Impact of Age, Gender, and Education on Dialect Word Usage in the Shaki Dialect of Azerbaijani

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ORIGINAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the relationship between social variables and dialect word usage in Shaki, Azerbaijan. The research employed a quantitative correlational research design. The data was collected from 176 informants, who were native speakers of the Shaki dialect of Azerbaijani, via an online questionnaire. Twenty dialect words from the Shaki region were included in the closed-ended questionnaire. The respondents were instructed to provide demographic information about themselves and to indicate whether they used the selected terms in their everyday speech. The results showed that the older speakers used dialect words more often than the younger ones. Besides, the males used more dialectal forms in their everyday speech than the females. While there was a general trend that higher education led to a decrease in the use of dialect words, the difference between uneducated and university-educated respondents was insignificant. This suggests that education may play a role in shaping language practices; nonetheless, it does not completely eliminate the use of local dialect forms among speakers. The findings of the study contribute to the general knowledge of dialectal variation in Azerbaijani and emphasize the need to consider sociological factors in the analysis of language use. Additionally, this article calls for further studies that employ qualitative methods and include broader regional comparisons to obtain more comprehensive knowledge of dialect usage in different areas of the country.

Introduction

Language, a means of communication, reflects cultural identity, regional background, and social characteristics of its users. There are various socio-political, historical, and other types of contexts across the globe. They make languages develop different dialects and varieties. Dialects cannot be identified as simple deviations from standard language forms.

Instead, they are organized, meaningful expressions. There are complex social connections between language and society. Therefore, the study of differences in terms of language use can help us to understand them better.

Some locations have extensive linguistic diversity. Moreover, some countries have several official languages. Therefore, the study of dialects has become absolutely important in such areas. Azerbaijan also has linguistic diversity, which equips researchers with an important opportunity to investigate language use. The standard Azerbaijani is commonly used in official and educational contexts. However, regional dialects play an important role in daily conversations. These dialects preserve the historical and cultural traditions of their respective regions. Sociolinguistic analyses of dialect use show us the linguistic patterns that influence language practices between different generations. It is important to consider the broader principles of sociolinguistics to better understand the relationship between dialect use and social factors.

Sociolinguistics tries to determine how different social situations affect the way people use language and why people do not all speak the same way (Romaine, 2000, p. ix; Holmes, 2013, p. 9). It studies "the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard forms of language, the patterns and needs of national language use, social varieties and levels of language," and other matters (Crystal, 2008, pp. 440–441). Dialectology, a subfield of sociolinguistics, deals with the study of dialects, which are linguistically unique variations specific to a particular region or social group. The main interest of dialectology is in regional dialects (Crystal, 2008, pp. 142-143). Methods of dialectology include linguistic maps, questionnaires, etc. Regardless of how different the culture is, most of the informants of dialect geography surveys have usually been selected from nonmobile older men living in rural areas (Chambers & Trudgill, 2004, p. 29). One can infer from such a selection that those people were believed to be the main users of regional dialect vocabulary. The current article investigates whether this conclusion is true for the Shaki dialect of Azerbaijani.

There is a complex link between language and society; hence, they affect one another in many ways. Dialects exist as markers of identity. They let people connect with certain social groups or keep a distance from other ones. The natural process of linguistic evolution results in permanent language variations that create distinct linguistic forms for geographical areas and social communities. The study of dialects provides both linguistic value and social understanding of basic social structures and individual identities. The analysis of the Azerbaijani language, therefore, becomes crucial because this language spans across various regional territories and cultural domains. The Shaki dialect, in turn, provides an ideal case to analyse sociolinguistic processes because it preserves unique phonological and lexical features.

According to the most widely accepted classification of Azerbaijani dialects developed by Shiraliyev, the Shaki dialect is one of the northern dialects (Shiraliyev, 1967, p. 19; Öztopçu, 2003, p. xix). The dialects of the northern group have been studied from different perspectives, both generally and specifically, in the context of the Shaki dialect. Despite numerous scientific works on Azerbaijani dialects, one can find an important knowledge gap in terms of sociolinguistic analysis of the Shaki dialect. In the past, scholars examined this dialect from structural and grammatical points of view (Islamov, 1968; Samadova, 2024). This article aims to fill in this research gap. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first empirical sociolinguistic research on the Shaki dialect of the Azerbaijani language, as it focuses on how age, gender, and education affect dialect word usage.

Standardization and globalization have created growing pressure against regional dialects. Standard languages, on the one hand, dominate education and official media discourse. Such dominance of high varieties is likely to make regional dialects disappear.

On the other hand, regional dialects continue to survive in everyday life among elderly and non-mobile community members. This demonstrates their enduring cultural importance. Thus, sociolinguistic research on dialects serves two main purposes: first, it records linguistic diversity; second, it helps to protect minority and regional speech forms from extinction. The evaluation of dialect vitality and future prospects depends on understanding how different social groups maintain or shift their dialects.

In the past, research was mostly devoted to investigating the grammatical aspects of the dialects of the northern group (e.g., Samadova, 2024), as well as describing the phonetic and grammatical features of the Shaki dialect (e.g., Islamov, 1968). Although several sources document the vocabulary of Azerbaijani dialects, including the Dialectological Dictionary of the Azerbaijani Language (Akhundov *et al.*, 2007), which covers most dialect words, this study is unique. It focuses exclusively on the vocabulary of the Shaki dialect and empirically examines how speakers' sociological characteristics influence their use of dialect words in daily speech.

