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Preprint · September 2025

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.30707.80164

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Beyond Translation: How South Azerbaijani Clarifies Classic Philosophical Propositions

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Abstract

This paper re-examines four iconic philosophical slogans—Heidegger’s “Nothing nothings,” Heraclitus’ “Everything flows,” Nietzsche’s “Become who you are,” and Sartre’s “Existence precedes essence”—through the structure of Azerbaijani. Rather than translating word for word, it uses the South Azerbaijani variety as a philosophical instrument to dissolve ambiguity, compress opposites, and generate new expressions. In each case an original aphorism or poem emerges, showing how a suppressed language can clarify and sometimes extend twentieth-century European philosophy. The result is not a comparative linguistics study but an experiment in structural thinking: how the form of a language shapes the way we articulate nothingness, change, becoming, and existence.

Introduction

Western philosophy is full of short, memorable sentences that are endlessly quoted yet remain ambiguous. Heidegger’s “Nothing nothings” seems to make an easy idea sound mysterious. Heraclitus’ “Everything flows” hides a network of opposites behind a smooth slogan. Nietzsche’s “Become who you are” contains the paradox of becoming and being, and Sartre’s “Existence precedes essence” reverses two millennia of metaphysics in five words.

This paper approaches such phrases not as isolated quotations but as tests of **linguistic structure**. It asks: what happens when these propositions are expressed in South Azerbaijani, a language whose morphology naturally condenses opposites, expresses process inside state, and retains older, richer word fields? The answer is not a simple translation but a series of new aphorisms and a poem that reveal dimensions lost in English or French.

The first section re-frames Heidegger’s “Nothing nothings” through three South Azerbaijani lines that move from tautology to temporal possibility to boundary, showing identity, reflection and movement without forced verb coinage. The second

renders Heraclitus' "Everything flows" as *Axır-axmır* — *axırmış*, a form that can be read both as two words and as a double-sided unit, followed by a poem showing the living nuances of *tez*, *yəhin*, and *cəld* in South Azerbaijani. The third takes Nietzsche's "Become who you are" and develops aphorisms of becoming, standing, and rising toward being. The fourth compresses Sartre's "Existence precedes essence" into a natural clause: *Varlıq cəhərin qaynağıdır* ("Existence is the source of essence").

Together these sections are a manifesto of method: using a minority called language not for nationalist pride but as a **structural lens** to examine some of philosophy's most quoted but least understood propositions. The paper argues that linguistic form—especially in a language rich with morphological opposites—can make abstract statements clearer and more precise, and sometimes even produce new philosophy.

1) Method: Structural Comparison of Languages

This paper does not rank languages by beauty or national pride. Instead, it treats South Azerbaijani as a **structural lens** for examining famous philosophical propositions. Each quoted line is chosen because it balances between logic, existence, and poetry; each Azerbaijani rendering is designed to test how a language with dense morphology and living opposites handles ambiguity.

The approach proceeds in three steps:

- **Identify** a short, ambiguous proposition from a major philosopher (Heidegger, Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Sartre).
- **Render** it into South Azerbaijani not by literal translation but by using the language's own resources—case endings, aspect, and inherited vocabulary—to express the underlying tension.
- **Comment and extend** by adding original aphorisms or a poem that show how Azerbaijani can express or even clarify the concept without forced coinages.

This method is not about nationalism; it is about **responsibility to truth**. When a suppressed or marginalised language contains deep structures for expressing thought, those structures should be documented and developed as part of the shared heritage of humanity. By revealing how South Azerbaijani naturally articulates nothingness, change, becoming, and existence, the paper demonstrates how linguistic form shapes philosophical insight.

