

PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

DIALECT IS NOT DIFFERENCE, BUT RICHNESS

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Abstract

The article systematizes the main phonetic-lexical features of local speech in a simple and practical language, showing that dialect is not a “difference”, but a strategic asset that nourishes the literary language. In the study, audio samples collected on the basis of field observations are processed with multilayer annotation, the open-closed and front-back distribution of vowels, assimilation and fricativeization in consonants, as well as variations in stress-intonation contours are explained in minimal pairs. At the lexical level, the functional value of local variants stabilized in everyday communication (proximity, style signal) is indicated and a small table for the transition “dialect → literary language” is presented. Urban-rural and intergenerational differences, media influence and the importance of code-switching skills in the social context are discussed. Recommendations for schools and the media are supplemented with the creation of an open audio corpus, annotation based on ELAN, simple IPA guides and editorial ethics. As a result, the scientific description of dialect increases clarity in communication, preserves cultural diversity, and creates a stable basis for the rapid renewal of the literary language.

Keywords: dialect, literary language, phonetics, intonation, lexical differences.

Introduction: Dialects are living cultural units that carry the memory of a community, the style of everyday communication, and local identity; therefore, they are not an “extra” element of the language, but a natural source that nourishes the norm [10; p. 3]. The phonetic variation observed in the historical and geographical spread of Azerbaijani Turkic — the opening and closing of vowels, the softening and hardening of consonants, stress and intonation patterns — is of a systematic nature and has a separate scientific value in the general Turkic context [7; p. 248–252]. In this respect, dialects not only retain traces of antiquity, but also expand the expressive reserve of the modern literary language: each new pronunciation nuance, each local word-intonation combination included in the norm increases the flexibility of the future standard [7; p. 248–252]. This understanding also has practical consequences in the public sphere: instead of stigmatizing a dialect as a “mistake”, recognizing it as a cultural asset creates inclusiveness in language policy and strengthens the commitment of local communities to the language [10; p. 3].

Preservation of dialects is both a moral duty and a scientific necessity; since urbanization and mass media accelerate the leveling of the speech of the younger generation and reduce the lively circulation of sound differences [10; p. 3]. The basis of the preservation strategy is accurate description and transparent sharing: first, the uniform recording of phonetic features in the International Writing System (IPA) enables comparison between studies [5; pp. 200–206]; second, digital archive networks (OLAC) provide long-term accessibility by linking language resources to searchable metadata [4; pp. 210–218]; third, the multimodal annotation environment (ELAN) stratifies audio recordings with time precision and makes them usable for teaching

and scientific analysis [12; pp. 1556–1559]. Thus, a dialect example—a story written in the field, a proverb, a toponym—makes both the subtlety of pronunciation and the cultural landscape visible at the same time; This visibility not only “reinforces” the past, but also enriches the selective capacity of tomorrow’s literary language [5; pp. 200–206], [4; pp. 210–218].

The main purpose of this article is to show the main phonetic-lexical features of local speech, without renouncing scientific rigor, but in as simple and practical a language as possible. The task is twofold: on the one hand, to give a concise answer to the question “what is it and where does it work?” of such features as the open-closed and front-back distribution of vowels, the softening-hardening tendencies of consonants, stress and intonation patterns; on the other hand, to trace how the same features behave in contact with the literary norm — enriching, neutralizing or creating misunderstandings — based on examples of everyday communication. The relevance of the topic is strengthened by three reasons: urbanization and mass media accelerate leveling in the younger generation; as the education system focuses on communication, the need for students to explain the sounds they hear at home in a scientific language in the classroom increases; in the cultural self-awareness of local communities, dialect is not only a relic of the past, but also a living indicator of today’s identity. Ultimately, the article aims to provide the reader with two practical tools: a small guide to recognizing the minimal pairs that are often encountered in the transition “dialect → literary language” and a brief explanatory model for the classroom, editorial office, and media environment. Such an approach presents dialect as a source that nourishes the norm, not “against the norm,” and makes inclusive, delicate balance in language policy possible.

