



ARTICLE

Comparison constructions in two Northern Talyshi dialects

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In memory of Zinaida Tabakyan

Abstract

This article examines the comparison constructions in two Northern Talyshi varieties: in Anbarāni, used in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and the Northern Talyshi dialects spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan. These constructions have been poorly studied in previous research dealing with this North-western Iranian language and this article aims to fill that gap. In contrast with a number of Western Iranian languages, Northern Talyshi (and the Talyshi language in general) does not have special morphological markers for expressing the degrees of comparison. The comparative grades are marked syntactically using various adpositions and function words. Having long been under the influence of neighbouring languages such as Persian and Azerbaijani, both Anbarāni and the Talyshi dialects spoken in the present-day Republic of Azerbaijan have been affected by these languages at some level in the ways to make comparison.

Introduction

Talyshi¹ is a North-western Iranian language that is spoken in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan. The land of Talysh is located in the south-western region of the Caspian Sea and generally stretches from the south-east to the north for more than 150 kilometres.² In the Republic of Azerbaijan, most Talyshis live in a region extending from the western bank of the Vilaj River in the north to the Iranian border in the south and from the Caspian Sea in the east to the Iranian border in the west—that is, in the five districts of Āstārā, Lankarān, Lerik, Māsāly, and Yardymly that include over 350 Talysh villages and towns.³ As for the Islamic Republic of Iran, Talysh people compactly dwell mainly in the provinces of Gilān (in the counties of Āstārā, Tālesh, Rezvānshahr, Māsāl, and Fuman) and Ardabil (mainly in Namin county as well as in

¹ In my transcription of Northern Talyshi here, I almost entirely follow the transliteration system used by Wolfgang Schulze in his work *Northern Talysh* (W. Schulze, *Northern Talysh* (Muenchen, 2000)). It is worth noting that the symbols *a* and *ā* differ in quality rather than in length and denote front and back open vowels, respectively. The NT *ə* is a mid-high central vowel that should not be confused with the front *a* in Azerbaijani (and NT texts written in the Latin Azerbaijani alphabet) denoted by the same symbol. The other letters used here have their usual values (*č* = *ç*, *ǰ* = *ğ*, *x* = *x*, *š* = *ş*, *ž* = *j*). The only difference between the system employed here and Schulze's work is that I use *j* as the Latin Azerbaijani *c* [dʒ], whereas Schulze represents it as *ç*.

² G. Asatryan and H. Borjjan, 'Talış and the Talishis (the state of research)', *Iran and the Caucasus* 9.1 (2005), p. 43.

³ J. Clifton et al., *Sociolinguistic Situation of the Talysh in Azerbaijan* (SIL International, 2005), p. 3.

Khālkhāl and Bileh Savār). The Talysh language includes a wide range of dialects, which are traditionally divided into three main groups, namely Northern, Central, and Southern, based on phonological, grammatical, and lexical factors.⁴ Northern Talyshi is spoken almost exclusively in the Republic of Azerbaijan, but it is also used in the neighbouring parts of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the Anbarān district of Ardabil, the only area in the Islamic Republic of Iran where the Northern dialect of Talyshi dominates in the social domain in more than one neighbouring village.⁵ Thus, Northern Talyshi in turn splits up into several clusters; Talyshi spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan is divided into four main groups: dialects of Lankarān, Āstārā, Lerik, and Māsāly.⁶ There are a number of insignificant phonological, morphological, and lexical differences between these dialects.⁷ Anbarāni is the southernmost dialect of the Northern group and, as already mentioned, is a Northern Talyshi variety found in Iran. Anbarāni and the Northern Talyshi dialects of the Republic of Azerbaijan are completely mutually intelligible but, since they have been divided between two countries and thus have long been under the strong influence of Persian and Azerbaijani languages,⁸ the phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical dissimilarities between Anbarāni and Azerbaijani Talyshi are quite considerable, including those of the comparison constructions, which will be further discussed.

The aim of this article is the synchronic comparative description of positive, comparative, superlative, equative, and simulative constructions in Anbarāni and the Talyshi dialects of Azerbaijan. Comparison is an act of examining two or more items to reveal the similarities and differences between them. Stassen defines a comparative construction: ‘a construction in a natural language counts as a comparative construction (and will therefore be taken into account in the typology) if that construction has the semantic function of assigning a graded (i.e., non-identical) position on a predicative scale to two (possibly complex) objects.’⁹ Traditionally, in grammar, four degrees of comparison of the adjective are differentiated and the labels for these morphological forms of the adjective are also applied to the whole comparison construction in which they are used: positive degree, equative degree, comparative degree, and superlative degree.¹⁰

To describe the comparison constructions in the two varieties of Northern Talyshi, this article mainly adopts the following terminology used by Dixon:

COMPAREE—that which is being compared,
 STANDARD of comparison—what the comparee is being compared against,
 PARAMETER of comparison—the property of comparison,
 INDEX of comparison—marks the degree of presence or absence of a property in the comparee, and

⁴ See M. Bazin, *Le Tālech: Une Région Ethnique au Nord de l’Iran*, tome 2 (Paris, 1980); D. Stilo, ‘The Tati language group in the sociolinguistic context of Northwestern Iran and Transcaucasia’, *Iranian Studies* 14.3–4 (1981); E. Yarshater, ‘The Taleshi of Asālem’, *Studia Iranica* 25.1 (1996).

⁵ D. Paul, ‘A comparative dialectal description of Iranian Taleshi’ (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Manchester, 2011), p. 18.

⁶ L. Pireyko, ‘Talyšskij jazyk. Dialekty Tati Irana’, in *Osnovy iranskogo jazykoznanija: Novoiranskije jazyki: severo-zapadnaja grupa*, (eds.) Vasily Abaev, Mikhail Bogolyubov, and Vera Rastorgueva (Moscow, 1991), p. 91.

⁷ See L. Pireyko, *Talyšsko-russkij slovar’* (Moscow, 1976), p. 351.

⁸ Bazin describes the population of Anbarān as bilingual, gradually becoming trilingual: ‘Nowadays, all this Tāleš population is bilingual, speaking both *tāleši* and Turkish, and increasingly becoming trilingual by using Persian as well’ (M. Bazin, ‘ANBARĀN’, *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2012, available at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anbaran> (accessed 24 October 2023)).

⁹ L. Stassen, *Comparative and Universal Grammar* (Oxford, 1985), p. 24.

¹⁰ Y. Treis, ‘Comparative construction: an introduction’, in *On the Expression of Comparison: Contributions to the Typology of Comparative Constructions from Lesser-Known Languages*, Special Issue of *Linguistic Discovery* 16.1 (2018), p. iii.

MARK of the grammatical function of the STANDARD—marker of the grammatical function of the standard.^{11,12}

The data

The data on Anbarāni (AnbTal) upon which this article is based were recorded during fieldwork conducted between 2015 and 2017 in the former village of Aminjān¹³ (Ardabil Province, Namin County, Anbarān District). Example sentences were drawn from a corpus including 30 texts (folktales, anecdotes, translations from Persian, and personal narratives) and a sentence list consisting of more than 300 sentences. As for the Northern Talyshi dialects spoken in the Republic of Azerbaijan (AzTal), due to the impossibility of carrying out fieldwork in the area in which these dialects are spoken, data gathered through modern technologies for remote communication, as well as a number of published language materials such as fairy tales miscellanea and works of Talyshi writers and also newspapers and texts from Talyshi-language news portals, were taken into account.

Background of the informants

My main informant from Anbarān was Sinā Moradzādeh—a 20-year-old student at the University of Mohaghegh Ardabili, who had perfect command over both his mother tongue and Persian, and helped me to also write down and transcribe the language material provided by other informants; Safā Ghamkhāri—a 55-year-old bilingual man (Talyshi and Persian) working as an independent contractor (*peymānkār*) and having a high-school education; Ruhangiz Ehsāni—an 81-year-old trilingual woman (Talyshi, Persian, and Turkic) without a school education; and Shaghāyegh Ghoreyshi—a 19-year-old bilingual girl (Talyshi and Persian) and a student at the Ardabil University of Medical Sciences.

Two of my informants of AzTal with whom I worked through video technologies for remote communication preferred to remain anonymous. Both of them are male, bilingual, and fluent in Talyshi and Azerbaijani. One has a high-school education and the second has a master's degree and currently teaches in a university.

