

# A STUDY ON THE VIOLATIONS OF VOWEL HARMONY (DISHARMONY) IN THE DIALECTS OF AZERBAIJAN TURKISH IN IRAN

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to study the violations of vowel harmony (disharmony) in the dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish in Iran. In fact, the researcher has made an attempt to find a reliable answer to the question "Are there any violations in regard with vowel harmony in the speech of the Azerbaijan Turks in Iran?" Using the necessary linguistic data, the author of the paper has attempted to find and show the violations of vowel harmony and the related causes in the above-mentioned dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish (a synchronic study). The results of the study showed that the violations are mostly observed in the loanwords, though we observe some violations caused by other languages and internal changes in some native words, too. The writer comes to the conclusion that to minimize the degree of the violations, the use of loanwords should be avoided, especially in the cases where there are equivalent native words.

**Keywords:** vowel harmony, disharmony, Dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish, loanwords, Phonology

## ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın esas amacı İranda kullanılan Azerbaycan Türkçesinin Ağızlarındaki ünlü uyumsuzluklarını incelemektir. Bildirinin yazarı acaba İranda yaşayan Azerbaycanlıların konuşmalarında uyumsuzluk varmı sorusuna cevap bulmağa çalışmıştır. Yazar, dilbilimsel verilere dayanarak, şu ağızlarda kullanılan uyumsuzlukları ortaya çıkarıp nedenlerini açıklamıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçlarına göre, bahsedilen uyumsuzluklar çoğunlukla başka dillerden alınan sözcüklerde gözüküyor, gerçi bazı yerli sözcüklerde de başka dillerin etkisi altında ya da iç değişimlere göre az olsa bile uyumsuzluk gözüküyor. Yazara göre, yabancı sözcüklerinin az kullanılması ya da mutlaka kullanılmaması uyumsuzluk derecesini azaltabilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ünlü Uyumu, Uyumsuzluk, Azerbaycan Türkçesinin Ağızları, Alıntı sözcükler, Fonoloji

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## Introduction

This article deals with the violations of vowel harmony in the dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish in Iran. Vowel Harmony (VH) is one of the distinctive characteristics of Azerbaijan Turkish, a member of Turkic languages. It plays a very important role in the speech of the dialects under discussion. VH is a phonological rule which is mainly related with the vowels, though some degrees of harmony exist between vowels and consonants and also between some consonants in these dialects. According to Zehtabi (2002, pp. 37-38) VH is divided into three types:

1. The harmony between vowels
2. The harmony between vowels and consonants
3. The harmony between consonants

Dəmirçizadə (2007, pp.104-5) suggests: *"In agglutinating languages, especially in Turkish languages such as Azerbaijan Turkish, there is a phonological rule named vowel harmony according to which the phonemes of a word, especially the vowels, assimilate with each other."*

Lass (1984) asserts: *"It is the last vowel of the root in Azerbaijan Turkish which determines the kind of the vowel of the suffix added to it. In other words, it is the vowel of the suffix which assimilates with that of the root."* For example:

əl (hand) + -Im (possessive suffix) → [əlim] (my hand),

qulax (ear) + -lAr (plural suffix) → [qulaxlar] (ears)

Carr (1993, p.248) quotes some of the characteristics of VH as follows:

1. VH may occur in the roots.
2. VH may affect the suffixes.

According to Falk (1978): *"When the vowel of the suffix assimilates with that of the root, whatever occurs is called vowel harmony. Falk names Hungarian and Turkish languages as examples of vowel harmony."*

Goldsmith (1990) asserts: *"According to vowel harmony, the vowels of a word should be of the same kind."* Lyons (1981) believes *"Vowel harmony in Turkish languages is realized on the basis of [back] and [round] features."*

Gökdağ (2006, p.79) has done a study on the dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish in Iran. He says: *"In Salmas dialect, VH is highly realized on the basis of [back] feature in the roots of the words, though some degree of violation occurs in different forms of the verbs."*

Yorgancı (2000, p.131): *"VH in Turkic languages is based on both [back] and [round] features."* The same is true in Azerbaijan Turkish. It should be mentioned, however, that in Turkey Turkish and Azerbaijan Turkish the realization of the harmony on the basis of [round] feature is rather limited. In other words, this kind of harmony is realized in these languages only when the vowels of the word belong to [back] vowels.

