

FIRST DIALECTOLOGISTS



MAMMADAGHA SHIRALIYEV

(1909 - 1991)

“As the vocabulary of our dialects and sub-dialects is a product of long centuries, we meet here the words reflecting the past periods of the Azerbaijani people. The words that indicate tribe names and family relationships connected with the tribal period are still found in the vocabulary of our dialects and regional varieties”.

(M. Shiraliyev. *Fundamentals of Azerbaijani Dialectology*)



- 1909, September 13: Born in Shamakhi, Azerbaijan.
- 1927: Entered the Department of Linguistics of the Oriental Faculty at Azerbaijan State University.
- 1931: Graduated from Azerbaijan State University.
- 1933: Admitted to the *aspirantura* at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute and studied under Professor B. Chobanzade.
- 1941: Defended his dissertation.
- 1943: Received professor degree.
- 1949: Corresponding member of Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.
- 1949-51, 1960-68: Director of the Institute of Language and Literature, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.
- 1953-54: Head of Turkish Philology Department at Sofia University (Bulgaria).
- 1957: Full member of Turkish Language Association (Turkey).
- 1962: Full member of Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.
- 1972: Received the State Award of Azerbaijan.
- 1969-1988: Director of the Institute of Linguistics, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences.



Short Biography

Mammadagha Shirali oglu Shiraliyev, the founder of Azerbaijani professional dialectology, was born in Shamakhi (Azerbaijan) on September 13, 1909. He studied at the Department of Linguistics of the Oriental Faculty, Azerbaijan State University (now Baku State University) from 1927 to 1931. After graduating from the University, Shiraliyev was sent for mandatory service to Aghdam (this city is located in the region of Karabakh, which is now under Armenian occupation), where he worked as a teacher at the Agrochemical Technical School. In 1933, M. Shiraliyev was admitted to the *aspirantura* (postgraduate program) at the Azerbaijan State Pedagogical Institute (now

Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University) on the specialty of Azerbaijani linguistics. Here, he studied under Professor B. Chobanzade, a distinguished Turkologist, who was repressed by Stalin's regime in 1938.

M. Shiraliev taught language courses at the same institute during his postgraduate study as well as after graduation. After completing the postgraduate program, he was elevated to the post of vice dean and then dean. He worked here until 1941.

In 1941, M. Shiraliev successfully defended his thesis "Baku dialect". This thesis was actually submitted as a candidate dissertation, i.e. a doctoral thesis, not a habilitation one. However, the defense council, one of the members of which was a prominent Turkologist, N. Dmitriyev, highly appreciated the value of the work and M. Shiraliev was directly awarded the degree of doctor of philology. This was first and a unique case in the history of thesis defenses in Azerbaijan.

In the same year, M. Shiraliev began to work at the Faculty of Philology, Azerbaijan State University. He worked as the head of the Department of General Linguistics in 1941-1942, 1949-1960 and served as the dean of the Faculty between 1942 and 1945. When Shiraliev became professor in 1943, he was just 34 years old. He was the university's vice-rector for science from 1945 to 1949.

M. Shiraliev was elected a corresponding member of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences in 1949, becoming its full member in 1962. He worked as the Director of the Institute of Language and Literature, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences from 1949 to 1951 and in 1960-68. He played an essential role in establishing and growing of the Department of Dialectology of the Institute.

In 1968-1969, Shiraliev became the academic secretary of the Division for Humanities of the Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences. He was re-appointed as the Director of the Linguistic Institute in 1969, when the Institute of Language and Literature was separated into two parts. He held this position until his retirement in 1988. After his retirement, he served as a consultant of the director of the same institute from 1988 to the time of his death in 1991.

M. Shiraliev was also a good field-worker, working on dialectal expeditions. He collected dialectal data from Nakhchivan (1941), Gazakh (1942), Ganja (1943) and

Karabakh, namely from Shusha (1938) and Aghdam (1944). As it can be seen from the dates in the parentheses, even the Second World War could not stop him from collecting the materials. During 1945-1958, he participated in most of the dialectal expeditions organized by the Institute of Language and Literature, Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences and the Faculty of Philology, Azerbaijan State University, collecting data from Zagatala, Gakh, Sabirabad, Ordubad, Aghstafa, Tovuz, İsmailli and other regions of Azerbaijan.