Northern Talyshi: morphosyntactic background

Talyshi is both genealogically and structurally very close to the highly diversified Tati languages spoken in the Iranian plateau with which it is unified into one Tatic group.¹⁴ Being one of the North-western Iranian languages that descended from an Old Iranian dialect (or dialects) that was already differentiated from Old Persian (a South-western Iranian language, the ancestor of Modern Persian) in its earliest attested form in the sixth century BC, one can assume a time-depth of some 2,800 years in the North-western

¹¹ R. M. W. Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. 3: *Further Grammatical Topics* (Oxford, 2012), p. 344.

¹² For equatives and similatives, adopting the terminology used by Haspelmath et al., MARK is replaced by STANDARD-MARKER.

¹³ The Anbarān region consists of two rural districts (dehestān): the dehestān of Anbarān, which includes the villages of Anbarān-e Olyā, Qeshlāq-e Pelāzir, and Qeshlāq-e Sarābād, and the dehestān of Minābād, consisting of the villages of Jeyd, Kalash, Mirzānaq, and Minābād. The Anbarān region has a town under the same name, which was created in 1998 by uniting the villages of Anbarān-e Soflā and Aminjān (see Bazin, 'ANBARĀN'). It should be noted that under the term 'Anbarāni', the Northern Talyshi dialect spoken throughout the Anbarān region is considered; however, this dialect itself includes a number of subdialects, which have some slight differences in terms of both phonology and grammar. This article is mainly based on the dialect of the former village of Aminjān, but the subdialects of other villages in the region have also been studied.

¹⁴ Stilo, 'Tati language group', pp. 138–41.

Iranian/South-western Iranian split, thus making Talyshi, in general terms, much further apart from Persian than English is from Swedish or French from Romanian.¹⁵

Here, I briefly introduce the salient morphosyntactic features of Northern Talyshi that will help the readers to have a better understanding of the main topic of the article and clarify the individual examples.

Nouns in Northern Talyshi possess the following grammatical categories: number, case, and definiteness–indefiniteness. The grammatical descriptions of Northern Talyshi are at variance with the number of cases in this language. Some authors believe that Northern Talyshi has two cases: direct and oblique,¹⁶ while Boris Miller distinguishes three cases for Northern Talyshi: direct, oblique, and ablative cases.¹⁷ Further, Schulze includes the vocative amongst the cases in Northern Talyshi.¹⁸ This article follows the two-case system to describe the comparison constructions in Northern Talyshi. Both in AnbTal and AzTal, nouns in direct case have zero ending. The oblique case ending is *-ə* in AnbTal and *-i* in AzTal.¹⁹ Whereas in AzTal, in most dialects, *-i* usually changes into *-y* when attached to vowel-ending nouns (e.g. *kay ba* ‘the house’s door’ and *kinay moa* ‘the girl’s mother’), in AnbTal, in this case, the distinction between the direct and oblique cases vanishes. One of the main functions of the oblique case in Northern Talyshi is the expression of genitive—that is, marking a person or thing that possesses someone or something (see examples (16), (32), (33), (42), (44), and (46)). It also serves to mark the definite direct object in accusative constructions (as seen in examples (1) and (2)) and the agent in ergative constructions (as seen in examples (6) and (7)):

(1) *hā ruž a merd-i čaš kārde=da=m* (AzTal)
 every day DEM man-OBL eye do=in=COP.1SG
 ‘Every day I wait for that man’

(2) *hərs āngivin-ə hā=na=y čayo hət=na=y* (AnbTal)
 bear honey-OBL eat=in=COP.3SG then sleep=in=COP.3SG
 ‘The bear eats the honey, then sleeps’

Due to the limited number of cases, the syntactic relationship between words in sentences in Northern Talyshi is conveyed using helper words, including prepositions (*čə* ‘from, of’, *ba* ‘to’, *bo* ‘for’, *be* ‘without’, *de/da* ‘with’, etc.) and postpositions (*ku* ‘from’, *sa* ‘on’, *ada* ‘in’ (AzTal)/*anda* ‘in, with’ (AnbTal), etc.). Most of these adpositions are used with nouns in the oblique case²⁰ (see examples (12) and (13)). The core postpositions are enclitics²¹ while the prepositions are used independently. Note that, while all prepositions never

¹⁵ D. Stilo, ‘Two sets of mobile verbal person agreement markers in the Northern Talyshi language’, in *Aspects of Iranian Linguistics*, (eds.) Simin Karimi, Donald Stilo, and Vida Samiiian (Newcastle, 2008), p. 364.

¹⁶ Pireyko, *Talyško-russkij slovar*, p. 25, Pireyko, ‘Talyšskij jazyk’, p. 127; G. Windfuhr, ‘Cases’, in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 5 (Costa Mesa, 1992), p. 29.

¹⁷ B. Miller, *Talyšskij jazyk* (Moscow, 1953), p. 88.

¹⁸ Schulze, *Northern Talysh*, p. 17.

¹⁹ B. Miller (*Talyšskij jazyk*, p. 79) claims that the oblique case ending derives from Old Persian demonstrative particle *hya*. According to W. Schulze (*Northern Talysh*, p. 17), it corresponds to Old Persian *-ahyā* (genitive singular of *a*-stems), which in turn derives from Old Iranian case ending **-ahya* (Windfuhr, ‘Cases’, p. 29).

²⁰ In AnbTal, the postpositions *ku* and *sa* are used with personal pronouns and can attach either to the oblique forms (for 1SG and 3SG, e.g. *mānəsa* ‘on me’, *avəku* ‘from him/her’) or to direct forms (*amaku* ‘from us’, *avonsa* ‘on them’). In AzTal, however, these postpositions do not attach to personal pronouns, but instead attach to possessive pronouns (e.g. *čəməku* ‘from me’, *əštəsa* ‘on you’, *čəvonku* ‘from them’, *čəysa* ‘on him/her’, etc.).

²¹ D. Paul, following Dixon, calls them ‘case clitics’ (for more details, see Paul, ‘Comparative dialectal description’, p. 158).

attach to nouns, they can be used either proclitically or independently with personal, demonstrative, and reflexive pronouns, e.g. *bamə* or *ba mə* ‘to me’, *bašma* or *ba šəma* ‘to you’ (PL.), *bay* or *ba ay* ‘to it, to him/her’ *čəm* or *čə əm* ‘of this’, *ča* or *čə a* ‘of that’, *day* or *de ay* ‘with it, with him/her’, *dešta* or *de əšta* ‘with his/her own...’, *bošta* or *bo əšta* ‘for his/her own...’, etc.

The Northern Talyshi personal pronouns differentiate three persons in the singular and plural, which are as follows: 1SG. *āz*, 2SG. *tə*, 3SG. *av*, 1PL. *ama*, 2PL. *šəma*, 3PL. *avon* (AzTal)/*avun* (AnbTal). These are the forms in the direct case. The first and third singulars also have oblique forms (1SG. *mə* and 3SG. *ay* in AzTal, 1SG. *mān/mānə* and 3SG. *avə* in AnbTal). The direct and oblique forms for the rest of the persons and numbers are the same.

AzTal has also developed secondary accusative forms that are not found in AnbTal. AzTal secondary accusative forms of personal pronouns are: 1SG. *məni*, 2SG. *təni*, 3SG. *avi*, 1PL. *amani*, 2PL. *šəmani*, 3PL. *avoni*. They act only as direct objects in accusative structures:

- (3) *avon amani vinde=da=ni-n*
 PP.3PL PP.1PL.ACC see=in=NEG-COP.3PL
 ‘They do not see us’

The direct forms of personal pronouns have a wide range of syntactic roles, whereas the first and third singular oblique forms mainly function as agents in ergative constructions (see examples (29), (30), and (60)). Northern Talyshi also has possessive pronouns, namely 1SG. *čəmən* (AnbTal)/*čəmə*, 2SG. *əštə*, 3SG. *čavə* (AnbTal)/*čay* (AzTal), 1PL. *čəma*, 2PL. *šəma*, 3PL. *čəvun* (AnbTal)/*čəvon* (AzTal). These are analytic forms consisting of the preposition *čə* and personal pronouns (the oblique forms for the first and third singulars).²² The possessive pronouns always precede the nouns modified by them, are invariable, do not express the grammatical number of the nouns they qualify, and are only used as attributes (see examples (10), (11), (17), (20), (38), (39), (44), (45), (49), (55), and (61)).