The difference between standard language and dialects is evident when we look at the selection of words. Vocabulary is something that both linguists and the general public can easily observe. There are different motivations for people to use dialect-specific lexical items during everyday conversations. They may desire to establish connections with other users of the same dialect, or they may want to deviate from the high variety. Thus, word selection, or lexical item selection, has great significance in locations where multiple languages are being used. The examination of vocabulary use in the Shaki dialect across different social groups provides valuable information about the current state of the dialect and the social factors that influence its development.

The paper is situated within the domain of variationist sociolinguistics. This approach asserts that linguistic variation is not arbitrary; rather, it is systematically linked to social factors. According to the principle of orderly heterogeneity, language variation and change can be anticipated based on social variables, including age, gender, and education (Weinreich *et al.*, 1968; Matsumoto, 2019). Based on the established patterns observed in various linguistic communities, it is hypothesized that certain speakers of the Shaki dialect will use dialect words more frequently than their counterparts, depending on their age, gender, and educational attainment. This article aims to evaluate this hypothesis empirically.

The variationist approach demonstrates its strength through its quantitative analysis of social structures that appear in language use. Variationist sociolinguistics can provide researchers with a systematic framework to generate predictions and make generalizations beyond traditional descriptive linguistic studies. The standard language exposure through education tends to affect younger speakers more than older speakers, who tend to preserve traditional dialectal forms. The way people use regional vocabulary depends on the social expectations and gender roles that exist in their society. The analysis benefits from the inclusion of multiple variables, which both expand our knowledge of the Shaki dialect and advance theoretical understanding of language variation.

Empirical research articles such as this one serve an essential function in language preservation efforts. The lack of data-based analyses about dialect usage patterns among different groups makes it challenging to develop effective policies and educational programmes for linguistic diversity protection. The findings of this current paper might provide essential information to language planners and educators alongside community leaders who need to develop inclusive curricula and support local dialect use. Furthermore, the empirical findings on this understudied topic could contribute to refining sociolinguistic theories on dialect variation.

Beyond its theoretical and policy contributions, this research also has several practical implications. First and foremost, it may enhance our understanding of how social factors

influence dialect use in Shaki, Azerbaijan – a region with a rich linguistic heritage but limited sociolinguistic research. Moreover, such research can protect regional dialects from being seen as inferior language forms because it demonstrates these dialects as valuable linguistic variations that deserve recognition and respect.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions were addressed:

1) Do the young or the old use more dialect words in daily speech?
2) Do males or females use more dialect words in daily speech?
3) Do the uneducated or the educated use more dialect words in daily speech?

Literature review

Research shows that adults and adolescents, along with males and females, demonstrate statistically significant language use variations (Macaulay, 2005). For instance, younger people introduce fresh linguistic elements that do not exist in the speech patterns of their older peers. Conversely, the linguistic elements that older generations maintain are those that younger speakers have abandoned. Similarly, research and public opinion share the view that people speak the same language but express it differently (Hag Hamed, 2023). The social factors of gender and age shape both language usage and conscious language assessment and evaluation processes (Demirci, 1998). Education functions as another major social element that affects the linguistic decisions people make. People with higher education levels tend to construct complex sentences, yet those with less education tend to use basic sentence structures. Education level differences in language usage, however, tend to decrease in particular social situations (Ibrahim, 2020). Multiple researchers have studied how these sociological variables affect language usage (e.g., Wieling *et al.*, 2011; Barbu *et al.*, 2014; Alahmadi, 2015; Mugaddam, 2023, etc). Notably, Hassi and Al-Khanji (2024) found that linguistic choices are heavily influenced by regional differences, together with age and educational factors.

Research has extensively documented how sociological elements influence linguistic variations in regional and social dialect studies. According to Ash (1986, pp. 336–338), the pattern of /l/-vocalization in Philadelphia showed a rise until age 20, followed by stabilization before declining after age 60. The research data showed that linguistic variations exist among people of different ages. In the same vein, the first acoustic study of Kashmiri vowel duration across four age groups demonstrated substantial vowel length variations between male and female speakers as well as age-dependent changes. The research showed that female speakers produced vowels that lasted longer than those of male speakers. Besides, the duration of vowels grew longer as people aged. Moreover, the duration of vowels in rural speech exceeded that in urban speech. The study revealed that urban speakers of both genders produced shorter vowels than rural speakers, while the difference in vowel duration between males and females decreased with age (Ahmed & Nazir, 2023).

Similarly, the research by Barbu *et al.* (2014) showed that boys were essential for the preservation and transmission of local linguistic features in their communities. The study showed that boys used the non-standard variant more than girls did. The research supports the broader variationist findings that language change among different age groups does not follow the same pattern in all social settings (Hag Hamed, 2023, p. 7; Chambers & Trudgill, 2004).

Furthermore, community structure acts as another factor that influences linguistic variation. The study by Wieling *et al.* (2011) showed that Dutch speakers in the Netherlands adopted standard Dutch as they grew older. However, smaller communities with older populations maintained more distinct language patterns from the standard language.

