
Morphological and syntactic factors in the formation of abbreviations (based on the material of the Azerbaijani language)

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Abstract: The present study aims to investigate the morphological and syntactic factors underlying the formation of abbreviations in the Azerbaijani language. The research seeks to demonstrate that abbreviation is not merely a mechanical shortening process, but a systemic linguistic phenomenon reflecting the interaction between word-formation mechanisms, syntactic organization, semantic interpretation, and pragmatic functioning. Particular attention is given to the role of the agglutinative structure of Azerbaijani in shaping abbreviation models and to the principle of linguistic economy as a fundamental explanatory framework. The research is based on a descriptive-analytical approach. Structural and component analysis were applied to identify the morphological composition of source nominative complexes. Word-formation analysis was used to classify abbreviation types (initial, syllabic, mixed, telescopic). Contextual and syntactic analysis was employed to examine the integration of abbreviations into sentence structure and discourse. Elements of semantic and pragmatic analysis were incorporated to assess lexicalization processes, contextual transparency, and communicative efficiency. The findings demonstrate that morphological motivation in abbreviation is conditioned by the structural complexity of multicomponent nominative units, especially in an agglutinative language where extended constructions may hinder processing and perception. Abbreviations emerge as compact nominative units and subsequently integrate into the morphological system, acquiring inflectional and derivational potential. Syntactic motivation is manifested in repetition optimization, structural simplification, and the reduction of cognitive load within discourse. The study also reveals that semantic transparency and pragmatic appropriateness are crucial for successful abbreviation use. While some abbreviations undergo lexicalization and function as independent lexical items, others may generate ambiguity if insufficiently clarified. The interaction of morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic factors confirms its systemic character.

Keywords: Abbreviation, Linguistic economy, Verbal compression, Morphological motivation, Syntactic motivation, Lexicalization, Pragmatic factors, Azerbaijani language.

1. Introduction

The current stage in the development of the Azerbaijani language is characterized by a significant increase in the formation and use of abbreviations, driven by the intensification of information flows, the expansion of official and business communication, and the rapid development of digital modes of interaction. Under these conditions, the study of the morphological and syntactic mechanisms underlying abbreviation formation acquires particular relevance. The tendency toward linguistic economy has long been observed in Azerbaijani linguistic thought. The principle of economy has been examined from psycholinguistic and functional perspectives, including in the analysis of epic discourse [1], in studies of speech act organization [2], and in broader investigations of economy and redundancy in language [3]. These works demonstrate that the reduction of linguistic material is not a marginal phenomenon but a systemic characteristic of language functioning. Despite the existence of research addressing various aspects of shortening processes, a comprehensive analysis of abbreviation that takes into account the agglutinative structure of the Azerbaijani language and the interaction between word-formation and syntactic factors remains insufficiently developed.

2. Object and subject of research

The object of the present research is abbreviation as a structural and functional phenomenon in the contemporary Azerbaijani language. The subject of research is the interaction between morphological structure and syntactic organization in the formation and integration of abbreviations into the language system. The scientific novelty of the present study lies in the fact that abbreviation is examined not merely as a specific word-formation technique, but as the result of the interaction between the morphological structure of the word and the syntactic organization of the source word combination.

3. Target of research

Abbreviation in the Azerbaijani language constitutes a dynamic and multi-level process characterized by the interaction of morphological and syntactic factors. Compactness that cannot be achieved through a number of traditional word-formation means is effectively realized through the mechanism of shortening, which confirms its systemic and functionally significant role in contemporary language development. Based on the identified shortcomings, the goal of this research is to provide a systematic analysis of abbreviation in the Azerbaijani language as the result of interaction between morphological structure and syntactic organization.

4. Literature analysis

Building on previous research into the principle of economy and the psycholinguistic features of linguistic compression [1; 3; 4], this study extends the discussion to the structural mechanisms of abbreviation in contemporary Azerbaijani. For the first time, an attempt is made to provide a systematic description of the mechanisms by which abbreviations are integrated into the morphological system of the Azerbaijani language, with due consideration of its agglutinative nature, as well as to identify the correlation between structural types of abbreviations and the syntactic models of the original nominative complexes.

