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**STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC VARIABILITY OF PROVERBS:  
IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE DYNAMICS****Gulshan Bayram gizi Nasirova**

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**Abstract:** *The research explores the structural-syntactic features of proverbs in Azerbaijani and English, focusing especially on their elliptical constructions and variability. Variability in proverbs – the capacity for change in form and structure – highlights their wide applicability in both written and spoken discourse. Through ellipsis, the omission of certain words or expressions grants these units conciseness and expressive power, allowing meaning to be completed through context and collective consciousness. The study shows that in both literary examples (such as in the works of John Galsworthy and Ocean Vuong) and everyday speech, proverbs are often structurally modified, acquiring new syntactic and semantic forms. This reveals their stylistic and functional flexibility, as well as their dynamic and multi-layered variability within the language. Thus, proverbs function not only as a system of fixed expressions but also as adaptable and creative elements in contemporary language use.*

**Keywords:** *structural-syntactic variation, ellipsis, proverbs, stylistic function, syntactic structure, comparative analysis, literary language*

**Introduction**

The structural-semantic variability of proverbs is based on the analysis of different syntactic structures in the context of the language's dynamics and development. When discussing syntactic variability, it is important to note that although various expression methods exist, the number of syntactic variants is relatively limited. In this respect, syntactic variants seem to occur only under specific conditions – namely, changes in the principles of agreement and government of word combinations, the presence or absence of prefixes, and the use of case forms. Syntactic variability is more prominently reflected in the concordant features of words, and here, alongside the similarity of grammatical meanings and models, the compatibility of agreement components becomes central. The key distinction in syntactic variants lies in the formal incompatibility of the dependent component. For instance, the presence of a prefix, the case form, etc., are markers of such variants.

These structural-syntactic changes are also linked to semantic and grammatical interrelations. Identifying these connections can sometimes be practically challenging, as the breakdown of grammatical links and the overall meaning of the constructions may remain the same. In such cases, syntactic variants are viewed as the result of a historically developed process. These changes are caused, for example, by the use of similar structures or shifts in agreement patterns. As part of the natural evolution of language, formal changes may occasionally lead to more nuanced manifestations of semantic and grammatical relationships.

One of the current issues influencing language development concerns syntactic variability, particularly in English and Azerbaijani. This variability is mostly observed at the level of word combinations. In addition to the similarity of grammatical meanings and models, the lexical compatibility of the main component (the grammatical nucleus) of these combinations is one of the signs of syntactic variants. This demonstrates that language is a continuously evolving and changing system.

## **Syntax of Proverbs and the Role of Ellipsis: A Comparative Analysis in English and Azerbaijani**

When analyzing the syntactic structures of proverbs in English and Azerbaijani, it is evident that each language possesses its own unique structural characteristics. These proverbs may consist of different sentence types - simple and complex sentences, as well as elliptical constructions. For instance, certain parts of proverbs may feature elliptical sentences. When analyzing the features of such sentences, we observe that these types of constructions are increasingly used in both the spoken and written dimensions of language.

According to linguistic literature, elliptical sentences operate within a limited yet relative range of function. In spoken language, they are often situation-dependent, while in written language, they may independently convey complete thoughts even without context. In many instances, such sentences also depend on the communicative situation.[16] Elliptical sentences possess predicativity and are distinguished by their characteristic intonation. In linguistics, subjectless sentences were long classified as those requiring the restoration of an omitted component. However, compared to other sentence types, in elliptical sentences, there is generally no need to restore the omitted component or structure - on the contrary, inserting a word or phrase in that position may burden the expression of the idea. Therefore, in such constructions, the absence of a lexical or syntactic unit is not felt. Sentences incorporating these structures are now more commonly observed in the works of both English and Azerbaijani writers.

Elliptical sentences are known to hold a special place in linguistics. These sentences are used in spoken language depending on various situational contexts, while in written language, they typically allow for the expression of independent ideas without the need for additional context. The primary feature of elliptical sentences is the omission of certain components, yet this does not hinder comprehension. On the contrary, such sentences are often more concise and expressive. In cases where ellipsis occurs, the omitted component may be reconstructed based on the syntactic position within the sentence, which contributes to making the speech more natural and comprehensible. In many cases, elliptical sentences conform to the rhythm of language, forming more fluent and aesthetically pleasing expressions.

