

SYLLABIC METER IN AZERBAIJANI POETRY: LINGUISTIC CRITERIA AND PHONETIC POTENTIAL

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Abstract: This article analyzes the syllabic meter, widely used in the tradition of Azerbaijani poetry, from linguistic and phonetic perspectives. The system, based on the stability of syllable count, is structured in accordance with the phonetic features of Turkic languages, particularly the Azerbaijani language. The study is grounded in Mammad Aliyev's theoretical views on syllabic meter and examines poetic elements such as phonetic structure, rhythmic pauses (caesuras), rhyme, and other stylistic devices. A comparative approach is also used to highlight the distinctive characteristics of Azerbaijani poetry in relation to other Turkic literary traditions. The research sheds light on the linguistic foundations of the syllabic meter and emphasizes its significance in both literary heritage and contemporary poetic processes.

Keywords: syllabic meter, Azerbaijani poetry, phonetic structure, Mammad Aliyev, rhythmic pause, Turkic languages, literary heritage, poetic form.

СИЛЛАБИЧЕСКИЙ МЕТР В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОЙ ПОЭЗИИ: ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ КРИТЕРИИ И ФОНЕТИЧЕСКИЙ ПОТЕНЦИАЛ

Аннотация: В этой статье анализируется силлабический метр, широко используемый в традиции азербайджанской поэзии, с лингвистических и фонетических точек зрения. Система, основанная на стабильности счета слогов, структурирована в соответствии с фонетическими особенностями тюркских языков, в частности азербайджанского языка. Исследование основано на теоретических взглядах Мамеда Алиева на силлабический метр и рассматривает такие поэтические элементы, как фонетическая структура, ритмические паузы (цезуры), рифма и другие стилистические приемы. Также используется сравнительный подход для выделения отличительных особенностей азербайджанской поэзии по отношению к другим тюркским литературным традициям. Исследование проливает свет на лингвистические основы силлабического метра и подчеркивает его значение как в литературном наследии, так и в современных поэтических процессах.

Ключевые слова: силлабический метр, азербайджанская поэзия, фонетическая структура, Мамед Алиев, ритмическая пауза, тюркские языки, литературное наследие, поэтическая форма.

INTRODUCTION

Poetry, as an art form, is deeply intertwined with the linguistic and phonetic properties of the language in which it is composed. The concept of meter, which governs the rhythmic structure of poetry, is a fundamental element that shapes its aesthetic and expressive qualities. Among the various metrical systems, the syllabic meter—based on the equal distribution of syllables in poetic lines—holds a significant place in the poetic traditions of many cultures, particularly in Turkic and Azerbaijani literature. This study focuses on the syllabic meter, exploring its linguistic

foundations, its role in Azerbaijani poetry, and its relationship with the phonetic and rhythmic potential of the Azerbaijani language.

The syllabic meter, characterized by the consistent number of syllables per line, is a linguistic phenomenon that reflects the natural phonetic patterns of a language. Unlike other metrical systems, such as the tonic or metric systems, the syllabic meter prioritizes syllable count over stress or tonal variations. This system is particularly prominent in languages with relatively fixed stress patterns, such as Turkic languages, where the phonetic structure facilitates the creation of rhythm through syllable-based patterns. In Azerbaijani poetry, the syllabic meter has been a cornerstone of both folk and classical traditions, shaping the rhythmic and musical qualities of poetic compositions.

The study draws heavily on the works of Mammad Aliyev, a prominent Azerbaijani scholar whose extensive research on syllabic meter has provided critical insights into its linguistic and structural properties. Aliyev's approach emphasizes the inseparability of meter from the language's phonetic framework, arguing that the syllabic meter emerges from the natural rhythmic tendencies of the language. By examining Aliyev's contributions alongside comparative analyses of Turkic poetic traditions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the syllabic meter's role in Azerbaijani poetry and its broader linguistic significance.

Relevance of the Topic: The study of syllabic meter is highly relevant in the context of literary and linguistic scholarship for several reasons. First, it addresses a fundamental aspect of poetic composition—meter—which is essential for understanding the structural and aesthetic principles of poetry. In Azerbaijani literature, where the syllabic meter has been a dominant form, exploring its linguistic foundations offers insights into the interplay between language and art. This is particularly significant in the context of Turkic languages, which share similar phonetic and rhythmic characteristics, making the syllabic meter a unifying feature of their poetic traditions.