In Northern Talyshi, the verb stands out among the parts of speech for its richness and variety of grammatical categories and forms; it has categories of mood, tense, person, number, and voice. The salient characteristics of the NT verbal system include the opposition between the ‘present’ and ‘past’ stems,²³ the contrastive roles of suffixes and floating clitics,²⁴ and tense-sensitive alignment.²⁵

The morphosyntax of Northern Talyshi is characterised by a complicated split system based on the North-west Iranian type of accusativity/ergativity dichotomy.^{26,27} The term ‘ergativity’ is broadly used to describe a ‘grammatical pattern in which the subject of intransitive clause [S] is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause [O],

²² B. Miller suggests that the second singular and plural forms of possessive pronouns are also fused forms of *čə* and personal pronouns (*əšta* < *čə + tə*, *šəma* < *čə + šəma*). In the case of the second plural, the articulatory proximity of *š* and *č* has caused the latter to become inaudible (Miller, *Talyškij jazyk*, p. 115).

²³ For detailed information on the morphology of the verb in Northern Talyshi and especially the distribution of stem forms over the verb paradigm, see S. Kaye, ‘Morphomic stems in the Northern Talyshi verb: diachrony and synchrony’, in *The Boundaries of Pure Morphology*, (eds.) Silvio Cruschina, Martin Maiden, and John Charles Smith (Oxford, 2013), pp. 181–208.

²⁴ See Stilo, ‘Two sets’.

²⁵ See Paul, ‘Comparative dialectal description’, chapter 4.

²⁶ Schulze, *Northern Talysh*, p. 98.

²⁷ For information on the ergativity in Iranian languages in general and the course of its historical changes, see L. Pireyko, *Osnovnye voprosy ergativnosti na material indoiranskyx jazykov* (Moscow, 1968); T. Jügel, *Die Entwicklung Der Ergativkonstruktion Im Alt- Und Mitteliranischen: Eine Korpusbasierte Untersuchung Zu Kasus, Kongruenz Und Satzbau: 21 (Iranica)* (Wiesbaden, 2015); B. Scheucher, ‘Ergativity in new West Iranian’, in *Essays on Typology of Iranian Languages*, (eds.) Alireza Korangy and Behrooz Mahmoodi-Bakhtiari (Berlin/Boston, 2019).

and differently from a transitive subject [A]'.²⁸ Northern Talyshi has what has been called split ergativity—that is, some constructions use the ergative syntax and morphology, while others display an accusative pattern. The ergative construction is limited to transitive past-perfective environments (i.e. clauses in which the predicate is in one of the following tenses: past simple, present perfect, or past perfect). All other intransitive or transitive non-past-perfective forms trigger accusative marking. In this case, the subjects of intransitive verbs and the subjects of transitive verbs form a morphosyntactic unity in the way that both are marked by the same case (direct case). The direct object of the transitive verb, however, is distinguished from the subject by the oblique case (which is traditionally called 'accusative')²⁹:

(4) **Maryam** ba ka še=da (intransitive sentence) (AzTal)
 Maryam to house go=in
 'Maryam is going home'

(5) **Maryam** ba-y okārde=da (transitive sentence) (AzTal)
 Maryam door-OBL open=in
 'Maryam opens the door'

In the NT ergative constructions, the agent [A] of the verb is in the oblique case, the direct object [O] is in the direct case, and the number and person of the agent are expressed by enclitic pronouns³⁰:

(6) a šit-ə avun=əš kəšt=e (AnbTal)
 DEM madman-OBL PP.3PL=ENC.3SG kill=COP.3SG
 'That madman killed them'

(7) **žen-i** čāyxona ba=š okārd=e (AzTal)
 woman-OBL teahouse door=ENC.3SG open=COP.3SG
 'The woman opened the teahouse's door'

The placement of the enclitic pronouns displays great variety in NT and can be detached from the verb and attached to any component part of a sentence except the agent itself (see example (30), in which the enclitic pronoun is attached to the direct object, or (60), in which it is attached to the word *ğadar*; however, in example (61), it remains in the verb).

Adjectives in Northern Talyshi: the positive degree of comparison

Adjectives in the Northern Talyshi dialects lack the grammatical categories of case, number, and gender, as well as the category of definiteness or indefiniteness. Northern Talyshi adjectives can be divided into two groups in terms of their forms: **simple** and **complex** adjectives. **Simple adjectives** are root words in their own right and do not have prefixes

²⁸ R. M. W. Dixon, *Ergativity* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 1.

²⁹ See Scheucher, 'Ergativity in New West Iranian', p. 6.

³⁰ The NT enclitic pronouns are: 1SG. -əm, 2SG. -ə (AzTal)/-e/-ə (AnbTal), 3SG. -əš, 1PL. -əmon (AzTal)/-əmun (AnbTal), 2PL. -on (AzTal)/-en (AnbTal), 3PL. -əšon (AzTal)/-əšun (AnbTal). For more details about the functions of the enclitic pronouns, see H. Avchyan, 'Enclitic pronouns in the Anbarāni dialect of Talyshi', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Studies*, 2.1 (2022), pp. 129–35.

or suffixes, such as *yol* ‘big’, *māhubub* (AnbTal)/*rečīn* (AzTal) ‘beautiful’, *tərš* ‘sour’, *sərāf* ‘fat’, etc. **Complex adjectives** are split into two groups in their turn: **derived** and **compound adjectives**. **Derived adjectives** are formed chiefly from nouns and other adjectives by adding various suffixes and prefixes. The main affixes to form derived adjectives in both varieties of Northern Talyshi are as follows:

-in	<i>səgīn</i> ‘stony’, <i>gāmin</i> ‘sad’
-mānd	<i>xaymānd</i> ‘kind’, <i>zumānd</i> ‘powerful’
-li	<i>gadali</i> ‘small’
be-	<i>bevafo</i> (AnbTal) / <i>bebafo</i> (AzTal) ‘unfaithful’, <i>beāva</i> ‘cloudless’
no-	<i>nodon</i> ‘ignorant’, <i>noxas</i> ‘sick’, <i>novarz</i> ‘uncomfortable’

Compound adjectives are formed by combining different adjectives, nouns, verb stems, numerals, and pronouns as follows:

adjective + noun (or vice versa)	<i>šinaxun</i> (<i>šin</i> ‘sweet’ + <i>xun</i> ‘blood’) ‘pretty, cute’, <i>dəlṅām</i> (<i>dəl</i> ‘heart’ + <i>nām</i> ‘soft’) ‘kind-hearted’
numeral + noun (+ suffix)	<i>dətaraf</i> (<i>də</i> ‘two’ + <i>taraf</i> ‘side’) ‘two-sided’, <i>čoləngin</i> (AzTal) (<i>čo</i> ‘four’ + <i>ləng</i> ‘foot’ + <i>-in</i>) ‘quadrupedal, four-footed’
noun + verb stem	<i>dəlasut</i> (<i>dəl</i> ‘heart’ + <i>sute</i> ‘to burn’) ‘good-natured’, <i>gonağdo</i> (<i>gonağ</i> ‘guest’ + <i>doe</i> ‘to give’) ‘hospitable’
pronoun + noun (+ suffix)	<i>əmružna</i> (<i>əm</i> ‘this’ + <i>ruž</i> ‘day’ + <i>-na</i>) ‘today’s, modern’, <i>hətarafin</i> (AnbTal)/ <i>hərtarafin</i> (<i>hə(r)</i> ‘every’ + <i>taraf</i> ‘side’ + <i>-in</i>) ‘comprehensive, all-round’

Attributive adjectives describe a characteristic or an attribute of the noun or the noun phrase that they modify. In the Northern Talyshi dialects, attributive adjectives precede their head and are normally marked by the attributive marker *-a*, such as *māhububa kina* (AnbTal)/*rečīna kina* (AzTal) ‘beautiful girl’, *šina āngə* ‘sweet grapes’, *tāta āš* ‘hot soup’, *yola ka* ‘big house’, etc.³¹

Adjectives with a predicative sense, hence the positive construction (e.g. A is big) has the construction of noun + adjective + copula:

- (8) *ka yol=e* (AnbTal, AzTal)
house big=COP.3SG
‘The house is big’

In the positive degree of the comparative construction, attributive and predicative adjectives can modify the same noun:

- (9) *yol-a ka sipi=y* (AnbTal)
big-ATTR house white=COP.3SG
‘The big house is white’
- (10) *čəmə gada zoa vey āgəlmānd=e* (AzTal)
POSS.1SG little boy much smart=COP.3SG
‘My little boy is very smart’

³¹ When the adjective ends with a vowel, the attributive marker is usually omitted, e.g. *gada ka* ‘small house’, *siyu mašu* (AnbTal)/*siyo mašo* (AzTal) ‘black shoe’, etc. Adjectives ending with *-i* normally take the suffix *-a*, e.g. *gadalia zua* (AnbTal)/*gadalia zoa* (AzTal) ‘little boy’, *ruania gužd* ‘fatty meat’, etc.

