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A BRIEF

OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE LITERARY LANGUAGE OF XVI CENTURY AZERBAIJAN

BREVE RESEÑA DE LA HISTORIA DE LA LENGUA LITERARIA DEL SIGLO XVI EN AZERBAIYÁN

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to analyze the literary language of 16th-century Azerbaijan, with a focus on the integration and functional roles of Arabic lexical units. The study reveals that the frequency of Arabic vocabulary in Azerbaijani literary language significantly increased during this period compared to previous centuries. This rise is attributed to the solidification of classical book stylistics and literary genres, which called for a more extensive Arabic lexicon to meet stylistic demands. Furthermore, it was found that Arabic lexical units were employed with varying intensity across genres; some genres exhibited a high frequency of Arabic terms, while others used them more sparingly. Classical prose, in particular, stands out for its richness in these Arabic elements. In order to provide more context, in the article it is also examined in a brief way the 11th-century Azerbaijani literary language, showing how classical poetic stylistics and literary language interact. This perspective underscores how linguistic elements related to genre, rhyme, weight, form, and structure coalesced to form the distinct styles of the Middle Ages. Overall, it is remarked that Arabic lexical elements were instrumental in shaping the stylistic and genre diversity of medieval Azerbaijani literature, marking a defining feature of its linguistic evolution.

Keywords: XVI century, Literary language, Stylistics, Genre, Arabic words.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de esta investigación es analizar la lengua literaria del Azerbaiyán del siglo XVI, centrándose en la integración y los papeles funcionales de las unidades léxicas árabes. El estudio revela que la frecuencia del vocabulario árabe en la lengua literaria azerbaiyana aumentó significativamente durante este período en comparación con siglos anteriores. Este aumento se atribuye a la solidificación de la estilística clásica de los libros y los géneros literarios, lo que exigía un léxico árabe más amplio para satisfacer las demandas estilísticas. Además, se encontró que las unidades léxicas árabes se emplearon con intensidad variable en los géneros; algunos géneros exhibieron una alta frecuencia de términos árabes, mientras que otros los usaron con más moderación. La prosa clásica, en particular, se destaca por su riqueza en estos elementos árabes. Para proporcionar más contexto, en el artículo también se examina de manera breve la lengua literaria azerbaiyana del siglo XI, mostrando cómo interactúan la estilística poética clásica y el lenguaje literario. Esta perspectiva subraya cómo los elementos lingüísticos relacionados con el género, la rima, el peso, la forma y la estructura se fusionaron para formar los estilos distintivos de la Edad Media. En general, cabe señalar que los elementos léxicos árabes contribuyeron a configurar la diversidad estilística y de género de la literatura azerbaiyana medieval, lo que marcó un rasgo definitorio de su evolución lingüística.

Palabras clave: Siglo XVI, Lengua literaria, Estilística, Género, Palabras árabes.

INTRODUCTION

The Azerbaijani language is one of the main parts of Azerbaijan's cultural heritage, an important indicator of national identity. Being part of the Turkic language family, in the West Oghuz group, it possesses a weighty literary tradition, dating back to the 15th century and reflecting its historical depth (Jalilbayli, 2022). It is the mother tongue for about 92.5% of the population of Azerbaijan and, therefore, it plays a huge role in everyday communication and in the sphere of cultural expression (Alasgarova et al., 2024). Its historic use as a lingua franca among different ethnic groups has also integrated it into the multiethnic mosaic of the region. Throughout the centuries, the Azerbaijani language has resisted changes with scripts—from the early 20th century's use of the Arabic script to the introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet in 1939—showing the greater socio-political landscape in which Azerbaijan finds itself. It is the preservation and promotion that are needed in keeping this cultural treasure alive, as the language represents literature, folklore, and traditions that form the very cornerstone of Azerbaijani culture (Sahibogly, 2024). In this world, which is increasingly intermingling and integrationist, the Azerbaijani language represents a trademark of culture that guarantees the continuity of collective identity and the succession of generations. Thus, Azerbaijani is something more than a means of communication; it is a medium of knowledge and culture, organically linked to history and values of this nation (Karimov, 2020; Luscombe & Kazdal, 2014).

In the history of Azerbaijan, the 16th century was a transformative period marked by major political, religious, and cultural shifts (Zeynaloglu, 2020). The era was significantly shaped by the emergence of the Safavid Empire, established by Shah Ismail I in 1501. Under Safavid rule, Azerbaijan experienced a profound change towards Shia Islam, transitioning much of the population from Sunni to Shia and establishing the region as a key Shia stronghold, second in global Shiite population only to Iran. This religious transformation fostered a distinctive identity for Azerbaijan within the Islamic world, intertwining faith with cultural heritage. Politically, Azerbaijan's landscape was fragmented, with various local rulers holding regional power (Zarinebaf, 2019). However, the consolidation of these territories under the Safavid Empire marked a new era of governance and statehood, as local dynasties like the Shirvanshahs played integral roles within the broader imperial structure. The period also ignited a cultural renaissance that reflected Persian influences, particularly in literature, philosophy, and the arts. Azerbaijani poets, writers, and scholars contributed richly to the cultural life of the Safavid Empire, embedding Persian aesthetics into

local traditions and further developing the Azerbaijani language and literature (Abisaab, 2004; Bryce et al., 2013; Hamid, 2023).

