

## 1. Introduction

The linguistic diversity of the Caucasus, a largely mountainous geographical area nestled between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, has inspired much academic research since the mid-nineteenth century. Major projects of language description and documentation have been conducted, especially in the past three decades, on lesser known language varieties of the region. Nevertheless, a great number of smaller oral language varieties spoken in the Caucasus are still awaiting thorough and increasingly urgent fieldwork-based description. Among them are varieties to which established classification systems tend to refer as dialects of languages that happen to be relatively well described or even written. While not in essence false, such classification may inadvertently downplay the uniqueness of the individual varieties (which may not in fact be mutually very intelligible with the other varieties of their presumed language affiliation), for their features often make them stand out not only in comparison to their close relatives but also on a larger areal or typological level. The need for description is all the more pressing in view of serious challenges concerning the survival of some of these varieties in this rapidly urbanising region.

The purpose of this work is to produce a comprehensive grammatical description of the Şirvan dialect of Tat, one of several (and one of the most endangered) Iranian varieties spoken in the Caucasus.

This chapter will provide a general presentation of Tat, a brief synopsis of its common features, as well as its sociolinguistic background and research to date, before concentrating on the region of Şirvan and offering a broad overview of its Tat variety. The final part of this chapter will describe the fieldwork carried out for the purposes of the present work, including the methodology, field specifics and the collected corpora.

### 1.1. General overview of Tat

Tat is a name applied to a group of closely related Iranian dialects traditionally spoken in the East Caucasus, primarily in Azerbaijan and in Dagestan (southern Russia), overall in roughly 60 villages. Despite their obviously similar traits, Tat dialects display a wide range of phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic differences, which if taken into consideration, challenge the status of Tat as a single language (AUTHIER 2012a: 15). In this work, the term “Tat”, unless specified otherwise, will refer to Tat dialects collectively. All of these can be grouped into two large units: those spoken by the traditionally Jewish population (the so-called Mountain Jews) and referred to as Judaeo-Tat, Jewish Tat or Juhuri; and those spoken by the traditionally Muslim population and referred to as Muslim Tat. Varieties of Muslim Tat have also been historically spoken by a small minority of Armenian Orthodox people.<sup>1</sup> Judaeo-Tat is a written language, for which a literary standard (written in a Cyrillic alphabet) was developed and widely used during the Soviet era. Muslim Tat is a non-written language, though there is a limited corpus of oral literature

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<sup>1</sup> For this and other reasons, the terms “Jewish” and “Muslim” are not to be assumed as reflecting the identity or cultural background of every speaker and should be understood merely as a linguistic denomination.

