

Adjectives in Azerbaijani and French: A Contrastive Analysis of Formation, Agreement, and Placement

Les adjectifs en azerbaïdjanais et en français : une analyse contrastive de la formation, de l'accord et de la place

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69760/gsrh.0260304005>

Abstract

Adjectives provide a useful basis for examining how languages express comparable properties through different grammatical resources. This article presents a qualitative contrastive analysis of adjective formation, agreement, and placement in Azerbaijani and French, drawing on illustrative examples and reference-based grammatical descriptions. It distinguishes lexical derivation from inflection and separates ordinary attributive modification from substantivized and predicative uses. The analysis shows that Azerbaijani commonly expresses adjectival meanings through suffixation and prenominal modification, whereas French combines derivational processes with gender and number agreement and lexically conditioned adjective placement. Shared semantic domains, including colour, dimension, evaluation, and disposition, therefore do not imply structural equivalence. Particular attention is given to negative adjective formation, vowel-harmonic suffix variants, French feminine alternations, and constructions traditionally grouped under compound adjectives. Several overgeneralizations are reconsidered: Azerbaijani attributive adjectives do not normally agree in number with plural nouns; French feminine formation cannot be reduced to a single spelling rule; and reduplication should be distinguished analytically from lexical compounding. The article proposes a staged instructional framework for Azerbaijani-speaking learners of French, moving from noun-phrase recognition to agreement, placement, and meaning-sensitive translation. These recommendations are theoretically motivated rather than experimentally evaluated. The study contributes a focused account of the relationship between semantic comparability and grammatical asymmetry in adjective systems.

Keywords: *Azerbaijani; French; adjectives; contrastive linguistics; derivational morphology; agreement; language teaching*

Résumé

Les adjectifs offrent une base utile pour examiner comment les langues expriment des propriétés comparables au moyen de ressources grammaticales différentes. Cet article présente une analyse contrastive qualitative de la formation, de l'accord et de la place de l'adjectif en azerbaïdjanais et en français, à partir d'exemples illustratifs et de descriptions grammaticales fondées sur des ouvrages de référence. Il distingue la dérivation lexicale de la flexion et sépare la modification attributive ordinaire des emplois substantivés et prédicatifs. L'analyse montre que l'azerbaïdjanais exprime couramment les valeurs adjectivales par la suffixation et la modification antéposée, tandis que le français combine des

procédés dérivationnels avec l'accord en genre et en nombre et une place de l'adjectif conditionnée lexicalement. Les domaines sémantiques communs — couleur, dimension, évaluation et disposition — n'impliquent donc pas d'équivalence structurale. Une attention particulière est accordée à la formation des adjectifs négatifs, aux variantes suffixales à harmonie vocalique, aux alternances du féminin en français et aux constructions traditionnellement regroupées sous le terme d'adjectifs composés. Plusieurs généralisations excessives sont réexaminées : en azerbaïdjanais, l'adjectif épithète ne s'accorde normalement pas en nombre avec le nom au pluriel ; la formation du féminin en français ne peut être réduite à une seule règle orthographique ; et la reduplication doit être distinguée analytiquement de la composition lexicale. L'article propose un cadre pédagogique progressif pour les apprenants azerbaïdjanophones du français, allant de la reconnaissance du groupe nominal à l'accord, à la place et à la traduction sensible au sens. Ces recommandations sont motivées sur le plan théorique plutôt qu'évaluées expérimentalement. L'étude apporte une description ciblée de la relation entre la comparabilité sémantique et l'asymétrie grammaticale dans les systèmes adjectivaux.

Mots-clés : *azerbaïdjanais ; français ; adjectifs ; linguistique contrastive ; morphologie dérivationnelle ; accord ; enseignement des langues*

1. Introduction

Adjectives allow speakers to describe properties, distinguish referents, and express evaluations. A colour word can identify an object, a dimension word can compare entities, and an evaluative adjective can communicate the speaker's attitude. These familiar functions make adjectives appear straightforward to language learners. Yet equivalent meanings may be embedded in substantially different grammatical patterns. Learning a translation for “red” or “small” does not by itself establish where that adjective belongs, whether its form changes, or how it interacts with the noun it modifies.

