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 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.

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. 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. 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 /ə/

Vowel Changes:

In some words:
Turkish -u- changes to Azeri -o-:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Azeri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lip</td>
<td>dudak</td>
<td>dodaq/dodax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to wake up</td>
<td>uyan-</td>
<td>oyan-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turkish -û- changes to Azeri -ö-
big
beautiful

Labialization before -v- in some words:

rabbit
tavşan
dovşan

hunter
avcı
ovçu

Turkish -ü- changes to Azeri -i-

small
kücük
kiçik

Many of the Arabic and Persian loan words in Azeri have the variants containing the front vowels as opposed to the Turkish ones that contain the back vowels:

heart
kalb
qalb/galb

teacher
muallim
müallim

Word initial Turkish -i- does not exist in Azeri. It usually becomes an i-:

light
ışık
ışık/ışıx

to get warm
ışın
isin-

Consonant changes: Although there are some exceptions in both Azeri and Turkish, voicing of such consonants as Old Tukic “t” and “k” in the word-initial position, which is a common feature of Oghuz group of languages, is common in both languages:

Azeri, like some of the Anatolian dialects, takes this process one step further and applies it on Old Turkic word-initial q (/g/ in A.) sound as well: A. qal - /gal/ to stay, remain, is kal - /kal-/ in Turkish but gal- in some Anatolian dialects, qal- in Bashkir, Uygur, Kazakh, etc., A. qılnc /gilc / sword, is kılç in Turkish, but gılıç in some Anatolian dialects, qılıs in Bashkir, qılıç in Kirgiz and Uyghur, and qılış in Kazakh.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Azeri</th>
<th>Uzbek</th>
<th>Kazakh</th>
<th>Tatar</th>
<th>Kirghiz</th>
<th>Uyghur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tongue/language</td>
<td>dil7</td>
<td>dil</td>
<td>til</td>
<td>til</td>
<td>til</td>
<td>til</td>
<td>til</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to freeze</td>
<td>don-</td>
<td>don-</td>
<td>tong-</td>
<td>tong-</td>
<td>tong-</td>
<td>tong-</td>
<td>tong-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eye</td>
<td>göz</td>
<td>göz</td>
<td>kêz</td>
<td>kêz</td>
<td>kêz</td>
<td>kêz</td>
<td>kêz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to laugh</td>
<td>gül</td>
<td>gül</td>
<td>kül-</td>
<td>kül-</td>
<td>kül-</td>
<td>kül-</td>
<td>kül-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of the most distinguishing phonetic features of Azeri are also common features of many Anatolian dialects, most notably Central Anatolian dialects, such as Eskishehir, Ankara, and Konya. For example:

The –k- > -x- > and –k- > -x change:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Azeri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>back</td>
<td>arka</td>
<td>arxa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to read</td>
<td>oku-</td>
<td>oxu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>many, much</td>
<td>çok</td>
<td>çox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foot</td>
<td>ayak</td>
<td>ayaq/ayax</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Azeri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hungry</td>
<td>aç</td>
<td>ac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>milk</td>
<td>süt</td>
<td>süd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>color</td>
<td>renk</td>
<td>rəng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>book</td>
<td>kitap</td>
<td>kitab</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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, -da, and dan, -dən,