According to Zehtabi (2002, p.43): *"In Azerbaijan Turkish, if the vowel of the first syllable is an unround vowel (e- i- ı- a- ə) (back and front), no round vowel will be observed in the next syllable(s)." For example: a-na-mı-*

zin (our mother's), sa-tı-cı (seller), ev-lər-im-iz (our houses), əl-lər-im (my hands)

The main question of the study is "Are there any violations in regard with vowel harmony in the speech of the Azerbaijan Turks in Iran?" Clearly, we are going to know, using the collected data from the informants, if there are some violations (disharmony) in the speech of Azerbaijan Turks in Iran. We have limited the study to three Azerbaijani-inhabited states of Iran, i.e. West Azerbaijan, East Azerbaijan and Ardabil. The linguistic data have been collected from different cities, towns and villages of these states through free conversation method and the informants have been selected from among the old, male, illiterate and possibly villagers or those who have spent most of their lives in the village. The study is based on the spoken form of these dialects.

We will discuss the disharmony in three main categories:

1. The disharmony between the vowels
2. The disharmony between the vowels and consonants
3. The disharmony between the consonants

### 1. The disharmony between the vowels

It is clear that the dialects of a language may be different in some cases. This is true in regard with the realization of vowel harmony and disharmony. In some of the dialects under discussion, we observe some changes under the influence of other neighboring languages. The changes have been happened in different subfields of language such as phonology of which we may name the changes happened regarding vowel harmony.

Another matter related to phonetics and observed in most of the dialects under discussion is the tendency of the vowels /u/, /ü/ and /ı/ to sound like the vowel /i/ when occurring word-finally and used both as accusative case endings and/or a phoneme of the root. (The three vowels /u/, /ü/ and /ı/ share a distinctive feature, i.e. [+high]) As a result, the vowels /u/, /ü/ and /ı/ are pronounced as /i/, something between /i/ and /ı/. For example:

qız + -/ı/ → [qızı] (the girl) , gül + -/ü/ → [gülü] (the flower).

pul + /u/ → [pulı] (the money) (Here, /u/, /ü/ and /ı/ are used as accusative case endings).

oğru → [oğrı] (thief), ölü → [öli] (dead body), sarı → [sarı] (yellow) (Here, /u/, /ü/ and /ı/ are part of the root).

As it is observed, the strong phonological rule of vowel harmony in Azerbaijan Turkish is not realized in these words and as a result, we see disharmony in them. Regarding the reason of sounding like /i/, Ergin (1971) believes that it may occur as a result of either of the following factors:

- a. Being the final phoneme of the word
- b. Being affected by the written language

Gökdağ (2006), in his study on the dialects of Aerbaijan Turkish in Iran, says: “*In Salmas Dialect vowel harmony is realized in a high level in roots, but in different forms of the verbs we observe some violations.*” First, we are going to discuss the disharmony in verbs:

**1.1. In verbs:** It is clear that VH is very strong and stable between the roots and the Suffixes. However, in some dialects this rule is violated. Here, we will explain the disharmony in different forms of the verbs with a few examples.

**1.1. a. Present tense (real present):** The suffixes of this tense in Aerbaijan Turkish are -ir, -ır, -ur and -ür. For example:

gəlırəm (I’m coming), alıram (I’m buying), vururam (I’m hitting), gülürəm (I’m laughing).

When we add the first suffix (-ir) to the verbs with low vowels, VH is violated in the first plural person in some dialects such as Urmiya, Gulunji, Kohne Shahr, Miyandab, Ardabil, Khoy, Tabriz and Salmas:

gedirıx, ge:rux, gedyux, gederıx (We are going).

In Ardabil dialect, VH is violated in different forms of the verbs (present tense) with high vowels in the second and third singular and plural person:

Second singular person: aleysan (You’re buying), yatesan (You’re sleeping).

Second plural person: aleysuz (You’re buying), yatesuz (You’re sleeping).

Third singular person: aley (S/he is buying), yatey (S/he is sleeping).

Third plural person: aleylar (They are buying), yateylar (They are sleeping).

In this dialect, if the final phoneme of the verb (present tense) is /r/, it changes into /y/ except in the first plural person:

alıyam, aleysan, aley, alırıx, aleysuz, aleylar (buying)

yatıyam, yatesan, yatey, yatırıx, yatesuz, yateylar (sleeping)

In the first plural person of the verbs with low vowels in this dialect, VH is vilated:

gediyox (We’re going), veriyox (We’re giving).