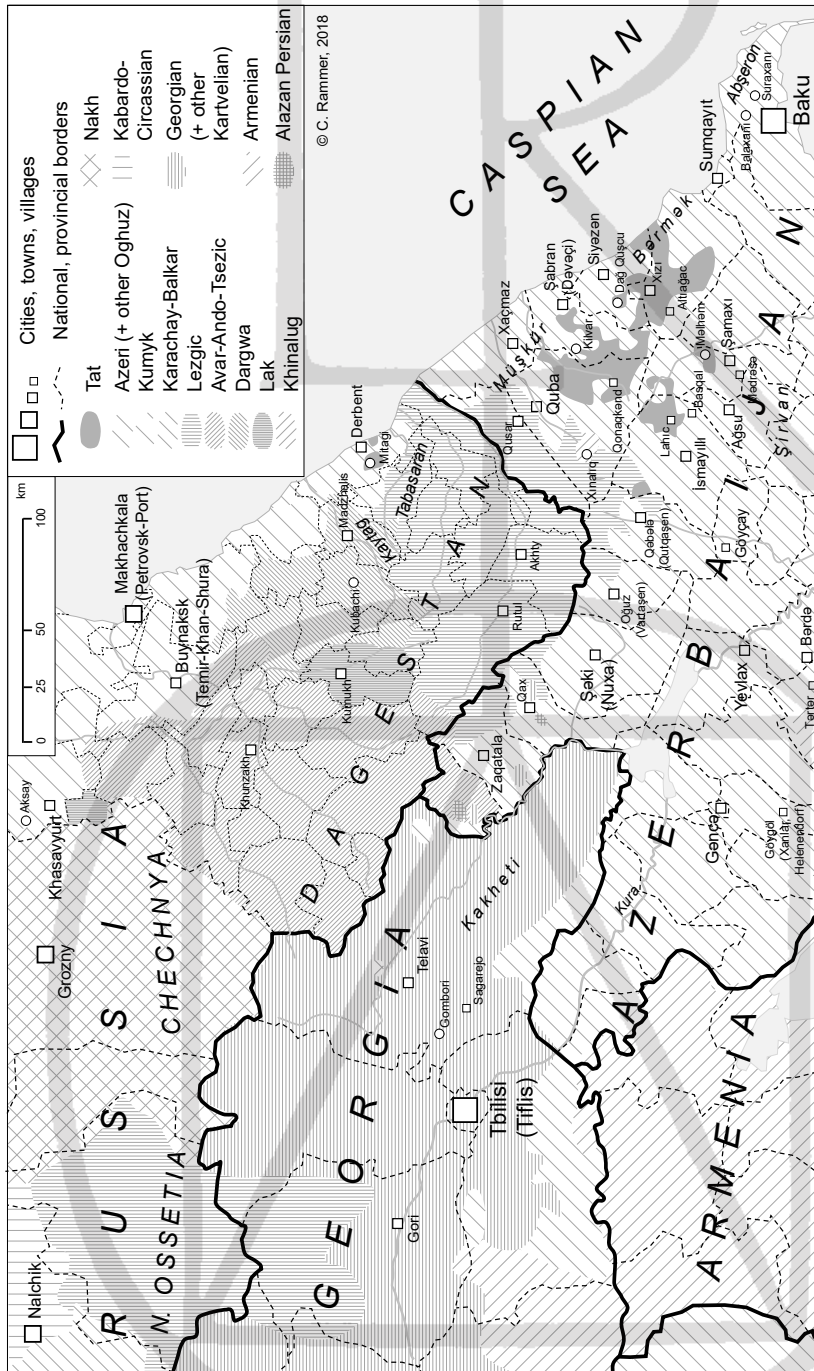
noted down at various times mainly in (semi-)adapted Cyrillic Azeri and Latin Azeri alphabets. Due to assimilation, today Tat is an endangered language, threatened predominantly by Azeri and Russian and by official languages in the diaspora.

It is important to keep in mind that despite similar names, Tat is a different language than the cluster of dialects known collectively as Tāti and spoken in northwestern Iran (previously also near Ordubad, Azerbaijan), in small pockets scattered across the provinces of West and East Azerbaijan, Ardabil, Zanjān, Qazvin, and Markazi (STILO 2016: 193). It should also be emphasised that despite the genetic proximity between Tat and Persian, occasional references to modern Tat as to a “dialect of Persian” or some form of Persian (MINORSKY 1936: 757, WINDFUHR 1979: 4, WINDFUHR & PERRY 2009: 417, STILO & NOORLANDER 2015: 428) are inaccurate, considering the significant grammatical differences and mutual unintelligibility between the two languages, as well as the so far unestablished genetic continuity between any earlier form of Persian and Tat.

The exact number of Tat speakers is unknown, as the existing statistical data is conflicting or insufficient. The latest Russian census (2010) recorded a little over 2,000 Tat speakers in all of Russia, of which about 1,500 reside in the Russian Caucasus, mostly in Dagestan. In Azerbaijan, the latest census (2009) results make no mention of the number of minority language speakers, though the number of people identifying as Tat is indicated as being at 25,000 persons. This figure nevertheless does not include those who do not identify as Tat but speak the Tat language (e.g. Mountain Jews or some groups of Muslim Tat speakers, see below). Conversely, not everyone identifying as Tat is necessarily a proficient speaker of the Tat language.