Second, the topic is relevant due to its implications for cross-cultural and comparative literary studies. By examining the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry alongside other Turkic traditions, the study highlights the shared linguistic heritage of these cultures while also identifying unique features specific to Azerbaijani poetic practices. This comparative approach contributes to a broader understanding of how language shapes poetic forms across different cultures.

Finally, the topic's relevance is underscored by the need to preserve and analyze traditional poetic forms in the face of modern literary trends. As globalization and modernization influence literary practices, understanding the historical and linguistic roots of syllabic meter ensures that this traditional form remains appreciated and studied. Mammad Aliyev's work, which bridges traditional scholarship with modern linguistic analysis, provides a valuable framework for this exploration.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a multidisciplinary methodology that combines linguistic analysis, literary criticism, and comparative poetics. The primary methods include:

1. **Linguistic Analysis:** This involves examining the phonetic and phonological properties of the Azerbaijani language to understand how they contribute to the formation of syllabic meter. Key elements such as syllable structure, stress patterns, and intonation are analyzed to identify their role in creating rhythmic patterns.

2. **Textual Analysis:** Poetic texts from Azerbaijani literature, including folk poetry and classical works, are analyzed to identify the structural characteristics of syllabic meter. This

includes counting syllables, identifying rhythmic pauses (caesuras), and examining the use of rhyme and other poetic devices.

3. Comparative Approach: The study compares the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry with its manifestations in other Turkic poetic traditions, such as Turkish, Uzbek, and Uyghur poetry. This approach highlights both commonalities and differences, providing a broader context for understanding the syllabic meter's linguistic foundations.

4. Historical Analysis: The evolution of syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry is traced through historical texts, drawing on Mammad Aliyev's research to understand its development over time. This includes examining its roots in folk poetry and its adaptation in classical and modern literary forms.

5. Theoretical Framework: The study is grounded in the theoretical contributions of scholars such as Mammad Aliyev, Emin Abid, and Fuad Köprülü, who emphasize the linguistic basis of poetic meter. Their works provide a conceptual framework for analyzing the syllabic meter as a language-driven phenomenon.

Scientific Novelty: The scientific novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry. While previous research, including Mammad Aliyev's work, has explored the linguistic aspects of syllabic meter, this study expands the scope by:

1. Integrating Linguistic and Poetic Analysis: The study combines detailed linguistic analysis with poetic interpretation, offering a holistic understanding of how phonetic structures shape poetic rhythm.

2. Comparative Perspective: By comparing Azerbaijani syllabic meter with other Turkic traditions, the study identifies unique features of Azerbaijani poetry while situating it within a broader Turkic literary context.

3. Focus on Rhythmic Pauses: The study places special emphasis on the role of rhythmic pauses (caesuras) in syllabic meter, building on Aliyev's insights to propose a new framework for analyzing rhythmic structures.

4. Modern Relevance: The study addresses the relevance of syllabic meter in contemporary literary studies, highlighting its significance in preserving cultural heritage and informing modern poetic practices.

Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the linguistic foundations of syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry, with a focus on its phonetic and rhythmic properties. The study aims to elucidate how the Azerbaijani language's phonetic structure shapes the syllabic meter and to evaluate its role in the development of Azerbaijani poetic traditions.

Tasks

1. To analyze the phonetic and phonological properties of the Azerbaijani language that contribute to the formation of syllabic meter.

2. To examine the structural characteristics of syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry, including syllable count, rhythmic pauses, and rhyme.

3. To explore Mammad Aliyev's contributions to the study of syllabic meter and their implications for understanding its linguistic basis.

4. To compare the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry with its manifestations in other Turkic poetic traditions.

5. To assess the historical development of syllabic meter in Azerbaijani literature and its significance in contemporary poetic practices.

The study has yielded several key findings:

1. Linguistic Basis of Syllabic Meter: The syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry is deeply rooted in the phonetic structure of the Azerbaijani language, particularly its syllable-based rhythm and relatively fixed stress patterns.