Likewise, the research on Urban Meccan Hijazi Arabic (Alahmadi, 2015) and Emirati Arabic (Alnamer & Alnamer, 2018) demonstrated that lexical differences emerge based on age, gender, and education levels, where older uneducated males prefer traditional loanwords, while younger, educated females use more English-derived terms. Such research findings show that language use results from social interactions rather than just demographic patterns.

Current studies continue to improve our knowledge about these relationships. Mugaddam (2023) found that lexical choices were significantly different between age groups and gender categories, while Hassi and Al-Khanji (2024) found that urban and rural dialects have different grammatical patterns, particularly in the selection of progressive aspect variants. Notably, their research findings contradict the traditional view that gender causes linguistic variation because they show that localized context-based research is necessary.

In line with the need for localized studies, the research about Pakistani youth investigated the impact of age and gender alongside education on language selection within home environments. The research showed that Punjabi and Siraiki are the dominant mother tongues in household communication, yet their usage patterns change according to age, gender, and educational level. Younger participants showed that they used Punjabi together with Urdu and English when speaking with family members and expressing emotions of anger and happiness. The study also demonstrated distinct ways of language usage between genders since female participants spoke Punjabi with their grandparents, while male participants used code-mixing in their speech. The linguistic behaviour of respondents depended on their educational level because those with higher education incorporated English into their spoken language (Saeed *et al.*, 2020).

Sociolinguistic variation research has produced abundant findings, but Azerbaijani dialect studies remain understudied in this regard. The dialect of Shaki has never received a systematic sociolinguistic examination in previous studies. Most existing research about Azerbaijani dialects has concentrated on structural elements instead of sociolinguistic variation. For example, research by Islamov (1968) and Samadova (2024) has documented phonetic, morphological, and syntactic features of the Shaki dialect. Nevertheless, their scientific works failed to investigate how sociological factors influence the usage of dialect words during everyday communication. This study aims to address the research gap by determining the degree to which sociological variables influence dialect word usage in Shaki.

Methods and materials

The research used a quantitative approach to analyse how sociological factors, including age and gender, as well as education level, affect the use of dialect words in casual speech. The study implemented a correlational design to study the relationship between these variables and dialect word usage. The online closed-ended questionnaire collected data in December 2023, which the researchers analysed through descriptive statistical methods that included percentages, numerical data, and correlation analysis.

Participants

The sample of this investigation included 176 native speakers of the Shaki dialect of Azerbaijani who were selected through purposive sampling to achieve true representation in terms of age and gender as well as educational level. The researchers selected participants from the Shaki region because this area contains a distinct linguistic community that

Table 1. Gender distribution.

Gender	f	%
Male	46	26.14
Female	131	74.43
Total	176	100

Table 2. Age distribution.

Age	f	%
Up to 40	129	73.29
41 or above	48	27.27
Total	176	100

Table 3. Education level distribution.

Education level	f	%
None/uneducated	4	6.06
Secondary school	13	19.7
University	49	74.24
Total	66	100

maintains uniform dialectal characteristics. The study excluded participants from outside the region because it needed to preserve dialect authenticity while preventing external linguistic influences from altering the data. However, the selection of these particular participants occurred without any specific criteria, except that they met the inclusion requirements, because any native Shaki dialect speaker who met these criteria could have participated in the study.

The voluntary nature of participation during recruitment resulted in some demographic imbalances, though the process focused on diversity. The high number of female participants (74.43%) might be explained by women showing greater interest in participating in online surveys. Likewise, the high number of younger participants (73.29% under 40) probably results from better digital literacy and social media usage among younger Shaki residents. The study findings thus may not apply to the entire Shaki dialect speaker population because of the participant imbalances, which need to be considered as a study limitation.

Table 1 indicates the graphical depiction of the participants by gender. As it illustrates, approximately three-quarters of the respondents were women. Male respondents constituted 26.14% (f=46) of the population, while female participants made up 74.43% (f=131).

Table 2 illustrates that the majority of the respondents were young. Individuals up to the age of 40 comprised 73.29% (f=129) of the population, while participants aged 41 or above constituted 27.27% (f=48).

Table 3 demonstrates the distribution of participants according to their educational background. The majority (74.24%) had a university degree, while 19.7% had completed secondary school, and 6.06% reported being uneducated. A limitation of the study is that only 66 participants disclosed their education levels, meaning the educational distribution may not fully represent the entire sample. However, the skew toward educated participants aligns with broader trends in the region, where access to higher education has significantly increased in recent decades.

Table 4. The list of the selected shaki dialect words.