Morphological and syntactic factors play a significant motivational role in the formation of abbreviations. Morphological motivation is understood as the need for reduction conditioned by the structural characteristics of the word and the principles of word formation. Azerbaijani belongs to agglutinative languages, in which new grammatical forms are created through the sequential attachment of affixes. However, complex terms and official designations often consist of multiple words and a considerable number of morphemes, which may hinder their perception and use. In such cases, the language tends to create a compact nominative unit not through conventional morphological means, but via non-morphological mechanisms, such as the combination of word segments or the use of initial elements.

The theoretical foundation for explaining this tendency is provided by the concept of verbal compression as a universal principle of language development. As emphasized by N. V. Diachok et al., the compensatory process involves the “substitution of analytical, multicomponent, nominative formations for the synthetic, monocomponent ones; that means saving time and space as the means of information conveyance” [5, p. 344]. Thus, abbreviation can be interpreted as a manifestation of linguistic economy and a tendency toward the synthetization of nomination.

Although abbreviation formally falls outside the scope of classical affixational word-formation models, its outcomes function as fully-fledged lexical units. Abbreviations become integrated into the morphological system of the language and conform to its grammatical rules. For instance, instead of the word combination “Azərbaycan Respublikası,” the abbreviation “AR” is used, which can subsequently take affixes (AR-i (to AR), AR-in (of AR), etc.). This demonstrates that, after the initial stage of formation, abbreviations are incorporated into the system of inflection and word formation.

Morphological motivation is closely connected with the structural organization of the source components. Complex designations consisting of several words possess their own internal morphological structure. In the process of abbreviation, these components may be preserved in full (as in initial formations such as ASAN, DOST), partially reduced, or combined to form a new morphological unit. The selection of elements varies depending on the model: in some cases, only the initial letter of each word is used (BDU, DTX); in others, the initial syllable is retained (“Texniki” → “Texno-”); and in certain instances, a mixed model emerges, combining a full lexical element with a shortened one (“Azərsu” from “Azərbaycan su təsərrüfatı qurumu”). This tendency toward structural reduction reflects the broader principle of linguistic economy, understood, following A.Martinet (2016), as a balance between communicative efficiency and structural stability within the language system [6].

The structural and semantic diversity of abbreviations in the Azerbaijani language is determined precisely by the multiplicity of shortening strategies. Among the identified types are initial (alphabetical) abbreviations, syllabic formations (“Azal” from “Azərbaycan Air Lines”), mixed forms (“Azərenerji,” “Texnopark”), as well as telescopic words formed through the fusion of phonological segments of a word combination. Similar processes have been observed in other communicative domains, including business discourse and digital communication, where abbreviations function not only as instruments of economy but also as markers of professional or social identity [7]. Studies of SMS and instant messaging discourse further demonstrate that shortening strategies significantly increase communicative speed [9], although they may also affect comprehension and stylistic norms [8]. These findings confirm that abbreviation operates across different registers and media, adapting to specific communicative conditions.

5. Research methods and materials

The material for the present study consists of abbreviations extracted from contemporary Azerbaijani-language sources, including official documents, legislative texts, academic publications, journalistic materials, and digital communication platforms. Both institutional and commonly used abbreviations (e.g., AR, AMEA, ASAN, DTX, Azərenerji, Azal) were selected to represent different structural types and functional domains. The research is based on a descriptive-analytical approach combining structural, morphological, and syntactic analysis. The methods employed include component analysis to identify the structural composition of source word combinations, word-formation analysis to determine abbreviation models (initial, syllabic, mixed, telescopic), and contextual-syntactic analysis to examine their integration into sentence structure and discourse. In addition, elements of semantic and pragmatic analysis were applied to evaluate lexicalization processes, contextual transparency, and communicative efficiency. The study also draws on comparative observations from digital and business communication to illustrate the broader functional dynamics of abbreviation.

6. Research results

Syntactic motivation reflects the role of sentential and intratextual factors in the formation of abbreviations. The repeated use of long word combinations within a syntactic structure may disrupt the fluency of speech, excessively lengthen sentences, and hinder comprehension. In syntax ellipsis — that is, the omission of certain elements without loss of meaning—represents a manifestation of the principle of economy [1; 4]. In this respect, an abbreviation may be interpreted as a form of lexical ellipsis: without reproducing the full word combination, it performs the same syntactic function in a reduced form.

As noted in Azerbaijani linguistic research, “The factors giving rise to abbreviation are of an extralinguistic nature. The shortening of a particular syntactic construction or lexical unit in language use has primarily served the purpose of simplification or the elimination of repetition” [10, p. 108].