Inconsistencies in comparison with earlier Azerbaijani data (10,900 Tats in 1999, 10,239 Tats in 1989, considering that Soviet censuses often counted Tat-speaking Jews as Tats and Tat-speaking Muslims as Azeris) cast serious doubts on the accuracy of the census figures. It is possible that at least some of these inconsistencies result from the fluid perception of ethnic and linguistic identity as a whole and overlaps of multiple identities typical of the traditionally Muslim peoples of the South Caucasus (VOLKOVA 1969: 61–65, also see 1.1.2). Otherwise, even with the demographic data for the traditionally Tat-speaking villages of Azerbaijan at hand, an estimate seems impossible, as in light of the migration into cities (where Tat is rarely retained) often unaccounted for by the census, the de facto population numbers are usually lower than those reflected in the official statistics. Furthermore, bearing in mind that even in the traditional areas, Tat is sometimes no longer spoken by the younger generation, it becomes impossible to hypothesise as to the number of the speakers without carrying out at least a representative survey. There is no exact data on Tat speakers in the diaspora, which includes the rest of the former USSR, Central Europe, Israel, and North America.

Map 1. Linguistic situation in the East Caucasus (present-day)



## 1.1.1. Geographical distribution

Tat is spoken in predominantly rural settlements located in valleys along the slopes of the Greater Caucasus and all the way south to the Abşeron Peninsula, in a linguistically rich area where Indo-European languages meet East Caucasian (Nakh-Dagestanian) and Turkic languages. Historical accounts (BAKIXANOV 1951 [1841]: 29–30), local toponymy and traces of language contact suggest that the spread of Tat may have been much wider in the past. Owing to ongoing heavy assimilation and urbanisation, no Tat speakers are presently found in many villages described as Tat-speaking as recently as the 1920s (MILLER 1929).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1.1.1. North Caucasus

In Dagestan, documented Tat-speaking communities were historically concentrated in the south. Judaeo-Tat has been spoken in the city of Derbent and a number of surrounding villages, as well as around the town of Madzhalis (the last remaining speaker died in 2019). In addition, there are many settlements dispersed across Western and Central Dagestan where traces of ancient Jewish populations can be identified in the form of artifacts or via collective “ancestral” memory of the local Muslim population (LAVROV 1982: 72, 80, 105, 146). As a result of the long-lasting and devastating Caucasian War between Russian Imperial forces and Caucasian mountaineers led by Imam Shamil (1817–1864), large groups of Judaeo-Tat speakers migrated throughout the nineteenth century much to the north of their traditional area of settlement, into Russian military strongholds in the region, which later grew into urban centres (AUTHIER 2012a: 22), namely Petrovsk-Port (present-day Makhachkala), Temir-Khan-Shura (present-day Buynaksk), Khasavyurt, Aksay, Kizlyar, Grozny, Mozdok, Stavropol, and Nalchik. Later, political unrest caused by the Russian Civil War (1917–1922) forced most of the remaining rural Jewish communities of southern Dagestan to abandon their traditional villages.

Muslim Tat was as of the late nineteenth century spoken in eight villages in the present-day Districts of Derbent and Tabasaran. It is nowadays only spoken in two of the original villages (both in the District of Derbent, the others having switched to Azeri or become depopulated), some of whose population later founded two outpost settlements, where the language is also spoken today. Speakers of Muslim Tat in the North Caucasus outside of southern Dagestan include the traditionally Armenian Orthodox communities which hail from northeastern (historically Müşkür) and central (historically Şirvan) Azerbaijan. They left Azerbaijan mostly for the Stavropol Krai, Kabardino-Balkaria and northern Dagestan in 1989, following ethnic tensions stirred by the Armenia–Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (AKOPJAN 2006: 208). By that time, only two Tat-speaking Armenian villages remained in Azerbaijan: Kilvar (in Müşkür) and Mədrəsə (in Upper Şirvan).