2. Role of Rhythmic Pauses: Rhythmic pauses (caesuras) play a critical role in shaping the syllabic meter, creating a sense of symmetry and balance in poetic lines.

3. Comparative Insights: While the syllabic meter is a common feature of Turkic poetic traditions, Azerbaijani poetry exhibits unique rhythmic patterns influenced by the language's phonetic and syntactic properties.

4. Mammad Aliyev's Contributions: Aliyev's research provides a robust framework for understanding the syllabic meter as a linguistic phenomenon, emphasizing the interplay between language, rhythm, and poetic form.

5. Cultural Significance: The syllabic meter remains a vital element of Azerbaijani literary heritage, with implications for both traditional and modern poetic practices.

The Linguistic Foundations of Syllabic Meter: The syllabic meter, also known as the syllabic system, is a poetic structure that relies on the equal distribution of syllables in each line of a poem. Unlike metrical systems that emphasize stress (e.g., iambic or trochaic meter) or tone (e.g., tonal meter in Chinese poetry), the syllabic meter prioritizes syllable count as the primary organizing principle. This system is particularly suited to languages with consistent syllable structures and minimal stress variation, such as the Turkic languages, including Azerbaijani.

In Azerbaijani poetry, the syllabic meter is characterized by lines containing a fixed number of syllables, typically ranging from 7 to 11 syllables per line in folk poetry and up to 14 in classical forms. The rhythm is created not through stress patterns but through the repetition of syllable groups, often separated by rhythmic pauses known as caesuras. These pauses divide the line into smaller rhythmic units, creating a sense of balance and symmetry.

Mammad Aliyev, a leading scholar in Azerbaijani poetics, argues that the syllabic meter is a direct reflection of the language's phonetic structure. In his seminal works, such as *Azerbaijani Poetry: Problems of Meter and Euphony* and *Literary Theory*, Aliyev emphasizes that the rhythmic potential of a language—its syllable structure, intonation, and phonetic patterns—shapes the metrical system of its poetry. He writes, "Poetry is a poetic language, and its soul and spirit lie in the phonetic nature, harmony, and pronunciation characteristics of the national language" [5, p. 119].

Mammad Aliyev's Contributions to the Study of Syllabic Meter: Mammad Aliyev's research on syllabic meter represents a cornerstone of Azerbaijani literary scholarship. His work spans several decades and includes both theoretical and comparative studies, such as his doctoral dissertation *Azerbaijani Poetry: Problems of Meter and Euphony* and his book *The Forms and Patterns of Azerbaijani Folk Poetry*. Aliyev's approach is distinguished by its emphasis on the linguistic basis of meter, viewing the syllabic system as a product of the Azerbaijani language's phonetic and rhythmic properties.

One of Aliyev's key contributions is his analysis of rhythmic pauses (caesuras) as a fundamental element of syllabic meter. He argues that caesuras are not merely syntactic breaks but rhythmic units that create a sense of symmetry and balance in poetic lines. In his view, the placement of caesuras is determined by the language's phonetic structure, particularly its syllable

patterns and intonation. Aliyev writes, “The rhythm in Azerbaijani poetry is formed not by stress but by the symmetrical arrangement of syllable groups” [5, p. 122].

Aliyev also distinguishes between different types of rhythmic pauses, including symmetric and asymmetric caesuras. Symmetric caesuras divide the line into equal syllable groups, creating a balanced rhythm, while asymmetric caesuras result in uneven divisions, adding variety and complexity to the rhythm. According to Aliyev, asymmetric caesuras are more common in Azerbaijani poetry, contributing to its distinctive rhythmic richness [5, pp. 130-134].

Comparative Analysis with Turkic Poetic Traditions: The syllabic meter serves as a cornerstone of Turkic poetic traditions, embodying the shared linguistic and cultural heritage of Turkic languages. This metrical system, which prioritizes the counting of syllables over stress or tonal patterns, is a defining feature across various Turkic poetic forms, yet its application diverges significantly due to the distinct phonetic, syntactic, and stylistic characteristics of each language. A detailed comparative analysis of Turkish, Uzbek, Uyghur, and Azerbaijani poetry highlights both the unifying role of the syllabic meter and the unique adaptations that distinguish each tradition, reflecting the diversity within the broader Turkic poetic framework.