In AnbTal and AzTal, the positive degree of the comparative construction has exactly the same structure.

Comparative constructions

Adjectival comparative constructions

The Northern Talyshi comparative construction of superiority (e.g. A is bigger than B) is mono-clausal—the COMPAREE and STANDARD are expressed by noun phrases whose head is a noun or a personal/demonstrative pronoun, with the PARAMETER as a copula complement. Both AnbTal and AzTal normally have zero (\emptyset) in the INDEX slot. As for the MARK of the standard of comparison, all Northern Talyshi dialects use a number of postpositions and prepositions or their combination.

In both AnbTal and AzTal, the main postposition functioning as the MARK of the STANDARD in the comparative construction is *sa*³² ‘on’:

- (11) *čama ka šəma ka=sa yol=e* (AnbTal)
 POSS.1PL house POSS.2PL house=on big=COP.3SG
 ‘Our house is bigger than your house’

- (12) *Maryam Šāhnoz-i=sa āğəlmānd=e* (AzTal)
 Maryam Šāhnoz-OBL=on smart=COP.3SG
 ‘Maryam is smarter than Shahnoz’

Another postposition used in both the dialects for marking the STANDARD is the postposition *ku*³³ ‘from’. In AzTal, the standard marked by it is often preceded by the preposition *čə*³⁴:

- (13) *Ali Ahmad-ə=ku yol=e* (AnbTal)
 Ali Ahmad-OBL=from tall=COP.3SG
 ‘Ali is taller than Ahmad’

- (14) *əmə bānd čəa bānd-i=ku bārz=e* (AzTal)
 DEM mountain from=DEM mountain-OBL=from high=COP.3SG
 ‘This mountain is higher than that mountain’

In AzTal, there are two additional ways of marking the STANDARD that are not found in Anbarāni. The first is the occasional use of the postposition *ada*³⁵ ‘in’ as the MARK:

³² The postposition *sa* ‘on, on top of’ has a nominal origin; it derives from the noun *sa* ‘head’ (< OIr. *sarah-). In both AnbTal and AzTal, besides its role as a postposition, it is used as a noun.

³³ According to B. Miller, the postposition *ku* ‘from’ has a nominal origin from the noun *ku* ‘place’ (Miller, *Talyškij jazyk*, p. 78). Daniel Paul states that in AzTal, *ku* ‘has word-level status as a nominal meaning “place,” in addition to its role as a postposition’ (Paul, ‘Comparative dialectal description’, p. 158), but I have never come across such a usage of this word nor do any of the main dictionaries of Northern Talyshi define *ku* as ‘place’ (F. Aboszoda, *English-Talishi Dictionary* (Muenchen, 2012); Pireyko, *Talyško-russkij slovar’*; F. Aboszoda, *Russko-talyškij slovar’* (Muenchen, 2012); B. Miller, *Talyškije teksty* (Moscow, 1930)).

³⁴ The preposition *čə* goes back to OIr. *hačā- ‘from’ (> New Persian *az*) (V. Rastorgueva and D. Edelman, *Étimologičeskij slovar’ iranskix jazykov* (Moscow, 2007), p. 301). This preposition is frequently used in AzTal, whereas its usage in AnbTal is sporadic. In fact, it is not even mentioned in the works dedicated to Iranian Talyshi, including Anbarāni (Paul, ‘Comparative dialectal description’; R. Amiriān-Budālālu, *Guyeš-e Tāleši-ye Anbarān-e Ardabil [Talyshi dialect of Anbarān of Ardabil]* (Hashtpar, 2005)).

³⁵ The postposition *ada* (AzTal) derives from OIr. *antar ‘in, among’ (> New Persian *dar*). The corresponding form in AnbTal is *anda* ‘in, with’, but it is not used in the constructions of comparison.

- (15) əm sef a sef=ada šin=e³⁶ (AzTal)
 DEM apple DEM apple=in sweet=COP.3SG
 ‘This apple is sweeter than that apple’

The second option for marking the STANDARD, which is more commonly used, can be viewed as another variation of the construction with the MARK *sa* that was previously discussed, but it also involves the use of the compound preposition *basa* ‘on, onto’ before the STANDARD:

- (16) Lānkon-i ğala ba-sa Boku ğala=sa dəžd=e (AzTal)
 Lankarān-OBL castle to-on Baku castle=on big=COP.3SG
 ‘The castle of Lankarān is bigger than the castle of Baku’

It is interesting that Anbarāni normally does not use an INDEX but, when the STANDARD and its MARK are omitted in an appropriate discourse context, the PARAMETER obligatorily takes the INDEX *-tar*,³⁷ borrowed from the Persian language³⁸:

- (17) čəmān kitub jāleb ni.
 POSS.1SG book interesting COP.3SG.NEG
 əštə kitub jāleb-tar=e (AnbTal)
 POSS.2SG book interesting-CMPR=COP.3SG
 ‘My book is not interesting. Your book is more interesting’

- (18) əm vəl-un māhbub-tar=in (AnbTal)
 DEM flower-PL beautiful-CMPR = COP.3PL
 ‘These flowers are more beautiful’

³⁶ Miller, *Talyškij jazyk*, p. 73.

³⁷ In Anbarāni, the Persian comparative suffix *-tar* is very rarely used as the INDEX of the normal comparative construction, when the STANDARD and the MARK are present. In my text corpus, it is found only once in the following sentence:

- (i) ğahva čāy-ə=sa tel-tar=e
 coffee tea-OBL=on bitter-CMPR=COP.3SG
 ‘Coffee is bitterer than tea’

³⁸ In the Persian language, when two items are being compared, the suffix *-tar* is affixed to an adjective in the predicate position, and the word *az* ‘from’ follows the item being compared and precedes the standard of comparison (see Shahrzad Mahootian, *Persian* (London/New York, 1997), p. 260). Examples (17), (18), and (19) translated into Persian would respectively be:

- (ii) Ketāb-e man jāleb nist. Ketab-e to
 book-EZ PP.1SG interesting NEG.COP.3SG book-EZ PP.2SG
 jāleb-tar ast (NewP)
 interesting-CMPR COP.3SG

- (iii) in gol-hā zibā-tar-and (NewP)
 DEM flower-PL beautiful-CMPR-COP.3PL

- (iv) na, in otāğ kučak-tar, vali rāhat-tar ast (NewP)
 no, DEM room small-CMPR but comfortable-CMPR COP.3SG

- (19) ne, əm ituğ gada-tar=e, vali
 no DEM room small-CMPR=COP.3SG but
 rahat-tar=e (AnbTal)
 comfortable-CMPR=COP.3SG
 ‘No, this room is smaller, but more comfortable’

Examples (18) and (19) were drawn from two different personal narratives of two of the informants. In the first narrative, the informant speaks of roses and says that he does not like them. Then he states that he loves daisies a lot: ‘These flowers are more beautiful.’ As for example (19), it was stated in response to my statement: ‘Surely, that big room is yours, and this small one is your grandson’s’ when the other informant was showing his house and describing it.

In analogical appropriate discourse contexts in AzTal as well, the standard can be omitted, and the words *haniyan* ‘even more’ and *tikayan* ‘a little more’ are used as INDEXES marking the PARAMETER:

- (20) šəma vazyat haniyan čok=e (AzTal)
 POSS.2PL situation even.more good=COP.3SG
 ‘Your situation is better’

- (21) a otāğ tikayan rušin=e (AzTal)
 DEM room a.little.more bright=COP.3SG
 ‘That room is a little brighter’

As previously mentioned, in both AnbTal and AzTal, the comparative construction normally lacks the INDEX, but the words *ve/vey* (AzTal), *vəyi, xayli* (AnbTal) ‘much, a lot’ are found to be used sporadically in the constructions under discussion:

- (22) ki əštə=sa vey čok=e? (AzTal)
 who POSS.2SG=on much good=COP.3SG
 ‘Who is better than you?’

- (23) əm film a film-ə=sa xayli jāleb=e (AnbTal)
 DEM movie DEM movie-OBL=on much interesting=COP.3SG
 ‘This movie is more interesting than that movie’

Adverbial comparative constructions

The examples provided thus far have dealt with the adjectives as copula complements—that is, the PARAMETERS of these comparison constructions describe the characteristic of the subject, thus the COMPAREE is the copula subject of the clause; in other words, it is not morphologically marked because, in both AnbTal and AzTal, copular clauses always have an accusative structure. While adjectives modify nouns or noun phrases, adverbs modify verbs; consequently, gradable comparisons can be classified into two main types: adjectival comparative constructions and adverbial comparative constructions (e.g. A runs faster than B). In Northern Talyshi, the number of manner adverbs is extremely small and mainly adjectives are used in adverbial function; therefore, in adverbial comparative constructions, the PARAMETER always acts as a manner adverbial, the COMPAREE can have various grammatical functions, while the STANDARD is seemingly always the indirect object of

comparison. As in the adjectival, adverbial comparative constructions usually do not have INDEX either and the same adpositions are used as the MARK.