No	Dialect word	Standard Azerbaijani	English
1.	Lələöyün	Acgöz	Greedy
2.	Maytarax	Axsaq	Lame
3.	Əhdaş	Alət	Tool
4.	Beyqafıl	Qəfil/qəfildən	Sudden/suddenly
5.	Dumba	Qısaboy	Short
6.	Pampax	Qorxaq	Coward
7.	Korafəhim	Qabiliyyətsiz	Unskillful/clumsy
8.	Darqursax	Hövsələsiz	Impatient
9.	Səvi	Yazıq	Poor/miserable
10.	Qafsımax	Mənimsəmək	Adopt/own
11.	Dəmşalax	Yüngülxasiyyət	Pert/lighthearted
12.	Tünlük	İzdihamlı	Crowded
13.	Yaraf	Görəsən	I wonder
14.	İvinmək	İslanmaq	To get wet
15.	Beyşüyür	Şüursuz, avara, səfeh	Idler/waster/wanderer
16.	Dəvəllayı	Hərəkətini bilməyən, tələskən	Hasty
17.	Midilənmək	Ləngimək, asta hərəkət etmək	To be slow
18.	Cılğı	Xalis, təmiz	Real/pure/net/neat
19.	İdimsiz	Eybəcər	Ugly
20.	Porzalmax	Dilxor olmaq	To get angry

Dialect words

Table 4 presents the 20 dialect words included in the questionnaire, all of which originate from the Shaki region. The selection process of these words used criterion-based purposive sampling, which met two essential criteria:

1) Active Usage: The selection of words depended on their continued usage by native speakers who belonged to different generations and social groups.
2) Lexical Diversity: The selected words encompassed different parts of speech which included nouns together with adjectives and verbs.

A survey with 10 native speakers of the Shaki dialect from different age groups confirmed that the selected words were familiar to them and actively used in their speech. Moreover, the research used existing literature about the Shaki dialect vocabulary (Islamov, 1968; Akhundov *et al.*, 2007) to validate the authenticity and regional specificity of the selected vocabulary. Nonetheless, the selection of these particular dialect words for the question-naire followed no specific criteria except meeting the inclusion criteria, since any eligible words could have been included.

Data analysis

The data was analysed quantitatively to identify patterns and trends in the frequency of dialect word usage based on sociological variables (gender, age, and education level). The analysis involved two steps. First, frequency counts (f) and percentages (%) were calculated for each dialect word to determine the proportion of respondents who used or did not use each word. The statistical analysis was performed independently for different population segments, such as male-female comparisons alongside age and educational status distinc-tions. Second, the analysis of dialect word usage between different demographic groups allowed for the detection of patterns (e.g., men use dialect words more often than women, and older people use dialect words more than younger people).

Theoretical framework

Theoretically, the current article benefits from variationist sociolinguistics, which was developed by Labov (1972). According to this perspective, one can find systematic relationships between variations in people's language use and some social variables. The Labovian framework asserts that language is such a changing system that both personal identity and social structures influence it. The main principle of variationist sociolinguistics advocates that differences in how individuals use language have something to do with demographic elements and situational factors. That is why this approach is suitable for studying how dialect words are used in Shaki, Azerbaijan.

This research paper also considers Labov's (1990) principles regarding language change and social stratification as a part of its variationist approach. According to these principles, women prefer using standardized language, but men favour linguistic elements that are not standard. The current study used this principle to analyse the role of gender in dialect word usage. Apart from Labov's findings, this research also benefited from Lakoff's (1975) Language and Gender theory to understand how the speech of men and women varies in terms of the usage of dialect vocabulary. There is no contrast between Lakoff's findings about gender-based linguistic behaviour and those of Labov, since she shows that women favour standard forms of language more frequently than male speakers.

In addition to gender, this paper also attempted to determine the role of age in dialect vocabulary retention. Therefore, this article used Age-Grading in Sociolinguistics. It indicates that the differences between different generations exist because traditional linguistic features survive in the speech of older individuals.

Finally, this research article employed Bernstein's (1971) Code Theory to understand the relationship between educational attainment and dialect word usage. It is known that formal education systems promote linguistic standardization. The current article investigated how formal education affects dialect word usage in everyday communication. The research analysed the relationship between formal education levels and non-standard language features as described by Labov (2006) in terms of linguistic variation and social class. The study thus combined multiple theoretical approaches to provide a complete analysis of sociolinguistic elements affecting Shaki dialect word usage.

Results

The questionnaire was presented in 3 sections. In section 1, participants were asked to report on their gender and level of education. Moving on to the second section, participants had to provide information about their age. They were given two options: "up to the age of 40" and "41 or above". In the third section, a list of 20 dialect words was presented. Participants were instructed to mark the "I use" option beside the words they used in their speech; otherwise, they were instructed to select the "I don't use" option.

Before completing the questionnaire, participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation, and they were assured that their responses would remain confidential. They were also notified that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason. Consent was obtained before proceeding with data collection.

