



AZARBAIJAN VIII. AZERI TURKISH

Azarbaijan

viii. Azeri (Ādarī) Turkish

Azeri belongs to the Oghuz branch of the Turkic language family. In the eleventh century the “Tūrān defeated Ērān” and a broad wave of Oghuz Turks flooded first Khorasan, then all the rest of Iran, and finally Anatolia, which they made a base for vast conquests. The Oghuz have always been the most important and numerous group of the Turks; in Iran they have assimilated many Turks of other origins and even Iranians.

Oghuz languages were earlier grouped into Turkish (of Turkey), Azeri, and Turkmen, but recent research has modified this simple picture. Today we may provisionally distinguish the following languages: Turkish of Turkey (including Crimean Osmanli and Balkan dialects, such as Gagauz), Azeri, “Afsharoid” dialects (spoken east and south of the provinces of Azarbaijan; there is a broad area of either transitional Azeri-“Afsharoid” dialects or of mixed territories between Qazvīn and Ḳalajestān, but south of a line Hamadān-Qom, including Qašqā’ī and Aynallū, “Afsharoid” dialects dominate; Afshar is also spoken in Kabul), Khorasan Turkic (northeastern Iran, Turkmenistan and northwestern Afghanistan), and Turkmen (in Turkmenistan, northern Afghanistan and close to the southeastern shore of



the Caspian Sea). Some features of Oghuz were described by Maḥmūd Kāšġarī (11th century), e.g., the sound change *t* > *d*- (*dāva* “camel” = *tāvā*, or similar, of other Turkic branches). But it is very difficult to draw a clear line between the East Anatolian dialects of Turkish and Azeri, on the one hand, and between Azeri and “Afsharoid” dialects or even Khorasan Turkic, on the other hand. There is a plethora of transitional phenomena among all Oghuz idioms. Thus one possibility would be to range East Anatolian as Azeri; however, the personal forms of the predicate show clear, and apparently archaic, distinctions among these five groups (Doerfer, 1982, pp. 109-15). The most distant of the Oghuz dialects is Turkmen; therefore the Iranian designations *torkī* (i.e., all Oghuz dialects except Turkmen) and/versus *torkamā/ānī* (i.e., Turkmen are rather appropriate.

Azeri is spoken in the Soviet Union (above all, in the AzSSR = Azarbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic), Iran (above all, in the northwestern provinces East and West Azarbaijan, but also on the southeastern shore of the Caspian Sea: Galūgāh, 36° 43’ north latitude, 53° 49’ east longitude), and in northern Iraq (e.g., in Kerkūk).

The early Azeri texts are a part of the Old Osmanli literature (the difference between Azeri and Turkish was then extremely small). The oldest poet of the Azeri literature known so far (and indubitably of Azeri, not of East Anatolian of Khorasani, origin) is ‘Emād-al-dīn Nasīmī (about 1369-1404, q.v.). Other important Azeri authors were Shah Esmā’īl Şafawī “Ķatā’ī” (1487-1524), and **Fożūli** (about 1494-1556), an outstanding Azeri poet. During the 17th-20th centuries a rich Azeri literature continued to flourish but classical Persian exercised a great influence on the language and its literary expression. On the other hand, many Azeri words (about 1,200) entered Persian (still more in Kurdish), since Iran was governed mostly by Azeri-speaking rulers and soldiers since the 16th century (Doerfer, 1963-75); these loanwords refer mainly to administration, titles, and conduct of war. This long-lasting Iranian-Azeri symbiosis must be borne in mind if one is to understand the modern history of Iran and its language correctly.

Azeri dialects. We may distinguish the following Azeri dialects (see Şirāliev, 1941 and 1947): (1) eastern group: Derbent (Darband), Kuba, Shemakha (Şamākī), Baku, Salyani (Salyānī), and Lenkoran (Lankarān), (2) western group: Kazakh (not to be confounded with the Kipchak-Turkic language of the same name), the dialect of the Ayrīm (Āyrom) tribe (which, however, resembles Turkish), and the dialect spoken in the region of the Borchala river;



(3) northern group: Zakataly, Nukha, and Kutkashen; (4) southern group: Yerevan (Īravān), Nakhichevan (Naḵjavān), and Ordubad (Ordūbād); (5) central group: Ganja (Kirovabad) and Shusha; (6) North Iraqi dialects; (7) Northwest Iranian dialects: Tabrīz, Reẓā'īya (Urmia), etc., extended east to about Qazvīn; (8) Southeast Caspian dialect (Galūgāh). Optionally, we may adjoin as Azeri (or “Azeroid”) dialects: (9) East Anatolian, (10) Qašqā'ī, (11) Aynallū, (12) Sonqorī, (13) dialects south of Qom, (14) Kabul Afšārī.

Modern literary Azeri has been constructed on the basis of the eastern group in the Soviet part of the Azeri area; this does not mean that it is identical with the dialect of Baku. It became the official language of the AzSSR after its establishment in 1936 and many thousand works have been published in this language.

This situation is different in the Azeri-speaking territory of Iran (Doerfer, 1970, p. 226): Very few native, European, or American scholars have worked on the Iranian type of Azeri. Most literary works there are produced in a language which resembles the dialect of the main city, Tabrīz. But the official language is Persian, and a large part of the population is bilingual. The only linguistic studies are some small vocabularies, grammars, and handbooks (for the use of Iranians) composed mostly in the 1960s by native authors (see the bibliography). New efforts at shaping a standard Azeri literary language have been made since the Islamic Revolution. Curiously enough, the most recent Azeri-Persian dictionary (Peyfūn) is based on the language of the AzSSR; the Persian word *īstgāh*, “railway station,” e.g., has been replaced by *vaḡzal* (< Russian *vokzal* < English Vauxhall).