- (24) āz toləši tərki=sa čok=im gap
 PP.1SG Talyshi Azerbaijani=on good=COP.1SG word
 ža=na (AnbTal)
 hit=in
 ‘I speak Talyshi better than Azerbaijani’

In example (24), the COMPAREE *toləši* functions as the direct object, the STANDARD *tərki* is the indirect object of comparison, and the adjective *čok* has a manner adverbial function and is used as the PARAMETER. The construction lacks the INDEX. In AzTal, this kind of adverbial comparative construction has exactly the same structure (not taking into account the dialectal dissimilarities not affecting the comparative constructions) with the COMPAREE, STANDARD, and PARAMETER with the same grammatical functions:

- (25) av tərki toləši=sa čok sarase=da (AzTal)
 PP.3SG Azerbaijani Talyshi=on good understand=in
 ‘He understands Azerbaijani better than Talyshi’

In example (26), (27), and (28), the PARAMETER describes the characteristic of the action carried out by the COMPAREE, which functions as the subject, in comparison with the STANDARD:

- (26) āz Ahmad-ə=sa čok=im toləši
 PP.1SG Ahmad-OBL=on good=COP.1SG Talyshi
 gap ža=na (AnbTal)
 word hit=in
 ‘I speak Talyshi better than Ahmad’

- (27) Ali Ahmad-ə=sa ğərvağ=e təli=na (AnbTal)
 Ali Ahmad-OBL=on fast=COP.3SG run=in
 ‘Ali runs faster than Ahmad’

- (28) xədo əm-i šəma=sa vey čok zəne=da (AzTal)
 God DEM-OBL POSS.2PL=on much good know=in
 ‘God knows it better than you’

In contrast with adjectival comparative constructions in which the COMPAREE with the grammatical function of the subject is always morphologically unmarked, due to the fact that Northern Talyshi shows a split ergative pattern, the COMPAREE of adverbial comparative constructions can act as the agent of the clause and consequently will be marked as such:

- (29) mānə Maryam=əm Žāle=sa vəyi
 PP.1SG.OBL Maryam=ENC.1SG Žāle=on much
 pi=na³⁹ (AnbTal)

³⁹ The verb *pie* ‘to love’ and ‘to want’ holds a special place in the verbal system of Northern Talyshi, showing an ergative pattern throughout its paradigm (see H. Avchyan, ‘A short story of Mullah Nasreddin in the Anbarāni

love=in
 ‘I love Maryam more than Žāle’⁴⁰

- (30) mə Rabil-i=sa vey sef=əm hārd=e (AzTal)
 PP.1SG.OBL Rabil-OBL=on much apple=ENC.1SG eat=COP.3SG
 ‘I ate more apples than Rabil’

Thus, summing up all the aforementioned and taking into account the criteria for identifying comparative types suggested by scholars who have discussed the topic, the Northern Talyshi comparative constructions can be categorised. Dixon defines the types of comparative constructions according to morphosyntactic parameters, as Treis claims that ‘[i]mportant features for the categorisation seems to be the mono/bi-clausality of the construction, the syntactic functions of the primary components of a comparison scheme and the degree of grammaticalisation of the construction’.⁴¹ Thus, according to Dixon’s typology,⁴² Northern Talyshi has an A1 type of comparative construction—that is, the COMPAREE is the copula subject, the STANDARD is an oblique NP, the PARAMETER is the head of the copula complement, the MARK marks the oblique NP, and the INDEX modifies the copula complement, although both AnbTal and AzTal comparative constructions usually lack it. Dixon’s A1 type only applies to adjectival comparative constructions. The adverbial comparative constructions are defined as one of the ‘other schemes of comparison’.⁴³

Stassen identifies the comparative types preponderantly by the type of MARK of the STANDARD.⁴⁴ According to Stassen’s sample, a language can have more than one option for marking the standard; thus, there can be several options for the comparative-type choice. The type that is more widely used in the language is the primary comparative construction and the others are consequently called secondary comparatives.⁴⁵ Northern Talyshi has what are called fixed-case comparatives. These comparatives are in turn divided into exceed comparatives and locational/adverbial comparatives. Northern Talyshi comparative constructions, as displayed through the provided examples, are locational/adverbial—that is, the STANDARD NP is expressed by a phrase that is in an adverbial relation to the PARAMETER. These constructions comprise three subtypes, two of which are typical for Northern Talyshi. Both AnbTal and AzTal have type 3 (the locative comparative) as their primary comparative constructions—that is, ‘the standard NP is invariably encoded as a constituent of an adverbial phrase which is marked by an element that indicates spatial or non-spatial contact’.⁴⁶ The postposition *sa* ‘on’ is used as the MARK of the

dialect of the Talyshi language: text, translation, glossary and comments’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental Studies*, 1.2 (2021), pp. 220–21).

⁴⁰ In fact, this sentence is ambiguous. It can be translated either as ‘I love Maryam more than Žāle (loves Maryam)’ or ‘I love Maryam more than (I love) Žāle’. In some languages, such ambiguity arises because comparatives allow ellipsis of a repeated element, and it can be eliminated by restoring the missing elements, e.g. in English, the ambiguous sentence ‘I love you more than Ana’ can be paraphrased as ‘I love you more than Ana loves you’ or ‘I love you more than I love Ana’ (see Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, p. 368). In Northern Talyshi, paraphrasing this sentence is impossible, thus the meaning of the sentence has to be understood from the context.

⁴¹ Treis, ‘Comparative construction’, pp. vi–vii.

⁴² Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, pp. 343–75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁴⁴ Stassen, *Comparative and Universal Grammar*, pp. 24–52.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

standard in both the Northern Talyshi varieties. In AzTal, the STANDARD marked by *sa* can be additionally preceded by the compound preposition *basa* ‘on, onto’.

Stassen’s type 1 (the separative comparative) is the secondary comparative construction found in Northern Talyshi. The postposition *ku* ‘from’ functions as the MARK to modify the STANDARD; it is used more frequently in AzTal and is often preceded by the preposition *čə* ‘from’.

None of the Northern Talyshi dialects seems to have a grammaticalised or conventionalised comparative construction of inferiority. Instead, it can be expressed through the negation of equative comparative constructions (see ‘Equative constructions’, below):

- (31) *āz tə kimi ǧavi ni-m* (AnbTal)
 PP.1SG PP.2SG like strong NEG-COP.1SG
 ‘I am not as strong as you’ (= I am less strong than you)

Superlative constructions

The superlative expresses the highest degree of a quality that someone or something possesses—that is, the COMPAREE has a PARAMETER to a higher degree than each individual entity in a group of more than two.⁴⁷ Several types of superlative constructions (e.g. A is the biggest) are used in Northern Talyshi. The first type that is found in both AnbTal and AzTal is based on the comparative construction with the STANDARD expressed by the pronoun *hama* (AnbTal)/*hamma/hammay* (AzTal) ‘all, everybody’, which is modified by the MARK *sa* as in the comparative constructions:

- (32) *Tehrūn Irūn-ə hama=sa yol-a šahr=e*⁴⁸ (AnbTal)
 Tehran Iran-OBL all=on big-ATTR city=COP.3SG
 ‘Tehran is the biggest city of Iran’

- (33) *əmrūž sur-ə hama=sa kutu ruž=e* (AnbTal)
 today year-OBL all=on short day=COP.3SG
 ‘Today is the year’s shortest day’

- (34) *hammay=sa čok-a zoa Rabil=e* (AzTal)
 all=on good-ATTR boy Rabil=COP.3SG
 ‘The best boy is Rabil’

- (35) *Lānkon dənyo=ada hammay=sa rečīn-a šahar=e* (Az Tal)
 Lankarān world=in all=on beautiful-ATTR city=COP.3SG
 ‘Lankarān is the most beautiful city in the world’

In AnbTal, this type of superlative is based only on the locative comparative constructions with the STANDARD marked by *sa* ‘on’. In AzTal, the STANDARD of superlative constructions is

⁴⁷ Treis, ‘Comparative construction’, p. x.

