



## The Adjective Category in Azerbaijani and French: A Contrastive Analysis of Structural, Semantic, and Functional Properties

*La catégorie de l'adjectif en azerbaïdjanais et en français : une analyse contrastive des propriétés structurales, sémantiques et fonctionnelles*

<sup>1</sup> Ali Allahverdiyev

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**Abstract.** This article presents a systematic comparative analysis of the adjective category in Azerbaijani and French across three interconnected analytical dimensions: structural formation and morphological typology, syntactic position and agreement behavior, and lexical-semantic classification. The two languages represent radically different morphological typologies — Azerbaijani as an agglutinative Turkic language and French as an inflectional Romance language — whose divergence produces fundamental differences in adjectival behavior that constitute a major source of learning difficulty for Azerbaijani learners of French. The analysis identifies six principal areas of contrast: the complete absence of grammatical gender in Azerbaijani adjectives versus the obligatory masculine-feminine agreement system of French; the invariant form of Azerbaijani adjectives versus the number agreement morphology of French; the strictly prenominal position of Azerbaijani adjectives versus the variable pre- and postnominal position of French adjectives; the analytic comparison system of Azerbaijani versus the partly suppletive comparison system of French; and the different semantic classification systems operative in the two languages. The article further examines the implications of these contrasts for the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Azerbaijani educational contexts, proposing that contrastive awareness instruction — explicit pedagogical engagement with the structural divergences identified in the analysis — constitutes the most theoretically principled and practically effective approach to addressing the characteristic errors that Azerbaijani learners produce in French adjectival grammar.

**Keywords:** adjective, Azerbaijani, French, comparative grammar, agreement, grammatical gender, adjectival position, contrastive linguistics

### La catégorie de l'adjectif en azerbaïdjanais et en français : une analyse contrastive des propriétés structurales, sémantiques et fonctionnelles

**Résumé.** Cet article présente une analyse comparative systématique de la catégorie de l'adjectif en azerbaïdjanais et en français selon trois dimensions analytiques interdépendantes : la formation structurale

<sup>1</sup> Allahverdiyev, A. Author, Nakhchivan State University, Azerbaijan. Email: [aliallahverdiyev@ndu.edu.az](mailto:aliallahverdiyev@ndu.edu.az). ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1249-3041>



*et la typologie morphologique, la position syntaxique et le comportement en accord, ainsi que la classification lexico-sémantique. Les deux langues représentent des typologies morphologiques radicalement différentes — l'azerbaïdjanais en tant que langue agglutinante d'origine turque et le français en tant que langue romane flexionnelle — dont la divergence engendre des différences fondamentales dans le comportement de l'adjectif, constituant une source majeure de difficultés d'apprentissage pour les apprenants azerbaïdjanais du français. L'analyse identifie six domaines de contraste principaux : l'absence totale de genre grammatical dans les adjectifs azerbaïdjanais par opposition au système obligatoire d'accord masculin-féminin du français ; la forme invariante des adjectifs azerbaïdjanais par opposition à la morphologie d'accord en nombre du français ; la position strictement antéposée des adjectifs en azerbaïdjanais par opposition à la position variable pré- ou postnominale des adjectifs français ; le système analytique de comparaison de l'azerbaïdjanais par opposition au système partiellement supplétif du français ; ainsi que les différents systèmes de classification sémantique en vigueur dans les deux langues.*

**Mots-clés :** *adjectif, azerbaïdjanais, français, grammaire comparée, accord, genre grammatical, position de l'adjectif, linguistique contrastive*

## 1. Introduction

The adjective constitutes one of the most theoretically productive grammatical categories for cross-linguistic comparison, because the way in which languages encode adjectival meaning — the attribution of qualities, properties, and relational characteristics to nominal referents — reflects with particular clarity the fundamental typological differences between grammatical systems (Dixon, 2004). Languages differ profoundly not only in the morphological forms that adjectives take but in whether adjectives agree with the nouns they modify, in what dimensions agreement is marked, in the syntactic positions adjectives occupy relative to their head nouns, and in the semantic classifications that the adjectival lexicon encodes. These differences are not arbitrary; they are systematic reflexes of the deeper typological organizations of the languages in which they occur.

