

# **The Sociolinguistic Situation of the Tsakhur in Azerbaijan**

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## Abstract

This paper presents the results of sociolinguistic research conducted in June 1999 and August 2001 among the Tsakhur people living in northwestern Azerbaijan. The goals of the research were to investigate patterns of language use, bilingualism, and language attitudes with regard to the Tsakhur, Russian, and Azerbaijani languages in the Tsakhur community. Interviews, observations, and questionnaires were employed.\*

## 1. Background

The Tsakhur language belongs to the Lezgi group of Northeastern Caucasian languages. Tsakhurs refer to themselves as *jiqi* (plural *jiqbi*) and their language as *c'aiχna miz*. The common designation of Tsakhur is derived from the name of one of the Tsakhur villages in Dagestan, Caxur (*ts'a'χ*). The two major dialects of the Tsakhur language are Tsakh and Gelmets (Ibragimov 1990). Linguistically, however, the Gelmets dialect is said to share much with the Rutul language, and Tsakhur, Gelmets, and Rutul may actually form a dialect chain (Schulze 1997). Djeiranshvili (1984) further divides the Tsakh dialect into three varieties: Mişleş, Tsakhur, and Mikik. Schulze (1997:8) suggests five speech varieties of the Tsakh dialect but notes that the differences between them are “marginal, though they may identify the provenance of a speaker.”

The Tsakhur language has been the focus of research for over 100 years. The first written documentation of Tsakhur is attributed to Erckert (1895), while Dirr (1913) published the first grammatical description of the language. Trubetskoy (1931) was the first to deal with the phonological nature of Tsakhur in-depth. Djeiranshvili (1966) researched the morphology and phonetics of Tsakhur in his dissertation. The work of Talibov (1955) on the Tsakhur verb is included in Ibragimov (1968). The most comprehensive description of the language to date is Ibragimov (1990).

According to the 1989 Soviet census, there are 19,972 Tsakhur. The actual number of Tsakhurs is most likely higher, possibly as high as 50,000 (Ibragimov 1990). There are over thirty Tsakhur villages (Schulze 1997) scattered from the Samur River valley in the Rutul district of Southern Dagestan in the north to the Azerbaijani districts of Zaqatala and Qax in the south. It has been claimed that close to two-thirds of the Tsakhur population lives in Azerbaijan.

Schulze (1997) identifies nine villages in Azerbaijan where Tsakhurs constitute the majority of the population: Ağdam-Kalyal, Suvaqıl, Karkay, Kalalu, Sabunçı, Alaskar, Mamrux, Gezbarax, and Mişleş. All of these are in the district of Zaqatala. Significant numbers of Tsakhur are said to live in an additional sixteen ethnically mixed communities. These communities are listed in table 1.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The spelling of village names here and elsewhere in this report follows the current Azerbaijani Latin alphabet when possible. Ağyazi is also known as Uzumlu.

**Table 1: Ethnically Mixed Communities with Tsakhur**

Village Name	District	Ethnic Majority
Yeni Suvaqil	Zaqatala	Azerbaijani
Muxax	Zaqatala	Azerbaijani
Əli Bayramlı	Zaqatala	Azerbaijani
Çobankol	Zaqatala	Azerbaijani
Cimdhimix	Zaqatala	Azerbaijani
Cardixlar	Zaqatala	Avar
Tala	Zaqatala	Avar
Əlibeglu	Qax	Azerbaijani
Güllük	Qax	Azerbaijani
Ləkit-Kotoklu	Qax	Azerbaijani
Emircan	Qax	Azerbaijani
Ağyazi	Qax	Azerbaijani
Zarna	Qax	Azerbaijani

In the 1989 Soviet census, 93% of Tsakhurs claimed to speak Tsakhur as their first language. A significant percentage, 6%, reported a language other than Russian or Tsakhur as their first language. We assume this is Azerbaijani.

Less than 10% of Tsakhur reported Russian was their second language, while 71% reported their second language was a language other than Russian or Tsakhur. Once again, we assume Azerbaijani is the second language for the vast majority of this 71%.

During the 1930s a literary Tsakhur language was created, and it was taught in primary schools in Azerbaijan beginning in 1934. While use of literary Tsakhur continued in Dagestan, it was discontinued in Azerbaijan in 1938. Instruction in Tsakhur literacy began again in Azerbaijan in 1989 when the language once again gained semiliterary status there.

