

A Comparison of Modern Azeri With Modern Turkish

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In this short article I will try briefly to compare Modern Turkish and Modern Azeri. Modern Turkish is the literary idiom of the Anatolian Turks and the official language of the Republic of Turkey, whereas Azeri or Azerbaijani is the language of the Azeris living mostly in Azerbaijan and in northwestern Iran and the official language of the recently independent Republic of Azerbaijan.

Since there is not enough space to go into a more detailed study of the Southern Azeri which is spoken in Iranian Azerbaijan, Azeri dialects and Turkish dialects and their comparison in this article, a deliberate attempt is made only to compare the official, literary languages of Turkey and Azerbaijan. As is well well-known, there are various regional dialects in Anatolia and in both Northern and Southern Azerbaijan and these dialects have phonetic, morphological, and lexical differences.

Although there have been various different influences in the ethnic formation of Turks living in Azerbaijan and Anatolia, i.e., Turks and Azeris, the basis of their main ethnic background has been the Oghuz tribal confederation. Therefore Azeri and Turkish languages, along with Turkmen, the language of the Turkmens living in Turkmenistan Republic and Northeastern Iran, comprise the Oghuz or Western Turkic group of Turkic languages. All three languages share some common linguistic features that are not found in other groups of Turkic languages.¹

The dialectical differences that exist between Azeri and Turkish have usually been attributed to the existence of more Mongolian and other Turkic ethnic elements in Azerbaijan.² Although it is possible to say that different literary languages for Azeri and Ottoman existed between the 13th – 19th centuries, in reality, differences between the two were so minimal, they were not always clear cut, and the mutual intelligibility between them was so complete that famous Azeri poets such as Nasimi, Qazi Burhaneddin, Fizuli, and famous works of the Azeri folk literature such as the stories of Dada Qorqud, and the epic of Koroghlu have always been regarded by the Anatolian Turks as a part of their own literary heritage.

Similarly, an attempt to combine the two literary languages into a common one has received consideration and support among Azeri intellectuals.³ Ismail Bey Gaspirali, the

leading intellectual of the Crimean Tatars in the 19th century, went a step further, and suggested a common literary language for all the Turks living in the Middle East, Central Asia and various regions of Russia.⁴

Differences between Turkish and Azerbaijani increased in some areas in the twentieth century as a result of the two languages undergoing different developments and changes, and receiving different foreign influences during these processes.

A brief comparison of some of the most prominent features of Azeri and Turkish follows. Since some well-known general linguistic features of the Turkic languages such as agglutination, inflection of nouns for case, formation of passive, causative, reflexive, reciprocal, and negative verbal structures by suffixes, using postpositions instead of prepositions, having a subject-object-verb word order, modifiers preceding the modified head nouns, and absence of gender, definite article, duality, certain initial and final consonant clusters, are shared by both languages, I did not elaborate on these features separately in this comparison. And since there are many more similarities between the two languages, dissimilarities rather than the similarities are stressed below.

a) Orthography and Phonology

For Modern Turkish a modified Latin alphabet has been in use since 1928. Prior to that, it was written in an Arabic script. For Azeri, also an Arabic script was used until 1928.

In 1928 a modified Latin script, although different than that of Turkish, began to be used. It was replaced by a modified Cyrillic alphabet in 1940 which with a few modifications was in use until 1991.⁵

After the independence of Azerbaijan, a Latin alphabet, based on the Turkish model, replaced the Cyrillic script. There are 29 characters in the Turkish alphabet. In the Azeri alphabet, in addition to these 29, there are 3 more characters.⁶

q /x, g, ,k/

x /x/

ə /ä/

Vowel Changes:

In some words:

Turkish -u- changes to Azeri -o-:

English

lip

to wake up

Turkish

dudak

uyan-

Azeri

dodaq/dodax

oyan-

Turkish -ü- changes to Azeri -ö-

Some of the most distinguishing phonetic features of Azeri are also common features of many Anatolian dialects, most notably Central Anatolian dialects, such as Eskişehir, Ankara, and Konya.⁸ For example:

The -k- > -x- > and -k- > -x change:

<u>English</u>	<u>Turkish</u>	<u>Azeri</u>
back	arka	arxa
to read	oku-	oxu-
many, much	çok	çox
foot	ayak	ayaq/ayax

Word final -p, -ç, -t, -k voiceless consonants in many Turkish words change to -b, -c, -d, and -g respectively in Azeri:

<u>English</u>	<u>Turkish</u>	<u>Azeri</u>
hungry	aç	ac
milk	süt	süd
color	renk	rəng
book	kitap	kitab

b) Morphology:

Noun: Plural suffixes are the same in both languages. Among the case endings, dative and genitive are the same, for locative and ablative A. uses only the versions that have voiced consonants, i.e. -da, -də, and dan, -dən,

Turkish also uses the versions with voiceless counterparts of the same suffixes, i. e. -ta, -te, and -tan, -ten: A. universitetdə 'at the university,' universitetdən 'from the university'; T. mektepte 'at the school,' mektepten 'from the school.' In the objective case, A. has -nı, -ni, -nu, -nü, whereas T. has -yı, -yi, -yu, -yü after words that end in vowel: A. dairəni 'the circle,' T. daireyi. However, in the word su 'water' A. also uses the yu suffix in the objective case. Possessive suffixes are the same. The genitive-possessive structure 'izafet' is the same.

Derivational suffixes are particularly identical in both languages, the only difference is that A. prefers mostly the voiced consonants with some suffixes and T. has both voiced and voiceless versions.

Personal suffixes used with the verb 'to be' in the present tense are slightly different in some persons. For the singular first person A. has

-(y)am, -(y)əm; T. has -(y)ım, -(y)im, -(y)üm; for the second person A. has -san, sən; T. has -sın, -sın, -sun, -sün. For the plural first person A. has -(y)ıq, -(y)ik, -(y)uq, -(y)ük, and T. has -(y)ız, -(y)iz, -(y)uz, -(y)üz.

Suffixes for other persons are the same. The past and conditional forms of the verb 'to be' are also the same in both languages: A. tələbəyəm 'I am a student', T. talebeyim, A. tələbəyik 'we are students,' talebeyiz; A. tələbə idi '(s)he' was a student, T. talebe idi.

Personal pronouns are the same with the exception of 'I.' In A. it is mən, in T. ben. Its declension is also different; in A. mənim, məni, mənə, məndə, məndən, in T. benim, beni, bana, bende, benden. Reflexive pronoun in A. is öz 'myself', whereas in T. it is kendi.

Demonstrative pronouns are the same. T. şu is not used in A., instead həmin is used. Some interrogative pronouns are different, and some are the same: Here are some of the different ones:

Interrogative Pronouns		
English	Turkish	Azeri
which	hangi	hansı
all	hepsi	hamısı
nobody	hiç kimsə	heç kəs
nobody	hiç kimsə	heç kim
nothing	hiçbir şey	heç nə
where	nerede	harada
when	ne zaman	haçan
how	nasıl	necə

Adjectives: Comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives, diminutives, intensifiers are basically the same: daha gözəl 'more beautiful,' ən gözəl 'the most beautiful,' bomboş, 'completely empty.' Numerals are basically the same.

The following are the slightly different ones: A. dörd 'four', yeddi 'seven', səggiz 'eight,' doqquz 'nine', iyirmi 'twenty,' min 'thousand,' milyard 'billion' = T. dört, yedi, sekiz, dokuz, yirmi, bin, milyar. Ordinal numbers are obtained in the same way.

Postpositions: Most of the postpositions are the same in both languages. Some Azeri postpositions such as təkin 'like,' tək 'like', kimi 'like,' sarı 'towards,' -cən 'until' are not used in Turkish.

Verbs: The personal suffixes that are used in the formation of reported past tense, present tense, future tense, aoristfuture tense, necessitative are slightly different in

some persons. First person singular usually takes the suffixes –am, əm, second person singular takes –sən, sən, and first person plural takes –ıq, ik, -uq, -ük for T. -(yım), -(y)im, -(y)um, -(y)üm; -sın, -sin, -sun, -sün; -(y)ız, -(y)iz, -(y)üz respectively; A. gəlməliyəm ‘I must come,’ T. gelmeliyim; A. gəlirsən ‘you are coming,’ T. gelirsin ‘you come.’