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<sup>2</sup> However, if the small population of southern Zangezür (present-day Armenia) mentioned as “Tats” in earlier works and already fully Azeri-speaking by the 1880s (VOLKOVA 1969: 55–56) was ever Iranian-speaking, it most likely spoke a language akin to the Tāti dialects of northwestern Iran and to the extinct Kilit language of the neighbouring Naxçıvan, rather than to (Caucasian) Tat.

## 1.1.1.2. South Caucasus

In Azerbaijan, Judaeo-Tat is spoken mainly in Quba, more specifically in its historical Jewish quarter (known as Qulğat, Krasnaya Sloboda or Qırmızı Qəsəbə) by a few thousand speakers. The community grew large as a result of eighteenth-century migrations from southern Dagestan and to a smaller extent from Persia. Vartaşen (present-day Oğuz) is another town with a Judaeo-Tat-speaking quarter (known colloquially as Cuhudlar or Cuhudluq) and is located on the westernmost extreme of the Tat-speaking area in Azerbaijan. Today, affected by emigration, it is home to only a few dozen speakers. Its Jewish population is made up in part of earlier migrants from the former Jewish settlements around Qutqaşen (present-day Qəbələ) and Şəki. The Judaeo-Tat-speaking community of Upper Şirvan, previously concentrated in two villages and in the city of Şamaxı,<sup>3</sup> is virtually non-existent today because of emigration. Starting in the early twentieth century, some Judaeo-Tat speakers originally from Quba have settled in Qusar and some originally from Upper Şirvan and Vartaşen have settled in Gəncə, Göyçay (where very few of them remain) and Yevlax (none remain as of 2007), as well as in Tbilisi, Georgia. A small immigrant community of Mountain Jews has existed in the very south of Azerbaijan, in Lənkəran and Privolnoye (less than ten remain today), where they sometimes mixed with the local Subbotniks (Christians practising Jewish customs) or served the latter's religious needs. Judaeo-Tat speakers living in Baku (traditionally in Bayırşəhər, in a neighbourhood known as Cuhud Məhəlləsi) are for the most part immigrants (or their descendants) from elsewhere in Azerbaijan.<sup>4</sup>

The area of Muslim Tat is much vaster in Azerbaijan than that of Judaeo-Tat. In the northeast, Tat is spoken in the mountainous villages along the valleys of the rivers Vəlvələ, Şabran and Dəvəçi, and in the adjacent foothill areas. Together this constitutes the historical regions of Buduq and Şeşpara and covers parts of the present-day Districts of Quba, Xaçmaz and Şabran (formerly Dəvəçi). To the south of the latter, Tat is found in the historical regions of Quşçu and Bərmək, both pierced through by the Greater Caucasus ridge and covering the sparsely populated Districts of Siyəzən and Xızı. From there, Tat once formed a dialectal continuum into the semidesert Abşeron Peninsula, most of which was Tat-speaking a century and a half ago. Today, as a result of linguistic assimilation, Tat is spoken only in two Abşeron villages – Balaxanı and Suraxanı –, which form the present-day easternmost extremity of the Tat-speaking area. In the centre of Azerbaijan, Tat is spoken in the mountainous part of the historical region of Şirvan, by the northern limits of the Districts of İsmayılı and Şamaxı. An offshoot of that dialect is found in one village in the District of Ağsu and in one village in Georgia, in the Province of Kakheti. The overview of the region will be given in 1.5 and 1.6.

Muslim Tat speakers living in Baku are immigrants from the above regions (especially from Xızı and Siyəzən) and have historically been concentrated in the hilly northwestern parts of the city: Yasamal, Alatava, Sallaqxana, Papanin, and Sovetskaya. A

<sup>3</sup> A historical neighbourhood in the eastern part of the upper (Christian) quarter of Şamaxı is called Cuhudlar (Azeri for 'Jews').