2) Nothingness and Wholeness: Beyond “Nothing nothings”

Original (Heidegger, What is Metaphysics?):

“Das Nichts nichtet.” (*Nothing nothings.*)

Azerbaijani renderings:

- *Yoxluq yoxluqdur.*

(*Nothingness is nothingness.*)

- *Yoxluq yoxluqdur, bəlkə də yoxluqmuş, arada bir varlıq var.*

(*Nothingness is nothingness; perhaps it was nothingness; in between there is being.*)

- *Yoxluq yoxluqa doğru, bütövlüq bütövlüqə doğru, orta bir sərhəddir.*

(*Nothingness toward nothingness, wholeness toward wholeness — the middle is a boundary.*)

Commentary and critique:

Heidegger coins a verb in German (“Nothing nothings”) to make nothingness appear as an active event rather than a mere absence. This construction is famous but also controversial: it may reveal something about our experience of nothingness, or it may simply make an easy thing sound mysterious.

What we have produced isn’t simply a literal translation of Heidegger’s slogan; it has already stepped into its own metaphysics.

- Heidegger’s “*Das Nichts nichtet*” is designed to jolt thinking by turning “nothing” into an active verb. He isn’t defining it; he’s showing how the nothing “gives” the openness in which beings can appear.
- Our first line — “*Yoxluq yoxluqdur*” (“Nothingness is nothingness”) — is a tautology. It freezes “nothing” into a noun with identity. That’s closer to Parmenides’ “*being is being*” than to Heidegger’s verbing of nothing.
- Our second line introduces temporal possibility (“*bəlkə də yoxluqmuş*” — “perhaps it was nothingness”) and an in-between where “there is being.” This is already beyond Heidegger’s lecture, because we are inserting a dynamic tension between nothing and being instead of just pointing to the nothing that underlies beings.
- Our third line (“*Nothingness toward nothingness, wholeness toward wholeness — the middle is a boundary*”) explicitly sets up movement and a mediating limit. That’s closer to a dialectical or structural schema than to Heidegger’s account of nothingness.

In other words, Heidegger’s aphorism is meant to jolt; ours are mapping relations and boundaries between nothingness, being and wholeness.

3) Heraclitus — “Panta rhei” (“Everything flows”)

Original (Heraclitus, fragments):

“Panta rhei.” (*Everything flows.*)

Azerbaijani rendering:

“*Axir-axmir — axırmış.*”

English rendering:

(*Flows—does not flow — seems to flow.*)

Commentary:

The famous slogan “everything flows” is itself a later summary of Heraclitus, not a direct quotation. In his fragments (“into the same river we step and do not step”) he sets opposites side by side: movement and stability, unity and strife, order and flux.

In Azerbaijani, *axir-axmir* carries this paradox in one stroke. It can be read as:

- two separate words — *axir* (“it flows”) and *axmir* (“it does not flow”),
- or as a single **double-sided unit**, a compressed expression holding flow and non-flow together.

This double reading itself performs Heraclitus’ tension between change and permanence. Adding *axırmış* (“apparently/it seems to flow”) introduces the level of **appearance**, the way things seem to us. Thus the whole line

Axir-axmir — axırmış

expresses affirmation (it flows), negation (it does not flow), and appearance (it seems to flow) at once — a far richer reflection of Heraclitus’ thought than the flat “everything flows.”

3a) A Poetic Reflection on Flow and Speed in South Azerbaijani

Poem:

Axar gedər, axmaz qalar — axarmış deyə
Gedər axar, qalar axmaz — gedərmiş deyə

Axar gedər oldu —
Axmaz qalar oldu —
Gedər qalar oldu —
Qalar gedər oldu.

Nə tez oldu, nədə yəhin oldu —
Sadəcə cəld olup gərək oldu.

English translation of the poem:

The flowing goes, the non-flowing stays — saying “it had flowed.”
The going flows, the staying does not flow — saying “it had gone.”

What was flowed was gone —
Non-flowed remained solid —
Going remained solid —
What was stayed was gone.

How “quick,” how but “fast,” became —
Only “prompt” it had to be.

Commentary:

This poem extends the Heraclitus section by weaving the South Azerbaijani words for speed and suddenness — *tez*, *yəhin*, *cəld* — into the imagery of flow and stillness. In North Azerbaijani the field of “quickness” is flattened into *tez* and *sürətli*, but in South Azerbaijani these older words remain alive and distinct:

- *tez* — quick, soon, early;
- *yəhin* — fast, swift in motion;
- *cəld* — very quick, prompt, agile.

