



JOURNAL OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

TURKIC LANGUAGES

TEHLİKEDEKİ DİLLER DERGİSİ
TÜRK DİLLERİ

Issue/Sayı 22 Volume/Cilt 13 Winter/ Kış 2023

ISSN: 2148-130X



LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY IN AZERBAIJAN

PRESENT STATE AND FUTURE CHALLENGES



Guest Editors: Jala Garibova & Elisabetta Ragagnin

Gilles Authier • Marina Beridze, Maka Tetradze, Zakharia Pourtskhvanidze
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Donald Stilo • Murad Suleymanov • Matthew Zaslansky

Khinalug, Quba, Azerbaijan



Cover Design: Süer Eker

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E-Dergi/E-Journal: www.dergipark.gov.tr/td

TEHLİKEDEKİ DİLLER DERGİSİ-TÜRK DİLLERİ (TDD)

JOURNAL OF ENDANGERED LANGUAGES- TURKIC LANGUAGES (JofEL)

Cilt/Volume 13, Sayı/Issue 22, Winter/Kış 2023

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An international peer-reviewed and bi-annual e-journal publishing linguistic, sociolinguistic, anthropological and culturological studies on the lesser spoken languages of the Turkic and related communities. It is the authors' responsibility to ensure that submitted manuscripts are original and unpublished.

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Türkçe, İngilizce (Rusça, Türk dilleri)/Turkish, English (Russian, Turkic languages)

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Linguistic Diversity in Azerbaijan
Present State and Future Challenges

Guest Editors



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Introduction

This is the first volume ever exclusively dealing with indigenous minority languages of Azerbaijan from the Sociolinguistics and Contact Linguistics perspectives, and it is a great honour for us to be its editors.

Besides Azerbaijani and its dialects, the territory of Azerbaijan is home of several other varieties belonging to the Caucasian and Iranian language families, respectively. Centuries-long co-existence of these languages representing different language families and groups have certainly produced an interesting and colorful picture of interacting codes, which, while exchanging some intrinsic elements, have come to be unique varieties long intriguing scholars from many parts of the world.

Moreover, Azerbaijan lying in an extremely propitious position between the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, and possessing some of the best pastures in Asia, has always been an important stop along the Silk Road, and a melting pot of languages and cultures. Many ethnic, religious and linguistic groups passing through or settling in the territories of present-day Azerbaijan historically came into contact with local communities hence contributing to this linguistic mosaic. Investigating languages of Azerbaijan is interesting and important not only from the linguistic point of view. It also bears a socio-cultural value in that it can offer a new perspective on studying these languages from the standpoint of their vitality and maintenance. Researchers, for many years since Azerbaijan's independence, have been reporting stable diglossia and continuing intergenerational native language transmission among many minority communities. Positive steps within the language policy of Azerbaijan, such as developing alphabets, writing systems and resources, including textbooks for minority language teaching, should also be noted. However, setting grounds for sustainable quality research in language preservation, which will further inform language and education policy and contribute to the development of effective policy instruments, is crucial for continuous vitality of indigenous languages especially if they are spoken by small communities. We hope that this issue will also be an invitation for future research, in particular among young Azerbaijani scholars, into languages of Azerbaijan.

Our volume offers new data and highly valuable insights into various linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of the Nakh-Dagestani Caucasian varieties Kryz, Udi and Khinalugh, Ingilo Georgian, as well as the Iranian varieties Tat and Talyshi.

This volume consists of eight articles written by world-renowned experts in the respective linguistic fields.

Gilles Authier presents in a nutshell the salient features of Kryz – a severely endangered language variety belonging to the Lezgi branch of the East Caucasian family, spoken in the Quba region in Northern Azerbaijan – and offers highly important lexical data reflecting both Kryz ancestral culture and Azerbaijani influence. Another Lezgian variety, that of the village of Yeni Dizaxlı, spoken in the Qəbələ district, is the topic of Matthew Zaslansky's contribution, which focuses on Azerbaijani influence on the valency patterns of Qəbələ Lezgian.

Two contributions specifically deal with Khinalug, a Nakh-Dagestanian language, spoken by a small, isolated community in the homonymous village in the Quba district by approximately 2,300 people. Jala Garibova and Ildirim Zeynalov's contribution thematize the major sociolinguistic factors endangering the sustained vitality of Khinalug. The authors also propose some measures for preventing shift to Azerbaijani, which would yield to the irrevocable loss of the Khinalug language. Monika Rind-Pawłowski's contribution offers a very rich overview on Azerbaijani influence on Khinalug, aiming at distinguishing Azerbaijani influence from the influence of other contact languages.

Timur Maisak's contribution offers an overview of Udi – another indigenous Nakh-Daghestanian language of the Lezgi branch – focusing on the history of the study of Udi and Caucasian Albanian, as well as on the development of modern writing systems, publications and media in Udi. Marina Beridze, Maka Tetradsze and Zakharia Pourtskhvanidze present and discuss several contact-induced features of Ingilo Georgian, an intriguing cross-border dialect of the Georgian language spoken in western Azerbaijan.

Finally, Iranian varieties are the subject of Don Stilo's and Murad Suleymanov's contributions.

Murad Suleymanov offers up-to-date sociolinguistic data on Tat, a cluster of varieties spoken in several pockets of the Greater Caucasus Mountain area, with special focus on language identity and language shift.

Donald Stilo offers unique data on Talyshi, a Northwest Iranian language spoken along the Caspian littoral and adjacent mountainous areas in both Azerbaijan and Iran. In this contribution, the author shares with the readers a transcribed, translated and glossed narrative passage with a wealth of comments on the grammatical features of this language.

Last but not least, we would like to thank Ülkü Çelik Şavk and Süer Eker as well as the editorial team of Tehlikedeki Diller Dergisi/Journal of Endangered Languages for their precious editorial support, and all the contributors for their articles.

With this publication, we hope to set in motion more linguistic activities and research initiatives on the different varieties forming Azerbaijan's languages treasure, including Azerbaijanian dialects – many of which display highly interesting features due to contact with the languages presented in this volume.