**1.1. b. Future tense (more probable):** The suffies of this tense in Aerbaijan Turkish are -əcək and -acaq, e.g. gələcək (S/he will come.), alacaq (S/he will buy).

If we add the first suffix (-əcək) to the verbs with low vowels, VH is violated in the first and the third singular and plural person in some dialects such as Tabriz, Ahar, Miyandab, Salmas, Gulunji, Khoy and Ardabil:

First singular person: gedəcağam, gedəca: m, gedəcam (I will go).

First plural person: gedəcəyix, gedəcəğix, gedəcəyix, gedəcəyux (We will go).

Third singular person: gedəcəx (S/he will go), yiyəcəx (S/he will eat).

Third plural person: gedəcəxlar (They will go), yiyəcəxlar (They will eat).

**1.1. c. Future tense** (less probable): The suffixes of this tense in Azerbaijan Turkish are -ar and -ər, e.g. gedərəm (I may go), yazaram (I may write) Regarding VH, we observe some violations in the first plural person of this tense in some dialects such as Khoy, Salmas, Urmiya, Kohne Shahr, Tabriz, Gulunji, Maku, Ardabil, Miyandab:

gələrix, gələrix (we may come.), gedərix, gedərix (we may go.), verərix, verərix (we may give).

**1.1. d. Future in past tense:** The suffixes of this tense in Azerbaijan Turkish are -əcəkdı and -əcəqdı. When the first suffix is added to low-vowel verbs, Vh is violated in the first and second singular person and also in the first plural person in some dialects such as Ardabil, Salmas, Miyandab, Tabriz, Maku, Gulunji:

I singular person: gedəcəğdım, gedəcəğdım, gələəcəğdım (I would go).

I plural person şəxs cəm: gedəcəydıx, gedəcəydıx, gedəcəydıx (we would go).

II singular person: gedəcəğdın, gedəcəğdın (you would go).

**1.1. e. Simple past tense:** The suffixes of this tense in Azerbaijan Turkish are -dı, -dı, -du and -dü. When the suffixes -dı, -du and -dü are added to the verbs with high and round vowels, we observe disharmony in third singular person in Salmas, Marand, Gulunci, Urmiya, Maku, Kohne Shahr, Tabriz and Ardabil dialects: aldı (S/he bought), soruşdı (S/he asked), öpdı (S/he kissed).

VH is also violated when we add the first plural person suffix to the verbs with low vowels: gəldıx, (we came), geddıx (we went).

The speakers of Tabriz and Ardabil dialects add the suffix -du to both low-vowel and high-vowel verbs in the first plural person: Gördux (we saw), girdux (we went into), yedux (we ate).

In Tabriz dialect, when this suffix is added, the VH based on [round] feature is violated, e.g. aldıx (we bought), yatdıx (we slept).

In Kohne Shahr dialect, VH is violated in the third plural person, e.g. yədılar (they ate), getdılar (they went), içdılar (they drank).

**1.1. f. Narrative past tense:** The suffixes of this tense in Azerbaijan Turkish are -miş, -miş, -muş, and -müş. In the II and III singular and plural person the suffixes -ıb, ıb, -ub and -üb are used, too, e.g.

I singular and plural person: gəlmişəm (I have come), gəlmişik (we have come).

II singular and plural person: gəlmi (ş) sən, gəlibsən (you have come, one person), gəlmi (ş) siz, gəlibsiz (you have come, more than one person)

III singular and plural person: gəlibdi (S/he has come), gəlib (di) lər (they have come).

In the I plural person of this tense in low-vowel verbs, VH is violated in some dialects such as Urmiya, Salmas, Gulunji, Marand, Tabriz, Köhne Şahr, Maku, Ardabil, Miyandab, e.g. yemişix, yemişux (we have eaten), dözmüşux (we have tolerated).

**1.1. g. Durative past tense:** The suffixes of this tense in Aerbaijan Turkish are -irdi, -ırdı, -urdu, -ürdü. In the I plural person of this tense in low-vowel verbs, VH is violated in some dialects such Ardabil, Maku, Miyandab, Urmiya, Ahar, Khoy, Gulunji, Köhne Şahr, Tabriz, e.g.

yeyirdix, yiyirdix, yiyirdux, yiyərdux, iyerdix (we were eating).

görürdux, göreydux, görərdux (we were seeing).

eşidirdix, eşidərdix (we were hearing), gəlirdix, gələydux (we were coming).