Sometimes, there is no need to restore the elided element or structure at all; in fact, doing so may overburden the sentence and obscure the intended meaning. As a result, the absence of any lexical or syntactic unit in such constructions is not felt. Sentence structures of this kind appear frequently in the works of both English and Azerbaijani authors.

For example:

*I differ from the last speaker in his diagnosis of the case. Let us admit all he says, and look at the thing more widely. The proof of pudding...* [3, 92]

The proverb *"The proof of the pudding is in the eating"* is translated into Azerbaijani as *"Puddinqi yeyərsən, dadını bilərsən."* Such variations highlight the structural similarities and differences between languages. In Azerbaijani, a comparable expression is *"Yeyərsən qaz ətini, görərsən ləzzətini."* Sometimes, this proverb also appears in the negative form: *"Yeməmişən qaz ətini, görməmişən ləzzətini."* Here, elliptical structures function as tools that enhance the effectiveness of the language. [4, 93]

The use of ellipsis in the structure of language is not limited to the mere omission of specific words. It also enhances both the positive and negative expressiveness of the language. Many linguists have emphasized that such constructions are closely tied to stylistic and aesthetic considerations. According to A.M. Babayev, the aim of ellipsis is not to repeat certain words, but rather to ensure a more concise and impactful expression. For this reason, restoring the omitted component may sometimes weaken the stylistic effect. [4, 93]

K.A.Habibova shows that elliptical sentences are widely used in modern Azerbaijani. She notes that such constructions are especially effective in advertising discourse, as they are both laconic and psychologically powerful. [11, 21]

David Crystal also emphasizes that ellipsis serves the purpose of making language more concise and impactful in style. He explains how this feature is used in both spoken and written language, including in paremiological units. [6]

In addition to ellipsis, linguists note that the frequent repetition of such phraseological units contributes to the emergence of new, shortened forms in the process of language development. I. Abramets believes that under the name of ellipsis, such an abbreviation is often meant, in which case the full form, which is easily restored when using speech ellipsis, exists in the minds of language speakers. According to him, repeated use of elliptical phraseological units in speech eventually leads to the emergence of both full and shortened forms coexisting in the language. [18] Z. Mustafa states that such reductions arise from the fragmentation of lengthy spoken phraseological units, which in turn leads to a transformation of stylistic expression.

The application of ellipsis in proverbs manifests itself at various levels. First, ellipsis can occur at the level of affixes. This phenomenon is frequently observed in spoken language and literary texts. For example:

*Ata doğrayıb, oğul yeyib(dir). Qız yükü duz yükü(dür). Qız yükü duz yükü(dür).*

As these examples show, the affixes have been omitted from the sentences, yet this does not hinder comprehension. On the contrary, these types of sentences create a powerful effect in terms of emphasis and expressiveness. The omission of affixes also contributes to making the sentence structure more rhythmic and fluid.

The second type of ellipsis occurs at the level of words and expressions. This type of ellipsis involves the omission of a particular sentence element. For instance:

*It is never to late (to learn)* [1, 97].

*A bird in the hand (is worth two in the bush)* [1, 18].

Or in Azerbaijani:

*Altmışında zurnaçılıq öyrənən axırətdə (çalar)* [20, 682].

As can be seen, the omission of a part in the proverb does not diminish its meaning - in fact, it allows for a more concise and expressive delivery.

Elliptical sentence structures are more commonly observed in English proverbs due to their high frequency of usage. The English proverbs cited above appear in literary works in the following ways. For example:

*"It will be, whatever's done. A bird in the hand and such a big bird, Michael. Ah! Here's Hilary!"* [17, 108]

In another work, we read:

*"He complained to Fleur that the book dealt with nothing but birds in the bush."* [10, 29]

*"Time was flying, his birds in the bush no nearer, no issue from the web anywhere visible."* [9, 134]

In the Azerbaijani equivalent of *"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,"* which is translated as *"Soğan olsun, nağd olsun,"* we observe that in the first sentence only the first part of the proverb is given, while the second part is omitted. In the second and third sentences, on the contrary, the first part is shown in abbreviated form. The phrase *"A bird in the hand"* independently refers to something reliable or a task one can confidently rely on.

