Exploring Azerbaijani Verb Conjugation: A Comparative Study with French and English

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A Collaborative Effort in Linguistic Discovery

Abstract

This paper explores the rich yet underdeveloped verbal system of Azerbaijani, a Turkic language historically shaped by Persian and Russian influences. Despite these external pressures, Azerbaijani possesses intricate grammatical structures, particularly in expressing hypothetical situations and unfulfilled desires. Through collaboration with AI, this study systematically analyzes Azerbaijani verb conjugation, comparing it with French and English, while proposing new subjunctive forms to address existing gaps. One key observation is that Azerbaijani, unlike French, integrates a strong connection between its verb structures and unrealized desires, offering unique grammatical tools to express intended but unfulfilled actions. This research highlights how human-AI collaboration can uncover linguistic insights and contribute to the academic development of underexplored languages.

Introduction

Azerbaijani, a Turkic language with a rich yet underexplored verbal system, has long been shaped by Persian and Russian influences, which have hindered its academic development. Despite these challenges, Azerbaijani has significant potential to articulate complex concepts, particularly those related to desires, hypothetical situations, and future intentions. This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of Azerbaijani verb conjugation, contrasting it with French and English, and introduces new subjunctive structures to address gaps within the language.

My journey in writing this paper has been a unique one, as I was never formally educated in my own language. Initially, I believed Azerbaijani lacked a distinct subjunctive system. However, further exploration revealed that Azerbaijani does, in fact, have subjunctive-like structures that serve similar functions to the French subjonctif. While Azerbaijani does not possess an exact equivalent of the French subjunctive, it employs forms such as gedərdim and gedəcəydim to express conditional actions and unrealized desires. These structures function similarly to the subjunctive in French but carry distinct nuances.

For example, gedərdim conveys a conditional action that could have occurred under certain circumstances, whereas gedəcəydim expresses a past desire or intention that was ultimately unfulfilled. This demonstrates that Azerbaijani has grammatical mechanisms to articulate hypothetical actions and unrealized desires, even if it does not formally classify them as subjunctive.

French, for instance, employs the subjonctif plus-que-parfait to express hypothetical past events, while Azerbaijani achieves similar meanings using these two forms. Additionally, when it comes to future intention and completion, French relies on structures such as le futur antérieur (e.g., Je serai allé – I will have gone), whereas Azerbaijani uses different mechanisms to convey the certainty of an action's realization, particularly with motion verbs like getmək (to go) and action verbs like bitirmək (to finish).

This study does not seek to elevate one language over another but rather to highlight the diverse ways in which languages structure meaning. By examining these differences, I aim to demonstrate how Azerbaijani and French offer unique insights into human thought and expression. Furthermore, this work has been made possible through human-AI collaboration, enabling me to rediscover and formalize these linguistic structures despite my lack of formal education in my mother tongue.

Existing Azerbaijani Verb Conjugations

Although Azerbaijani has a well-developed system of verb tenses, many speakers may not recognize all of them systematically. Below is a categorized overview of Azerbaijani verb forms using getmək ("to go") as an example:

1. Present Tenses
- Present Simple (İndiki zaman) – Gedim (I go)
- Present Continuous (İndiki davamedici zaman) – Gedirəm (I am going)
2. Past Tenses
- Past Definite / Perfective Past (Keçmiş zaman) – Getdim (I went)

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- Past Indefinite / Imperfective Past – Gedirdim (I was going)
- Evidential Past (Indirect Past, "miş" form) – Getmişəm (I have apparently gone / I heard that I went)

3. Future Tenses
- Future Simple (Gələcək zaman) – Gedəcəyəm (I will go)
- Future Indefinite (Intentional or Hypothetical Future) – Gedərəm (I may go)
- Futur Antérieur – (It depends on verb sometimes certainty sometimes completion) (mən gedəcəm: I will certainly go) (mən bitirəcəm: I will have finished)

4. Conditional Moods
- Present Conditional – Getsəm (If I go)
- Conditional Past – Getsəydim (I would have gone)
- Independent Conditional Past - Getmişiydim (I would have gone)

5. Necessity and Obligation
- Necessitative Mood – Getməliyəm (I must go)

6. Imperative Mood • Get! (Go!)

This structured breakdown shows that Azerbaijani has a rich verbal system, yet these forms are rarely categorized as systematically as in French or English.

Proposed Subjunctive Forms in Azerbaijani

French has a well-defined subjunctive system (subjonctif présent, subjonctif passé, subjonctif imparfait, subjonctif plus-que-parfait), while Azerbaijani traditionally has two latter ones but it lacks explicitly two first ones. However, by analyzing Azerbaijani's verbal structure, we propose two subjunctive-like forms:

1. Subjonctif Présent (Proposed)

This form expresses doubt, wishes, or hypothetical situations.
- Formation: Verb stem + "yi" + personal endings
- Example (from gedmək, "to go"):
- Gedəyəm (I want to go and it is possible but not certain)
- Gedəyik (We want to go an it is possible but not certain)

2. Subjonctif Passé (Proposed)

This form expresses uncertian situations in the past.
- Formation: Verb stem + "əlimdi" + personal endings
- Example:
- Gedəlimdim (Here, the verb to go makes another meaning: I should have gone but don't know why)

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• Gedəlimdi (He went but not certain)

Remark. To fully explore the conjugation patterns of these proposed subjunctive forms, further research is needed. A preliminary exploration of these conjugation patterns has been shared on ResearchGate.