The relationship between age and the use of dialect words

The data in Fig. 1 shows the relative frequency of selected dialect words in the speech of respondents from different age groups. The research results show that younger speakers
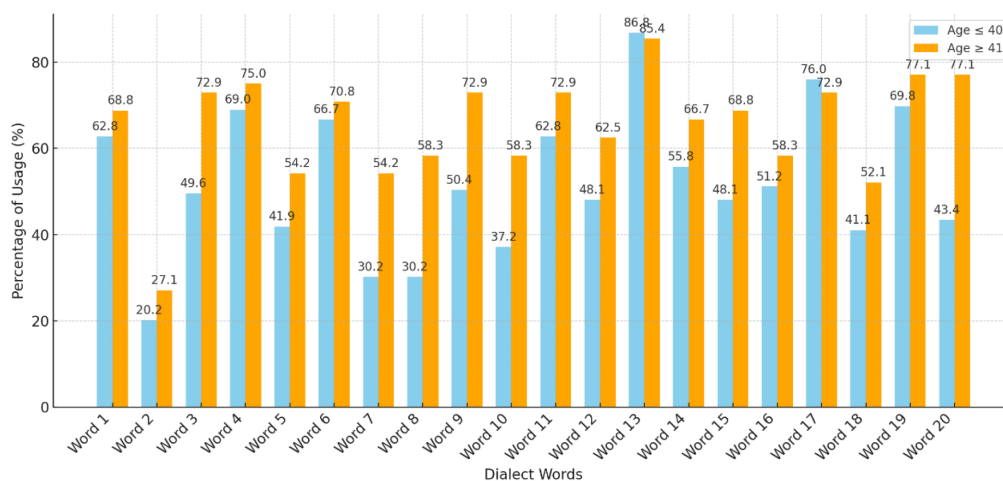
Fig. 1. Comparison of dialect word usage by age groups.

used dialect words less frequently than older speakers. For instance, word number 8 was used by only 30.2% of younger participants, but 58.3% of older participants employed it in their daily speech. The number of dialect words that were used by less than 50% of the participants was ten among the young, while it was only one word among those aged 41 or above. Overall, the data shows that older respondents used dialect words more often than younger respondents, except for words 13 and 17.

The results of this study confirm the findings of previous studies that older respondents more frequently use dialect words. The observation is consistent with Wieling *et al.* (2011) who found that younger speakers prefer standard linguistic forms while older speakers maintain regional and dialectal features. The results of this study also confirm those of Mugaddam (2023) that older respondents mainly used certain dialect words.

The relationship between gender and the use of dialect words

The data presented in Fig. 2 shows how often selected dialect words appeared in respondents' speech according to gender. The research results show that there was a decline in the women's usage of dialect words. For example, dialect word number 13 was used by 82.4% of female informants, but 97.8% of males reported using this term in their daily speech. Besides, the number of dialect words that fewer than 50% of respondents used reached nine among women, but the corresponding number was only three among men. Overall, the dialect words appeared more frequently in male speech than in female speech, except for words 4, 9, and 19. The research thus indicates that men use dialect words more often than women. The findings support Barbu *et al.* (2014), who found that males lead the preservation of regional linguistic characteristics.

The relationship between education level and dialect word usage

The data in Fig. 3 shows the frequency distribution of selected dialect words among respondents with different educational backgrounds. The small number of participants without formal education makes it essential to approach these results with caution.

The respondents who completed secondary education used dialect words most frequently, while university graduates used them the least. These results, therefore, indicate
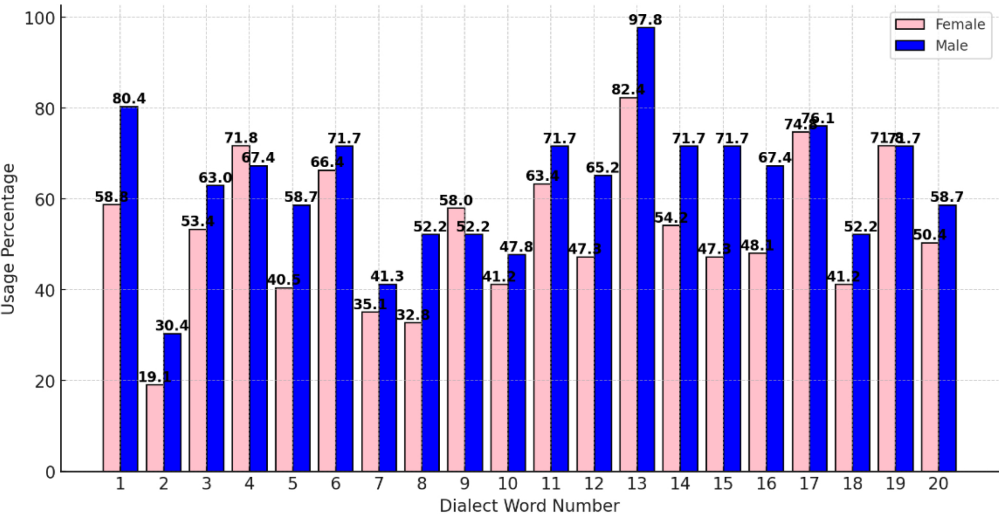
Fig. 2. Comparison of dialect word usage by gender.
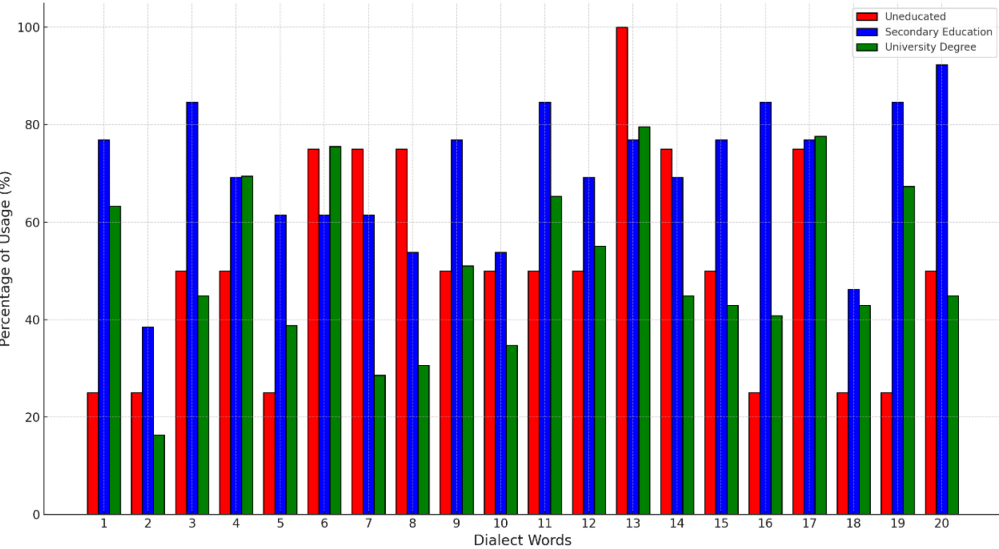
Fig. 3. Comparison of dialect word usage by educational background.