Definite past tense reported past tense, future tense, conditional, necessitative are declined in the same way in both A. and T. by using the same suffixes barring the differences for personal endings noted above.

Aorist: Turkish aorist is declined in the same way in A., but it also indicates an indefinite future function. In A. for the present continuous tense -(y)ır, -(y)ir, -(y)ur, -(y)ür suffixes are used, in T. -(i)yor is used: A. gəlirəm ‘I am coming,’= T. geliyorum. A reported past tense that is used in Azeri is not used in T.; gəlirsən ‘you have come, you reportedly came,’ oxuyub ‘(s)he has read, (s)he reportedly read.’

Necessity: In A. there are two more ways of expressing necessity. T. does not have these forms: gələsiyəm ‘I have to come,’ gələsisən, gələsidir, etc., and gərək gələm, ‘I need to come,’ gərək gələsən, gərək gələ, etc. Negation of verbal forms are obtained by -ma, -mə suffixes in both languages, however in A. in the present continuous and aorist-future tenses it is only –m: alıram ‘I take,’ almıram ‘I don’t take,’ alıram ‘I am taking,’ almıram ‘I am not taking.’ Imperative is the same in all persons except in the first person singular and plural: A. gəlim ‘Let me come,’ T. geleyim, A. oxuyaq ‘let us read,’ T. okuyalım.

Ability is the same in affirmative form, but different in the negative: A. gələ bildim ‘I was able to come,’ T. gelebildim; but A. gələ bilmədim ‘I was not able to come,’ T. gelemədim. Question suffixes –mı, -mi, -mu, -mü in verbal forms come almost always at the end in Azeri, in Turkish in many cases their places are more flexible.

Participles: Most of the participial forms are the same. In A. the following participles are also used extensively: -ası, -əsi; and –malı, -məli: həllediləsi iş ‘the matter that will be solved,’ oxunmalı kitab ‘the book that has to be read,’

Gerunds: Both languages share a group of gerunds. A typical A. gerund is found in –anda, -əndə: gələndə ‘when coming, upon coming,’ oxuyanda ‘when reading, upon reading,’

Reciprocal, passive, causative, and reflexive forms are basically the same, showing occasional sound changes.⁹

c) Vocabulary:

The overwhelming majority of the word stock is common to both languages. The main bulk of the Azerbaijani vocabulary is of Turkic origin. It represents typical Oghuz group features. However, in addition Azeri has also some words that are either not found in Turkish or they have different meanings. I am giving a random list here: *danış-* 'to talk,' *tap-* 'to find,' *arvad* 'wife,' *bulaq* 'spring, water source,' *bayır* 'outside,' *kənd* 'village,' *qabaq* 'front,' *yağış* 'rain,' *subay* 'unmarried,' *düş-* 'to get off,' *qurtar-* 'to finish,' *apar-* 'to take away,' *sabah* 'tomorrow,' *işlət-* 'to use,' *lap* 'very, extremely,' *nökər* 'friend.'

Loan Words: Both languages share a large number of loanwords from Arabic and Persian. Most of them are used with the same or similar meanings, but are slightly different in pronunciation.

Azerbaijani has many loanwords from Russian and in many cases they are also loanwords from other European languages. They are mostly related to technics, science and recent inventions, and represent a modern, changing lifestyle.

On the other hand, T. borrowed this type of loanwords mostly from French, English, Italian and Greek. They might be similar, but in many cases different, indicating the source of this type of vocabulary: A. *televizor* 'television set,' T. *televizyon*; *filtr* 'filter,' T. *filitre*; A. *qəzet* 'newspaper,' T. *gazette*; A. *abunə* 'subscription,' T. *abone*.

d) Syntax:

Sentence structure in the Turkic languages has a subject + object + verb word order. So both languages have the same type of word order, and in most cases they adhere to this structure. Both languages have many participles and gerunds, which in many cases function like that of a relative clause in Indo-European languages.

Due to a long and close contact with Persian over the centuries, both Turkish and Azerbaijani have borrowed and used some Persian syntactic structures, the most important of which is the so called *ki* structure.