<sup>4</sup> İçərişəhər, the oldest part of Baku located within mediaeval fortified walls, has a neighbourhood known as Cuhud-Zeynallılar, whose name suggests a possible older Jewish settlement, though no recent existence of a Jewish community there has been documented.



large immigrant community exists in the city of Sumqayıt, 40 km northwest of Baku. Immigrants from Upper Şirvan are found in the industrial neighbourhoods of Baku known as Çermet and NZS (Neftzavodstroy) and in the village of Bülbülə, northeast of the city.

### 1.1.2. Nomenclature

“Tat” is a term used most commonly to refer to the language varieties briefly described above. Much has been said on the origin and historical use of the term “Tat” (ŽUZE 1930, MINORSKY 1936: 756–757, LJUŠKEVIČ 1971, ALIKBEROV 2003: 50, HACIYEV 2009: 368–376, GOLDEN 2016b: 104–106, among others), with sources generally agreeing that this was a name given by Turkic tribes to their sedentary peasant and mostly Iranian-speaking neighbours across the Islamic realm.<sup>5</sup> In some communities, the name has come to be accepted as a self-designation. Nevertheless, it is important to touch upon the use of this term both as an ethnonym and a language name in the contemporary Tat-speaking communities of the Caucasus.

Before the introduction of Soviet anti-religious policies, identifying simply as “Muslim” was commonplace among the Muslims of the South Caucasus and Central Asia, who, in spite of linguistic differences, did not define themselves according to the European (mostly language-based) notion of “ethnicity”.<sup>6</sup> Centuries-long familial, cultural, political, and economic ties have brought communities of diverse origins together under a shared religious identity, and even more so in the face of the political dominance of the non-Islamic powers to which these communities have been subjected. In addition, gradual linguistic assimilation of the non-Turkic population has for centuries played a significant role in the consolidation of many modern Turkic-speaking societies, often affecting the lifestyle of the original Turkic tribes more than those of the assimilated non-Turkic population (GOLDEN 2016a). As a result, it made little sense for groups still speaking non-Turkic languages to view themselves as “different” to the groups in the neighbouring communities only because the latter had shifted to a Turkic language some time earlier. Today, Muslim Tat speakers tend to identify as Azeris and consider Azeri their second mother-tongue (GARDANOV et al. 1961: 15, ORANSKIJ 1979: 38, GRJUNBERG & DAVYDOVA 1982: 231), viewing *tat* rather as an additional sub-ethnic, regional or sociocultural identification. It is likely that the present-day Azeri identity is seen by those identifying as both Tat and Azeri as the extension of the old Muslim identity, reinforced by the absence of significant cultural and socioeconomic differences between Tat speakers and Azeri speakers on the one hand (GRJUNBERG 1963: 7) and the not-always-precise distinction between ethnicity and nationality in the context of a post-Soviet (nation-)state on the other hand. The Armenian Orthodox population that once lived beside Muslim speakers of Tat and Azeri reportedly did not differentiate between them either as far as ethnonyms were concerned (AKOPIAN 2006: 195, 198).

A *tat* identity (in the above-mentioned sense) is typical of a great portion of Muslim Tat speakers, as is the case with the term *tati* for the language. These terms are used by Muslim Tat speakers to designate themselves and their language in Dagestan as

<sup>5</sup> ABELOV (1887: 21) notes that in Şirvan, locals applied the term “Tat” to all sedentary population.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that other, more specific forms of communal identity (e.g. tribal, regional, sectarian, or occupational) did not exist.