that higher levels of formal education led to decreased usage of dialect words. The research of Ibrahim (2020) also supports this conclusion and asserts that education plays a major role in shaping language selection. The assumption, however, faces challenges because uneducated individuals and university graduates show different patterns of dialect vocabulary usage, which do not follow a straightforward pattern. For instance, the most used dialect word among both uneducated and university-educated respondents was word number 13. Nevertheless, word number 2 received the least usage in these groups. The usage patterns of some lexical items, like words numbered 3, 6, and 9, remained consistent between both groups, but words 7 and 19 demonstrated substantial differences. Furthermore, the comparison of uneducated respondents in relation to informants with

secondary education reveals more complex patterns. Uneducated respondents used words 1, 16, and 19 at a rate of 25% whereas secondary education respondents used these words at a rate above 75%. The usage rates of words 3, 4, 5, and 9 were substantially higher among respondents who had completed secondary education.

The research results indicate that formal education affects dialect word use, but it does not result in a significant reduction of dialect vocabulary usage during casual conversations. Rather, education affects the rate at which language users employ dialect words, together with the situations in which they use such non-standard forms. The findings are in line with Alnamer and Alnamer's (2018) conclusion that education does not create a uniform decrease in non-standard language use.

Discussion

The research results provide essential implications and applications for sociolinguistic studies as well as language policy development and educational practices. This research establishes that sociological factors, including age, gender, and education, determine how people use dialect words. The findings indicate that language variation exists within social networks of cultural influences and structural systems, so it should not be studied independently.

Sociolinguistic studies about dialect preservation and change must include sociological variables in their analyses to achieve a complete understanding of linguistic variation. The study shows how different age groups use Shaki dialect vocabulary, which proves the necessity to document traditional words before they become extinct. The traditional lexical items from the older generation will become extinct because their usage will fade away when this generation passes away. Language planners together with cultural institutions should develop programmes that include oral history projects, additional dialect dictionaries and community storytelling initiatives to record valuable linguistic resources before their permanent loss systematically.

This paper shows that social identity and social expectations play a crucial role in determining language use patterns between genders. The study shows that men use dialect words at a higher rate than women. This observation is consistent with the patterns found in other linguistic communities around the world. The evidence indicates that language selection patterns follow societal standards that shape cultural beliefs about gender roles. For instance, women tend to face greater social pressure to use standard language because society expects them to speak correctly in educational and professional environments. Nonetheless, the social environment puts less pressure on men to drop their regional speech patterns, while they actively choose to use these dialects to connect with local cultural traditions. Therefore, the research results create multiple opportunities to conduct additional studies. Future research should analyse whether these language patterns exist across different Azerbaijani regions while studying how social factors affecting gendered language usage differ based on age, occupation, and urban-rural residence.

The research findings, which demonstrate education's impact on dialect word usage in everyday speech, reveal specific patterns about how formal education shapes speaking habits. The use of dialect words decreases with education, but university-educated people continue to use dialectal forms. The research evidence contradicts fundamental theories that claim that education automatically leads to standardized language behaviour. The research demonstrates that educated speakers choose between standard and non-standard language varieties according to their audience's needs, communication targets, and situational context. The research findings have important implications for language education,

too. The study results suggest that educational institutions should provide equal attention to teaching standard language and regional dialects. Educational institutions should develop an expanded teaching method that teaches students standard and dialectal language forms while supporting linguistic diversity and teaching students to adjust their speech based on different contexts. The addition of dialect studies to curricula would help students understand the cultural worth of regional forms while preventing the disappearance of non-standard language varieties.

The research findings offer essential data to create language policies that promote linguistic diversity. Educational institutions and media platforms should implement programmes that enable dialect usage in their operations and community-based activities. The prestige of local linguistic forms would increase through broadcasting regional programmes and publishing literary works in local dialects. The implementation of protective measures would protect dialects from extinction while establishing linguistic diversity as an important asset instead of a weakness.

The research results from this study extend beyond Shaki to deliver substantial findings that benefit sociolinguistic research. The research demonstrates how social structures create intricate relationships with linguistic behaviour to show that language variation exists as a complex phenomenon that social elements transform. The research establishes crucial empirical evidence about dialectal variation and its social roots through its documentation of these dynamics in an understudied region.