The use of this structure is more frequent in Azeri than Turkish, since Azeri has been in closer contact with Persian, and under stronger influence. This influence of course is even stronger in Southern Azerbaijan: A. *Bilirəm ki, Bakıya gedirsən.* 'I know that you are going to Baku.' = T. *Bakuya gittiğini biliyorum.*

Another strong Persian influence on Azeri shows itself on question formations. It is possible in Azeri to form a question without the Turkic question particle *-mı*. A special intonation pattern is used for such questions. It is also used in written language.

In such a case if the question mark were not used the affirmative and the question forms would be identical: *Bakıda qalacaq.* '(S)he will remain in Baku.' In Turkish such a usage can only be tolerated in spoken language and only in extremely limited cases.

From the brief comparison that I have tried to make above, it should be clear to the reader that the differences between the two languages are not that numerous. From a strictly linguistic point of view, it is difficult to call them separate languages. They look like dialects of each other.

Despite the lack of exposure between Azeri and Turkish speakers during the last seventy years, the two languages are mutually intelligible; that is to say, an average Turk can understand Azeri, and make himself understood simply by using his Turkish in Azerbaijan, and vice versa.

We also should not forget that many of the Azeri features are found in Anatolian dialects, most notably in Central and Eastern Anatolian dialects. Almost everywhere to the East of Erzurum, Azeri is the spoken language of the population. To illustrate this point, I will give two selections taken from Kars and Sivas dialects:

Kars: Yaxın menzilimiz ehlet daşıdı
Canımı yandıran eşq ataşıdı
Evli ayrılıx haggın işidi
Felek bizden cida saldı dağları.¹⁰

Sivas: Çıxdım havuz başına
Bir qız çıxdı garşıma,
Sevda nedir bilmezdim
O da geldi başıma¹¹

Most of the Azeri linguistic features I mentioned above can be seen in these two passages. It is almost certain that the new political situation will lead to more exposure of these two languages. This and the use of an almost identical script will certainly decrease the dissimilarities between the two 'languages.'

Bibliography

¹ Benzing, J., Menges, K. H. "Classification of the Turkic Languages," *Philologicae Turcicae Fundamenta*, vol. I (1959) Wiesbaden. Pp. 1-10.

² Körpülü, M. Fuat. "Azeri" *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. Cilt 1 (1970) İstanbul. pp. 120-122.

³ Körpülü, M. Fuat. op.cit. pp. 146-147

⁴ Kırımlı, Cafer Seydiahmet. *Gaspıralı İsmail Bey; Dilde, Fikirde, İşde Birlik*. İstanbul, 1934, Saray, Mehmet. *Türk Dünyasında Eğitim Reformu ve Gaspıralı İsmail Bey*. Ankara, 1987, Körpülü, M. Fuat. op. cit. pp. 146. In order to disseminate his ideas Ismail Bey

Gaspıralı published a newspaper in Crimea, named Tercüman. The main slogan of the newspaper was 'Dilde, fikirde, İşde birlik' 'Unity in language, idea and work.

⁵ Allworth, E. Nationalities of the Soviet East Publications and Writing Systems. New York, 1971. pp. 306-307.

⁶ Between / signs phonetic values of sounds are given.

⁷ For Azeri and Turkish their official alphabets are used, for other Turkic languages and dialects a phonetic transcription system is used.

⁸ See Caferoğlu, A. Anadolu İlleri Ağızlarından Derlemeler. İstanbul, 1951.

⁹ I used the following sources in the comparison of the two languages: Şıraliyev, M. Ş. And E. V. Sevortyan. Grammatika Azerbajanskogo Yazika. Baku 1971; Simpson, C. G. The Turkish Language of Azerbaijan. Oxford, 1957; Lewis, G. L. Turkish Grammar. Oxford, 1975; Bozkurt, F. Türklerin Dili. İstanbul, 1992; Karşılaştırmalı Türk Lehçeleri Sözlüğü. Ankara, 1991.

¹⁰ Caferoğlu, A. Doğu İllerimiz Ağızlarından Toplamalar. İstanbul, 1942, p. 32.

¹¹ Caferoğlu, A. Sivas ve Tokat İlleri Ağızlarından Toplamalar. İstanbul, 1944, p. 82.