Azerbaijani and French offer a revealing comparison. Azerbaijani belongs to the Turkic family, while French is a Romance language within Indo-European. Their adjective systems share many descriptive functions, but differ in the grammatical organization of those functions. Azerbaijani typically places an attributive adjective before its noun and does not possess grammatical gender. French adjectives generally participate in gender and number agreement, and their position depends on lexical, semantic, and stylistic conditions. Word formation also differs: Azerbaijani makes extensive use of suffixes with vowel-harmonic variants, while French employs both prefixes and suffixes alongside less transparent lexical alternations.

The present article develops a contrastive account centred on three questions. First, how do the languages form adjectives from nominal and verbal material? Second, how do adjective forms relate to the gender and number properties of nouns? Third, how do adjective position and morphological structure affect interpretation and teaching? The analysis places examples within their grammatical contexts rather than treating isolated word pairs as sufficient evidence of equivalence.

The contribution is descriptive and pedagogical. It does not report a learner experiment, a frequency study, or a newly assembled representative corpus. Instead, it reorganizes a set of Azerbaijani–French grammatical examples into a systematic comparison and identifies distinctions that matter for accurate explanation. Its principal argument is that semantic similarity should provide a starting point for comparison, while language-specific grammatical categories determine the analysis. The resulting teaching proposals are intended as hypotheses and practical options for classroom use, not demonstrated learning outcomes.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1. *Semantic comparability and language-specific categories*

Cross-linguistic comparison requires a distinction between comparable meanings and identical grammatical categories. Haspelmath (2010) argues that comparative concepts must be distinguished from the descriptive categories established within particular languages. This distinction prevents analysts from assuming that the category traditionally called “adjective” has exactly the same boundaries and behaviour everywhere. A useful comparison therefore asks which expressions modify nouns or predicate properties, and then examines their morphological and syntactic behaviour separately.

The typological perspective represented by Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004) likewise encourages attention to both shared property meanings and the diversity of adjective classes. For this study, colour, dimension, evaluation, taste, and disposition serve as practical comparison domains. They are not assumed to be equally productive subclasses in either language. A word describing a stable characteristic and a participial expression describing a temporary condition may both modify nouns, but their internal grammatical structures need not coincide.

This approach is particularly important for forms that overlap with nouns. French *créateur* and Azerbaijani expressions describing occupations or habitual activities can appear in different syntactic roles. A word's ability to qualify a noun in one construction does not establish that every use of the same word is adjectival. Category assignment must consider the construction as well as the dictionary form.

2.2. *Derivation, inflection, and allomorphy*

Derivation creates a lexical item or modifies its lexical meaning; inflection expresses grammatical distinctions within a paradigm. Haspelmath and Sims (2010) provide the general morphological framework underlying this distinction. In the present comparison, the formation of French *impossible* from *possible* concerns lexical negation, whereas the contrast between *petit* and *petite* concerns agreement. Azerbaijani *duzlu* “salty” and *duzsuz* “without salt; unsalted” illustrate derivational contrasts rather than noun–adjective agreement.

Allomorphy introduces a further distinction. The Azerbaijani suffix variants *-lı*, *-li*, *-lu*, and *-lü* belong to a vowel-harmonic pattern. Their selection is conditioned by the phonological properties of the base. It would be misleading to analyse them as four unrelated suffixes with independent meanings. Similarly, French *in-*, *im-*, and *il-* can be considered related forms of a negative prefix in the examples examined here, although their distribution and lexical availability require attention to established words rather than unrestricted substitution.

2.3. *Agreement and cross-linguistic influence*

Agreement concerns grammatical relations in which one expression's form reflects features associated with another expression. Corbett (2006) provides a general account of agreement as a cross-linguistic phenomenon. The present study uses a narrowly defined comparison of adjective agreement in ordinary noun phrases. Gender, number, position, and pronunciation are examined separately so that a visible ending is not confused with every possible realization of agreement.

Pedagogically, contrastive descriptions can identify plausible areas of difficulty but cannot establish the causes or frequencies of learner errors. Odlin (1989) and Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) locate cross-linguistic influence within a broader account of language

learning. Accordingly, the absence of adjective agreement in Azerbaijani provides a reason to attend explicitly to French agreement, but it does not prove that every agreement error made by an Azerbaijani-speaking learner results from first-language transfer.