The Tsakhur language and people are under increasing influence from Azerbaijani. Contact between the Tsakhurs and Azerbaijanis is not a recent development. The Tsakhur are traditionally shepherds, and their winter pastures have been located in what is now Azerbaijan throughout history. Schulze (1997) reports that Tsakhur settlements in Azerbaijan historically could be found as far south as the region around Mingəçevir.

In light of the high bilingualism among Tsakhurs, the lack of literary status for the language in Azerbaijan, and the influence of Azerbaijani, it would not be surprising if the language was endangered. Schulze (1997:10), however, claims that language use is strong even among urbanized Tsakhur. Recently both Tsakhur radio programs and newspapers have appeared in the areas where Tsakhurs live in Azerbaijan as well as in Dagestan. Neither Schulze nor any other researcher, however, have conducted systematic research into the sociolinguistic situation of Tsakhur in Azerbaijan.

The research presented in this study attempted to answer the following three questions concerning the current sociolinguistic situation of the Tsakhur.

1. What is the general social situation at present in the Tsakhur communities in terms of geography, economics, administrative structure, demographics, social facilities, and social contact?
2. What is the nature at present of the key social domains of education, health, and religion in these communities in terms of staffing, extent of service, and resources?
3. What patterns of language use and language proficiency exist at present in these communities?

Our research was designed to test the following eight hypotheses concerning patterns of language use in predominantly Tsakhur communities.

1. Tsakhur would be the major language of use in communities in which a significant majority of the residents are Tsakhur.
2. Proficiency in Tsakhur would be reported to be high.
3. Azerbaijani would be the most important language after Tsakhur for most speakers of Tsakhur.
4. Russian would be the most important language after Tsakhur for a minority of Tsakhur individuals.
5. The Tsakhur region would be sociolinguistically less uniform than past research suggests; there would be variation between communities in their patterns of language use and language proficiencies.
6. Variation between communities would show the influence of social isolation; levels of Tsakhur language use and proficiency would be lower in communities in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers than in communities not in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers.
7. A language shift towards Azerbaijani and away from Tsakhur would be exhibited in patterns of language use in at least some communities. This language shift would be limited at present, but growing and most pronounced in communities in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers or communities.
8. The distribution of Azerbaijani versus Russian as the majority second language would be dependent on the local social context of a community. That is, the 10% of the Tsakhurs who reported Russian as their second language would not be evenly distributed throughout the Tsakhur communities. Instead, they would be concentrated in a small number of communities. It would be possible to characterize these communities in terms of one or more of the major domains of education, health, and religion.

Hypotheses 1–4 were formulated on the basis of background research. The other hypotheses were not addressed in any of our background research. This was not surprising since most of the published information on patterns of language use among the Tsakhur of Azerbaijan is general (pertaining primarily to the group as a whole) and is limited in its sociolinguistic focus.

## 2. Methodology

The core of the data presented in this report was collected on two trips to the northwestern districts of Zaqatala and Qax taken in June of 1999 and August of 2001. Information from libraries and personal interviews with various key individuals in Baku, private and governmental, also played a significant role in gaining a perspective on the data.

Five communities were visited in the districts of Zaqatala and Qax. These included the district centers of Zaqatala and Qax and the three rural communities of Yeni Suvaqil, Qum, and Ağyazi (Uzumlu). The rural communities were chosen as representative of the types of Tsakhur villages. They present a mixture of (i) communities from different political districts, (ii) communities with varying degrees of isolation from other Tsakhur communities, and (iii) communities with varying population sizes. Table 2 lists the communities and relevant typological factors.

**Table 2: Research Communities and Typology**

District	Name	Type	Social Isolation	Ethnicity	Population*
Qax	Qax town	Urban	High	Mixed	500/12,000
	Qum	Rural	Low	Homogenous	558
	Ağyazi	Rural	High	Homogenous	937
Zaqatala	Zaqatala town	Urban	High	Mixed	2,000/20,000
	Yeni Suvaqil	Semi-urban	Low	Homogenous	4,200

\*For ethnically mixed communities two numbers are given. The first is the Tsakhur population in the community and the second is the overall population.

Nine interview questionnaires were used, in part or in entirety, in the district centers and chosen villages. Each interview questionnaire was designed to be used with a specific individual or group. Questionnaires were prepared for government representatives at the district and local levels, personnel in district statistics bureaus and educational departments, educators in schools and kindergartens, medical workers in hospitals or clinics, religious leaders, and groups of residents. Additional information was obtained through interviews with other individuals in the district and village communities, including cultural center directors, postal authorities, librarians, and local business people.