⁴⁸ This sentence literally says ‘Tehran is a big[ger] city than all [cities] of Iran’. In this type of superlative construction, the words indicating a place can either be in the oblique case or marked by the postposition *ada/anda* ‘in’ (as in example (35)).

hardly ever marked by the postpositions *ku* ‘from’ and *ada* ‘in’,⁴⁹ but superlatives with the MARK *basā... sa* are not rare:

- (36) *xədo ba=sa hammay=sa dəžd=e (AzTal)*
 god to=on all=on enormous=COP.3SG
 ‘God is the most enormous’

- (37) *ba=sa čavon hammay=sa čok urusi səxān ba-kārd=eš (AzTal)*
 to=on POSS.3PL all=on good Russian word FUT-do=2SG
 ‘You will speak Russian the best amongst all of them’

In Northern Talyshi, this type of superlative construction can be paraphrased; thus, the copula complement becomes the STANDARD of the construction, the pronoun *hama/hamma* precedes the STANDARD (naturally, if it was singular, it becomes plural), and then the MARK *sa* modifies it. In this kind of construction, the parameter acts as the copula complement, cf. examples (38) and (39); (40) and (41):

- (38) *čəmə moa hammay=sa xaymānd-a žen=e (AzTal)*
 POSS.1SG mother all=on kind-ATTR woman=COP.3SG
 ‘My mother is the kindest woman’

- (39) *čəmə moa hamma žen-on=sa xaymānd=e (AzTal)*
 POSS.1SG mother all woman-PL=on kind=COP.3SG
 ‘My mother is the kindest woman’ (lit. my mother is kinder than all women)

- (40) *Maryam bə Lāla hama=sa māhbub-a kin-un=in (AnbTal)*
 Maryam and Lāleh all=on beautiful-ATTR girl-PL=COP.3PL
 ‘Maryam and Lāleh are the most beautiful girls’

- (41) *Maryam bə Lāla hama kin-un=sa māhbub=in (AnbTal)*
 Maryam and Lāleh all girl-PL=on beautiful=COP.3PL
 ‘Maryam and Lāleh are the most beautiful girls’ (lit. Maryam and Lāleh are more beautiful than all girls)

The second type of superlative construction found in Northern Talyshi is the result of the influence of neighbouring languages on Northern Talyshi and is characterised by the obligatory use of a dedicated degree marker, which accompanies the PARAMETER.⁵⁰ In AzTal, this is the most common type to form superlatives and is found more often

⁴⁹ The only example in which the STANDARD in the superlative construction is marked by the postposition *ada* is given by Pireyko (*Talyško-russkij slovar*, p. 326):

(v) *tə hamma odam-on=ada āğəlmānd=iš*
 PP.2SG all person-PL=in smart=COP.2SG
 ‘You are the smartest of all people’

⁵⁰ Treis, ‘Comparative construction’, p. xii.

than the first type described above. This type of superlative construction in AzTal is formed by adding the word *an* ‘most’, a borrowing from Azerbaijani,⁵¹ which precedes the PARAMETER:

(42) Lik-i an bārz-a bānd kom bānd=e? (AzTal)
 Lerik-OBL most high-ATTR mountain which mountain=COP.3SG
 ‘Which is the highest mountain of Lerik?’

(43) an pok-a gol-on čama vatan=ada=n (AzTal)
 most clean-ATTR lake-PL POSS.1PL motherland=in=COP.3PL
 ‘The cleanest lakes are in our motherland’

It is interesting that this type of superlative construction is not described by Boris Miller⁵² nor is it found in any other work on Azerbaijani Talyshi.⁵³ This fact likely shows that it is a recent borrowing that is rapidly spreading. It seems that, in AzTal, the degree marker *an* modifies the parameter when it is an attributive adjective as in examples (42) and (43) and does not act as the MARK with predicative adjectives or the adjectives functioning as manner adverbs. In this case, the pronoun *hamma* is used, as in examples (38) and (39).

This type of superlative is rarely found in AnbTal and is formed by the suffix *-tarin* borrowed from Persian.⁵⁴ It appears twice in my text corpus in the following sentences:

⁵¹ In Azerbaijani, the superlative is formed by placing the superlative word *an* ‘most’ before the adjectives. Examples (42) and (43) translated into Azerbaijani would respectively be (Latin Azerbaijani alphabet used):

(vi) Lerik-in ən hündür dağ-ı hansı-dır? (Az)
 Lerik-GEN SUP high mountain-PSFX.3SG which=COP.3SG

(vii) ən təmiz göl-lər vətən-imiz-də-dir (Az)
 SUP clean lake-PL motherland-PSFX.1PL-in-COP.3SG

⁵² Miller describes only one way to express the superlative in Northern Talyshi—the intensifier superlative discussed here further: ‘Only the descriptive method is used to express the superlative degree, the highest degree of any feature or quality – that is to put the adverbs *ve* ‘very’ or *xayli* ‘a lot’ before the adjective’ (Miller, *Talyškij jazyk*, p. 73). He does not, however, provide any examples.

⁵³ Pireyko mentions two ways for expressing the superlatives; the first is the intensifier superlative as described by Miller and the second is the absolute comparison superlative with the pronoun *hamma/hammay* ‘all, everybody’ (Pireyko, ‘Talyškij jazyk’, p. 131). Meanwhile, Schulze does not discuss the superlative (Schulze, *Northern Talysh*, p. 19).

⁵⁴ In the Persian language, when contrasting more than two different items, or the same item from more than two perspectives, the suffix *-tarin* is used. Superlative adjectives are attributive and precede the noun (Mahootian, *Persian*, pp. 260–61). Examples (44) and (45) translated into Persian would respectively be:

(viii) in amiğ-tarin daryāče-ye kešvar-e mā ast (NewP)
 DEM deep-SUP lake-EZ country-EZ PP.1PL COP.3SG

(ix) mādar-am mehrabān-tarin zan-e donyā ast (NewP)
 mother-ENC.1SG kind-SUP woman-EZ world COP.3SG

(44) əm čama kišvar-ə nəğəl-tarin gol=e (AnbTal)
 DEM POSS.1PL country-OBL deep-SUP lake=COP.3SG
 ‘This is the deepest lake in our country’

(45) čəmān nana dənyo=anda mehrabun-tarin žen=e (AnbTal)
 POSS.1SG mother world=in kind-SUP woman=COP.3SG
 ‘My mother is the kindest woman in the world’

It is also worth noting that, as we can judge from examples (44) and (45), the *PARAMETER* modified by *-tarin* does not take the attributive marker *-a*, which, as has been discussed in ‘Adjectives in Northern Talyshi’ above, normally marks the attributive adjectives preceding their head. This is in all probability triggered by the fact that the Persian superlative adjectives suffixed by *-tarin* precede the head and, if the head is singular, they do not take *ezafə*.

The third means of expressing the idea of the superlative is the usage of the intensifying adverb *lāp* ‘very’, which modifies the *PARAMETER* and precedes it. This is the only type of superlative construction described by Boris Miller. Examples of this type are illustrated in examples (46) to (51):

(46) Tehrun Irun-ə lāp yol-a šahr=e (AnbTal)
 Tehran Iran-OBL very big-ATTR city=COP.3SG
 ‘Tehran is the biggest city in Iran’

(47) Sinā kəlās-ə lāp čok-a zoa=y (AnbTal)
 Sinā class-OBL very good-ATTR boy=COP.3SG
 ‘Sinā is the best boy in the class’

(48) āz lāp ġərvağ=im təli=na (AnbTal)
 PP.1SG very fast=COP.1SG run=in
 ‘I run the fastest’

(49) əm čəmə lāp yol-a dārd=e (AzTal)
 DEM POSS.1SG very big-ATTR pain=COP.3SG
 ‘This is my biggest pain’

(50) lavangin-a polo lāp mašhur-a xorak=e (AzTal)
 lavangi-ATTR pilaf very famous-ATTR dish=COP.3SG
 ‘Lavangi pilaf is the most famous dish’

(51) tə lāp šin=iš (AzTal)
 PP.2SG very sweet=COP.2SG
 ‘You are the sweetest’

AzTal has a superlative-like form that is expressed by means of the reduplication of adjectives. In these constructions, the first copy of the reduplicated adjective is used substantively, is in the oblique case, and is marked by the postposition *sa*. The second component is unmarked and functions as a copula complement:

- (52) əm do bārz-i=sa bārz=e (AzTal)
 DEM tree high-OBL=on high=COP.3SG
 ‘This tree is the highest’
- (53) tə bo=mə=ro čok-i=sa čok=iš (AzTal)
 PP.2SG for=PP.1SG.OBL=for good-OBL=on good=COP.2SG
 ‘You are the best for me’

The use of these constructions seems to be quite limited and the parameter always has the grammatical role of a copula complement. Besides, these forms express not the sense of comparison, but the highest degree of a quality; thus, they should not be considered real superlatives. In my corpus of Anbarāni, no example of this construction could be identified.