Azerbaijani and French present one of the most typologically instructive contrasts available for the comparative study of adjectival systems, precisely because the two languages are organized along fundamentally different grammatical principles. Azerbaijani is an agglutinative language of the Oghuz branch of the Turkic family, characterized by a morphological strategy in which grammatical relations are expressed through the successive addition of discrete, semantically transparent suffixes to invariant roots (Johanson & Csató, 1998). French is an inflectional language of the Romance branch of Indo-European, characterized by a morphological strategy in which grammatical information — including gender, number, and agreement — is encoded through fusion morphology that does not decompose cleanly into one-suffix-one-meaning units. Within the adjectival system, this typological difference produces contrasts of the most fundamental kind: Azerbaijani adjectives are morphologically invariant, do not agree with their head nouns in any grammatical category, and occupy a fixed prenominal position; French adjectives agree with their head nouns in grammatical gender and number through a system of inflectional endings, and



occupy a variable position — prenominal or postnominal — whose determination reflects a complex interaction of semantic, pragmatic, and lexical factors (Grevisse & Goosse, 2016).

These contrasts are not merely of theoretical interest; they have direct practical consequences for Azerbaijani learners of French, for whom the French adjectival system constitutes one of the most persistent and systematically difficult domains of grammatical acquisition. The absence of grammatical gender in Azerbaijani means that learners must not only acquire the inflectional endings of the French gender system but must first develop the conceptual category of grammatical gender itself — a category that has no functional analog in their first language. The variable position of French adjectives presents a further challenge: Azerbaijani learners, accustomed to the invariant prenominal position of adjectives in their first language, must develop sensitivity to the semantic and pragmatic factors that determine adjectival position in French, factors that are not encoded in any equivalent way in Azerbaijani grammar (Qasimova, 2025).

This article provides a systematic comparative analysis of the adjective category in Azerbaijani and French across three principal dimensions: structural formation and morphological typology; syntactic position and agreement behavior; and lexical-semantic classification. The analysis draws on established descriptive grammars of both languages — particularly Grevisse and Goosse's (2016) *Le Bon Usage* for French and Budagova's (1982) descriptive grammar of Azerbaijani — supplemented by the contrastive linguistics tradition for Azerbaijani-French comparisons (Asgarova, 2024; Allahverdiyev, 2025).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this analysis integrates three complementary traditions. The first is the cross-linguistic typology of adjectives, as developed by Dixon (2004), who provides a systematic account of the grammatical properties that adjectives exhibit cross-linguistically — including the degree to which they participate in agreement, their syntactic distribution, and their semantic organization — and identifies the typological parameters along which languages vary in their adjectival systems. Dixon's work provides the comparative vocabulary for identifying and interpreting the contrasts between Azerbaijani and French adjectival systems.

The second tradition is the descriptive grammar of French adjectives, represented principally by Grevisse and Goosse's (2016) authoritative *Le Bon Usage* and Riegel, Pellat, and Rioul's (2018) *Grammaire méthodique du français*. These works provide the empirical description of French adjectival behavior — including the complex rules for gender agreement, number agreement, variable position, degrees of comparison, and semantic classification — that the contrastive analysis requires. For Azerbaijani, the primary descriptive source is Budagova's (1982) grammar of Azerbaijani, supplemented by Johanson and Csató's (1998) typological account of Turkic languages.

The third tradition is contrastive linguistics, particularly the methodology developed by James (1980) for identifying and analyzing systematic structural differences between languages.



Contrastive analysis provides both the theoretical justification for the present study — the evidence that structural contrasts predict learning difficulty — and the methodological tools for conducting feature-by-feature comparison across the relevant grammatical dimensions. Recent work by Qasimova (2025) and Asgarova (2024) on French-Azerbaijani linguistic contrasts provides the most directly relevant scholarly context for the present analysis.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-comparative methodology grounded in contrastive linguistics. The analysis proceeds through systematic feature-by-feature comparison of the adjectival systems of Azerbaijani and French across three analytical dimensions. Descriptive data were drawn from established grammatical references for both languages, and authentic examples were selected to illustrate each structural contrast with maximum clarity. The analysis follows James's (1980) contrastive analysis methodology, identifying areas of structural divergence that are predictive of learning difficulty, and the pedagogical implications section draws on applied linguistics research on contrastive awareness instruction in foreign language teaching contexts.