General demographic information was collected in interviews with administrators, statistic bureau officials, and groups. This included information at both the district and local levels. The questions focused on eight areas: (i) identification of the population centers in which minority language groups are living, (ii) the ethnic nature of the areas in which these groups are living, (iii) basic demographics of these areas, (iv) the administrative structure in which the population centers exist, (v) the economics of these areas, (vi) the social contact patterns of the communities in these areas, (vii) the nature of the facilities bearing social significance in these communities, and (viii) specialists related to these facilities or of other social significance.

Two questionnaires focused on education, one for school directors and teachers and one for kindergarten directors and instructors. These provided the majority of information concerning the domain of education. Additional information was gathered at the district level from district officials and representatives of the ministry of education. Combining all of these sources, information was gathered on (i) medium of instruction, (ii) program structure, and (iii) study of the vernacular.

Interviews were conducted with local health officials (including nurses, doctors, and in larger communities, hospital directors) and religious leaders in each community we visited. These interviews focused on patterns of language use in the domains of health and religion, as well as on the nature of health and religious facilities.

More specific information concerning patterns of language proficiencies was gathered through interviews with educators and groups of residents. The interviews with educators included questions about how well the teaching staff as well as the students speak or understand Tsakhur. Interviews with kindergarten directors included questions about how well young children spoke and understood Tsakhur, Azerbaijani, and Russian when they begin school.

During interviews with groups, a number of questions focused on levels of proficiency in the areas of speaking, comprehension, reading, and writing, in the Tsakhur, Azerbaijani, and Russian. Additionally, they dealt with differences in levels of proficiency between men versus women and among different age groups.

Table 3 summarizes the physical domains of language use that were in focus in the various questionnaires used in this research.

**Table 3: Interviews and Physical Domains**

Questionnaire	Domains
1 District Administrators	District center
2 Local Administrators	Locally, outside village
3 School Directors and Teachers	School: In class School: Teachers, outside class School: Students, outside class School: Teachers/Students, outside class
4 Kindergarten Directors	Kindergarten: In class Kindergarten: Teachers, outside class Kindergarten: Students, outside class Kindergarten: Teachers/Students, outside class
5 Hospital Directors, Doctors, Nurses	Hospital/Clinic
6 Religious Leaders	Mosque Religious ceremonies
7 Group Interviews*	Home Street Bazaar
Other Interviews	Teahouse Post office Mill Library House of Culture Store

\*The group interview included information for almost all of the domains. Only the domains that are not specifically focused upon in other interviews are included here.

Information concerning functional domains was gathered primarily during the group interviews. Of interest were reported patterns of languages used in the following functional domains:

Outside home/work—nonofficial occasions	Language listened to most on radio Language most watched on TV
Outside home/work—official occasions	Write letters Write official papers
First language learned	Language easiest to write in
Language spoken most fluently	Language for arguing
Language read most	Language for cursing
Language easiest to understand when read	Language for counting Language for singing

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1 Location Descriptions

##### 3.1.1 Village inventory

Tsakhurs were reported to represent a majority in the following sixteen communities:<sup>2</sup> Ağdam-Kalyal, Suvaqil, Karkay, Kalalu, Sabunçi, Alaskar, Mamrux, Gezbarax, Mişleş, Yeni Suvaqil, Güllük, Cimdhimix, Ağyazi, Qum, Çinarli, and Kas. The communities of Ləkit-Kotoklu and Muxax were reported to have sections that are homogenously Tsakhur,<sup>3</sup> although the overall majority is Azerbaijani in each community. Significant

<sup>2</sup> Schultz (1997) lists Yeni Suvaqil, Güllük, Cimdhimix, and Ağyazi as minority Tsakhur communities and does not include Qum, Chinarli, and Kas as Tsakhur communities.

<sup>3</sup> Half of Ləkit-Kotoklu was populated by people from Sabunçi in the 60s.

numbers of Tsakhur also live in the three predominantly Azerbaijani communities of Emircan, Əli Bayramlı, and Zarna.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.1.2 Description of research communities

#### 3.1.2.1 The district of Qax (Qax town, Qum, Ağyazi)

The district of Qax is multiethnic with a relatively small but growing population totaling 51,000 in 2000, up from 49,000 in 1985. District officials reported that 84% of the district population are ethnically Azerbaijani, 14% Georgians and 2% a mixture of other ethnicities. The demographics of the district center roughly reflect the overall ethnic diversity of the entire district. Approximately 800 Tsakhurs live in the district.