Shiraliyev was well-known not only in Azerbaijan, but also throughout the Soviet Union and even beyond its borders. He conducted his research and teaching activity outside of Azerbaijan, too. He was invited by the Bulgarian government to Bulgaria and headed the Turkish Philology Department at Sofia University in the 1953-1954 academic year. He gave here lectures on Turkish dialectology. Shiraliyev did fieldwork in Bulgaria, too. He is the first scholar to study the Rhodope Turkish dialect. He visited also the villages Komuniga (Kardjali Region) and Opaka (Targovishte Region). Shiraliyev illustrated his lectures at Sofia University with examples from these regions by highlighting the special features of the related dialects and making comparisons between them. In 1963, M. Shiraliyev gave lectures on dialectology and taught Turkish to European students in Poland's Warsaw and Cracow Universities as a guest professor.

M. Shiraliyev's abroad activity was not limited to the pedagogical and field-work spheres. His articles about Turkic languages and dialects were published in Turkey, Russia, Uzbekistan, Poland, England and other countries. He was a full member of Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu, Ankara). One has to agree with Prof. Dr. Aghamusa Akhundov, who wrote in his book *Language and Literature* (Axundov 2003) that M. Shiraliyev is the first Azerbaijan linguist who breaking Azerbaijan linguistic borders to the international community has gained his bright place in the boundless horizons of academic Turkology.



Main works

- 1941: *Bakı Dialekti [Baku Dialect]*. Doctoral thesis. This work was published as a book by Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences in 1949 and 1957.
- 1958: “О диалектной основе азербайджанского национального литературного языка” [On koiné of the Standard Azerbaijani language]. *Вопросы Языкознания*, 1, 79-84.
- 1960: “Azerbaycan dili dialektlerinin Türk dili dialektleri ile mukayiseli öyrenilmesi (Fonetik materiallar esasında)” [The comparative study of Azerbaijani and Turkish dialects (On the base of phonetic materials)], in *VIII. Türk Dili Kurultayında Okunan Bilimsel Bildiriler-1957*, Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 191-208.
- 1962: *Azərbaycan Dialektologiyasının Əsasları [Fundamentals of Azerbaijan Dialectology]*. Baku: Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences Press (the book, republished with some additions in 1968, was awarded Azerbaijan State Prize in 1972).
- 1964: *Azərbaycan Dilinin Dialektoloji Lüğəti [Dialectological Dictionary of the Azerbaijani Language]* (with M. İslamov, K. Ramazanov and others). Baku: Azerbaijan Academy of Sciences Press.
- 1965: “Кыпчакские элементы в азербайджанском языке (на материале диалектов и говоров)” [Kipchak elements in the Azerbaijani language (On the material the dialects and sub-dialects)], in *Исследования по Грамматике и Лексике Тюркских Языков*. Ташкент: Наука, 5-17.
- 1976: “Носовые гласные (на материале диалектов и говоров азербайджанского языка)” [Nasal vowels (on the material of dialects and sub-dialects of the Azerbaijani Language)], in *Turcologica 1976. К Семидесятилетию Академика А. Н. Кононова*. Ленинград: Наука, Ленинградское отделение, pp. 181-183.
- 1983: *Диалекты и Говоры Азербайджанского Языка [Dialects and Sub-dialects of the Azerbaijani Language]*. Баку: Элм.



Achievements

Shiraliyev's contribution to the development of Azerbaijani linguistics was significant. He published ten monographs and more than hundred articles and presentation papers. M. Shiraliyev was interested in many issues of dialectology, like how to collect the relevant dialectal data and describe a dialect; how to reveal Kipchak elements in an Oghuz dialect and to show historical background of this fact (Ширалиев 1965); etc. Shiraliyev was one of the first Turkologists who noticed the existence of nasal vowels in Turkic dialects (Ширалиев 1976). Especially, his contribution in the field of studying the Turkic languages with geolinguistic methods is undeniable.