well as in Azerbaijan, in the Districts of Quba, Xaçmaz, and Şabran. In the Districts of Siyəzən and Xızı and among immigrants from those regions living in Baku and Sumqayıt, the most common ethnonym is *dağlı* (← Azeri *dağlı* ‘mountaineer’), which is also applied to the language. However, the terms *tat* and especially *tati* (for the language) are known and generally accepted as well. In the only two Muslim Tat-speaking villages on the Abşeron Peninsula, speakers call their language *parsi* (cognate of ‘Persian’), a term unknown to Tat speakers elsewhere, and use demonyms derived from their village names as self-identification, e.g. *bälxunüji* for someone from Balaxanı. The term *tat* is known in Abşeron but not self-applied. In Upper Şirvan, the terms *tat* and *tati* are universally used by the speakers, except in the town of Lahıc. Residents of the latter prefer the derived demonym *löüzi* or *löyiži*, including for their language, and are generally strongly opposed to the terms *tat* and *tati* being applied to them, sometimes to the point of disassociating from those who identify themselves and their language as such.<sup>7</sup>

In Georgia, most Tat speakers are early twentieth-century immigrants from Lahıc, who also refer to themselves as *löüzi*. The matter is complicated by the fact that in Georgia, Tat speakers use the word *tat* to refer to local Muslims whose origin is not traced to Lahıc, who happen to be for the most part speakers of Azeri (this may have resulted from contamination by the colloquial Georgian term *tatari* used to refer to the Azeris of Georgia and more broadly to Muslims). Correspondingly, the word *tati* is used to refer to the Azeri language.

Starting in the 1930s, there was a general tendency, possibly rooted in the anti-Semitic attitudes of the Soviet government, to ignore or downplay the Jewish identity of non-Ashkenazi Jews of the USSR. It was inspired by a tradition instituted by the Russian imperial administration whereby citizens were classified in accordance with their ethnic and religious identification. Contrary to many European systems that associated ‘Jewish’ with both of those categories, in Russia, there existed a two-tier system: the term *evrej* (cognate of ‘Hebrew’) designated people of Jewish origin regardless of their religious background and the term *iudej* (cognate of ‘Jew’) designated groups professing Judaism, including those who did not necessarily claim a genetic link to ancient Israelites. In the Soviet period, labelling Tat-speaking Jews as “Tats of Judaic faith” (*taty-iudei*) implied the existence of a single suprareligious ethnic Tat entity, whose members at different times in history had gone separate religious paths, i.e. that Mountain Jews were merely ancient Tat converts to Judaism. This was in contradiction with the oral history of Mountain Jews, according to which they hailed from one of the ten lost tribes of Israel. The political position of the Soviet administration thus in a way denied them the “right” to claim a common origin with the other Jewish groups of the USSR. For many non-Jews in the Soviet Union, this gradually led to a steady connection between the terms “Tat” and “Mountain Jew”. The disassociation of Mountain Jews from the larger Jewish mass was reinforced, notably in the minds of non-Jewish residents of Baku, by an obvious contrast between the more numerous Ashkenazi Jews, whose distinctly Eastern European culture fit well with the common Soviet perception of “Jewishness”, and the less numerous Mountain Jews, who, as far as their everyday culture was concerned, appeared closer to their gentile Caucasian neighbours than to their Ashkenazi co-religionaries. The “fifth point” of the Soviet identity cards

<sup>7</sup> This contrasts with Miller’s data obtained during interviews with natives of Lahıc, who referred to their language as Tat (MILLER 1929: 8).

(which mentioned the bearer's ethnic origin) contained the term “Tat” for many Mountain Jews. Though some members of this group may as a result identify as Tats today, the most common self-identification is by far *juhur* (Tat for ‘Jew’) and for the language, *juhuri*, even if the speakers recognise its close resemblance to Muslim Tat.

Armenian Orthodox speakers of Tat identified as *hay* (Armenian for ‘Armenian’) in Mədrəsə or *ärmāni* (Tat for ‘Armenian’) in Kilyar. For the language, the terms *farsi* (Tat for ‘Persian’) and *tati* were used respectively (AKOPIAN 2006: 201).