Ağyazi, also called Uzumli, is located close to the Georgian border in the southern section of the district of Qax. The administrative group of villages for which it is the center is quite isolated from other population centers. There is a single main road that leads south from the Şexi-Balakən highway into the administrative area. This is a dirt road and is difficult to travel in bad weather. The administrative group has a population of 937. Ağyazi is homogeneously Tsakhur. The population of Ağyazi is shrinking slightly. While there is no major movement of families in or out of the village, the mayor reports that many young people are leaving the village after finishing school.

The economic base for Ağyazi is viticulture. There is no longer a collective farm in the area and now the village acts as a cooperative. Everyone in the administrative area received 0.5 hectares of grapes and 1.0 hectare of wheat when the collective was dissolved.

Russian is the main language of instruction in the kindergarten and school in Ağyazi. Ağyazi has the only kindergarten in the administrative area and so children from the neighboring Rutul village of Xirsa also attend. All of the staff in the kindergarten and school is ethnically Tsakhur from Ağyazi. They speak Tsakhur as their first language and Russian as their second. It is not uncommon for boys to pursue higher education, but few girls go on to higher education.

Qum is the administrative center for the villages of Qum, Çinarlı, Suskand, and Fistikli. Qum and Çinarlı are majority Tsakhur villages while Suskand and Fistikli are Azerbaijani villages. There are 558 Tsakhurs in the administrative area out of a total population of 2,757. The administrative area is growing; the population was 1,920 five years ago. Growth is said to be occurring among the Tsakhurs and non-Tsakhurs at equal rates. Of the 1,350 men and 1,407 women in the administrative area, 247 men and 311 women are Tsakhur. Over half the individuals in the administrative area are over the age of 35.

There is a post office, a mosque, a cultural center, a club, two mills, a clinic, a middle school, and a kindergarten in Qum. The cooperative farm in Qum employs 127 individuals; it used to employ 600. Each individual in the administrative area received 0.33 hectares of land when the collective was dissolved. There is a medical clinic in each of the four towns in the administrative area.

There is one middle school with 400 students, and one kindergarten in Qum. Çinarlı has a school with grades 1–9. The language of instruction is Azerbaijani in these schools, but Tsakhur and Russian are taught as subjects in grades 1 to 4.

#### 3.1.2.2 The district of Zaqatala (Zaqatala town, Yeni Suvaqıl)

The population of the Zaqatala district is growing due to a high birthrate. In 2000 there were 110,000 people living in the district of which 52% were ethnically Azerbaijani, 22% Avar, 14% Tsakhur, and 11% Inghiloi. The demographics of the 20,000 residents of the district center roughly reflect the overall ethnic diversity of the

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<sup>4</sup> The communities of Əlibəglu and Çobankol are reported to be Inghiloi and Azerbaijani, respectively, not Tsakhur as reported by Schulze (1997). In addition, the Tsakhurs who live in the predominantly Avar villages of Tala and Cardixlar are reported to have married in, mostly women.



entire district. District officials estimate approximately 15,000 Tsakhurs lived in the Zaqatala district in 2000.

The village of Yeni Suvaqil is a young village. It was built in 1953 and most of the population came from high mountain communities in the northern part of Zaqatala where living has become difficult. There are 4,200 people in the village of Yeni Suvaqil. Over half the population is under the age of 45. The mayor estimated that about 45% of the residents are men and 55% are women. Yeni Suvaqil is 99% Tsakhur. The population is growing slowly as a result of growing families; the average family has two or three children. Most young people stay either in Yeni Suvaqil or in the town of Zaqatala when they finish school. Approximately 5–7% of the young people emigrate to Russia for work or higher education.

There used to be a tobacco collective in Yeni Suvaqil. When the land was divided, each individual received 0.2 to 0.3 hectares of land. There is one new mosque in Yeni Suvaqil that the community built. It is administered by a local imam. The hospital in Yeni Suvaqil has one head doctor and an additional visiting doctor. There are also two kindergartens, a post office, and a cultural center in the village.

The programs that the cultural center runs involve individuals of all ages. There are various dance troupes and singing ensembles. The largest of the groups, ‘Ceyranum’, consists of 20 young people. They sing national songs, read poems, and dance. Two or three times a month they perform at the house of culture, in other places in Zaqatala, or in Baku. They meet two times a week to practice. Performances in the cultural center are in Avar, Russian, Turkish, and Azerbaijani as well as Tsakhur. The government of Zaqatala has given the Yeni Suvaqil house of culture a unique status as a cultural heritage site.