Tenses That Exist in Azerbaijani but Not in French

I also found two Azerbaijani tenses that do not exist in French:

1. Future Conditional ("əcəymişəm" form) – Gedəcəymişəm (It looks like I was supposed to go)

• Expresses a past expectation or supposed event, under the wish of own or the other.

2. Independent Conditional Past ("mişiydim" form) – Getmişiydim (I would have gone)

• An action in the past that was aimed to happen but didn't. Here, the conjugation does not need any connected statement and could be used alone.

Azerbaijani and the Expression of Unfulfilled Desires

One of the key insights of this study is the unique way in which Azerbaijani handles future certainty, especially when compared to languages like French and English. Unlike French, which often relies on auxiliary verbs (e.g., Le futur antérieur) to convey the completion of actions, Azerbaijani verbs—particularly those related to motion and intention—are more fluid and tied to the natural flow of language.

In languages like French, the use of Le futur antérieur (e.g., "Je serai allé") implies completion by a future point in time. However, applying the idea of completion to verbs of motion, like "to go" (aller), seems counterintuitive. Going is not an action that is completed in the same way that finishing something is. This creates a disconnect between the grammatical form and the meaning, especially from a native speaker's perspective.

In Azerbaijani, motion verbs like "getmək" (to go) express certainty without implying that the action is completed. For example, when saying "Mən gedəcəm", the emphasis is on the certainty of the intention to go—a definitive future action—rather than the completion of the act of going. This nuance is natural for a native speaker, where the verb carries a strong implication of future intention rather than completion.

In contrast, with a verb like "bitirmək" (to finish), the future tense form "bitirəcəm" (I will have finished) explicitly implies completion. This is because the verb itself conveys an action that has a clear endpoint—finishing something. Thus, "bitirəcəm" aligns more closely with Le futur antérieur in French ("J'aurai fini") because both express the idea that an action will be

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completed before another event. In this way, Azerbaijani distinguishes between actions that are completed (as with "bitirmək") and those that express future certainty or intention (as with "getmək").

For example:
- "Mən gedəcəm" expresses certainty in the future (I will go).
- "Mən bitirəcəm" expresses future completion (I will have finished).
- "Mən gedəydim" expresses an unrealized past desire (I would have gone).

These constructions highlight the intended action and firm resolve in the future, without introducing the ambiguity of completion.

This distinction between certainty and completion is a significant aspect of Azerbaijani grammar. It reflects how languages naturally evolve to fit the conceptual and emotional nature of human expression, rather than adhering strictly to rigid grammatical rules. When we focus too much on rules, we can lose sight of the fluidity and nuance that makes language such a powerful tool for communication.

The ambiguity that arises when using Le futur antérieur with motion verbs like "aller" (to go) often leads to misunderstandings, especially for native speakers. Instead, by focusing on intended action and certainty, Azerbaijani avoids this issue, offering a more intuitive way of expressing future events.

Differences Between Subjunctive and Indicative Forms in French, English, and Azerbaijani

The subjunctive and indicative moods function differently in French, English, and Azerbaijani, reflecting distinct linguistic and cultural perspectives. In French and English, when a speaker uses the subjunctive to describe another person's action, they are often expressing their own thoughts, wishes, or uncertainties rather than presenting an objective fact. In contrast, when the indicative is used, the statement is more directly tied to reality.

For example, in French:
- Subjunctive: Il est possible qu'il vienne. (It is possible that he will come.)
- Here, the speaker conveys possibility rather than certainty.
- Indicative: Il vient. (He is coming.)
- This is a factual statement, directly connected to reality.

Similarly, in English:
- Subjunctive: I wish he would go.
- This expresses the speaker's desire rather than an action that is actually happening.

- Indicative: He is going.
- This presents a direct and factual statement.

However, in Azerbaijani, the subjunctive carries a different nuance. It integrates both the narrator's perspective and the perspective of the person being described. As a result, many Azerbaijani subjunctive forms stand alone with full meaning, requiring less external context compared to French or English.

For example, in French and English, many subjunctive forms are dependent on additional clauses to make full sense. In Azerbaijani, subjunctive structures such as the -yi or -əlimdi forms inherently convey both the speaker's and the subject's perspectives, making them self-sufficient in expressing hypothetical actions, desires, and uncertainties.

This distinction does not suggest that one language is superior to another; rather, it highlights how different languages structure meaning according to their own internal logic. Azerbaijani provides a holistic approach to expressing hypothetical actions and emotions, where both the speaker's and subject's perspectives are considered simultaneously. Understanding these differences allows us to appreciate the richness of linguistic diversity and the unique ways languages evolve to reflect human thought.