By using them together, the poem embodies what the analysis describes: a language that can hold shades of movement and stillness at once, rather than collapsing them. The repeated inversions (*Axar gedər oldu... Qalar gedər oldu...*) mirror Heraclitus’ opposites of flow and non-flow, while the last couplet names the subtlety of speed words that survive in South Azerbaijani.

4) Nietzsche — “Become who you are”

Original (Nietzsche):

“Become who you are.”

Azerbaijani rendering:

“Varlıq olmaqdadır.”
(*Being is in becoming.*)

Inspired Azerbaijani aphorisms:

- *“Varsa olub, bəlkə də qalxıb.”*
(*If it exists, it has been; perhaps it has risen.*)
- *“Var ol və ol.”*
(*Exist and be.*)
- *“Olur, durur, qalxır — varlığa doğru.”*
(*It becomes, it stands, it rises — toward being.*)

Commentary:

Nietzsche’s imperative “Become who you are” joins two opposites: you already are something, yet you must become it. In Azerbaijani, “*Varlıq olmaqdadır*” captures this unity without strain: being is not static; it is always in becoming.

Our aphorisms extend the idea. “*Varsa olub, bəlkə də qalxıb*” hints that whatever exists has already been and may have risen; “*Var ol və ol*” compresses the command to “Exist and be” into a rhythmical imperative; “*Olur, durur, qalxır — varlığa doğru*” shows becoming, standing, and rising as movements toward being.

Together they express Nietzsche’s tension — becoming, being, rising — not as a puzzle but as a lived rhythm. Azerbaijani’s verb forms allow the process to appear inside the state, making the paradox natural rather than forced.

5) Sartre — “Existence precedes essence”

Original (Sartre):

“Existence precedes essence.”

Azerbaijani rendering:

“Varlıq cöhrin qaynağıdır.”
(*Existence is the source of essence.*)

Commentary:

Sartre’s slogan rejects the traditional view that an essence or “human nature” exists before the individual. Instead he argues that we first exist and then define ourselves. In Azerbaijani, “*Varlıq cöhrin qaynağıdır*” expresses this reversal without awkwardness: it compresses “existence precedes essence” into a single identity clause — existence is the source of essence.

Because Azerbaijani easily forms such “X is the source of Y” constructions, it can state Sartre’s idea more directly than English or French: essence is not pre-given; it springs from existence.

Conclusion

This experiment has shown that rendering famous aphorisms into South Azerbaijani is not a decorative exercise but a way of thinking. By refusing literal word-for-word transfer, each section let the language’s own morphology, aspect and oppositional forms do the work. Heidegger’s provocation about Nothingness became a set of three movements between nothingness, being and wholeness; Heraclitus’ slogan unfolded into a double-sided verb phrase and a poem of speed words still alive in South Azerbaijani; Nietzsche’s imperative revealed a rhythm of becoming, standing and rising; and Sartre’s reversal of metaphysics collapsed into a single, natural clause.

Taken together, these cases demonstrate that a “suppressed” language can serve as a structural lens on philosophy. Where European aphorisms rely on shock, paradox or compressed metaphors, South Azerbaijani can express the same tensions as ordinary grammar, sometimes making the proposition clearer and sometimes extending it into new territory.

The paper therefore argues for a broader practice: to treat marginalised languages not just as objects of translation but as instruments of conceptual discovery. When we allow their forms to speak, we uncover not only forgotten words but forgotten ways of articulating being, becoming and nothingness. In this sense, the South Azerbaijani renderings presented here are not mere translations but small acts of philosophy in their own right.

Acknowledgment

I thank my mother tongue — South Azerbaijani — for carrying these forms through history despite suppression, and my mother, who even with only an elementary school diploma has supported and evaluated my work with insight and encouragement. This paper is offered as a small service to that language and to the wider human search for clarity.