### 4. Overview of the Adjective Category in Both Languages

In both Azerbaijani and French, the adjective functions as a primary word class whose central semantic function is the attribution of qualities, properties, and relational characteristics to nominal referents. In this fundamental respect, the two languages are parallel: adjectives modify nouns in both attributive and predicative functions, they participate in comparative constructions that encode degrees of property possession, and they are organized into semantic subclasses that reflect the ontological distinctions between qualitative, relational, and evaluative properties. However, this functional parallelism conceals structural divergences of the most fundamental kind that arise from the different typological organizations of the two languages.

Azerbaijani, as an agglutinative language, organizes its grammar around the principle of morphological transparency: each grammatical meaning is encoded by a distinct, consistently identifiable suffix added to a stable root. Adjectives in Azerbaijani conform to this principle by being morphologically invariant — they do not change their form to agree with the nouns they modify in any grammatical category — and syntactically fixed — they invariably precede the nouns they modify and do not alternate between prenominal and postnominal positions. French, as an inflectional language, organizes its grammar around the principle of morphological fusion: grammatical meanings are encoded through endings that simultaneously mark multiple grammatical categories, and agreement — the systematic matching of dependent elements to head elements in specified grammatical features — is a pervasive organizing principle of the noun phrase and the clause. Adjectives in French are therefore morphologically variable, reflecting the gender and number of the nouns they modify through inflectional endings, and syntactically flexible, occupying prenominal or postnominal positions whose determination is governed by a complex interaction of semantic and pragmatic factors.



## 5. Structural and Morphological Analysis

### 5.1 Adjective Formation in Azerbaijani

Azerbaijani adjectives can be divided into three principal structural categories: simple (*sadə*) adjectives, which consist of underived roots (e.g., *böyük* "big", *kiçik* "small", *yaxşı* "good", *pis* "bad", *qırmızı* "red"); derived (*düzəltmə*) adjectives, which are formed from nominal, verbal, or other adjectival bases through the addition of derivational suffixes; and compound (*mürəkkəb*) adjectives, which are formed through the combination of two or more lexical elements. Derivational suffixes that productively form adjectives from nominal bases include *-lı/-li/-lu/-lü* (indicating possession or association: *dağlı* "mountainous", *suyu* "watery"), *-sız/-siz/-suz/-süz* (indicating absence: *susuz* "waterless", *işsiz* "unemployed"), and *-(i)ncı/-(i)nci* (indicating ordinal sequence: *birinci* "first", *ikinci* "second"). These derivational suffixes follow the vowel harmony principle that is a defining characteristic of Turkic morphophonology.

Crucially, regardless of their structural category, Azerbaijani adjectives are morphologically invariant: they take no inflectional suffixes to agree with the nouns they modify in gender, number, or case. The same form *böyük* serves in *böyük adam* ("big man") and *böyük qadın* ("big woman") — there is no feminine form. Similarly, *böyük* is unchanged in *böyük adamlar* ("big men"): there is no plural form. This invariance is a fundamental property of the Azerbaijani adjectival system that has no equivalent in French.

### 5.2 Adjective Formation and Agreement in French

French adjectives are marked by obligatory agreement with the nouns they modify in grammatical gender (masculine or feminine) and number (singular or plural). The regular agreement paradigm adds *-e* to the masculine singular base form to derive the feminine singular (*grand* → *grande*, *petit* → *petite*), adds *-s* to the masculine singular to derive the masculine plural (*grand* → *grands*), and adds *-es* to the masculine singular to derive the feminine plural (*grande* → *grandes*). This four-way paradigm — masculine singular, feminine singular, masculine plural, feminine plural — applies to the majority of French adjectives, though the phonological realization of the agreement morphology varies depending on the final consonant of the adjective stem, producing numerous orthographic and phonological irregularities that must be individually acquired (e.g., *beau/belle/beaux/belles*; *vieux/vieille/vieux/vieilles*; *doux/douce/doux/douces*).

Beyond the regular paradigm, French has a substantial class of adjectives with irregular feminine forms that cannot be derived by the simple addition of *-e* but require more complex morphological operations: adjectives ending in consonant clusters that assimilate in the feminine (*gros* → *grosse*; *gras* → *grasse*), adjectives that undergo stem alternation in the feminine (*long* → *longue*; *blanc* → *blanche*; *sec* → *sèche*), and adjectives derived from present or past participles (*fatigué* → *fatiguée*; *aimant* → *aimante*). The agreement system therefore demands of French learners not merely the



mastery of a regular paradigm but an extensive repertoire of lexically specific knowledge about the morphophonological behavior of individual adjectives in agreement contexts.