The ethnonym debate remains outside of the scope of this work. While respecting the opinion of the speakers and recognising their freedom to refer to their language by a term of their choice, I will refer to the language in question as “Tat” by reason of the relatively wide spread of the term both in the speech community and in the existing academic works. To avoid making a choice among the available ethnyonyms, I will refer to the speech community as “Tat speakers”.

### 1.1.3. The position of Tat among Iranian languages

Attempts to make a clear-cut distinction between prototypically “Western Iranian” and “Eastern Iranian” languages, as well as between branches within those groups made by earlier researchers (TEDESCO 1921, MORGENSTIERNE 1929, MACKENZIE 1961, ORANSKIJ 1963: 175–177, WINDFUHR 1975), rest upon phonetic, morphological and lexical divergences between documented Old and Middle Iranian languages. This classification method has been criticised in recent works due to manifestly dubious application of the isogloss criteria (SIMS-WILLIAMS 1996: 651, PAUL 1998, KORN 2003, WENDTLAND 2009). Specifically, the proposed isoglosses for differentiating between “Northwestern Iranian” and “Southwestern Iranian” were seen as merely reflecting the difference between Middle Persian and Parthian and criticised for not taking into account features that bring Middle Persian and Parthian together (KORN 2016, 2019). Dissimilar patterns of divergence, borrowing and innovation suggest that the classification should instead be approached on the basis of specific linguistic features found in all Iranian languages; a task that remains unfulfilled to this day.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, this would necessitate refraining from assigning a prototype role to any particular Iranian language.

The traditional approach to classifying Iranian languages would place Tat, together with Persian, Luri, Larestani, Bashkardi, etc., within “Southwestern Iranian”. This would mean that an earlier grouping of Tat with Caspian and Semnani languages (GEIGER 1901: 288, FREJMAN 1927: 53), which today are regarded as “Northwestern Iranian”, is not accurate and seems to have been assumed on the grounds of geographical proximity and occasional common features. The new classification was established by GRJUNBERG (1961) following his comparison of Tat with Persian and the geographically close Caspian languages (Talyshi, Gilaki and Mazandarani). Tat can be also safely grouped with Persian by reason of them both showing the rather exceptional development of Proto-Indo-European  $*g^{(h)}$  into *d* and of Proto-Indo-European palatalised  $*g^{(w)(h)}$  into *z*.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Agnes Korn, personal communication, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> In other Iranian varieties, these normally yield *z* and *ʃ* / *ʒ* respectively (KORN 2019: 241).



#### 1.1.4. Classification of Tat dialects

Tat is characterised by heavy dialectal variation, which has allowed the characterisation of these dialects even as separate languages (AUTHIER 2016: 3179). It should be noted that the classification offered hereinbelow does not necessarily presuppose a common genetic origin of all Tat varieties, which may actually derive from more distantly related language varieties brought together in an areal convergence. What is given below merely reflects the present-day distance between the varieties from the point of view of their grammatical structure.

##### 1.1.4.1. Judaeo-Tat

Despite their geographical remoteness, Judaeo-Tat dialects remain largely uniform and mutually intelligible. Their exact classification has never been established.

AUTHIER (2012a: 22–23) identifies the following Judaeo-Tat varieties:

- the Derbent variety (Derbent and the villages around it), the largest one and the basis for the literary standard;
- the Northern Cities variety (northern Dagestan, namely Makhachkala, Buynaksk, Kizlyar, and Khasavyurt);
- the Kaytag variety (originally in Tyuben-Aul, the Jewish quarter of Madzhalis in the District of Kaytag, later also elsewhere in the North Caucasus, most notably Nalchik and Grozny);

Within the “Southern dialects” spoken in Azerbaijan, which Authier mentions but does not classify, I can suggest the existence of the following varieties following my inquiries in 2017–2018 among speakers in New York, Toronto, Baku, and Oğuz:

- the Quba variety (District of Quba), closely related to the Derbent variety;
- the Vartaşen variety (District of Oğuz);
- the Şirvan variety (previously Districts of İsmayılı and Şamaxı), transitional between the two above-mentioned.