Turkish also uses the versions with voiceless counterparts of the same suffixes, i.e. –ta, -te, and –tan, -ten: A. üniversitetdə ‘at the university,’ üniversitedən ‘from the university’; T. mektepte ‘at the school,’ mektepten ‘from the school.’ In the objective case, A. has -n, -ni, -nu, -nə, whereas T. has -yi, yi, -yu, -yə after words that end in vowel: A. dairənì ‘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)əm, -(y)im, -(y)üm; for the second person A. has -san, san; T. has -sin, -sin, -sun, -sün. For the plural first person A. has -(y)əq, -(y)ık, -(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. takım Yam ‘I am a student’, T. talebe yım, A. takım yık ‘we are students,’ talebe yız; A. takım 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. manım, 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interrogative Pronouns</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Azeri</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>which</td>
<td>which</td>
<td>hangi</td>
<td>hansi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all</td>
<td>all</td>
<td>hepsi</td>
<td>həmısı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nobody</td>
<td>hiç kimsə</td>
<td>hiç kimsə</td>
<td>heç kəs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nobody</td>
<td>hiç kimsə</td>
<td>hiç kimsə</td>
<td>heç kim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nothing</td>
<td>hicibir şey</td>
<td>hiç bir şey</td>
<td>heç nə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>where</td>
<td>nerede</td>
<td>nerede</td>
<td>harada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when</td>
<td>ne zaman</td>
<td>ne zaman</td>
<td>haçan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how</td>
<td>nasıl</td>
<td>nasıl</td>
<td>necə</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adjectives:** Comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives, diminutives, intensifiers are basically the same: daha gözlə ‘more beautiful,’ an gözlə ‘the most beautiful,’ bombos, ‘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,’ sərə ‘towards,’ -can ‘until’ are not used in Turkish.

**Verbs:** The personal suffixes that are used in the formation of reported past tense, present tense, future tense, aorist/future tense, necessititative are slightly different in
some persons. First person singular usually takes the suffixes –am, ḏam, second person singular takes –sân, sân, and first person plural takes -tq, ḏq, ḏûk for T. -(y)m, -(y)ım, -(y)um, -(y)ûm; -sîn, -sîn, -sûn, -sûn; -(y)îz, -(y)îz, -(y)ûz respectively; A. ḏâlmâliyâm ‘I must come,’ T. gelmeliyim; A. ḏâlisân ‘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)ı̇r, -(y)ı̇r, -(y)ı̇r, -(y)ı̇r suffixes are used, in T. -(i)yor is used: A. geliram ‘I am coming,’= T. geliyorum. A reported past tense that is used in Azeri is not used in T.; ḏâlisân ‘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: ḏâlsiyâm ‘I have to come,’ ḏâlasisan, ḏâlasidir, etc., and ḏârak ḏâlâm, ‘I need to come,’ ḏârak ḏâlasan, ḏârak ḏâla, etc.Negation of verbal forms are obtained by -ma, -m suffixes in both languages, however in A. in the present continuous and aorist-future tensesit is only –m: alı̇ram ‘I take,’ alı̇ram ‘I don’t take,’ alı̇ram ‘I am taking,’ alı̇ram ‘I am not taking.’ Imperative is the same in all persons except in the first person singular and plural: A. ḏâlim ‘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. ḏâla bildim ‘I was able to come,’ T. gelebildim; but A. ḏâla bilmədəm ‘I was not able to come,’ T. gelemedim. Question suffixes –m, -m, -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: -asî, -ası; and -mâlî, -mâli: ḏâlledilası is ‘the matter that will be solved,’ oxunmâlı kitab ‘the book that has to be read,’

**Gerunds:** Both languages share a group of gerunds. A typical A. gerund is found in –anda, -anda: ḏâlanda ‘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,’ kond ‘village,’ qabaq ‘front,’ yağış ‘rain,’ subay ‘unmarried,’ düş- ‘to get off,’ qurtar- ‘to finish,’ apar- ‘to take away,’ sabah ‘tomorrow,’ ıslat- ‘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. qazet ‘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 gedırsən. ‘I know that you are going to Baku.’ = T. Bakuya gittiğimi 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 -mi. A special intonation pattern is used for such questions I 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 qalaçaq. ‘(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 daşdırıd
Canım yandıran eşq atasıdırıd
Evli ayrılyx hagın işıldır
Felek bizden cida saldı dağları.¹⁰

**Sivas:**  Çixdım havuz başına
Bir qız çıxdı gərşimə,
Sevda nədə bilmezdim
O da geldi başına¹¹

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.’

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**Bibliography**


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

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


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.


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

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