The material base consists of two layers: field observations and descriptions validated on the basis of existing literature. In the field phase, purposive sampling is applied so that at least the main axes of differentiation are represented by region, age (18–30; 31–55; 56+), type of residence (rural/urban), and gender; a 30–45-minute semi-structured interview is conducted with each informant, along with spontaneous speech (memories, everyday life stories), purposeful elicitations are collected through a 100-unit word list, 10 minimal pairs, and a short reading passage. A quiet location is selected for high sound quality, an external microphone is used, 48 kHz/24-bit parameters are maintained, the microphone-speaker distance is stabilized, and the sound files are pre-processed with normalization and basic silence removal. Informed consent is obtained in accordance with ethical requirements, personal data is replaced with encrypted codes, and minimal metadata such as region, age group, and communication context is included in the file names.

At the annotation stage, each sample is stratified on the time axis with orthographic level, phonetic transcription, stress, word root and context markers; sentence end contours are separately marked for intonation, length and pause points are marked. In phonetic analysis, the square positions of vowels are estimated based on the F1/F2 support points, the duration of sounding in consonants and VOT for plosives are observed, the shift of stress from a prosodic perspective and the main trends in the melodic contour are noted. In the lexical part, samples are selected according to the principle of frequency and semantic proximity in the most frequently used areas — household, economic, ceremonial lexicon. The principle of demonstration is simple: only the most common and stable features in speech are presented; if “a similar form is not confirmed in at least three informants and two age groups”, that sample is excluded from the final presentation. To increase reliability, annotation rules are standardized with a short “decision table”, a second annotator check is performed on randomly selected fragments, and inconsistencies are resolved with a discussion protocol. The article prioritizes explanatory examples to present the results without tiring the reader, tables are used only when necessary, for the purpose of “seeing at a glance,” and each table is closely linked to the explanation in the text. This method ensures readability while maintaining scientific accuracy: the reader first hears the sound, then sees it in writing, and then understands the role of that sign in communication in a concise, understandable framework.

Vowel/consonant changes. The most visible trend in the vowel system is the stabilization of small shifts in the open–closed and front–back dimensions: in some regions, a narrowing towards /e/ → [i] (“I say” → “I say”), the transformation of the /ey/ sequence into a hiatus (“eating” “eating”), and at the same time, the weakening of the “-ra-” sequence as a result of syntagm in mid-syllables (“where/there/here” “where/there/here”) is observed [10; pp. 52–61], [11; pp. 130–145]. In vowel harmony, the preservation or loss of roundness, especially in the final syllable, varies

from dialect to dialect; this also affects the sound harmony of word-final suffixes and makes some of the correspondences neutralized in the literary norm visible again in speech [11; pp. 146–156]. The main changes in consonants are associated with regressive assimilation and local solutions of the hard-soft contrast: the “brother” “brother” type of pronunciation shows voicing assimilation, the tendency to fricativeization in positions where the density of “k” and “q” decreases; in some dialects, [h] weakens or becomes zero at the beginning of the syllable, which creates conditions for the transfer of the sound load to the vowel in a position close to the stress [10; pp. 62–70], [11; pp. 157–170]. All of these phenomena correspond to general phonetic regularities: an increase in the F1 indicator of open vowels creates an “opener” sound, while a decrease in F1 in closed vowels creates an audible “narrowing” impression; in consonants, as the VOT and continuity parameters change, the listener perceives the hardness-softness contrast differently [9; pp. 281–299], [5; pp. 200–206].

Stress and intonation. The place of stress in speech is not only the “loudness of the voice”, but also a sign indicating the boundaries of the rhythmic unit and the information structure: in some Western dialects, the shift of word stress from the penultimate syllable to the penultimate syllable strengthens the phrase stress and increases the amplitude of the falling contour at the end of the sentence; as a result, the same word order creates the impression of a more “flexible” intonation compared to the model in the literary language [11; pp. 171–182]. The “spreading” of the rising contour in the middle of Y/n interrogative sentences, and the sharp fall of the final tone in news sentences, give the listener additional pragmatic signals; therefore, the stress-intonation change is not only a matter of “melody”, but also an element affecting the transfer of meaning [10; pp. 71–79]. To describe prosodic differences, it is sufficient to work on minimal pairs and short template sentences: noting the location of the pitch peak and the angle of the fall at the end of the phrase, marking syllable lengths and pauses allows the reader to see the “soundscape” in the text [5; pp. 200–206], [9; pp. 290–299].