In summary, in the Northern Talyshi dialects, three of the five types of superlative constructions suggested by Gorshenin⁵⁵ are found:

- 1) Type A = Absolute comparison superlative that is ‘based on a comparative construction with the STANDARD expressed by a universal quantifier *all, everybody, everything* as head of the phrase or as modifier’.⁵⁶ In both AnbTal and AzTal, the pronoun *hama/hamma(y)* functions as such a quantifier that is mainly modified by the MARK *sa* (AnbTal, AzTal), *basa... sa* (AzTal), and also sporadically by *ku* and *ada* in AzTal.
- 2) Type DEG = Conventionalised degree superlative ‘is characterised by the obligatory use of a dedicated degree marker, which accompanies the parameter and can either be free or bound’.⁵⁷ This type in both AzTal, where it appears quite frequently, and in AnbTal, where it rarely occurs, results from the influences of Azerbaijani and Persian, respectively. In AzTal, the degree marker *an* modifies the PARAMETER, which is in turn linked to its head by the vowel *-a*. In AnbTal, the superlative suffix *-tarin*, borrowed from Persian, marking the parameter in the superlative construction does not bear the attributive marker *-a* (examples (44) and (45)) in contrast with the superlatives formed by the means *hama: naǰǰaltarin gol*, but *hamasa naǰǰala gol* ‘the deepest lake’, *mehrabuntarin žen*, but *hamasa mehrabuna žen* ‘the kindest woman’.
- 3) Type INT = Intensifier superlative, which ‘includes an overt degree marker, which is, however, not restricted to the expression of superlativity but has a general intensifying function “very,” “by far,” etc.’.⁵⁸ The main degree marker used in this type of superlative construction both in AnbTal and in AzTal is the adverb *lāp* ‘very’, which marks the PARAMETER in all its grammatical functions, including a copula complement as in examples (51), an attribute as in examples (46), (47), (49), and (50), and a manner adverb as in example (48).

Equative and similitive constructions

Equative and similitive constructions share close semantic and formal similarities; thus, they are usually discussed together in typological works. Equatives express sameness of degree or extent, while similitives express sameness or identity of manner.

⁵⁵ M. Gorshenin, ‘The crosslinguistics of the superlative’, in *Neues aus der Bremer Linguistikwerkstatt: Aktuelle Themen und Projekte*, vol. 31, (ed.) Cornelia Stroh (Bochum, 2012), pp. 65–88.

⁵⁶ Treis, ‘Comparative construction’, p. xi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Equative constructions

The equative constructions (e.g. A is as big as B) in Northern Talyshi are very similar to the adjectival comparative constructions with almost the same components (A—COMPAREE, B—STANDARD, as—STANDARD-MARKER (= MARK), big—PARAMETER) and structure. Both AnbTal and AzTal lack the DEGREE-MARKER (as). In AnbTal, the words *kimi*, *taki/takina*, *bata* ‘like’ are used as the STANDARD-MARKER. *Kimi*, which is borrowed from Turkic, and *taki/takina* are post-posed, while *bata* precedes the STANDARD. The STANDARD is always in the oblique case:

- (54) Lāla Maryam-ə kimi māhbuḅ=e (AnbTal)
Lāleh Maryam-OBL like beautiful=COP.3SG
‘Lāleh is as beautiful as Maryam’
- (55) čama ka šəma ka taki yol=e (AnbTal)
POSS.1PL house POSS.2PL house like big=COP.3SG
‘Our house is as big as your house’
- (56) āz bata Ahmad-ə ġavi=m (AnbTal)
PP.1SG like Ahmad-OBL strong=COP.1SG
‘I am as strong as Ahmad’

In AzTal, the main word acting as the STANDARD-MARKER is *bana* ‘like’, which precedes the standard in the oblique case:

- (57) Sabuhi bana əšta dust-i dəroz b-e (AzTal)
Sabuhi like REFL friend-OBL tall be-3SG
‘Sabuhi was as tall as his friend’
- (58) āz=an bana šəma jigamānd=im (AzTal)
PP.1SG=too like PP.2PL brave=COP.1SG
‘I am as brave as you, too’

In all the provided examples (54) to (58), the PARAMETER is the copula complement; thus, as in the adjectival comparative constructions, the COMPAREE is unmarked, and the STANDARD is always in the direct case marked by the STANDARD-MARKER.

Northern Talyshi also has what is called quantitative equative constructions⁵⁹ that express quantity (e.g. A has as many books as B). Both AnbTal and AzTal use the Turkic⁶⁰ loanword *ğadar* ‘as/as much as’. It is used with the standard in the oblique case or with possessive pronouns:

- (59) avə=ro čəmān ġadar pul=e
PP.3SG.OBL=for POSS.1SG as.much.as money=COP.3SG
hest (AnbTal)
exist
‘He has as much money as I’

⁵⁹ See M. Haspelmath and O. Buchholz, ‘Equative and similitive constructions in the languages of Europe’, in *Adverbial Constructions in the Languages of Europe*, (ed.) Johan van der Auwera (Berlin, 1998), pp. 298–301.

⁶⁰ This word of Arabic origin also exists in Persian as *qadr* but, clearly, in both AnbTal and AzTal, it is an indirect Arabic loanword with a Turkic source as intermediary, cf. *Az. qədar*, Tr. *kadar* ‘extent, quantity’, also functioning as ‘as, as much as’.

(60) mānə Yusef-ə ġadar=əm kitub hānd-a (AnbTal)
 PP.1SG.OBL Yusef-OBL as.much.as=ENC.1SG book read-PPTC
 ‘I have read as many books as Yusef’

(61) əštə ġadar fath-on kārde
 POSS.2SG as.much.as conquest-PL to.do
 zən-a=šon=ni (AzTal)
 be.able-PPTC=ENC.3PL=COP.3SG.NEG
 ‘They have not been able to make as many conquests as you’

As seen from examples (59) to (61), the peculiarity of the quantitative equative is that it is the only comparison construction in Northern Talyshi wherein the parameter is expressed by nouns. Besides, unlike the qualitative equatives, the COMPAREE acting as subject, depending on the used verb, its transitivity/intransitivity, and the tense, can be either in the direct case and thus unmarked or in the oblique case and marked as such.

Many languages morphologically differentiate between specific and generic equatives. Rett describes the generic equative as ‘an adjectival equation construction in which the subordinate clause (the one introducing the standard) has a generic or habitual aspect’.⁶¹ Haspelmath and Buchholz argue that often the standard in such comparisons is a class but possesses the property in question to a highly salient degree, and the comparison must not be taken too literally, such as ‘white as snow’, ‘heavy as lead’, ‘dark as night’, ‘cunning as a fox’, etc.⁶² In Northern Talyshi, no difference exists between specific (examples (54) to (58)) and generic constructions; both have exactly the same structure and components, and the same words are used as the STANDARD-MARKER:

(62) čavə sivat šav-ə kimi siyu b-ə (AnbTal)
 POSS.3SG face night-OBL like black be-3SG
 ‘His/her face was black as night’

(63) av bata rəvos-ə hilagar=e (AnbTal)
 PP.3SG like fox-OBL cunning=COP.3SG
 ‘He/she is cunning as fox’

(64) čay olat bana voa sipi b-e (AzTal)
 POSS.3SG dress like snow white be-3SG
 ‘Her dress was white as snow’

(65) bana səpa bafomānd=e (AzTal)
 like dog loyal=COP.3SG
 ‘He/she is loyal like a dog’

In sum, Haspelmath and Buchholz classify the equative constructions found in European languages into three main types: 1) relative-based equative constructions, 2) constructions primarily characterised by a parameter marker, and 3) constructions primarily

⁶¹ J. Rett, ‘Similatives and the argument structure of verbs’, *Nat Lang Linguist Theory*, 31, November (2013), p. 1125.

⁶² Haspelmath and Buchholz, ‘Equative and simulative constructions’, p. 309.

characterised by a standard marker.⁶³ Northern Talyshi clearly belongs to the third group that completely lacks a DEGREE-MARKER and is only characterised by the connective words *bata*, *taki/takina*, *kimi* (AnbTal), *bana* (AzTal) ‘like’, and *ğadar* (AnbTal, AzTal) ‘as/as much as’. All these words combined with the STANDARD place it in the oblique case. In more recent work, Haspelmath et al. propose to distinguish six primary types of equative constructions.⁶⁴ Both the Northern Talyshi varieties belong to type 1: only the equative standard marker (‘Kim is tall **like** + Pat’), which is the most common of all types.