In Ardabil dialect, VH is violated in I, II and III plural person in high-vowel verbs:

aleydux (we were buying), aleyduz (you were buying), aleydılar (they were buying).

**1.1. h. Past perfect tense:** The suffixes of this tense in Aerbaijan Turkish are -mişdi, -mişdi, -muşdu and -müşdü. In the I plural person of this tense in low-vowel verbs, VH is violated in some dialects such as Ardabil, Maku, Miyandab, Urmiya, Ahar, Khoy, Gulunji, Köhne Şahr, Tabriz, Salmas, e.g. görmüşdux (we had seen), yemişdix, yemişdux (we had eaten).

**1.1. i. Imperative form of the verb:** There is nnot a special suffix to make the iperative for of the verb in Aerbaijan Turkish. This form is made by adding person suffixes to the root of the verb (except in II singular person).

I şəxs tək: -ım, -im (alım, gəlim) cəm: -aq, -ək (alaq, gələk)

II şəxs tək: \_\_\_\_\_ cəm: -ın, in (alın, gəlin)

III şəxs tək: -sın, -sin (alsın, gəlsin) cəm: -sınlar, sinlər (alsınlar, gəlsinlər)

VH is violated in I plural person of low-vowel verbs in some dialects such as Salmas, Köhnə Şəhər, Təbriz, Urmiyə, Miyandab, e.g. get + -ək → gedax (let's go), gül + -aq → gülax (let's laugh).

**1.1. j. Certain form of the verb:** The suffixes of this form in Azerbaijan Turkish are -malı and -məli. This form shows the necessity of an action which will be done in future, e.g. getməliyəm (I have to go). VH is violated in

I plural person of this form in low-vowel verbs in some dialects such as Salmas, Kohne Shahr, Tabriz, Urmiya, Miyandab, Maku, Gulunji, and Ardabil, e.g. *getməliyix*, *getməliyux*, *getməliyox* (we have to go).

**1.1. k. Conditional form of the verb:** The suffixes of this form in Azerbaijan Turkish are *-sa* and *-sə*. This form shows the hapenning of an action in future due to some specific conditions, e.g. *yesəm* (if I eat). In the first plural person of this form in low-vowel verbs, VH is violated in some dialects such as Salmas, Khoy, Tabriz, Miyandab and Ardabil, e.g. *yesax* (if we eat), *getsax*, *getsox* (if we go).

In Tabriz dialect, this form is sometimes made by adding the suffix *-su* to the verb. In this case, we see disharmony in II singular and plural person in low-vowel verbs in this dialect, e.g. *getsun* (if you go, one person), *getsuz* (if you go, more than one person).

**1.2. In Nouns:** We observe some violation in the nouns in some of the dialects under discussion. Some of these nouns are native and some others are borrowed nouns, e.g.

Native nouns: *piçax*, *əyran*, *əyax*, *bizov*, *qəzmax*, *qəynana*, *qəynata*

Borrowed nouns: *ziyarət*, *radiyo*, *əzan*, *kitab*, *alim*, *İslam*, *zalim*

As we know, language change is a natural process which happens in the languages. Regarding the native nouns, we may name the internal phonetic changes as one of the reasons of change occurring as a result of different factors during time. (Internally-motivated chnges) Another reason may be the influence of other languages. It is clear that languages, especially neighboring ones, affect each other and as a result some changes occur (Externally-motivated changes) and the direction of this process is normally from more-prestigious to less-prestigious languages. It is necessary to mention that the above-mentioned native nouns are pronounced in some other dialects (especially in the villages) according to VH rules: *puçax*, *piçax*, *ayran*, *ayax*, *buzov*, *qazmax*, *qaynana* və *qaynata*. The reason may be the lack of social relationship and geographical distance between the speakers of the dialects (V. Fromkin, R. Rodman və N. Hyams).

Regarding the borrowed nouns, we may classify them in three groups:

a. The nouns which have been harmonized completely with VH rules,

e.g.

*hormət* → [hörmət]

*nəma:z* → [namaz]

*qa:ede* → [qayda]

*qa:sem* → [qasım]

*ta:yefe* → [tayfa]

*Ka:zem* → [kazım]

*a:dəm* → [adam]

*Cəva:d* → [Cavat]

*Cəbba:r* → [Cabbar]

*sa:ət* → [sahat]

*moəllem* → [məllim]

*ğəffa:r* → [qafar]

*Omər* → [Ömər]

*Ba:qer* → [bağır]

All of the preceding loanwords on the left of the arrow belong to Arabic. As we see, they are pronounced according to VH rules in Azerbaijan Turkish.

b. The nouns which have been harmonized partially with VH rules, e.g.

ketâb → [kitab]	zندان → [zindan]
Sohrâb → [Söhrab]	Hâfez → [Hâfiz]
zâlem → [zâlim]	Eslâm → [İslam]

c. The nouns which are accidentally harmonized with the rules of VH, e.g.