Lexical vernacular words (3–5 examples). At the lexical level, differences are concentrated mainly in everyday communication areas and often appear in conjunction with phonetic simplifications. Below are five examples that are both widespread in use and phonetically explainable:

“where/there/here” “where/there/here” — syn-gopesis in the middle syllable; as the rhythm of speech accelerates, the vowel in the weak position is shortened [10; pp. 52–61], [11; pp. 130–145].

“I say” “I say” — contraction of /e/ [i] and transformation of the “ey” sequence into a hiatus; strengthening of vocal harmony in rapid speech [10; pp. 58–60].

“yiyir” “yiyir” — weakening of diphthongization or a sequence of two separate vowels; articulatory flexibility prevails at the syllable boundary [11; pp. 138–142].

“brother” “brother” — regressive voicing assimilation; the transition [q] [g] is more often heard in contexts where intonation is rising [11; pp. 160–165].

“nətər” “nəcə” — lexical variant; although the meaning remains the same, the local form signals intimacy and informal style in communication [10; pp. 66–68].

These examples show that phonetic processes (syngope, contraction, assimilation, weakening of diphthongization) and lexical variation often work together: a small shift in sound is read as a stylistic signal, and

stylistic choice makes the transition between the literary norm and local speech “painless” [10; pp. 71–79], [11; pp. 171–182]. The practical conclusion for the reader is clear: in which cases the transition to the literary form preserves the meaning, and in which cases the preservation of the local form makes communication natural and convincing; in the next part of the article we will summarize this transition with a small table “dialect → literary language” [10; pp. 79–82], [11; pp. 182–186].

Table 1.

"Dialect literary language"		
Local form	Literary response	Short explanation
where / there / here	where / there / here	Synopsis in the middle syllable: the syllable -ra- in the weak position is shortened; it is retained in the literary style [10; pp. 52–61], [11; pp. 130–145].
I say	I say	The contraction of /e/→[i] and the transformation of the “ey” sequence into a hiatus increase articulatory flexibility in rapid speech [10; pp. 58–60].
brother	brother	As a result of regressive voicing assimilation, the transition q→g is heard; q is retained in the literary language [11; pp. 160–165].
what is it	how	Lexical variation: same in meaning, informal in style, signals closeness; “how” is acceptable in formal communication [10; pp. 66–68].
eats	eats	Weakening of diphthongization or the succession of two vowels; in some dialects the hiatus is fixed, in the literary language “ey” is preserved [11; pp. 138–142].

Social context

The difference between urban and rural speech is primarily formed by the density and diversity of everyday communication networks: in the countryside, pronunciation models that have been stabilized within the circle of relatives and neighbors are preserved for a long time, while in the city, speech types from different regions collide in the same space and professional environment, accelerating leveling [10; pp. 83–90]. As the literary norm gains dominance in urban speech, processes such as the reduction of weak vowels (“harada” → “harda”) and regressive assonance (“qardash” → “qardash”) are either neutralized or become stylistic signs; in the countryside, these forms live as signs of social identity and are stabilized in assembly, ceremonial, and economic discourses [11; pp. 190–198]. Observations of dialect atlases also show this on the map: as the flow to large urban centers increases, isoglosses soften, transition zones expand, and “sharp boundaries” are preserved only in pockets where communicative isolation remains [1; pp. 9–15], [3; pp. 5–8].