The research results confirm previous sociolinguistic studies by showing similar patterns. The article shows that dialect word usage depends on sociological factors, including age, gender, and education level, but the strength of this relationship varies between specific linguistic features. The research on the Shaki dialect of the Azerbaijani language provides additional empirical data that confirms general linguistic patterns while filling a gap in sociolinguistic studies of Azerbaijani dialects. The research findings demonstrate importance, but they also show how complex language variation remains.

Conclusion

The present study investigated sociological variables such as age, gender, and education level to determine their effect on dialect word use in spoken language throughout the Shaki region. The research studied which factors among age, gender, and education level determine dialect-specific vocabulary retention in local daily conversations. The analysis found multiple patterns showing how speakers use dialect words according to their social group membership.

The male speakers used dialect words more frequently than the female speakers did, according to the collected data. It can be concluded that males maintain regional lexical features throughout their speech more frequently than females do. Second, the variable of age emerged as another influential factor in dialect word usage. The study demonstrated that older people utilize more dialect words when they speak; thus, they become the main group responsible for preserving regional dialect terms. Older speakers demonstrate a stronger connection to dialectal elements compared to younger individuals, according to this pattern.

The article also examined whether education level affects how people use dialect vocabulary. It had been hypothesized that educated individuals would use fewer dialect words during their everyday conversations. The research found that although educational background affects dialect word usage, the differences between educated and uneducated speakers were insignificant when considering everyday communication. Nonetheless, the

research results about education and dialect usage remain uncertain because the study lacked a sufficient number of participants who identified as uneducated. Therefore, the findings about education and dialect usage need further investigation through research with expanded participant numbers and balanced demographics for establishing definitive conclusions.

Limitations

The current article adds new knowledge to Azerbaijani dialectology through its empirical investigation of Shaki dialect sociolinguistic variation, yet several study limitations need acknowledgment. To begin with, the small number of uneducated participants in the study restricts the ability to generalize the findings about education and dialect usage. Next, the study depends on self-reported data, which could be affected by participants' subjective understanding of their language behaviour instead of their actual spoken language. Furthermore, the research examined only the Shaki dialect, so its results may not directly apply to other Azerbaijani dialects.

Future research directions

Future research should address the above-mentioned limitations by utilizing larger and more diverse samples, incorporating natural speech analysis, and exploring additional dialect regions. Since sociolinguistic research on Azerbaijani dialects is limited, future studies should expand on these findings. This can be achieved by examining a wider range of dialects and employing qualitative methods, such as interviews and ethnographic observations, to gain deeper insights into language use in various social contexts.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data availability

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article and its appendices.

Author contribution

Conceptualization, M.A.; methodology, M.A.; validation, M.A., formal analysis, E.S.; investigation, E.S.; data curation, E.S.; writing—original draft preparation, M.A. and E.S.; writing—review and editing, M.A.; visualization, E.S.; supervision, M.A.

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Appendices

Appendix A. The frequency of dialect word usage in female respondents' speech.

Dialect word No	Users		Non-users	
1.	77 (f)	58.8%	54 (f)	41.2%
2.	25 (f)	19.1%	106 (f)	80.9%
3.	70 (f)	53.4%	61 (f)	46.6%
4.	94 (f)	71.8%	37 (f)	28.2%
5.	53 (f)	40.5%	78 (f)	59.5%
6.	87 (f)	66.4%	44 (f)	33.6%
7.	46 (f)	35.1%	85 (f)	64.9%
8.	43 (f)	32.8%	88 (f)	67.2%
9.	76 (f)	58%	55 (f)	42%
10.	54 (f)	41.2%	77 (f)	58.8%
11.	83 (f)	63.4%	48 (f)	36.6%
12.	62 (f)	47.3%	69 (f)	52.7%
13.	108 (f)	82.4%	23 (f)	17.6%
14.	71 (f)	54.2%	60 (f)	45.8%
15.	62 (f)	47.3%	69 (f)	52.7%
16.	63 (f)	48.1%	68 (f)	51.9%
17.	98 (f)	74.8%	33 (f)	25.2%
18.	54 (f)	41.2%	77 (f)	58.8%
19.	94 (f)	71.8%	37 (f)	28.2%
20.	66 (f)	50.4%	65 (f)	49.6%

Appendix B. The frequency of dialect word usage in male respondents' speech.

Dialect word No	Users		Non-users	
1.	37 (f)	80.4%	9 (f)	19.6%
2.	14 (f)	30.4%	32 (f)	69.6%
3.	29 (f)	63%	17 (f)	37%
4.	31 (f)	67.4%	15 (f)	32.6%
5.	27 (f)	58.7%	19 (f)	41.3%
6.	33 (f)	71.7%	13 (f)	28.3%
7.	19 (f)	41.3%	27 (f)	58.7%
8.	24 (f)	52.2%	22 (f)	47.8%
9.	24 (f)	52.2%	22 (f)	47.8%
10.	22 (f)	47.8%	24 (f)	52.2%
11.	33 (f)	71.7%	13 (f)	28.3%
12.	30 (f)	65.2%	16 (f)	34.8%
13.	45 (f)	97.8%	1 (f)	2.2%
14.	33 (f)	71.7%	13 (f)	28.3%
15.	33 (f)	71.7%	13 (f)	28.3%
16.	31 (f)	67.4%	15 (f)	32.6%
17.	35 (f)	76.1%	11 (f)	23.9%
18.	24 (f)	52.2%	22 (f)	47.8%
19.	33 (f)	71.7%	13 (f)	28.3%
20.	27 (f)	58.7%	19 (f)	41.3%

Appendix C. The frequency of dialect word usage in the speech of the respondents up to 40 years old.