##### 1.1.4.2. Muslim Tat

Muslim Tat varieties are much more numerous and display far more phonological, lexical and grammatical differences, heavily affecting mutual intelligibility. The classifications offered so far are in need of verification. GRJUNBERG (1963: 7–8) emphasises the relevance of the religious factor, suggesting that linguistic differences lie along the geographical borders between Shia Muslim and Sunni Muslim settlements (the distribution of these religious denominations among Tat speakers is roughly equal). This classification was later used in other works (HÜSEYNOVA 2002: 12), though sometimes the religious division was not overtly mentioned (HACIYEV 1971: 5, HACIYEV 2009: 18). Ağacamal Soltanov, the author of the only Tat–Azeri dictionary to date (SOLTANOV & SOLTANOV 2013), believes the religious factor in the case of Muslim Tat is not defining. According to him, it is often the case that Sunni speakers and Shia speakers living in neighbouring villages in the Districts of Siyəzən and Quba share more linguistic features with each other than with

members of their respective religious groups living elsewhere in the region.<sup>10</sup> This statement also seems to reflect the situation in Upper Şirvan. The variety of Lahıc, a Shia-majority settlement, has more in common with that of the traditionally Sunni villages of the Mūdri valley and less so with the neighbouring Shia village of Əhən. At the same time, the varieties of Məlhəm and Buynuz, originally stemming from the Mūdri valley (see 1.8.1) and spoken by a traditionally Sunni population, considerably differ from those of the other Sunni villages of that valley. It remains unclear whether or not the cross-confessional proximity is due to recent convergence, since the ideological load of identifying as either Sunni or Shia has not stirred antagonism or rivalry in Azerbaijan as much as it has in other parts of the Islamic realm, and certainly not in the mid-twentieth century, by which time there had remained no stigma attached to Sunni–Shia intermarriage.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the occasional Sunni–Shia dialectal split may simply reflect different periods and patterns of internal migration. What is clear is that currently for Şirvan Tat, it is not conceivable to propose isoglosses lying along the historical Sunni–Shia divide.

Taking into consideration the findings from my fieldwork (which extended beyond Upper Şirvan) and the study of the published Tat texts, I offer the following classification of Muslim Tat dialects. Note that the varieties listed below may require further subdivision following a more thorough study.

- Northern varieties:
  - Derbent (four villages in southern Dagestan);
  - Quba (central part of the District of Quba, western parts of the District of Şabran);
  - Qonaqkənd (southern part of the District of Quba, southern part of the District of Şabran, parts of the Districts of İsmayılı and Şamaxı);
  - Ərüsküş–Dağ Quşçu (western parts of the District of Siyəzən);
- Xızı varieties (the District of Xızı, some parts of the District of Siyəzən), transitional between the latter and the following;
- Abşeron varieties (two villages near Baku);
- Şirvan varieties (see 6.3).

The almost extinct Tat variety of Mədrəsə Armenians appears to be transitional between Xızı Tat and Şirvan Tat. The Tat dialect of Kilvar Armenians, however, belongs to the Quba branch of the Northern variety, hence the impossibility of marking out a separate “Armeno-Tat” or Christian (sub-)variety.

## 1.2. Salient features of Tat

Despite its genetic proximity to Persian, the phonology, morphology and syntax of Tat show a set of distinctive features. This section will address those of them that are common to all or most Tat varieties.

<sup>10</sup> Ağacamal Soltanov, personal communication, 2014. My own subsequent field observations confirm this opinion.

<sup>11</sup> Cases of Shia men marrying Sunni women (but not vice versa) were widespread in what is now Azerbaijan already in the 1880s (VOLKOVA 1984: 250).