3. Materials and Method

The study adopts qualitative descriptive contrastive analysis. Its starting material consists of seven photographed Azerbaijani-language pages discussing adjectives in Azerbaijani and French. These pages contain explanations, adjective pairs, short noun phrases, and illustrative sentences. They address simple, derived, and compound forms; French feminine alternations; Azerbaijani suffixation; and differences in noun-phrase structure. The photographs do not display a complete bibliographic record, so the pages are treated as supplied study material rather than attributed to an unidentified published work.

Examples were organized into five comparison dimensions: semantic function, derivational structure, agreement, attributive position, and complex formation. Clear spelling and grammatical errors were normalized. Explanatory generalizations were checked against accessible reference resources, including the Azerbaijani documentation of Universal Dependencies and official French-language guidance from the Office québécois de la langue française and the Translation Bureau of Canada. Hawkins and Towell (2015) provide a broader reference point for contemporary French grammar. Newly constructed parallel examples are used for explanation and are not presented as naturally occurring corpus observations.

The unit of analysis is the lexical form within a specified construction. For agreement, a singular noun phrase is compared with a plural counterpart. For derivation, the relation between a base and a derived form is examined. For placement, alternative noun–adjective orders are considered where they are relevant to interpretation. For complex forms, reduplication, coordination, derivation within a compound, and multiword modification are distinguished rather than treated as a single homogeneous process.

The study does not provide token counts, productivity measurements, acceptability ratings, or learner-performance statistics. It also does not attempt an exhaustive account of every adjective pattern in either language. Its conclusions concern the grammatical contrasts illustrated by the material and reference descriptions. Proposed classroom applications are kept separate from descriptive findings to avoid claiming empirical support that the study does not possess.

4. Contrastive Analysis

4.1. Shared semantic domains

Both languages use adjectives to express properties such as colour, size, taste, and evaluation. Azerbaijani *qırmızı alma* and French *une pomme rouge* both describe a red apple. Azerbaijani *kiçik ev* and French *une petite maison* both describe a small house. These comparisons establish semantic correspondence while immediately revealing different word orders. The colour adjective follows the noun in the French example, whereas *petite* precedes *maison*. Azerbaijani places both *qırmızı* and *kiçik* before their nouns.

Semantic categories alone do not reliably predict the full grammatical pattern. French includes many common prenominal adjectives, but treating all short adjectives as obligatorily prenominal would overgeneralize. Likewise, property descriptions may differ in contextual interpretation. Azerbaijani *şirin* can refer to sweet taste and can also carry affectionate or

evaluative meanings. Its French equivalent must therefore be selected in context rather than fixed once for every occurrence.

The supplied examples also include *kar uşaq* and *un enfant sourd*. Deafness is more accurately understood here as a sensory characteristic than as an external visible feature. This small terminological correction illustrates a broader principle: semantic classification should clarify the examples rather than preserve an unsuitable category label. The analysis consequently uses property domains as flexible descriptive tools, not exhaustive classifications of adjective meaning.

4.2. Azerbaijani attributive invariance

In an ordinary Azerbaijani noun phrase, the adjective does not normally change form when its noun becomes plural. Thus *qırmızı alma* “red apple” corresponds to *qırmızı almalar* “red apples,” and *kiçik ev* “small house” corresponds to *kiçik evlər* “small houses.” The plural suffix belongs to the noun. It is therefore inaccurate to state that attributive adjectives generally take *-lar* or *-lər* in agreement with plural nouns.

Substantivized uses must be distinguished from this pattern. An adjective may be used without an overt noun and acquire nominal morphology. *Yaxşılar* can refer to “the good ones” in an appropriate context. The plural marking in such a construction does not establish a rule of agreement for *yaxşı insanlar* “good people.” The distinction concerns the adjective's function in the phrase, not a contradiction between two competing pluralization rules.

Gender provides an additional asymmetry. Azerbaijani lacks grammatical gender, as the Universal Dependencies documentation confirms (Universal Dependencies, n.d.). A descriptive adjective does not have a masculine and feminine agreement paradigm corresponding to French forms such as *petit* and *petite*. Lexical expressions can identify sex or gender where relevant, but lexical identification is different from a grammatical agreement system.

Predicative constructions require separate treatment as well. An adjective used as a predicate can occur after the subject noun phrase and can participate in copular structures. Consequently, the statement that Azerbaijani adjectives “always precede nouns” must be restricted to ordinary attributive modification. The contrast between *kiçik ev* “small house” and *Ev kiçikdir* “The house is small” demonstrates why syntactic function must be stated explicitly.