Dialect words	Users		Non-users	
1.	81 (f)	62.8%	48 (f)	37.2%
2.	26 (f)	20.2%	103 (f)	79.8%
3.	64 (f)	49.6%	65 (f)	50.4%
4.	89 (f)	69%	40 (f)	31%
5.	54 (f)	41.9%	75 (f)	58.1%
6.	86 (f)	66.7%	43 (f)	33.3%
7.	39 (f)	30.2%	90 (f)	69.8%
8.	39 (f)	30.2%	90 (f)	69.8%
9.	65 (f)	50.4%	64 (f)	49.6%
10.	48 (f)	37.2%	81 (f)	62.8%
11.	81 (f)	62.8%	48 (f)	37.2%
12.	62 (f)	48.1%	67 (f)	51.9%
13.	112 (f)	86.8%	17 (f)	13.2%
14.	72 (f)	55.8%	57 (f)	44.2%
15.	62 (f)	48.1%	67 (f)	51.9%
16.	66 (f)	51.2%	63 (f)	48.8%
17.	98 (f)	76%	31 (f)	24%
18.	53 (f)	41.1%	76 (f)	58.9%
19.	90 (f)	69.8%	39 (f)	30.2%
20.	56 (f)	43.4%	73 (f)	56.6%

Appendix D. The frequency of dialect word usage in the speech of the respondents aged 41 or above.

Dialect words	Users		Non-users	
1.	33 (f)	68.8%	15 (f)	31.2%
2.	13 (f)	27.1%	35 (f)	72.9%
3.	35 (f)	72.9%	13 (f)	27.1%
4.	36 (f)	75%	12 (f)	25%
5.	26 (f)	54.2%	22 (f)	45.8%
6.	34 (f)	70.8%	14 (f)	29.2%
7.	26 (f)	54.2%	22 (f)	45.8%
8.	28 (f)	58.3%	20 (f)	41.7%
9.	35 (f)	72.9%	13 (f)	27.1%
10.	28 (f)	58.3%	20 (f)	41.7%
11.	35 (f)	72.9%	13 (f)	27.1%
12.	30 (f)	62.5%	18 (f)	37.5%
13.	41 (f)	85.4%	7 (f)	14.6%
14.	32 (f)	66.7%	16 (f)	33.3%
15.	33 (f)	68.8%	15 (f)	31.2%
16.	28 (f)	58.3%	20 (f)	41.7%
17.	35 (f)	72.9%	13 (f)	27.1%
18.	25 (f)	52.1%	23 (f)	47.9%
19.	37 (f)	77.1%	11 (f)	22.9%
20.	37 (f)	77.1%	11 (f)	22.9%

Appendix E. The frequency of dialect word usage in the speech of the respondents with different educational backgrounds.

Dialect words	Uneducated individuals				Individuals with secondary education				Individuals with university degree			
	Users		Non-users		Users		Non-users		Users		Non-users	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1.	1	25	3	75	10	76.9	3	23.1	31	63.3	18	36.7
2.	1	25	3	75	5	38.5	8	61.5	8	16.3	41	83.7
3.	2	50	2	50	11	84.6	2	15.4	22	44.9	27	55.1
4.	2	50	2	50	9	69.2	4	30.8	34	69.4	15	30.6
5.	1	25	3	75	8	61.5	5	38.5	19	38.8	30	61.2
6.	3	75	1	25	8	61.5	5	38.5	37	75.5	12	24.5
7.	3	75	1	25	8	61.5	5	38.5	14	28.6	35	71.4
8.	3	75	1	25	7	53.8	6	46.2	15	30.6	34	69.4
9.	2	50	2	50	10	76.9	3	23.1	25	51	24	49
10.	2	50	2	50	7	53.8	6	46.2	17	34.7	32	65.3
11.	2	50	2	50	11	84.6	2	15.4	32	65.3	17	34.7
12.	2	50	2	50	9	69.2	4	30.8	27	55.1	22	44.9
13.	4	100	0	0	10	76.9	3	23.1	39	79.6	10	20.4
14.	3	75	1	25	9	69.2	4	30.8	22	44.9	27	55.1
15.	2	50	2	50	10	76.9	3	23.1	21	42.9	28	57.1
16.	1	25	3	75	11	84.6	2	15.4	20	40.8	29	59.2
17.	3	75	1	25	10	76.9	3	23.1	38	77.6	11	22.4
18.	1	25	3	75	6	46.2	7	53.8	21	42.9	28	57.1
19.	1	25	3	75	11	84.6	2	15.4	33	67.3	16	32.7
20.	2	50	2	50	12	92.3	1	7.7	22	44.9	27	55.1