As can be seen, the omission of a particular expression in such sentences does not harm the overall content; on the contrary, it serves to create strong emotionality, conciseness, and expressiveness. Elliptical sentences contribute to enhancing fluency. These are not forms consciously constructed from the outset, but rather have been gradually refined and polished over time. As a result, the genre and stylistic features of the language have contributed to the prevalence of elliptical forms of proverbs.

Clearly, ellipsis refers to the meaningful absence of a unit within a certain component of the text.

Sometimes, the English writer John Galsworthy very successfully creates variation by shortening a proverb while simultaneously enriching it with additional elements. This can be seen in the following example:

*"Their papers he (Soames) noticed, never lost a chance of having a dab at English policy; seemed to think, they could always call the tune for England to pipe to."* [7, 78]

Here, the original proverb *"Who pays the piper, calls the tune"* has been varied. As the example shows, Galsworthy does not use the entire proverb, but only the second part - *"call the tune."* This expression carries meanings such as *"to be in control," "to have authority."* Furthermore, instead of the omitted first part of the proverb, the author adds an entire phrase - *"for England to pipe to"* - as a new contextual element.

This demonstrates how ellipsis allows the meaning of a paremial unit to be clarified and contextualized, thereby fulfilling the same function as reduction. In the sentence above, ellipsis significantly enhances the expressiveness of the statement. The omission of components increases expressivity, heightens emotional intensity, and can serve as a means of individualizing a character's speech.

The renowned English linguist Jonathan Black, who specializes in paremiology, has explored three types of variation in proverbs: lexical, morphological, and structural. [17] He argues that at the structural-syntactic level, proverbs can undergo various forms of variation, which he categorizes as follows:

**I. The basic structure of the proverb is preserved, while the second part is completely altered.**

For example:

The English proverb *"When the cat is away, the mice will play"* - equivalent to the Azerbaijani expressions *"At ölüb, itlərin bayramıdır"* or *"Ev qalıb əyriyə, ham yeyə, həm səyriyə"* - is used in a shortened and modified form in John Galsworthy's work:

*"When the cat is away... Gramophone going in the kitchen!"* [8, 102] (*"When the cat's away, the gramophone is moved to the kitchen."*)

As seen in this example, the core structure of the proverb is retained, while the second part is replaced with an entirely different clause—*"Gramophone going in the kitchen!"*

Another instance from the same author reads:

*"With characteristic decision old Jolyon came at once to the point. 'I've been altering my arrangements, Jo,' he said. 'You can cut your coat a bit longer in the future.'"* [8, 166]

Here, Galsworthy makes use of the proverb *"Cut your coat according to your cloth"* - equivalent to the Azerbaijani *"Ayağını yorğanına görə uzat"*. He retains the main structure but replaces the second half entirely, thus creating a structurally altered version.

Such structural modifications can also be found in Azerbaijani literature. For instance, the well-known proverb *"Malını yeməyən malını yeyərlər, ölüsünü də söyərlər"* is creatively transformed in S. Rahimov's novel *Shamo* as follows:

*"Malını yeməyən malını yeyərlər, üstündən də cam-cam sərin sudan içərlər."* [22, 316] (*"They will eat the wealth of those who do not eat their own wealth, and drink cool water on top of it."*)

Similarly, the proverb cited by A. Huseynzada - *"Dünya beş gündür, beşi də qara"* (*"The world lasts five days, and all five are dark"*) - appears in a modified version in Anar's work *"Beşmərtəbəli evin altıncı mərtəbəsi"*:

*"Dünya beş gündür, nə qədər imkan var, keş çəkəcəm"* [2, 220].