Similitive constructions

Similitives (e.g. A runs like a rabbit) are comparative constructions with respect to the manner in which an action is fulfilled. Equative constructions express the identity, which is a simple one-dimensional notion, whereas manner is a complex multi-faceted notion. Hence, in general, only equatives really express equality, while similitives tend to express similarity.⁶⁵ Similitive constructions in AnbTal and AzTal are similar to quantitative equative constructions in terms of their structure; in both constructions, the COMPAREE is the subject of the clause, and the STANDARD is marked by a STANDARD-MARKER functioning as a manner adverbial that modifies the predicative verb:

(66) av Yusef-ə ğadar=e kitub hān=na (AnbTal)
 PP.3SG Yusef-OBL as.much.as=COP.3SG book read=in
 ‘He/she reads as many books as Yusef’ (quantitative equative)

(67) av Yusef-ə kimi hān=na=y (AnbTal)
 PP.3SG Yusef-OBL like read=in=COP.3SG
 ‘He/she reads like Yusef’ (similitive)

The only structural difference between examples (66) and (67) is that the quantitative equative construction also contains a parameter whereas, in examples (67), the parameter is not overtly expressed.

In similitive constructions in both AnbTal and AzTal, the same connective words are used as standard-markers as in normal, namely qualitative (≠quantitative) equative constructions:

(68) čāmān hoa bəlbəl-ə kimi hān=na=y (AnbTal)
 POSS.1SG sister nightingale-OBL like sing=in=COP.3SG
 ‘My sister sings like a nightingale’

(69) bata əštə nana gap ža=na=š (AnbTal)
 like POSS.2SG mother word hit=in=COP.2SG
 ‘You are talking like your mother’

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁶⁴ M. Haspelmath et al., ‘Equative constructions in world-wide perspective: a crosslinguistic perspective’, in *Similitive and Equative Constructions: A Cross-linguistic Perspective*, (eds.) Yvonne Treis and Martine Vanhove (Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2017), pp. 14–15.

⁶⁵ Haspelmath and Buchholz, ‘Equative and similitive constructions’, p. 278.

(70) bana pahlivon-i jāng kārde=da=be (AzTal)
 like hero-OBL fight do=in=was.3SG
 ‘He was fighting like a hero’

(71) bana ġəzəl-i davaše=da (AzTal)
 like gold-OBL shine=in
 ‘It shines like gold’

Conclusion

The main features of comparison constructions in the Northern Talyshi dialects spoken in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan can be summarised as follows. Northern Talyshi does not have any special morphological means for marking the comparative grade; hence, both AzTal and AnbTal rely on syntactic frames to express the comparative, superlative, equative, and similitive degrees. The comparative construction of superiority mainly comprises four components: COMPAREE, STANDARD, PARAMETER, and MARK. Both AnbTal and AzTal comparative constructions almost always lack the fifth component, namely the INDEX or DEGREE-MARKER, but it can be sporadically expressed using manner adverbs such as *ve/vey* (AzTal), *vəyi* (AnbTal), and *xayli* ‘much, many, a lot’. The PARAMETER of comparison is a gradable adjective. The main postposition acting as the MARK of the standard is *sa* ‘on’ in AnbTal and AzTal. The STANDARD can be also marked by the postposition *ku* ‘from’ in both the Northern Talyshi varieties. The postposition *ada* ‘in’ functioning as the MARK appears rarely and is found only in AzTal. All postpositions in AzTal can be combined with the preposition *čə* ‘from’; besides, in this variety, the circumposition *basa... sa* modifying the STANDARD is quite frequent. On this level of comparison, the influence of neighbouring languages is found in AnbTal when, in an appropriate discourse context, *-tar*, borrowed from Persian, is used as the INDEX.

The main type of superlative construction in Northern Talyshi is based on the comparative construction. The standard of the comparison here is the pronoun *hama* (AnbTal), *hamma/hammay* (AzTal) ‘all, everybody’, which is marked by the same adpositions as in the comparative construction. The second type of superlative is characterised by the obligatory use of a dedicated DEGREE-MARKER encoding the STANDARD, which is *an* ‘the most’—an Azerbaijani loanword—in AzTal and appears very frequently whereas, in AnbTal, the Persian-borrowed suffix *-tarin* is very rarely used. There are also intensifier superlatives that contain an overt degree marker having a general intensifying function. In AnbTal and AzTal, the adverb *lāp* ‘very’ functions as such a marker.

The specific and generic equatives in Northern Talyshi are structurally very similar to adjectival comparative constructions. They include exactly the same components but, instead of the adpositions functioning as the MARK of the standard, the words *kimi, taki/takina/bata* (AnbTal), *bana* ‘like’ are used as the STANDARD-MARKER. In quantitative equative constructions, both the Northern Talyshi dialects utilise the Turkic-borrowed word *ğadar* of Arabic origin as the STANDARD-MARKER. The similitive constructions are structurally identical to quantitative equatives; however, the parameter is expressed covertly, and the standard is modified by the markers used in specific equatives.

Acknowledgements. This article was written during my research stay at the Institute of Iranian Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in the frames of the Joint Excellence in Science and Humanities (JESH) programme. I take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt thanks to the invitation of Prof. Dr. Florian Schwarz. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Sinā Moradzādeh for his immense help with writing down and transcribing the data on Anbarāni, as well as for offering the needed information and explanations. I am especially

thankful to my colleague and friend Dr. Artyom Tonoyan for reading this article and his valuable comments and suggestions.

Conflicts of interest. None.

Abbreviations.

I	first person	GEN	genitive
2	second person	NEG	negative
3	third person	NewP	New Persian
ACC	accusative	NP	noun phrase
AnbTal	Anbarāni Talyshi	NT	Northern Talyshi
ATTR	attributive marker	OBL	oblique case
Az	Azerbaijani	PL	plural
AzTal	Azerbaijani Talyshi	POSS	possessive pronoun
CMPR	comparative	PP	personal pronoun
COP	copula	PPTC	past participle
DEM	demonstrative pronoun	PSFX	possessive suffix
ENC	enclitic pronoun	REFL	reflexive pronoun
EZ	ezafe	SG	singular
FUT	future	SUP	superlative

Appendix

In this Appendix, two versions of the same text are provided. The AzTal version, drawn from the ‘Manual of Talyshi’,⁶⁶ has been prepared by the authors and checked and edited by a native speaker who preferred to stay anonymous. The Anbarāni version has been translated by Sinā Moradzādeh, a student from Anbarān with perfect command of his mother tongue, from Persian.

Azerbaijani Talyshi (AzTal)

Vist sorisa veye ki čəmə moa čə kišvari hammaysa yola universitetada ko kardedə. Av ingilisa zəvoni miállimaye iyan əm zəvoni vey čok zəneda. Moa hežo bašta talabon votedə ki ingilisa zəvon čə dənyo an ganjina zəvononada gəlayniye, ammā av peštəpure ki tolaša zəvon hammaysa rečina zəvone va hatto ingilisisa ğadime. Čəmə moa hamkoronan čoka miállimonin, ammā boməro čəmə moa hammaysa čoka iyan aĝəlmānda miállime. Av hammay ženonsa xaymānd iyan rečine.

Anbarāni

Vist sorəsa vəyi ba ki čəmān nana mamlakatə lāp yola dānəšġāhanda koy kana. Av ingilisi muállime o əm zəvuno xayli čoke zəna. Nana hamiša baštān dars-ahāndun vonay ki ingilisi ila ča lāp ġania zəvununoy, vali av mutma-enne ki toləši hamasa māhbuba zəvune o de ingilisisan kənay. Čəmān nana hamkārunan čoka muállimin, vali māro čəmān nana ġərdəsa čok o aĝəlmānde. Av hama ženonsa mehrbān o māhbube.

English translation

My mother has been working in the country’s biggest university for more than 20 years. She is an English language teacher and knows that language very well. Mother always tells her students that English is one of the richest languages in the world, but she’s sure that the Talyshi language is the most beautiful language and is even older than English. My mother’s colleagues are good teachers as well, but for me my mother is the best and smartest teacher. She’s the kindest and most beautiful woman.

⁶⁶ H. Avchyan and V. Voskianian, *Tališereni dasagirk* (Yerevan, 2022).