The generational difference is more subtle: in older speakers, the fixed rhythm and stress distribution act as a powerful prosodic sign expressing the emotional charge of speech, while in young people, literary examples learned through school and the media “regulate” the rhythm and simplify the contour [11; pp. 171–182]. This is not just a change in sounds at the phonetic level, but a redistribution of the information structure: the younger generation conveys the same idea in a more neutral melodic contour, and this contour gains additional strength with the spread of written-speech synthesis in social networks [10; pp. 91–95]. In the communication of young people, code-switching (dialect form → literary form) is often connected with a situa-

tional function: with a teacher, official, in a job interview, the literary form prevails, and at home and in a close circle, the local form; as a result, the ability to flexibly switch between the two modes becomes social capital [10; pp. 95–98].

The influence of the media is twofold: on the one hand, the acoustic “template” of the literary language is widely disseminated on television, radio and especially on global platforms and triggers mass imitation mechanisms; on the other hand, local content (regional blogs, folklore channels, micro-podcasts) makes the dialect sound visible, giving it a positive symbolic value [11; pp. 200–208]. What is decisive in this balance is the “public reputation” of the pronunciation: dialect is either stigmatized as a “mistake” and hidden, or presented as a “cultural asset” and put on display; the first case strengthens the leveling, the second case strengthens the conscious protection mechanisms [10; pp. 83–90]. That is why education and media cooperation should become a goal: simple explanatory audio-examples, dialect-literary pairs and short explanatory stories form both auditory discrimination and awareness of stylistic choice in the younger generation [11; pp. 204–208].

Migration and the labor market also play an important role in the restructuring of speech regimes: seasonal and permanent migrations create new speech coalitions, and although professional jargon prevails over literary language, the local style remains a sign of “social proximity” outside of work hours [7; pp. 248–252]. This shows that dialect is not only a “geographical” but also a “functional” entity: as the space changes, the form changes, but the functions — expressing identity, creating proximity, strengthening emotional emphasis — live on and adapt to new conditions [10; pp. 96–98]. Thus, the social context is not a passive background

that determines the fate of a dialect; on the contrary, it is an active mechanism that reshapes its sound, rhythm, and social value every day in conversations, on screens, and in classrooms [11; pp. 200–208], [1; pp. 12–15].

Recommendations. Use of dialect resources in school and media

The integration of dialect resources into the educational and media environment should be based on two main principles: a stigmatization-free approach and a “dual-code literacy” model. The first principle requires explaining the functional value and historical-cultural burden of dialect forms without labeling them as “wrong”; the second principle aims to provide the student and listener with the ability to flexibly switch between the literary language and the dialect in accordance with the situation [10; pp. 83–90], [11; pp. 190–198]. This framework both increases the credibility of communication and supports the adaptive development of the norm, preserving the living diversity of the language [10; pp. 95–98], [7; pp. 248–252].

The use of dialect resources in the school environment should be implemented primarily through small modules that create a bridge between listening-discriminating, transcription and meaning-making. In the 6–8 textbook micro-module entitled “Dialect and Literary Language: Listening-Writing”, the student first hears the sound difference of minimal pairs, then briefly notes this difference with IPA symbols, and then checks the meaning in context by converting the text fragment into literary language; the goal is to establish a conscious connection between the sound level and the meaning level [5; pp. 200–206], [9; pp. 281–299]. Assessment should be formative in nature, that is, the student should not be punished for using a dialect form, but on the contrary, it should be supported by rubrics on the explanation and argumentation of code-switching appropriate to the situation (why the literary form is more appropriate in this context) [10; pp. 91–98], [11; pp. 171–182]. It is recommended that the teacher's brief guide file include a schematic explanation of the five most common phonetic features, a map of the “main isoglosses” by zone, and a 10-sentence test piece for quick classroom diagnostics; this material should be localized by region, aligned with maps from local dialect atlases [1; pp. 9–15], [3; pp. 5–8], [11; pp. 200–208].