(*"The world lasts five days; as long as I can, I'll enjoy myself."*)

**II. The basic structure of the proverb is preserved, but one or more words in its composition are altered.**

For example:

“*The cowl does not make the monk*” [5, 66] - the Azerbaijani equivalent of the proverb “*Hər əmmamə qoyan rahib olmaz*” is “*Hər oxuyandan Molla Panah olmaz*” (“Not everyone who wears a turban is a scholar”).

“*It is not the hood that makes the monk*”. As seen in the example, the main structure is maintained, but a few words are altered: *cowl* becomes *hood*, and *does not* is changed to *is not*.

In the same work, we read:

“*The cobbler must stick to his last*” [5, 49] - the Azerbaijani version of the proverb is “*Öz köcünü sür, özgədə işin olmasın*”. This proverb also undergoes variation and appears as: “*Let the cobbler go behind his last*.” As seen, *must stick* is changed to *go behind*.

Now, let us consider some examples in Azerbaijani literature:

“*Dünya bir yağlı quyruqdur, yeyə bilənə nuş, geyənə don olsun*” [15, 289], the proverb in S. Rahimov’s *Shamo* is transformed into:

“*Qoca dünya yeyənə quyruqdur, geyənə don, minənə atdır*” [21, 290]. In this case, the structure is preserved, but several words are altered: *dünya* becomes *qoca dünya* (“old world”), *yağlı quyruqdur* is modified to *yeyənə quyruqdur* (“for those who eat, there’s the tail”), and *yeyə bilənə nuş* changes to *minənə atdır* (“for those who ride, there’s the horse”).

Similarly, the well-known proverb “*Könlü balıq istəyənin quyruğu suda gərək*” is used in various forms in Azerbaijani literature:

“*Könlü balıq istəyən gərək girsin dənizə*” [23, 68]

“*Könlü balıq istəyən quyruğunu suya vurur*” [15, 442].

As seen, the same proverb undergoes variations and appears in different forms.

### **III. The form of the proverb is completely changed, but the meaning is preserved.**

For example:

“*He that would have eggs must endure the cackling of hens.*”

(“*Yumurta istəyəndə gərək toyuqların qaqqıltısına dözsün*” or “*Əziyyətsiz məziyyət olmaz*”)

The Azerbaijani equivalent of the proverb is “*Çəkməsən cəfa, görməzsən səfa*”.

Similarly, we encounter the following proverbs:

“*He that would eat the fruit must climb the tree.*”

“*He who does not work neither shall he eat.*”

“*He who would eat the nut must first crack the shell.*”

As seen from the examples, the same proverb undergoes variation in different writers' works, appearing in four different forms. In each case, the form is completely changed, but the meaning remains the same.

To illustrate further, we shall examine another example:

“*One cloud is enough to eclipse all the sun*”

(*Bütün günəşin qarşısını kəsmək üçün bircə bulud kifayətdir*)

The Azerbaijani equivalent is “*Bir dana bir naxırı korlar*”.

Other variations:

“*One drop of poison infects the whole tun of wine.*”

“*The rotten apple injures its neighbours.*”

Now, let us look at the Azerbaijani examples:

“*Doğru söz qılınc kimi kəsərli olar*”/“*Adamın sözü doğru olanda qılınc kimi daşdan keçər*” [12, 25]

“*Qonağın ruzisi özündən qabaq gələr*” [13, 214]

As seen, the structure of the proverb is completely changed, but the same meanings are expressed.

Changes in word order within proverbs - despite their generally fixed nature - are particularly noteworthy. Such changes often emerge as a natural outcome of transformations in a language’s grammatical structure. In the novel *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* by the renowned English-language writer Ocean Vuong, modifications in the position of modifiers (i.e., a modifier following the word it qualifies) and the use of ellipsis are employed in a simple yet highly effective manner:

*“Love is not a thing. It is a series of decisions made in the dark.” [24, 129]*

In this sentence, the ellipsis and the postposed modifier serve rhetorical clarity and emphasis, all the while preserving grammatical structure. The omission of an element in the sentence does not impair the overall meaning; on the contrary, it creates a more powerful and meaningful impact.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the variations in word order within the structures of proverbs in both English and Azerbaijani reflect the historical evolution of sentence construction. Consequently, both older and newer variants coexist within specific historical contexts, revealing the fluidity and adaptability of proverbs over time.