## 6. Syntactic Position

### 6.1 Fixed Prenominal Position in Azerbaijani

In Azerbaijani, adjectives occupy a strictly fixed prenominal position: they invariably precede the nouns they modify and cannot be placed postnominally without becoming predicative rather than attributive. The adjective in *gözəl qız* ("beautiful girl"), *qara at* ("black horse"), and *böyük ev* ("big house") always precedes the head noun, and this positional constraint applies without exception across all adjective types and syntactic contexts. The invariant prenominal position of Azerbaijani adjectives reflects the broader head-final typology of Turkic languages, in which modifiers systematically precede their heads at all levels of grammatical structure — adjectives precede nouns, genitive phrases precede the possessed noun, and the verb is final in the clause.

### 6.2 Variable Pre- and Postnominal Position in French

In French, the position of attributive adjectives relative to the head noun is variable and grammatically significant. The default position for most adjectives is postnominal: the vast majority of French adjectives appear after the head noun in the basic, unmarked attributive construction, as in *un homme grand* ("a tall man"), *une voiture rouge* ("a red car"), and *un livre intéressant* ("an interesting book"). However, a well-defined class of adjectives — those expressing absolute or evaluative qualities such as size, age, goodness, and beauty — normally appear prenominally: *un grand homme* ("a great man"), *une belle femme* ("a beautiful woman"), *un vieux livre* ("an old book"), *un bon repas* ("a good meal").

For a subset of these adjectives, the positional alternation is semantically contrastive: the same adjective, placed before or after the noun, expresses a different meaning. *Grand homme* means "great man" (figuratively large in stature, i.e., important), while *homme grand* means "tall man" (physically large). *Ancien professeur* means "former professor" (no longer holding the position), while *professeur ancien* means "old/ancient professor" (of great age). *Certain homme* means "a certain man" (some unspecified man), while *homme certain* means "a sure man" (a reliable man). This position-meaning interaction has no equivalent in Azerbaijani and constitutes one of the most pedagogically challenging dimensions of French adjectival syntax for Azerbaijani learners (Grevisse & Goosse, 2016; Riegel, Pellat, & Rioul, 2018).

## 7. Lexical-Semantic Classification

Both Azerbaijani and French organize their adjectival lexicons into semantic subclasses, though the classification systems are not identical. In Azerbaijani, the primary semantic distinction is between qualitative adjectives (*keyfiyyət sifətləri*), which directly attribute a quality or property to the nominal referent (*yaxşı* "good", *pis* "bad", *ağıllı* "intelligent", *güclü* "strong"), and relational adjectives (*nisbi sifətlər*), which express a relationship between the referent and some other entity



(dəmir "iron, made of iron", kənd "village, rural", qış "winter"). This binary classification reflects the fundamental semantic distinction between descriptive predication (the referent has quality X) and relational classification (the referent stands in relation R to entity Y).

French adjectival semantics is organized around a similar but more finely differentiated set of distinctions. Qualitative adjectives (*adjectifs qualificatifs*) describe inherent properties of referents and can typically be used both attributively and predicatively, can be modified by degree adverbs, and can participate in comparative constructions: *grand*, *petit*, *beau*, *intelligent*, *rouge*. Classifying adjectives (*adjectifs classifiants* or *relationnels*) place referents within a category or class — they typically cannot be graded, cannot be used predicatively without a change of meaning, and do not normally participate in direct comparison: *national*, *chimique*, *médical*, *présidentiel*. The distributional differences between these two classes — including their different behavior with respect to degree modification, predicative use, and position — constitute a semantically principled but pedagogically challenging aspect of French adjectival grammar that has no direct parallel in the Azerbaijani system (Riegel, Pellat, & Rioul, 2018).

## 8. Comparative Summary

The following table presents a systematic comparison of the principal structural, syntactic, and semantic properties of adjectives in Azerbaijani and French, providing a concise reference for the contrasts analyzed in detail in the preceding sections.