Yeni Suvaqil has two school zones. Each zone has a kindergarten and a school. Azerbaijani is the language of instruction in all kindergartens and schools, while Russian is taught as a subject. Each school has a preparatory class for children to become familiar with Azerbaijani. All educators in the kindergartens and schools are local individuals and speak Tsakhur as their first language.

Tsakhur is taught as a subject in all Tsakhur schools from grades 1 to 4. All the teachers of Tsakhur in Zaqatala and Qax meet every year in August to develop a uniform curriculum to use that year.

## **3.2 Language Proficiency**

### *3.2.1 Tsakhur*

Everyone in Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi was reported to speak and understand Tsakhur perfectly. In Qum, everyone other than preschool and school-aged children was also reported to speak and understand Tsakhur perfectly. School-aged children in Qum were reported to have average proficiency in understanding and basic proficiency in speaking Tsakhur, while preschool children were reported to have basic proficiency in understanding and less than basic proficiency in speaking Tsakhur.

The only group reported to have any significant proficiency in reading or writing Tsakhur was school-aged children. They were reported to have basic levels of reading and writing in Tsakhur if they studied well.

### *3.2.2 Azerbaijani*

In Qum, all generations understand Azerbaijani well, and all but the older generation speak it well. Reading and writing Azerbaijani is easy for all but the oldest individuals. Older women, in particular, have trouble with Azerbaijani and have only average writing skills in it.

In Yeni Suvaqil, proficiency in Azerbaijani is tied to schooling. Preschool children don’t speak it well but understand it a little. Proficiency develops among school-aged children as they get older. In addition, writing Azerbaijani may be hard for older women.

In Ağyazi, proficiency in Azerbaijani is not reached until adulthood. All adults, however, are reported to speak it very well.

### 3.2.3 Russian

In Qum, Russian is spoken best by those between the ages of 30 and 55, particularly men. Those older than 55 understand Russian well, but have only average proficiency in speaking it. Preschoolers do not know it at all. School-aged children understand it at a low level but most cannot speak it. Those who do well in school, however, will know Russian well and will be able to read and write it well.

In Ağyazi, some preschoolers develop basic language skills in Russian at home. More generally, however, proficiency in Russian is developed in school. By grade 6 or 7, children reach high levels of proficiency in Russian in all areas. All adults speak and understand Russian well. Writing skills vary depending on the amount of opportunity individuals have had to use written Russian after leaving school.

In Yeni Suvaqil, individuals under 30 understand Russian better than they speak it. Women over 30 do not know Russian well, but men do. School-aged children have average levels of proficiency in Russian, while those over 18 have better-than-average levels of proficiency. Preschoolers have very little Russian.

### 3.3 Domains of Language Use

In Qum, Azerbaijani is the main language in all domains, while the use of Tsakhur is limited. If Tsakhur is used at all, it is minimally used in the home. Some individuals also use it on the street.

In Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi, Tsakhur is used much more widely than in Qum. Table 4 shows which languages were reported to be the main languages of use in various physical domains in Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi. Where two languages are given, the first is used more frequently. Language use in the religious domain is not included in table 4 as Ağyazi did not have a working mosque in 2000. The main language in the religious domain in Yeni Suvaqil was said to be Azerbaijani, although Tsakhur is also frequently used this domain. It was reported that Tsakhur and Azerbaijani were used equally in the house of culture in Yeni Suvaqil.

**Table 4: Language Use in Physical Domains in Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi**

<b>Domains</b>	<b>Yeni Suvaqil</b>	<b>Ağyazi</b>
Home	Tsakhur	Tsakhur
Street	Tsakhur	Tsakhur
Tea House	Tsakhur	Tsakhur
Kindergarten: Students	Tsakhur	Tsakhur
School: Students, outside class	Tsakhur	Tsakhur
Post office	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur
Store	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur
Kindergarten: Teachers, outside class	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur/Russian
School: Teachers, outside class	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur/Russian
Kindergarten: Teachers/ Students, outside class	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur/Russian
School: Teachers/ Students, outside class	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur/Russian
Hospital/Clinic	Tsakhur/Azeri	Tsakhur/Russian
Kindergarten A: In Class	Azerbaijani	Russian
School: In Class	Azerbaijani	Russian

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 The State of the Tsakhur Language

On the basis of our background research, we had expected that Tsakhur would be the major language of use in communities where the Tsakhur population was a significant majority. This proved to be true in Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi, but not in Qum. While the majority in Qum is Tsakhur in ethnicity, Tsakhur is used much less in Qum than it is in Ağyazi or Yeni Suvaqil. Mirroring this difference, Tsakhur proficiency levels, which were expected to be high among all Tsakhur individuals, were reported to be lower among Tsakhur children in Qum than among those in Yeni Suvaqil and Ağyazi.

