

Levantine Turkmen: in need of a Bible

Turkmen is not Southern Azeri

This short paper is written in defense of the need for the Bible to be translated into the Levantine Turkmen language which, until now, has been falsely classified as being southern Azeri. With this paper I hope to show the difference between them and also the great need for a translation to exist in Levantine Turkmen.

There are many tribes in the Middle East that can vary quite greatly in dialect, and for this short paper I will be speaking in broad terms of the Turkmen of Iraq and of Levant. The Levantine Turkmen are specifically Turkmen from or in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Israel / Palestine.

To begin, Azeri—or more specifically Southern Azeri—is primarily spoken in Iran. There are millions of speakers there. The Azeri Turkish has evolved separately from the Turkmen spoken in the Middle East. The Turkmen in the Middle East arrived prior to the Ottoman Empire and were influenced by the language for hundreds of years. The Azeri dialects did not have such an influence.

The Encyclopedia of Stateless Nations has the following to say about the two Middle Eastern Turkmen groups:

“LANGUAGE AND RELIGION: The Turkomans speak dialects of South Azerbaijani which is popularly called Turkoman in Iraq and Syria. The Kirkuk dialect is the basis of the standard and literacy language in Iraq, but the dialects spoken in Syria and Turkey differ considerably and are closer to Osmanli Turkish than to South Azerbaijani. Turkoman in Iraq is written in Arabic script, but there is little literature. The language is not a written language in Syria.”

—The Encyclopedia of
Stateless Nations (p.1929)

As they have mentioned, the language of the Levant is much closer to Ottoman than to Azeri. That said, both groups of Turkmen in Iraq and the Levant still maintain certain things in their language that set them apart from Ottoman.

For starters, page 173 of *Languages of Iraq Ancient and Modern* states the following about Turkmen:

“The instrumental case, which is {+(I)nAn} in most East Anatolian and Iran-Turkic varieties, has the form of {+DAN}.”

In simpler terms, in modern Turkish the word *benden* means “from me,” or in Azeri, *menden*. In Turkmen, however, *benden* can mean “from me,” “through me,” or “with me.”

On the same page of the same book we learn the following:

In the entire area of eastern Anatolia, western Iran, and Iraq the question particle {mi} does not appear.

In Levantine Turkmen you can find that it remains but has been greatly changed from that of Ottoman.

For example in Turkish one would say, *Gelecek misin?*

Azeri & Iraqi: *Sən gəlirsən?*

In Levantine Turkmen: *Gelacan ma?*

The Levantine Turkmen tend to have parts to their language that show they at one time spoke more closely to Iraqi; however, with the advent of TV, and more recently with the Syrian war, there are some influences that are causing change in this regard.

In this next section I would like to focus on verb conjugations.

I will be showing Turkish, Azeri, and the two Turkmen.

English

I will come	We will come
You will come	You all will come (y'all)
He / She will come	They will come

Turkish

geleceğim

geleceksin

gelecek

geleceğiz

geleceksiniz

gelecekler

Azeri

Gələcəyəm	Gələcəyik / ix
gələcəksən	gələcəksiniz
gələcək	Gələcəklər / əxlər

Levantine Turkmen

Gelecim گله جم	Gelecak / x گله جاق گله جاخ
Gelecan گله جان	Gelecenez گله جانز
Geleci گله جي	Gelecelar گله جيلر

Iraqi Turkmen taken from 243 from عراق تورکمن ديلى

Geleceğem گله جه غم	Geleceğiğ گله جه غيغ
Geleceğsen گله جه غسه ن	Gelecesiz گله جه سيز
gelecek گله جغ	Geleceğlar گله جه غلر

There are many other tenses that at which we could look; however, I think this is enough to demonstrate a few basic—but important—differences between the dialects or languages.

To close, I would like to quote again from *Languages of Iraq Ancient and Modern*. The writer states the following on page 179:

"Yet, it should be stressed that despite its historical connections to both the great written languages and dialect groups of the Oghuz branch, Iraqi Turkmen is definitely neither Azeri or Iran-Turkic, nor Ottoman or Anatolian Turkish."

An entire book on this topic has already been written. The book previously mentioned, عراق تورکمن ديلى, is written only on the topic of the difference between Iraqi Turkmen, Azeri, and Turkish.

Translation Needs:

A translation has begun. The primary source texts are 1827 Ottoman as well as 1920 Ottoman Bibles. They have been the primary source for use in vocabulary; however, there are several instances where Azeri borrowings have been used from the Elam translation (from Iran). The spellings are largely the same as the Ottoman although the letter كُ was not used as it is not well-known by Turkmen in the Middle East. Wherever كُ is located, the letters وُن are usually in place.

The translation is in great need of volunteers to help with checking and with translating. The current translation is being funded through and by Arabs for Christ. Translation excerpts and downloads can be found at <http://www.incilturkmani.org>.

We are also in great need of someone to help us with reformatting the text, and redesigning the website: incilturkmani.org.

Thank you, and may the Lord bless you all,

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