For the sustainability of the resource base, a small open audio corpus should be created based on school-community collaboration. An informed consent form is stored with each entry, audio files are collected at 48 kHz/24-bit settings, minimal metadata such as region, age group, and communication context are included in the file names; the orthographic layer, IPA transcription, stress, and intonation contours are marked on separate layers during the annotation phase [12; pp. 1556–1559]. During the archiving and sharing phase, minimal description fields are filled in accordance with OLAC principles so that the resources remain permanently “findable”; this facilitates both inter-school exchange and secondary analysis for researchers [4; pp. 210–218]. For the terminological consistency of the annotation rules, the elementary marking of the morpho-

syntactic layer within the MAF (ISO 24611) framework is adopted; thus, the sound-text-grammar relationship can be reused in the development of future learning materials [6; pp. 12–18]. This technical design provides practical implications for the classroom while maintaining scientific accuracy: the teacher immediately explains the “auditory difference” with symbols appearing on the board, and the student relates that difference to its role in the text [5; pp. 200–206], [12; pp. 1556–1559].

The use of dialect resources in the media environment should be regulated by a separate section of the editorial stylebook. Neutrality is maintained for the news language, but the heroes of the plot can speak in their own dialect in quotes; here, the transition “dialect → literary language” in the subtitles is given with small parenthetical notes or a parallel line of writing at the bottom of the screen in order to both maintain authenticity and ensure comprehensibility for the general audience [11; pp. 200–208]. In cultural-educational programs, it is advisable to allocate a 5–7-minute section called “dialect window”: in each issue, one local phonetic sign and 3–4 lexical units are presented in context, a short explanation and a sample sentence are given for the listener, and audio clips are uploaded to the program's website [10; pp. 83–90], [1; pp. 12–15]. The metadata of material shared on digital platforms (podcasts, short videos, radio archives) should be done with the same standards, and the files should be released under open licenses; this serves both reuse and a positive attitude of the public towards the dialect [4; pp. 210–218], [12; pp. 1556–1559]. In editorial language, it is an ethical norm to avoid “caricature” and the exaggeration of phonetic features into the object of ridicule; the dialect sound gains a public reputation through informative and respectful presentation, which in turn slows down leveling and increases the prestige of local speech [11; pp. 200–208], [10; pp. 95–98].

A short in-service training module for trainers and media professionals is of particular value. The four-block, 12-hour program sequentially covers the practical foundations of IPA, isogloss mapping based on local atlases, multi-layer annotation with ELAN, and editorial ethics; each block is completed with a micro-task on real material, and participants prepare a 10-minute sample package from their region to add to their portfolio [5; pp. 200–206], [1; pp. 9–15], [12; pp. 1556–1559]. Such programs create a common frame of reference for teachers and journalists, ensure synchronous movement in the training-media-community triangle, and make the value of dialect as “social capital” collectively visible [7; pp. 248–252], [11; pp. 204–208].

Consequently, the intelligent use of dialect resources in the school and media environment serves not only to preserve cultural heritage, but also to revitalize the literary language: the difference that is heard is reflected in writing, and the difference that is reflected in writing becomes a functional value in communication; the more stable this chain is, the more flexible and rich the future of the language seems [10; pp. 95–98], [11; pp. 200–208].

Conclusion

This article has shown that the phonetic and lexical layers of dialects are not a collection of randomly distributed differences, but a systematic structure that carries the rhythm of communication, the division of meaning, and the subtle signs of social relations. The expansion and contraction of vowels, the assimilation tendencies of consonants, the shifting contours of stress and intonation, as well as local variants of everyday vocabulary enrich the general language system and create a creative reserve for the literary norm. Against the background of urbanization and mass media, leveling may seem inevitable, but a smartly organized “dual-code literacy” in schools and the media — a flexible transition between literary and local forms depending on the situation — is the healthiest way to preserve both clarity and cultural diversity. The creation of small open audio corpora, the explanatory presentation of examples with multilayer annotation, and the respectful presentation of dialect sound based on editorial ethics strengthen the public reputation of the language, strengthen auditory discrimination and awareness of stylistic choices in the younger generation. Ultimately, dialect is not just a “trace of the past” but a “reserve of the future”: we must see it as such and protect it, valuing it as a strategic asset for the longevity and expressive power of the language.

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