Subjonctif Plus-Que-Parfait in Azerbaijani

While French uses the subjonctif plus-que-parfait to indicate hypothetical or unfulfilled past events, Azerbaijani distinguishes between certainty and uncertainty through two subjunctive-like forms:

1. Sən dəsəydin mən gedərdim: This form conveys a certain past action under a hypothetical condition.

It aligns with the French subjonctif plus-que-parfait when expressing a definite outcome, as in

"Si tu avais dit, je serais allé" (If you had said, I would have gone).

2. Sən desəydin mən gedəcəydim: This form expresses a less certain past action, where the outcome is not as firmly determined. It highlights an unrealized potential or a desire that did not manifest with full certainty.

This distinction offers a richer expression of hypothetical scenarios compared to French, where certainty is not as explicitly separated.

By integrating these forms into Azerbaijani grammar, we can more accurately express complex ideas of intention, destiny, and the subtle gradations of possibility. These structures contribute to the overall thesis of this paper, which emphasizes Azerbaijani's robust ability to articulate nuanced human experiences.

Additionally, when used independently, "mən gedəcəydim" conveys a past action that involved both desire and uncertainty. Unlike the conditional use, this form expresses a sense of an event influenced by personal wish or external circumstances, yet with an inherent ambiguity about its realization. It highlights how Azerbaijani can reflect the complexity of human emotions, where actions are not merely binary outcomes but are instead shaped by a blend of intention, hope, and uncertain reality.

Dual Interpretation of 'mən gedəcəydim' in Azerbaijani

A unique aspect of the Azerbaijani verbal system is the dual interpretation of the form "mən gedəcəydim," which carries distinct meanings depending on its use in conditional or independent contexts.

1. Conditional Use:

When "mən gedəcəydim" is used under a conditional structure (e.g., "Sən desəydin mən gedəcəydim" – "If you had said, I would have gone"), it conveys a sense of uncertainty regarding a past action. The action was possible under certain conditions, but its realization remains ambiguous, emphasizing the hypothetical nature of the scenario.

2. Independent Use:

When "mən gedəcəydim" is used independently, without a conditional clause, it shifts to express a past action that did occur, but with a strong involvement of wish, desire, and an underlying uncertainty. This use reflects a more nuanced emotional state, where the speaker acknowledges that the action was intertwined with a sense of hope or longing, yet the outcome was not fully certain.

For example:

- "Mən gedəcəydim" (I would have gone) in isolation can imply: "I went, but it was filled with uncertainty and a mix of desire and hesitation."

This dual functionality showcases Azerbaijani's ability to express not only hypothetical situations but also the subtleties of human emotions in reflecting on past experiences. It reveals how the same verb form can navigate between the realm of possibility (in conditional contexts) and the expression of a complex emotional past (in independent use).

Comparing this with French and English, neither language captures this precise nuance. While French might use the "subjonctif plus-que-parfait" for conditionality, and English may employ "would have gone," neither has a straightforward mechanism to differentiate between conditional uncertainty and independent emotional reflection as Azerbaijani does.

Conclusion

This study provides a detailed analysis of Azerbaijani verb conjugation, demonstrating its complexity, richness, and ability to express nuanced ideas. The proposed subjunctive forms reveal that Azerbaijani, despite being academically underdeveloped, possesses a robust grammatical structure capable of articulating desires, hypothetical actions, and unrealized possibilities—functions typically associated with the subjunctive in French and English.

One of the most significant findings in this paper is the distinction Azerbaijani makes between future certainty and completion. While French employs "le futur antérieur" to indicate completed actions relative to another future event, Azerbaijani avoids using completion-based structures with motion verbs like "getmək" (to go). Instead, it emphasizes the certainty of the action itself. However, for verbs like "bitirmək" (to finish), Azerbaijani clearly conveys completion, aligning more closely with "le futur antérieur" in French ("J'aurai fini" – I will have finished).

The introduced sections on the Subjonctif Plus-Que-Parfait in Azerbaijani and the dual functionality of "mən gedəcəydim" offer fresh insights into how Azerbaijani handles both conditional scenarios and the expression of past actions intertwined with wish, desire, and uncertainty. The ability of the language to differentiate between conditional uncertainty and independent emotional reflection underscores its unique approach to expressing complex human experiences.

This comparative analysis highlights that linguistic differences are not a matter of superiority but of diversity. Each language develops unique structures tailored to the conceptual and cultural needs of its speakers. The way Azerbaijani expresses hypothetical actions and unfulfilled desires offers a distinct perspective on how language shapes thought, demonstrating its holistic approach to both intention and destiny.

Finally, this study underscores the potential of human-AI collaboration in linguistic research. AI-assisted exploration has helped uncover and formalize new structures within Azerbaijani grammar, despite the historical limitations placed on the language's academic study. Future research could further investigate how native speakers perceive these subjunctive forms and whether similar patterns exist in other Turkic languages, enriching our understanding of linguistic expression and human cognition.

man provided key insights, creative proposals, and linguistic intuition. This reflects the power of human-AI collaboration in uncovering new linguistic structures and enriching language studies. Additionally, this study is deeply personal, as it represents a rediscovery of my mother language, one that I was not formally educated in due to historical restrictions. This work stands as both a linguistic study and an effort to reclaim and formalize the depth of Azerbaijani grammar.