4.3. French gender and number agreement

French adjectives commonly reflect the gender and number of the nouns they modify (Office québécois de la langue française, n.d.-b). *Une petite maison* and *des petites maisons* show feminine singular and feminine plural forms. *Un petit jardin* and *des petits jardins* show masculine counterparts. These examples contrast with Azerbaijani, where the adjective remains unchanged in the corresponding attributive phrases.

The frequent addition of written *-e* in the feminine is a useful initial generalization, but it is not a complete account. *Gris/grise*, *vert/verte*, and *haut/haute* illustrate this pattern. Adjectives already ending in written *-e* may retain the same spelling in masculine and feminine forms, as with *rouge* and *large*. Identical spelling does not mean that the adjective lacks agreement: it means that the relevant forms coincide in the written paradigm.

Other adjective pairs show more substantial alternations. *Actif/active* and *neuf/neuve* illustrate *-f/-ve* correspondences. *Léger/légère* and *dernier/dernière* include changes in accentuation. *Beau/belle* and *nouveau/nouvelle* require lexical knowledge. These contrasts

should be described as paradigmatic patterns, not as a universally applicable sequence of letter replacements. Written endings must also be distinguished from pronunciation, since French morphological contrasts are not uniformly audible.

Nationality adjectives such as *turc/turque* and *grec/grecque* illustrate why narrowly stated patterns are safer than rules covering every adjective ending in *-c*. The form *grecque* contains a spelling adjustment that cannot be captured adequately by simply replacing the final consonant with a single standard ending. Teaching should therefore combine regular patterns with explicitly learned lexical exceptions.

4.4. Adjective placement in French

French adjective placement is neither arbitrary nor fully reducible to one rule. The Translation Bureau (2020) identifies common postnominal patterns for colour and relational adjectives and common prenominal patterns for frequently used adjectives. In the present comparison, *une pomme rouge* and *une robe verte* illustrate the first pattern, while *une petite maison* and *un bon ami* illustrate the second. Azerbaijani generally uses a prenominal adjective for these ordinary attributive constructions.

Placement can also alter meaning. *Un grand homme* can describe an eminent man, whereas *un homme grand* describes a tall man. Azerbaijani translation should preserve the intended distinction through an appropriate lexical choice, such as *böyük* in an evaluative context or *ucaboy* for physical stature. Mechanically retaining the same adjective while changing only its position would miss the interpretive contrast.

Phonologically conditioned forms introduce another interaction between position and morphology. *Beau, nouveau, and vieux* have the prenominal masculine singular variants *bel, nouvel, and vieil* before appropriate vowel-initial or mute-h nouns. The corresponding feminine forms are *belle, nouvelle, and vieille*. *Fol* and *mol* belong to the same broader historical pattern, but require attention to contemporary register. Official guidance explicitly recognizes literary uses of *fol* and *mol* (Office québécois de la langue française, n.d.-a).

The supplied phrase *un fou sourires* contains a number mismatch. *Un sourire fou* provides a straightforward singular example; *des sourires fous* provides its plural counterpart. *Un fol espoir* is grammatically possible but should not be presented as equally neutral in register to every everyday adjective phrase. These revisions show that number, lexical form, placement, and register need to be considered together.

4.5. Azerbaijani adjective derivation

Nominal bases combine with productive adjectival suffix patterns in Azerbaijani. The variants *-lı/-li/-lu/-lü* commonly express possession, association, or a characteristic linked to the base. Examples include *duzlu* “salty,” *ağıllı* “intelligent,” *güclü* “strong,” and *sədaqətli* “loyal.” Their interpretation is partly compositional, but the English or French equivalent may lexicalize the property differently. A transparent Azerbaijani derivative need not correspond to a transparent derivative in the target language.

The contrasting suffix *-sız/-siz/-suz/-süz* often expresses absence or lack. *Duzsuz* “unsalted” and *susuz* “without water” provide relatively transparent examples. *Bacarıqsız* “unskilled; incapable” can acquire a more evaluative interpretation. This range discourages treating every such derivative as an exact semantic negation of a corresponding *-lı* form. Lexical usage determines whether a word describes absence, deficiency, or a conventional negative evaluation.