Thus, abbreviation may be viewed as a syntactically and pragmatically motivated strategy aimed at simplification and the elimination of redundancy within discourse.

For example, if the word combination “Nazirlər Kabineti” (Cabinet of Ministers) is frequently used in a text, it is advisable to employ the abbreviated form “NK” after its first full mention, instead of repeatedly reproducing the complete expression. This practice simplifies the syntactic structure of the text and enhances its readability.

As noted by I.P.Polonskaya, “Abbreviation in the broad sense of the word is a process as a result of which a certain initial multicomponent lexical unit loses part of its constituent components” [11, p. 98]. Particularly in journalistic and academic styles, the shortening of lengthy official designations (names of institutions, laws, documents) after their first occurrence is a generally accepted practice. It serves as a means of syntactic economy and contributes to improved textual clarity and coherence.

Syntactic motivation is also closely connected with the logical organization of the text: the use of an abbreviation instead of repeatedly reproducing the same designation helps to reduce redundant details that may distract from the main idea. Once the reader has assimilated the full form of a name at its first occurrence, subsequent encounters with its abbreviated variant are automatically associated with the same referent, while the visual and cognitive load is significantly reduced.

In this respect, the abbreviation can be viewed as a means of secondary nomination — that is, as a compact way of re-designating an already introduced object or concept. As emphasized in the research of A. Jalilzade, each newly formed abbreviation initially functions as a variant of its full form and performs the function of secondary nomination, and only later develops into an independent lexical unit [12]. Consequently, from a syntactic perspective, the primary motivation for using abbreviations lies in the optimization of repetition, namely in preventing excessive verbal redundancy within the text.

At the same time, syntactic considerations also influence the role of abbreviations within sentence structure. When lengthy official designations function as subjects or objects, their reduction contributes to the simplification of the syntactic construction. Compare the sentences: “Azərbaycan Respublikası Mədəniyyət Nazirliyi yeni elan verdi” and “AR Mədəniyyət Nazirliyi yeni elan verdi.” The second statement is more compact, yet no informational loss occurs, since the abbreviation “AR” already contains the widely recognized meaning “Azərbaycan Respublikası.” Such reductions, particularly in official documents and news texts, are aimed at preserving structural simplicity and clarity within the sentence.

Taken together, morphological and syntactic motivations demonstrate that the formation of abbreviations represents an adaptive mechanism of language directed toward achieving economy at both the lexical and sentential levels. From a morphological perspective, by shortening extended word combinations, the language creates new lexical units; from a syntactic perspective, it facilitates repetition and streamlines sentence structure. As a result, communicative intention is realized through a reduced volume of linguistic material while maintaining the same informational content. This balance reflects the functional efficiency of language and explains the systematic emergence of abbreviations.

In the study of abbreviations, the semantic aspect is associated with the formation and interpretation of their meaning. In general, each abbreviation carries the meaning of its full expanded form; however, over time, some of them become so firmly established in linguistic consciousness that they are perceived by speakers as independent lexical items with a direct meaning. For instance, in the political context, the abbreviation “YAP” denotes “Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası” (New Azerbaijan Party). Yet in everyday communication, this shortened form already functions as an autonomous lexical unit: when “YAP” is used, speakers associate it with a specific political party without necessarily activating its full form in their consciousness.

This phenomenon is defined in linguistics as lexicalization — a process whereby an abbreviation becomes directly perceived as a lexical unit with a fixed meaning. A number of international abbreviations, such as NATO, UNESCO, and UNICEF, are likewise perceived in Azerbaijani as lexical units. For example, when “NATO” is used, it is understood as an international military-

political alliance, even if the speaker does not fully reproduce its English expansion but possesses a general understanding of its semantic content.

As noted by Aliyeva, “It is true that when the expansion of an abbreviation corresponds to a word combination or a syntactic construction subjected to abbreviation, the newly formed shortened unit implicitly incorporates the components of that structure to some extent. However, this fact does not provide sufficient grounds to classify it as a compound word” [10, p. 110]. In other words, although an abbreviation implicitly contains the elements of the word combination or syntactic construction from which it originates, this characteristic alone does not justify treating it as a compound lexical unit.