Ellipsis, formed through syntactic means such as structure, word order, intonation, and rhythm, plays a central role in both languages. These elliptical constructions are semantically independent, a feature that underpins their structural stability. Even when certain expressions are substituted, the overarching meaning of the proverb remains unchanged, demonstrating the resilience of its communicative function.

The research at the paremiological level confirms that syntactic variation in proverbs illustrates the dynamic nature of language evolution. Stylistic changes, influenced by both natural and subtle processes, shape the form and meaning of these units. These linguistic transformations are evident across cultures and languages, highlighting the universal yet culturally specific role of proverbs in communication.

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## ATALAR SÖZLƏRİNİN STRUKTUR-SEMANTİK VARIATIVLIYI: DİLİN DİNAMİKASI KONTEKSTİNDƏ

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**Xülasə:** *Tədqiqatda Azərbaycan və ingilis dillərində atalar sözlərinin struktur-sintaktik xüsusiyyətləri, xüsusilə onların elliptik quruluşları və variativliyi araşdırılır. Atalar sözlərində variativlik, yəni forma və struktur baxımından dəyişmə qabiliyyəti – bu ifadələrin həm yazılı, həm də şifahi nitqdə geniş istifadə imkanlarını göstərir. Ellipsis vasitəsilə müəyyən söz və ya ifadələrin buraxılması, bu vahidlərə yığcamlıq və ifadə gücü qazandırır, eyni zamanda kontekstdən və kollektiv şüurdan asılı olaraq mənanın tamamlanmasına imkan verir. Tədqiqatda göstərilir ki, həm ədəbi nümunələrdə (məsələn, John Galsworthy və Ocean Vuong-un əsərlərində), həm də gündəlik danışmada atalar sözləri tez-tez struktur baxımından dəyişdirilərək yeni sintaktik və semantik forma alır. Bu da onların stilistik və funksional çevikliyini, eləcə də dil daxilində dinamik və çoxşaxəli variativliyini ortaya qoyur. Beləliklə, atalar sözləri həm sabit ifadələr sistemi, həm də müasir dil istifadəsində dəyişkən və yaradıcı elementlər kimi çıxış edir.*

**Açar sözlər:** *struktur-sintaktik variasiya, ellipsis, atalar sözləri, üslubi funksiya, sintaktik quruluş, müqayisəli təhlil, bədii dil*

## СТРУКТУРНО-СЕМАНТИЧЕСКАЯ ВАРИАТИВНОСТЬ ПОСЛОВИЦ: В КОНТЕКСТЕ ДИНАМИКИ ЯЗЫКА

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**Резюме:** *В исследовании рассматриваются структурно-синтаксические особенности пословиц на азербайджанском и английском языках, особенно их эллиптические конструкции и вариативность. Вариативность пословиц — способность изменяться с точки зрения формы и структуры — подчёркивает широкие возможности их применения как в письменной, так и в устной речи. Эллипсис, то есть опущение определённых слов или выражений, придаёт этим единицам лаконичность и выразительность, позволяя завершать смысл с опорой на контекст и коллективное сознание. В исследовании показано, что как в литературных образцах (например, в произведениях Джона Голсуорси и Оушена Вуонга), так и в повседневной речи пословицы часто подвергаются структурным изменениям, приобретая новые синтаксические и семантические формы. Это свидетельствует об их сти-*

*листической и функциональной гибкости, а также о динамичной и многослойной вариативности внутри языка. Таким образом, пословицы выступают не только как система устойчивых выражений, но и как изменчивые и креативные элементы в современном языковом употреблении.*

**Ключевые слова:** *структурно-синтаксическая вариативность, эллипсис, пословицы, стилистическая функция, синтаксическая структура, сравнительный анализ, художественный язык*

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