Other examples include *zarafatcıl* “joking; fond of joking,” *ölümcül* “fatal,” and *günlük* “daily.” The traditional grouping of suffix variants is useful, but semantic values differ across lexical items. The *-lıq/-lik/-luq/-lük* family also has nominal functions, so an ending alone cannot establish the category of every word. *Günlük* in *günlük iş* “daily work” is examined here through its modifying function rather than classified solely by its final letters.

Borrowed elements complicate an exclusively suffix-based account. Forms such as *bisavad*, *biədəb*, *namərd*, *tələbkar*, and *davakar* reflect lexical patterns associated with language contact. It is therefore too strong to claim that Azerbaijani forms derived adjectives only through suffixation. At the same time, the presence of borrowed prefixal patterns does not demonstrate unrestricted productivity with native bases. The distinction between established lexical items and freely available word-formation rules must be retained.

Deverbal adjectives describe dispositions, qualities, and states. *Çalışqan* “hardworking,” *döyüşkən* “combative,” *yorğun* “tired,” *açık* “open,” and *sökük* “dismantled; torn” exemplify different relations between an activity and a resulting property. Their meanings cannot be collapsed into one label such as permanent characteristic. Nor should every historical segment be assumed to constitute a synchronically productive suffix. The present analysis identifies illustrative patterns without claiming to establish their current productivity.

4.6. French derivation and cross-language asymmetry

French adjective derivation includes negative prefixation, as in *utile/inutile*, *possible/impossible*, and *lisible/illisible*. The negative meanings overlap with Azerbaijani resources, but the structural relation is different. *Utile* may correspond to *faydalı*, while *inutile* can correspond to *faydasız* in an appropriate context. This comparison connects a French prefixal contrast with an Azerbaijani suffixal contrast. It does not imply that every French negative adjective has one predictable Azerbaijani morphological equivalent.

Nominal bases also contribute to French adjectives. *Chimie/chimique* and *banque/bancaire* illustrate relational meanings associated with fields or institutions. *Bancaire* means “banking” or “related to banking”; it should not be glossed as “banker,” for which *banquier* is relevant. *Millionnaire* can function adjectivally or nominally depending on the construction. These cases reinforce the need to consider lexical category and phrase structure together.

French also has verbal derivatives and participial adjectives. *Lisible* “readable” expresses a property related to reading; *fatigant* “tiring” and *fatigué* “tired” distinguish a source of an effect from an experienced state. Azerbaijani translation may use a lexical adjective, a derivative, or a participial construction. The comparison is thus functional: each language has resources for property attribution, but the internal structures and preferred lexical choices vary.

4.7. Reduplication and complex modification

The supplied material groups several Azerbaijani patterns under compound adjectives. A more precise analysis distinguishes complete repetition, coordinated formations, and compounds containing derived material. *Balaca-balaca* and *uzun-uzun* repeat the same adjective and can convey expressive or distributive effects in context. Reduplication differs from combining independent lexical bases, even when both processes produce complex surface forms.

Forms such as *güllü-çiçəkli* combine related derived elements. *Ucaboylu* and *uzunsaçlı* integrate a property word with nominal material and an adjectival ending. *Beşmərtəbəli* “five-

storey” incorporates a numeral and a nominal base. These patterns reveal multiple routes to complex modification rather than a single rule of joining two adjectives.

French may express a comparable property through a different construction. *Uzunsaçlı qız* corresponds naturally to *une fille aux cheveux longs*, and *beşmərtəbəli bina* to *un bâtiment de cinq étages*. Such correspondences are instructive precisely because they cross structural boundaries. A single Azerbaijani modifying word can correspond to a French prepositional phrase. Translation should therefore preserve the property relation rather than force matching word counts or morphological categories.

5. Pedagogical Implications

The contrasts motivate a staged approach for Azerbaijani-speaking learners of French. The first stage should establish the noun phrase as a unit. Learners identify the noun and its modifier in pairs such as *qırmızı alma* and *une pomme rouge*. This makes the grammatical relationship visible before learners are asked to memorize numerous endings. It also encourages teachers to distinguish attributive phrases from complete predicative sentences.