Heydər (Heydar), məsdər (masdar), səfir (safir), vəkil (vakil), həsrət (hasrat)

**1.3. In Adjectives and Adverbs:** As mentioned before, most of the violations in regard with VH are observed in some verb forms (tenses) and some native and borrowed nouns. Generally speaking, disharmony is not observed in adjectives and adverbs and if we see disharmony in some adjectives and adverbs, they mostly belong to loanwords, e.g. bevac (changed form of Farsi [bi: vagt]), beçara (changed form of Farsi [bi: çare]), nəvac (changed form of Farsi [çe vəgt]).

## 2. The disharmony between the vowels and consonants

As we mentioned earlier, in addition to the harmony between vowels, we observe some degree of harmony between the vowels and the consonants, too, which is not applied widely in these dialects. In this part, we will try to show these violations along with the related causes. (Some of the given data are native and some are loan words.) Examples (group A):

qərqə	qərdəş	qərqiş	qəyin
nəği	nəğil	əğil	təği
xəmir	şəxdə	pəxil	təxdə
kal	kor	kəfdar	kamal

According to the examples, there is no harmony between the consonants /k/, /ğ/, /x/ and /q/ and the following/preceding vowels. The disharmony observed in these words is the result of vowel change. It should be mentioned that some of the above-mentioned words are pronounced based on VH rules in some dialects, e.g. qarqa, qardaş, nəğil, şaxda and taxda. Examples (group B):

yeməx	işməx	gedəx	əkəx
verəx	yiyəx	içəx	görəx

The words in group B all end to the consonant /x/ and are either the imperative form of the verb, e.g. verəx (I plural person), or the infinitive form of the verb, e.g. yeməx. Here, we observe disharmony between /x/ and the preceding vowel /ə/. As it is clear, the cause of disharmony in these words is the change from /k/ to /x/. Təkin and Ölməz (1999): "In some dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish, the consonant /k/ changes into /x/ when it is

*followed by a low vowel.*" In fact, a mid consonant changes into a back one. In some dialects, the vowel before /x/, i.e. /ə/ has changed into /a/, e.g. yemax, verax, etc and in this case the harmony between the vowels is violated.

### 3. The disharmony between the consonants

The assimilation between the consonants is not widely applied in these dialects. So, in most of the words in these dialects, no harmony is observed between the consonants. Here, we present some words which show disharmony between the consonants based on [voice] feature:

arpa	fır <u>ç</u> a	pa <u>l</u> cıx	ə <u>l</u> çə
yar <u>p</u> ax	da <u>ş</u> qa	kə <u>s</u> mə	pa <u>l</u> cıx

As we see, the adjacent consonants (underlined) in the presented words are not assimilated on the basis of [voice] feature, i.e. one is voiceless and the other is voiced, e.g. in arpa, /r/ is voiced and /p/ is voiceless.

### Results and discussion

The pronunciation of the words in these dialects is mainly based on vowel harmony and if it is removed, it will certainly be very difficult and even impossible to speak these dialects, e.g. pronouncing the word dəvə (camel) as either dəva or davə is both unnatural and difficult. In addition to the harmony between the vowels of these dialects, we observe some degree of harmony between vowels and some consonants and also between the consonants.

However, some degree of disharmony (between the vowels, between vowels and consonants and finally between the consonants) is observed in some of the dialects of Azerbaijan Turkish in Iran. As mentioned earlier, most of the disharmony between the vowels is observed among different forms (tenses) of the verbs and in the nouns (native and loanwords).

Regarding the loanwords, the degree of the influence of VH differs in different words, so in some of them where VH is applied partially, some degree of disharmony is observed.

In regard with the causes of disharmony in these dialects observed mainly in some verb forms and some native nouns, we may site two causes: internally-motivated and externally-motivated changes. The first type of change is a natural process which happens in the languages as a result of different factors during time. The second type of change may happen under the influence of other languages especially neighboring and/or prestigious languages. It is clear that languages, affect each other and as a result some changes occur in them.

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