In Turkish poetry, the syllabic meter is a fundamental element, particularly in folk poetic forms such as the *mani* and *koşma*. These forms adhere to strict syllable counts, typically ranging from 7 to 11 syllables per line, and incorporate rhythmic pauses to create a balanced and harmonious flow. The *mani*, a quatrain often used in oral traditions, employs a consistent syllabic structure (e.g., 7+7 or 8+8) combined with rhyme schemes to enhance its musicality and memorability. Similarly, the *koşma*, a longer narrative form, uses syllabic meter to maintain rhythmic consistency while allowing for thematic elaboration. Turkish poetry frequently integrates additional poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, and end-rhymes, which amplify the melodic quality of the verse. These elements, rooted in the phonetic properties of the Turkish language, contribute to a structured yet lyrical style that resonates deeply in both oral and written contexts.

In Uzbek and Uyghur poetry, the syllabic meter similarly dominates, reflecting the linguistic affinity of these Central Asian Turkic languages. Uzbek poetry, for instance, employs syllabic meter in forms like the *ghazal* and *doston*, where syllable counts are meticulously maintained to create a rhythmic foundation. The rhythmic structure in Uzbek poetry often avoids heavy reliance on stress, instead emphasizing the natural cadence of syllables, which aligns with the agglutinative nature of the language. Uyghur poetry shares this approach, with forms such as the *muqam*-inspired lyrical poems adhering to syllabic patterns that prioritize rhythm over metrical stress. Both traditions, however, tend to incorporate tonal variations and melodic phrasing, influenced by the musical traditions of Central Asia, which add a layer of complexity to their syllabic frameworks. Unlike Turkish poetry, Uzbek and Uyghur poetic forms are less focused on rigid rhyme schemes, allowing the syllabic rhythm to take precedence as the primary structural element.

Azerbaijani poetry, while rooted in the same syllabic tradition, stands out for its distinctive rhythmic and structural innovations, shaped by the unique phonetic and syntactic properties of the Azerbaijani language. One of the most notable features of Azerbaijani poetry is its use of asymmetric caesuras—strategic pauses within a line that disrupt the expected rhythmic flow and create a dynamic, almost conversational texture. This technique, more pronounced in Azerbaijani poetry than in its Turkish or Central Asian counterparts, allows poets to manipulate the pacing of a poem, introducing moments of tension or emphasis. For example, in the *qoshma* or *bayati* forms,

poets may employ irregular caesuras to break lines into uneven syllable groups, enhancing the emotional or dramatic effect of the verse. The Azerbaijani language's rich vowel harmony, with its nine vowel phonemes, further enriches this rhythmic flexibility, enabling poets to craft lines with varied intonations while maintaining syllabic consistency.

Moreover, the syntactic flexibility of Azerbaijani, characterized by relatively free word order due to its agglutinative structure, allows for greater experimentation within the syllabic framework. Poets can rearrange words or phrases to achieve desired rhythmic effects without sacrificing grammatical coherence, a feature less prominent in Turkish poetry, where word order is more constrained. This flexibility contributes to a fluid and dynamic rhythm in Azerbaijani poetry, distinguishing it from the more rigidly structured Turkish forms. Additionally, Azerbaijani poetry often emphasizes the interplay between syllable groups and caesuras over strict adherence to rhyme, resulting in a less predictable but highly expressive rhythmic pattern. While rhyme is not absent, it serves a secondary role compared to the rhythmic interplay, which drives the poem's momentum.

A comparative analysis of these traditions reveals that the syllabic meter, while a unifying feature, is adapted to suit the linguistic and cultural contexts of each Turkic language. In Turkish poetry, the syllabic meter is tightly interwoven with rhyme, alliteration, and assonance, creating a polished and musical style that prioritizes euphony. Uzbek and Uyghur poetry, by contrast, lean toward a purer syllabic rhythm, with less emphasis on rhyme and more on the natural cadence of the language, often complemented by melodic or tonal influences from regional musical traditions. Azerbaijani poetry, however, strikes a balance between structure and spontaneity, using asymmetric caesuras and syntactic flexibility to craft a more fluid and expressive rhythm. These variations underscore the adaptability of the syllabic meter, which serves as a versatile framework capable of accommodating diverse linguistic and aesthetic priorities.