The second stage should focus on agreement through controlled contrasts. Learners can transform *un petit jardin* into *une petite maison* and then into plural phrases. The task requires attention to the determiner, noun, and adjective together. Because agreement is not always audible, written and spoken practice should have separate objectives. Written work can target orthographic marking, while oral work can target contrasts that actually affect pronunciation.

The third stage should teach placement through meaningful phrase sets. Colour adjectives can be contrasted with common prenominal adjectives, followed by carefully selected meaning-sensitive pairs. Learners should explain the intended meaning before translating expressions involving *grand* or similar adjectives. This turns placement into an interpretive choice rather than a test of arbitrary word order.

The fourth stage should address derivation and translation. Pairs such as *faydalı/faydasız* and *utile/inutile* make the location of negative meaning visible. Other examples should demonstrate that morphological symmetry is limited. Students can compare *uzunsaçlı* with *aux cheveux longs* and discuss why a phrase is appropriate in French. Such tasks develop sensitivity to structural differences without suggesting that one language is more logical or more expressive.

Feedback should identify the dimension requiring correction. A wrong adjective ending, an unsuitable noun–adjective order, and an inaccurate lexical equivalent are different problems. Correcting all three under a general instruction to “learn the adjective” conceals the relevant distinction. Short revision tasks can ask students to correct one dimension first and then reconsider the whole phrase.

These proposals require empirical evaluation. A future study could compare instruction organized around isolated adjective lists with instruction organized around contrasting noun phrases and translation choices. Assessment would need to distinguish agreement accuracy, placement, and semantic interpretation, while accounting for proficiency and prior exposure to French. The present descriptive study supports the selection of these targets, but does not predict an effect size or establish instructional superiority.

6. Discussion and Limitations

The analysis shows that adjectival comparison becomes more informative when lexical meaning, morphology, and syntax are kept distinct. Azerbaijani and French share common

property domains, yet the grammatical work required to construct a noun phrase differs. In French, learning an adjective involves its agreement paradigm and placement behaviour. In Azerbaijani, the ordinary attributive form remains stable across noun number, while derivational structure and lexical interpretation often carry a substantial part of the descriptive information.

The most important descriptive corrections concern category boundaries. Substantivized adjectives should not be used to infer attributive agreement. Feminine alternation should not be confused with lexical adjective creation. Borrowed prefixes should not be excluded from Azerbaijani word formation. Reduplication and compound modification should not be treated as identical merely because traditional descriptions place them together. These distinctions improve both grammatical accuracy and the transparency of classroom explanation.

Several limitations remain. The supplied pages are selective and incomplete, and their original bibliographic source is not visible. The present account therefore cannot reconstruct the full argument from which they were taken. It does not quantify adjective use across genres or establish the distribution of competing forms in contemporary Azerbaijani and French. Questions concerning register, lexical productivity, and marginal constructions would benefit from corpus evidence and speaker judgments.

The pedagogical discussion is also limited by the absence of learner data. Structural contrasts identify potential teaching targets, but individual learning paths may depend on additional languages, instructional history, and exposure. A learner with substantial knowledge of another language with grammatical gender may approach French agreement differently from a learner whose experience is predominantly Azerbaijani. Future classroom research should account for such differences rather than treating the first-language group as uniform.

7. Conclusion

Azerbaijani and French adjectives express comparable properties through different grammatical arrangements. Azerbaijani ordinary attributive adjectives are generally prenominal and do not agree with nouns in gender or number. French adjectives commonly display agreement and follow lexical and meaning-sensitive placement patterns. Derivation in both languages includes multiple resources, but equivalent property meanings do not require equivalent morphological structures.

An accurate contrastive account must distinguish derivation from inflection, phonological variants from unrelated suffixes, and adjectival modification from nominalized or predicative use. It must also recognize that complex Azerbaijani modifiers can correspond to French phrases rather than single adjectives. These principles support an instructional sequence built around noun phrases, agreement, placement, and contextual translation. Their effectiveness remains a question for future empirical research.

Declarations

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, analysis, drafting, and revision: A.A.

How to Cite:

Allahverdiyev, A. (2026). Adjectives in Azerbaijani and French: A contrastive analysis of formation, agreement, and placement. *Global Spectrum of Research and Humanities*, 3(4), 46-55. <https://doi.org/10.69760/gsrh.0260304005>

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Received: 22 August 2026

Accepted: 06 October 2026

Published: 10 October 2026