁵ Headscarf similar to *marama*.

¹⁶ M. Magiru, 2009, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷ “Red dye”.

apistinna, made of red fabric, cut in the shape of a heart or flowers, and embroidered with stones.¹⁸

Kawkaz-kuşak is a Caucasian-inspired belt, which had a ceremonial rather than practical role. It was made in the form of a metalized textile cord, doubled with pieces of cloth. The belt was decorated with floral and plant ornaments using the incision and engraving techniques. This item can be found in the Tatar community in Dobruja in the 19th century. The word *kawkaz* designates the region of Caucasia and acquires cultural values in this Dobrujan context since some of the Tatars in Dobruja descend from Caucasian refugees. *Kusak* has common roots in many Turkic languages like Tatar, Turkish, Uzbek, etc. When used in reference to clothes, it refers to a traditional belt. Thus, *kawkaz-kusak* means “Caucasian belt”, denoting the cultural influence in that region.

Ceremonial jewelry can be perceived as decorative objects, but also as symbols of the bride’s and her family’s status.

Blezîk, word derived from Turkish (*bilezik*), refers to “bangles made of gold or silver”, which feature floral or emblematic ornaments, and are decorated with semiprecious stones.

Topli, “decorative clothes pins” (ceremonial brooch), is made using the same techniques as for *blezîk*. It could be worn to secure the veil or shawl, and in some ethnogeographical areas (Medgidia, Cobadin, Valu lui Traian) women wore it as a festive accessory at weddings.

Sîrga, a word of Turkic origin, with a form that has survived in the Tatar dialects in Dobruja, stands for earrings, which were given to girls at a symbolic age, at their engagement, for example. The earrings were part of the girl’s dowry and could be made of gold, silver, copper, or even a common metal, according to the family’s status. As a basic item in the attire of Dobrujan Tatar women, the *sîrga* had an aesthetic and protective role; it was worn as an amulet meant to ward off the evil eye, that is why some models contained protective symbols against the evil eye (*nazarlik*).

The Tatar groom wears clothes like *şalvar* (loose trousers made of fabric or silk), *işlik* (white or colored high collar shirts) or *keten kolek* (linen shirt), *takke* (traditional headwear), *kemer* (wide leather or embroidered fabric

¹⁸ C. D. Constantinescu-Mirceşti, 1939, p. 220.

belt), *ceket* (coat similar to a jacket or tunic made of wool or cashmere and embroidered with traditional motifs).

According to the historical period and the community the groom belonged to, we can distinguish several types of ornamental objects. For instance, *kemer* is a word derived from Turkish meaning “belt”, which was used to support the traditional pants and was usually made of leather.

Among the groom’s accessories we could mention:

- *Mendil* (wedding handkerchief), made of silk or cotton, sometimes embroidered with traditional or symbolic motifs. The groom can wear the *mendil* around his wrist or can attach it somewhere to his ceremonial dress (to the waistband of his trousers, for instance).
- *Para kisesi* (money pouch), sewn or embroidered with traditional motifs, could be black with golden embroidery and was used to collect the money given as wedding gift during the ceremony.
- *Şorap baw* (groom’s garter) matched the *para kisesi* (the same material and embroidery) and was worn on the groom's leg, around the thigh. Their significance is related to fertility, prosperity and luck in married life.

A piece of clothing worn by Tatar men during ceremonies is the *fermen*, “man’s vest with sleeves”. Such a garment, with its front made of baize and the lining made of yellow satin, is exhibited at the Museum of Folk Art in Constanța. The tunic collar is decorated with small floral and plant embroideries made with silver metallic thread. This item of clothing was worn in the first half of the 19th century in the Tatar communities in Dobruja.

In what the color pattern is concerned, we notice that the groom wears sober tones (dark blue, black), while the bride chooses strong colors for her pre-ceremony outfit (blue, green, red) leaving white and pastels for the wedding day.

Conclusions

To conclude, the language and terms that form the wedding prop in a Tatar family in Dobruja reveal a mixture of archaisms and ritualistic expressions, with elements borrowed from Turkish, Romanian, etc. The linguistic component of Dobrujan Tatar weddings is not just a simple verbal

expression, but it can be considered an identity landmark, which carries on the cultural legacy of the community.

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