*Table 1. Comparative Overview of Adjectival Properties in Azerbaijani and French*

Feature	Azerbaijani	French
Typological class	Agglutinative (Turkic)	Inflectional (Romance)
Grammatical gender	Absent — adjectives do not mark gender	Obligatory — masculine / feminine (e.g., <i>grand</i> / <i>grande</i> )
Number agreement	Absent — adjectives do not agree in number	Obligatory — singular / plural (e.g., <i>grands</i> / <i>grandes</i> )
Position relative to noun	Fixed — strictly prenominal ( <i>güclü adam</i> )	Variable — pre- or postnominal depending on meaning ( <i>un grand homme</i> / <i>un homme grand</i> )
Degrees of comparison	<i>Analytic: ən, daha (ən gözəl, daha böyük)</i>	<i>Analytic (plus beau) + suppletive (bon → meilleur, mauvais → pire)</i>
Semantic subtypes	Qualitative, relational, compound ( <i>düzəltmə, mürəkkəb</i> )	Qualitative ( <i>grand</i> ), relational/classifying ( <i>national</i> ), participial ( <i>fatigué</i> )
Predicative use	Requires copula <i>ol-</i> in present: <i>Adam zəhmətkeşdir</i>	Uses <i>être</i> : <i>L'homme est grand</i> — adjective agrees with subject



## 9. Pedagogical Implications

The contrastive analysis presented in this article has direct and substantial implications for the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language in Azerbaijani educational contexts. The systematic structural divergences identified — in gender agreement, number agreement, syntactic position, and semantic classification — are predictive of the characteristic errors that Azerbaijani learners produce in French adjectival grammar, and they identify the specific domains that require the most intensive pedagogical attention.

The most fundamental challenge is the acquisition of grammatical gender. Since Azerbaijani has no grammatical gender, Azerbaijani learners approach French without the conceptual framework needed to process gendered agreement. Research on the acquisition of French gender by learners from genderless L1 backgrounds consistently demonstrates that gender is one of the latest-acquired and most persistently error-prone dimensions of French grammar (Ayoun, 2007). Explicit instruction that introduces the concept of grammatical gender as a lexical property of nouns — to be stored together with the noun form as a single lexical entry — and that systematically teaches the gender-predictive morphological cues available in French (nominal suffixes that reliably predict gender) is more effective than implicit exposure alone for these learners.

The variable position of French adjectives presents a second major pedagogical challenge. Contrastive awareness instruction — explicitly drawing learners' attention to the contrast between the fixed prenominal position of Azerbaijani adjectives and the variable position of French adjectives, and providing systematic instruction in the semantic and pragmatic factors that determine French adjectival position — is more effective than attempting to teach position as a set of isolated lexical facts about individual adjectives. Understanding the underlying principle — that the prenominal position in French encodes a subjective, evaluative, or inherent reading while the postnominal position encodes an objective, descriptive, or classifying reading — gives learners a generative rule that can be applied across the full range of position-alternating adjectives rather than memorized item by item (Qasimova, 2025; Asgarova, 2024).

## 10. Conclusion

This article has provided a systematic comparative analysis of the adjective category in Azerbaijani and French, demonstrating that the two languages exhibit fundamental structural divergences that arise from their different typological organizations and that have direct implications for the acquisition of French by Azerbaijani learners. The complete absence of grammatical gender in Azerbaijani, the invariant form of Azerbaijani adjectives, and the fixed prenominal position of Azerbaijani adjectives all contrast sharply with the obligatory gender and number agreement system of French adjectives and their variable positional behavior — contrasts that constitute the principal sources of systematic difficulty in Azerbaijani learners' French adjectival grammar.

The analysis confirms that contrastive linguistics provides both a theoretically principled framework for understanding these difficulties and a practically useful basis for designing more



effective pedagogical approaches. Explicit contrastive instruction that makes learners aware of the structural divergences between their first and target languages — and that develops their understanding of the semantic and pragmatic principles that govern French adjectival behavior — equips them with the generative knowledge needed to produce accurate and appropriate French adjectival constructions rather than relying on inadequate transfer strategies from Azerbaijani. Future research should investigate the acquisition sequence of French adjectival agreement by Azerbaijani learners, the effectiveness of different instructional approaches for developing gender accuracy, and the role of explicit contrastive instruction in accelerating the acquisition of French adjectival position.

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