N. Baron analyzing the impact of technology—particularly mobile and Internet-mediated communication—on language, has examined how the use of abbreviations influences everyday interaction and the structural organization of language. She concludes that abbreviations enhance the dynamism of language and reduce cognitive load [13]. In a joint study with R. Ling, Baron compares the language use of American university students in SMS and instant messaging communication. The research demonstrates that abbreviations and shortenings are widely used in both SMS and instant messaging, contributing to increased communicative speed, although they may also complicate language comprehension [8].

At the same time, from a semantic perspective, cases of polysemy or ambiguity in abbreviations are possible. The same shortened form may have different meanings across various domains. For example, the abbreviation “AZN” in one context may denote the Azerbaijani manat (a former currency code), whereas in another it may function as a shortening of a different term (e.g., the name of an organization). In such cases, context or prior clarification becomes particularly significant. In this respect, the successful functioning of an abbreviation requires a high degree of semantic transparency: either its referent must be unambiguously clear from the context, or the abbreviation must possess a socially established meaning. Otherwise, a shortening created for the purpose of economy may generate communicative ambiguity and produce a result contrary to the intended effect.

“When abbreviation creates a successful unit, it becomes more advantageous and valuable for the language than its donor form. In such cases, the abbreviations formed in our language give us the right to raise the question of the role of conscious linguistic activity... in other words, these newly created units may also be evaluated from a stylistic perspective.

Therefore, in order to obtain a successful unit when forming an abbreviation, it is necessary to take into account the specific mechanisms of abbreviation, to use shortening techniques efficiently; in other words, to foresee (predict) the lexical unit to be created, to approach it from the perspective of ordinary words in the language, to model it after them, and thus to create words and terms in a planned manner” [14, p. 75].

The pragmatic approach focuses on the context in which abbreviations are used, the communicative situation, and their stylistic marking [15]. As emphasized in recent research, “the use of abbreviations in business correspondence is appropriate to save space and time, however can go far beyond that” [7], meaning that abbreviations perform not only an economy function but may also influence the nature of interaction between participants in communication. The use of shortenings is largely determined by communicative purpose and audience characteristics. In official speeches and academic publications, when a term or the name of an institution is expected to recur frequently, the author typically provides the full form at first mention and subsequently uses the abbreviated version. This practice corresponds both to the principle of intratextual economy and to the conventions of formal style. For example, in a scholarly article, “Azərbaycan Milli Elmlər Akademiyası (AMEA)” is given in full at first mention, and thereafter only “AMEA” is used. Such a strategy aligns with the principle of informing the addressee before transitioning to linguistic economy.

Conversely, in texts oriented toward a mass audience, particularly when an abbreviation may cause difficulties in comprehension, retaining the full form is pragmatically justified in order to ensure clarity. Excessive use of abbreviations may lead to “misunderstandings, frustration, and confusion

among those unfamiliar with the specific terminology” [7]. Thus, communicative intention directly influences the choice of whether or not to employ an abbreviation.

From a pragmatic perspective, the stylistic differentiation of abbreviations is also of particular interest. Some shortenings are characteristic primarily of the official-documentary sphere (for example, in legal texts “AR” for “Azərbaycan Respublikası,” “M/H” for “mühüm həll,” etc.). Others, however, possess an informal or even slang character. Abbreviations that have emerged in Internet and SMS communication (borrowed from English, such as “LOL,” “OMG,” etc.) are widely used among young people but are inappropriate in formal contexts. In Azerbaijani written practice among youth, shortened forms such as “s.a.” instead of “salam” and “nvny” instead of “nə var, nə yox” have also developed. Such reductions arise exclusively within the pragmatic dimension — as a consequence of the need for rapid communication — yet within the framework of the standard literary norm they are considered non-standard and may lead to intergenerational misunderstanding. The excessive use of abbreviations in contemporary youth speech may therefore hinder its comprehension by a broader audience.

This fact indicates that the pragmatic effectiveness of an abbreviation directly depends on the linguistic competence and communicative habits of the audience. In other words, a shortening proves economical only for an audience capable of interpreting it; otherwise, it may become a source of communicative difficulty.

7. Discussion

From a pragmatic perspective, another important factor to consider is the use of abbreviations for the purpose of maintaining confidentiality or avoiding deviations from an official tone. In certain cases—particularly when the speaker seeks to soften an utterance or avoid direct reference to undesirable or taboo vocabulary — preference is given to an abbreviated form. For example, instead of explicitly pronouncing a vulgar word, only its initial letter may be used (by analogy with the English “F-word”). Such a strategy represents a pragmatic choice aimed not so much at achieving linguistic economy as at observing ethical norms and ensuring communicative appropriateness.