The differences in patterns of language use and language proficiency support two of our research hypotheses, repeated here for ease of reference.

5. The Tsakhur region would be sociolinguistically less uniform than past research suggests; there would be variation between communities in their patterns of language use and language proficiencies.
6. Variation between communities would show the influence of social isolation; levels of Tsakhur language use and proficiency would be lower in communities in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers than in communities not in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers.

Of the three communities we visited, Qum was the one with the most social contact with Azerbaijani speakers. It is located close to the district center of Qax and is in an administrative area with an ethnic Azerbaijani majority. Ağyazi, on the other hand, was the most isolated community and it proved it be the location where Tsakhur language use was highest.

The differences in patterns of language use of Tsakhur also support our hypothesis regarding language shift, once again repeated here.

7. A language shift towards Azerbaijani and away from Tsakhur would be exhibited in patterns of language use in at least some communities. This language shift would be limited at present, but growing and most pronounced in communities in close contact with Azerbaijani speakers or communities.

The fact that children in Qum have significantly lower levels of proficiency in Tsakhur than do adults is a strong indication that a language shift is occurring in the location. The shift does not seem to be as strong in the other communities.

### 4.2 The State of Azerbaijani and Russian

Our background research led us to expect that Azerbaijani would be more widespread than Russian. This proved to be true. It was reported that Azerbaijani was used more widely than Russian in Yeni Suvaqil and Qum. In fact, as indicated in the previous section, Azerbaijani was used more widely than Tsakhur in Qum. Only in Ağyazi was it reported that Russian was used more widely than Tsakhur.

We also hypothesized that choice of second language would be dependent on location.

8. The distribution of Azerbaijani versus Russian as the majority second language would be dependent on the local social context of a community. That is, the 10% of the Tsakhurs who reported Russian as their second language would not be evenly distributed throughout the Tsakhur communities. Instead, they would be concentrated in a small number of communities. It would be possible to characterize these communities in terms of one or more of the major domains of education, health, and religion.

This was supported by the fact that all individuals in Ağyazi claimed Russian as their second language and all individuals in Yeni Suvaqil and Qum claimed Azerbaijani as their second (or first) language.

### 4.3 An Assessment of the State of Tsakhur in Azerbaijan

Three generalizations can be drawn about the state of Tsakhur in Azerbaijan. First, Tsakhur is losing its viability in some communities. There are two reasons for this: (i) a language shift towards Azerbaijani in some communities and (ii) a population movement away from some communities due to economic difficulties. Qum is an example of the first shift in viability and Ağyazi is an example of the second.

Second, Tsakhur is very strong in some communities. In Yeni Suvaqil, for example, proficiency in Tsakhur is being maintained even in the younger generations, and Tsakhur is being used in all of the major domains of life except education.

Third, Tsakhur is gaining prominence within the region. This can be seen in the growth of interest in Tsakhur-language study in school and the growing development of Tsakhur-language materials.

An outstanding issue is whether the communities in which Tsakhur is viable are going to survive even as Tsakhur gives way to Azerbaijani in other communities. Some of these communities, such as Ağyazi, are shrinking. Others, however, show no signs of weakness. One of these is Yeni Suvaqil, home to almost one-third of all Tsakhur in Azerbaijan. As long as villages like Yeni Suvaqil remain strong, the Tsakhur language does not appear to face imminent threat of extinction.

## 5. Conclusion

Tsakhur is still a major language of use for most Tsakhur of Azerbaijan. Most adult Tsakhur have a high level of proficiency in Tsakhur and use it in the most common domains of their daily lives. In some communities, however, individuals are choosing to use Azerbaijani more and children are not learning Tsakhur well. In spite of the language shift in these communities, the majority of Tsakhurs in Azerbaijan are expected to maintain Tsakhur as the major language of use in their daily lives and to pass it on to their children.

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