The founder of geolinguistics in Azerbaijan is M. Shiraliyev. He is the first linguist in Turkology who applied geolinguistic methods to choose the isoglosses, to clarify and show the specific features of dialects. He used for the classification of the Azerbaijani dialects mainly geolinguistic principles. However, he partially applied some genetic and cultural-historical criteria as well. The classification in the monograph *Fundamentals of Azerbaijan Dialectology*, the work that received the Azerbaijan State Award in 1972, is based on these principles. According to these criteria, the Azerbaijani dialects were divided into four main groups: Eastern (Baku, Guba and Shamakhi dialects), Northern (Nukha dialect), Western (Gazakh, Karabakh and Ganja dialects) and Southern (Nakhchivan, Ordubad and Tabriz dialects). Each of these groups includes also certain regional varieties.

The classification of the Turkic dialects on the basis of the geolinguistic principles are favored by many Turkologists and has been regarded as one of the most appropriate classification methods. For instance, Sh. Saribayev (1973), a Kazakh linguist, highly appreciated the Shiraliyev's geolinguistic approach and wrote: "There are many controversial issues in Kazakh dialectology. One of them is the classification of dialects. An objective path for this issue in Turkology was defined by Azerbaijan's prominent Turkologist M. Shiraliyev".

We see the geolinguistic methods of Shiraliyev in the fundamental work *Dialectological Atlas of the Azerbaijani Language*, too (Şirəliyev, Islamov 1990). This book of high polygraphic quality is the first and one of the best dialectological atlases in the Turkic world. The compilation of this atlas was developed during seventeen years of research by M. Islamov, T. Hamzayev, K. Ramazanov, S. Behbudov, E. Aghayev, Z. Hasiyev and E. Aliyev under direct leadership of M. Shiraliyev. The atlas consists of 128 maps based on rich dialectological data covering the phonetic (43 maps), morphologic (31 maps), syntactic (4 maps) and lexical (50 maps) levels of Azerbaijani.

M. Shiraliyev, along with dialectology, conducted a number of research works on language in other theoretical and practical areas. He worked on the syntax of complex sentences (Ширалиев 1956) and parts of speech (Ширалиев 1971), investigated the slangs used in Azerbaijan (Şiraliyev 1966) and focused on problems of etymology (Ширалиев 1960; 1975). These works also have a high academic value. Today, many Azerbaijani linguists benefit from Shiraliyev's works and apply his methods and approaches for their research.

One of the most significant contributions of M. Shiraliyev to the development of Turkic linguistics is connected with the journal *Советская Тюркология* (*Soviet Turkology*). M. Shiraliyev was the first editor-in-chief of this journal established in 1970. He was the one who organized the concept of the journal and served as its editor-in-chief for almost twenty years. This was the most prestigious journal on Turkology in the Soviet Union. The articles on Turkic languages and dialects that were published in the journal during that time dealt generally with the linguistic and literary problems of Turkology and discussed the ways of solutions of these problems. Many Turkologists from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Bashkiria, Kazakhstan and other Turkic countries periodically published their articles in the journal. However, the editor-in-chief published the papers of academicians from other countries as well. Thus, M. Shiraliyev believed that scholars of international area should work together in the development of Turkology.

Today, the journal is published under the name *Türkologiya* (*Turkology*). The editorial staff of the journal is trying to be loyal to the academic and cultural ideas of Professor M. Shiraliyev.

We outlined here just general contributions of Mammadagha Shiraliyev to the development of Turkology. He was one of the scholars who dedicated his whole life to academic works. Shiraliyev helped many young researches to get established in dialectology. Under his supervision, 10 doctors of philology and more than 50 candidates of philology prepared their dissertations and successfully defended them. The works of M. Shiraliyev, especially his dialectological school, will serve for many years in the development of Turkic linguistics.



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