The script. The older Azeri literature was written in the Arabic alphabet. In the Soviet-controlled northern Azarbaijan the Latin alphabet was introduced in 1925, and three variants of it were in use or at least tried out. In 1939 the Latin alphabet was replaced by an alphabet based on the Cyrillic alphabet. Subsequently, five different variants of this system came into use, the fifth in 1958; this means that between 1925-58 nine different writing systems existed (see Ismailova). In southern Azarbaijan the Arabic alphabet is still used (Peyfūn, however, distinguishes *ö* from the other labial vowels by adding a *hamza* to *wāw*).

The language. The linguistic structure of Azeri is very similar to that of Turkish. Therefore, it will be sufficient to characterize the main differences between these languages.



The modern literary language has nine vowels in initial syllables of Turkic words. Like the Anatolian and Khorasani dialects it has preserved the ancient Turkic opposition *ä* ~ *e*, lost in Turkish of Turkey; in most cases *e* is from Old Turkic *e*: Non-initial syllables have vowel harmony, as in Turkish; many dialects, however, show signs of a dissolution of the vowel harmony (e.g., *gäl-max-* “to come” instead of *gäl-mäk*). In consonantism, Azeri shows usual Oghuz features, such as *t-* > *d-*, *k-* > *g-*; but the frequent elision of *y-* before high vowels *i*, *ï*, *ü* is peculiar to Azeri (*it-* “to be lost” < *yit-*, *il* “year” < *yil*, *üz* “face” < *yüz*). A few of the twenty-four Russian letters for Azeri consonants mark allophones, e.g., *g* (front) and *q* (back; only initially; pronounced like Persian *q*), both belonging to the /G/ phoneme; other allophones, such as the back and front *l*, *lenes* and *madiae lenes*, are not distinguished in writing.

Grammatical structure. All the Turkic languages, including Azeri, are highly synthetic, i.e., words are inflected by means of affixes and suffixes (not, e.g., by umlaut and other internal inflection), cf. the typical example *türk-lä-š-dir-äbil-sä-x* “if we can make (somebody) become like Turks,” literally “Turk + verbal derivative (-*lä-*) + cooperative (-*š-*) + causative (-*dir-*) + possibilitive (-*äbil-*) + conditional (-*sä-*) + 1 person plural (-*x*).”

Azeri has many productive and non-productive suffixes both for nominal and verbal derivation. The Azeri literary language has six main cases (dialects show up to ten). Just as the other Turkic languages, Azeri has no special category of pre- or postpositions; instead it uses inflected “space nouns,” e.g., *kändin içindä* “within the village,” literally “village’s-inside-its-LOCATIVE;” some of these space nouns are of Persian or Arabic (via Persian) origin; these loans were facilitated by the fact that Persian itself uses such “space nouns” as *tū-ye*, *mīān-e* contrasting with genuine prepositions such as *be*, *dar*. Many dialects have a comparative case form in *-rAx*.

Whereas Azeri nominal morphology, generally speaking, is quite similar to that of Turkish, verbal morphology shows some distinctive features. We may distinguish five diatheses: active, passive, reflexive (nonproductive), reciprocal-cooperative, and causative. Each of them may be positive, negative, or possibilitive; the impossibilitive base form is, in contrast to Turkish, a simple combination of possibilitive + negative. We may distinguish the following “tense” forms: aorist (always in *-Ar*, in contrast to Turkish), present (*-Ir*), future (*-AjAK*), perfect (*-mIš* ~ *-Ib*, varying in the dialects), preterite (*-dI*), durative present (*-mAkdA*, also *-AdU* and similar forms in the dialects). Furthermore, we may distinguish five moods: indicative, voluntative-



imperative (vocative verbal form), optative (-A), necessitative (-mAlI, -AsI), and conditional. From a Turkic point of view, however, there is no structural difference between moods and tenses, cf., *al-a* “may he take” and *al-miš* “he took, he has taken.” It is therefore better to operate with only one category “tense-mood,” rather than the two categories “tense” and “mood.” Real past tense forms can be formed analytically by adding *(i)di* or *(i)miš* “was” to the tense-mood forms, e.g., *al-miš-dī* “he had taken.”

On the vocabulary see Iranian Elements in Azeri Turkish below.

The state of research. Soviet Azeri has been fairly well researched, although as yet no large Azeri dictionary has been produced and the available collections of dialect words are by no means comparable to the Turkish *Derleme sözlüğü* (Ankara, 1963-82, 12 vols.). However, the investigation of other parts of the language: phonology, grammar, etc., is satisfactory.

In contrast, Iranian Azeri is still but poorly known. In 1970, Doerfer stated that there existed at least 1,442 works on Soviet Azeri but only 18 on Iranian Azeri. Nevertheless, the publication of material from several Azeri dialects of Azarbaijan, Kalajestān, and Galūgāh (as well as quite comprehensive material from Afsharoid and Khorasani Turkic), based upon the Göttingen expeditions of 1968, 1969, and 1973, is planned for the near future.

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