Furthermore, the cultural and historical contexts of these poetic traditions shape their distinct approaches to the syllabic meter. Turkish poetry, with its deep roots in Ottoman literary culture and Anatolian folk traditions, reflects a blend of formal and oral influences, where the syllabic meter bridges classical and vernacular expressions. Uzbek and Uyghur poetry, situated in the crossroads of Central Asian cultural exchange, draw heavily on the region's musical and oral storytelling traditions, embedding the syllabic meter within a broader performative context. Azerbaijani poetry, influenced by its geographic position between the Caucasus, Persia, and the Turkic world, incorporates elements of both Turkic and Persian poetic traditions, with the syllabic meter serving as a vehicle for emotional and philosophical exploration.

In conclusion, the syllabic meter is a shared foundation of Turkic poetic traditions, yet its implementation reveals a spectrum of creative possibilities shaped by linguistic, cultural, and historical factors. Turkish poetry's structured musicality, Uzbek and Uyghur poetry's rhythmic purity, and Azerbaijani poetry's dynamic flexibility illustrate the richness of this metrical system. By examining these traditions side by side, we gain a deeper appreciation for the syllabic meter's role as both a unifying thread and a canvas for innovation, reflecting the vibrant diversity of Turkic literary heritage.

Historical Development of Syllabic Meter in Azerbaijani Poetry: The syllabic meter has deep roots in Azerbaijani literary history, originating in the oral traditions of folk poetry. Forms such as the *bayatı* (a four-line poem with a 7-syllable meter) and *gəraylı* (a longer form with 11 syllables per line) demonstrate the prominence of syllabic meter in Azerbaijani folk poetry. These

forms rely on the natural rhythmic patterns of the Azerbaijani language, creating a sense of harmony and musicality.

With the development of written literature in the medieval period, the syllabic meter was adapted to classical forms, particularly in the works of poets such as Nizami Ganjavi and Fuzuli. While these poets also employed the aruz meter (a quantitative meter based on syllable length), the syllabic meter remained a significant influence, particularly in lyric poetry.

In the modern period, the syllabic meter has continued to play a vital role in Azerbaijani poetry, particularly in the works of poets such as Samad Vurghun and Rasul Rza. These poets have drawn on the rhythmic potential of the Azerbaijani language to create innovative forms that blend traditional syllabic patterns with modern poetic techniques.

The Role of Phonetic Structure in Shaping Syllabic Meter: The phonetic structure of the Azerbaijani language is a key factor in the formation of syllabic meter. The language's syllable-based rhythm, characterized by clear syllable boundaries and minimal stress variation, provides an ideal foundation for syllabic meter. Additionally, the Azerbaijani language's vowel harmony and flexible word order allow poets to create varied rhythmic patterns within the syllabic framework.

Mammad Aliyev argues that the phonetic structure of a language determines its metrical possibilities. He writes, "If the phonetic nature of our language did not provide such possibilities, the aruz meter would not have developed new patterns in our national poetry" [5, p. 139]. This insight highlights the dynamic interplay between language and meter, demonstrating how the phonetic properties of Azerbaijani shape its poetic traditions.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided a comprehensive exploration of the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani poetry, emphasizing its linguistic foundations and rhythmic properties. The syllabic meter, characterized by its reliance on syllable count and rhythmic pauses, is a direct reflection of the Azerbaijani language's phonetic structure. Mammad Aliyev's research has been instrumental in elucidating these connections, offering a robust framework for understanding the syllabic meter as a linguistic phenomenon.

Through a comparative analysis with other Turkic poetic traditions, the study has highlighted both the shared features and unique characteristics of Azerbaijani syllabic meter. The prominence of asymmetric caesuras and the interplay between syllable groups and rhythmic pauses distinguish Azerbaijani poetry within the broader Turkic literary context.

The findings of this study underscore the cultural and linguistic significance of the syllabic meter in Azerbaijani literature. As a traditional form that continues to influence modern poetic practices, the syllabic meter serves as a testament to the enduring power of language in shaping artistic expression. Future research could further explore the application of syllabic meter in contemporary Azerbaijani poetry and its potential for cross-cultural literary exchanges.

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