Ultimately, the semantic-pragmatic approach demonstrates that an abbreviation is not merely a structural linguistic phenomenon, but also a phenomenon of meaning and communication. Its effectiveness depends on preserving semantic integrity, ensuring comprehensibility, and successfully realizing communicative intent. While carrying semantic content, abbreviations must simultaneously contribute to pragmatic efficiency in discourse. When these conditions are met, the principle of linguistic economy yields positive effects; otherwise, communicative imbalance arises, leading to a violation of the economy principle, whereby the original aim is paradoxically undermined.

This dynamic is обусловлена живым и изменчивым характером языка: in response to societal needs, new abbreviations emerge, and as they are accepted by speakers, they become established in usage, whereas forms that lose their relevance gradually fall out of active circulation.

In the use of abbreviations, a fundamental principle is the rule: clarification at first mention—economy thereafter. For example, if the full form “Qoşulmama Hərəkatı (QH)” is provided at the beginning of an official text, the subsequent use of “QH” alone no longer creates difficulties. However, employing an abbreviation whose meaning has not been previously explained and is not evident to the audience may result in communicative breakdowns.

In contemporary practice, even in monographs and doctoral dissertations, a “List of Abbreviations” is often included at the beginning of the text. This reflects the widespread use of abbreviations in modern language and indicates that their correct interpretation may require a dedicated reference section.

The study demonstrates that abbreviations play a significant role in the dynamics and development of language. As specific units enriching the lexical inventory, they simultaneously ensure the practical realization of the principle of economy in communication. The phenomenon of abbreviation testifies to the tendency of the linguistic system toward the rational use of its resources:

by eliminating redundant sounds and syllables, shortening lengthy words, and reducing multicomponent word combinations to unified forms, the language performs an internal optimization of its structure.

This process, as noted by André Martinet and other linguists, results from the search for equilibrium between communicative efficiency — the need to transmit information rapidly and with minimal expenditure of energy — and the language's tendency to preserve structural stability [6].

In the Azerbaijani language, abbreviations constitute a natural component of linguistic development, and in recent decades their number and functional significance have increased substantially in connection with scientific-technological and socio-political changes. As a manifestation of the principle of economy in language, abbreviations are of interest both to linguists and to practical language users: for researchers, they provide an opportunity to investigate the structural and functional flexibility of the linguistic system; for participants in communication, they serve as a means of enhancing speech efficiency.

The correct and contextually appropriate use of abbreviations contributes to the modernization and acceleration of language without compromising its communicative mission. This confirms that the principle of economy functions as a positive mechanism within language: through it, the linguistic system adapts to evolving communicative demands while striving to preserve fundamental qualities such as clarity and comprehensibility.

8. Conclusion

The conducted study confirms that abbreviation in the Azerbaijani language represents a systemic and multifunctional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic factors. The analysis has demonstrated that the formation of abbreviations is not a random or peripheral process, but an adaptive linguistic mechanism rooted in the principle of economy and conditioned by the agglutinative nature of the language. By reducing multicomponent nominative constructions to compact forms, the language optimizes its structural resources while preserving semantic integrity and communicative effectiveness.

From a morphological perspective, abbreviations emerge through various structural models — initial, syllabic, mixed, and telescopic formations—and subsequently integrate into the grammatical system of the language, acquiring the ability to participate in inflectional and word-formation processes. From a syntactic standpoint, abbreviation functions as a mechanism of repetition optimization and structural simplification, contributing to textual coherence and reducing cognitive load. In this sense, abbreviation may be regarded as a form of lexical ellipsis and secondary nomination that enhances discourse economy without sacrificing informational content.

The semantic-pragmatic dimension further reveals that the effectiveness of abbreviations depends on contextual transparency, audience competence, and communicative intention. While lexicalization enables certain abbreviations to function as independent lexical units, ambiguity or insufficient clarification may lead to communicative imbalance. Therefore, the principle of “clarification at first mention — economy thereafter” remains fundamental for their successful use.

Overall, abbreviation in contemporary Azerbaijani reflects the dynamic nature of the linguistic system and its capacity to respond to social, technological, and communicative transformations. The growing productivity of abbreviation models confirms that linguistic economy operates as a constructive and development-oriented force, enabling the language to modernize while maintaining clarity, stability, and structural coherence.

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