The 16th century Azerbaijani literary language represents the peak stage of medieval Azerbaijani literary language. In this century, Azerbaijan's literary language, like other leading languages of the East, became an artistic and scientific language while expanding its communicative role as a means of communication - it even entered the foreign arena, becoming a means of interstate communication and reaching the highest stage of its development in terms of content and meaning. Of course, the Arabic lexical words and Arabisms included in its vocabulary played a great role in its development in all these areas and its entry into a broader arena. In general, we do not divide the lexical fund of the entire Azerbaijani literary language into classifications of national and foreign words, either in the Middle Ages (13th-16th centuries) or in the following centuries. We perceive the language as a unitary whole, equating the content, essence, meaning, and importance of national and foreign words in the language. We do not assign lower or higher status to either category; rather, we assert that both play important roles in the essence of Azerbaijan's literary language, with one depending on the other. They serve the literary language of Azerbaijan equally, with the same rights.

The Arabic words used in our language have served its communicative function in all areas to the same extent as our national words, and in this respect, they are not inferior to our national words. "The leading language of the 13th-16th centuries is the classical book language. In this language, the entire picture of the vocabulary is revealed. Both national and acquired lexicon are concentrated here at the level of literary language" (Hajiyev, 2012, p. 249). In this sense, the contribution of Arabic lexical words to the acquisition of extremely wide artistic, scientific, and communicative qualities in 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language cannot be denied.

Considering the above, the goal of this research is to analyze the literary language of 16th-century Azerbaijan, with a specific emphasis on the integration of Arabic lexical elements. This study demonstrates how both the frequency and stylistic sophistication of Arabic vocabulary expanded during this period, driven by the development of classical stylistics and literary genres in Azerbaijani literature. It further examines the relationship between these stylistic conventions and the literary language, underscoring the importance of Arabic vocabulary across classical written works and oral folk literature of the era.

DEVELOPMENT

It should be noted with respect that when discussing the quantity and quality of Arabisms used in 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language, most researchers correctly identify the place and position of Arabicisms in the language. They observe that the quantity and quality of this lexicon increased significantly during this period. "Those who speak directly or indirectly about the vocabulary of the 16th-century literary language note first and foremost the abundance of Arabic and Persian words". Starting from the first quarter of the century (referring to the 16th century), Arabic and Persian words in the literary language became more concentrated, forming a dense layer in the written language. They equaled Azerbaijani words in quantity and in some cases surpassed them. By mid-century (second and third quarters), foreign words approached the apogee of their orbit of movement in the written language.

Until the 16th century, words had likely never been borrowed from vernacular, living speech (which was the main reserve fund) into the literary language to such an extent; similarly, Arabic and Persian words had likely never entered the literary language as abundantly as they did during this period. (Habibayli, 2007, pp. 287–288).

Literary stylistics and Arabic lexical units in the Azerbaijani literary language of the 16th century

We would not be wrong to say that the 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language is fundamentally a language of stylistics; rather, this statement summarizes the conclusions of most of our researchers. According to research conducted on the 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language, this period's literary language is distinguished from previous centuries by its unique characteristics and stylistic diversity. The role of Arabicisms in creating, developing, and differentiating all these stylistic elements is significant: "For the first time in this period, fiction divided into more colorful forms and genres, while literary language diversified into its own internal stylistics" (Habibayli, 2007, p. 286).

What are stylistics in general? What do medieval literary language historians mean by stylistics? Addressing these questions, Academician Tofiq Hajiyev explains: "Stylistics is a form of concrete expressive work. It is the maneuver of each art with its own vehicle to reach the content. Stylistics in a literary language is a complex of literary language material, an attitude toward the meaning and form of a linguistic unit, behavior with it, and a system of ways to analyze, perceive, and direct speech facts for work."

Typically, stylistics combines form and content. For example, when expressing an artistic subject in a unique way, the layers of vocabulary, the ratio of national and borrowed words, figurativeness, exaggeration, polysemy, word order, and other elements connect specifically with each other to form the fact of artistic style. Interestingly, medieval literary language researchers are not satisfied with this definition of stylistics. While attempting to interpret this concept more broadly and discussing styles in the development process of medieval literary language, they equate this concept with the genres of medieval classical books and folk poetry: "However, it is more appropriate to understand them (referring to the styles of classical poetry and folk poetry) as the language of classical poetry genres and the language of folk poetry genres" (Hajiyev, 2012).

When discussing the relationship between classical poetry stylistics and literary language - whether addressing stylistic features of literary language or how stylistic issues relate to literary language characteristics - we are not discussing the problems of genres such as rhyme, meter, form, and clause structure that shaped medieval literary language styles. Instead, we are primarily concerned with linguistic materials. In forming literary language stylistics, we must consider how genres approach language: what words they select based on their character and formal characteristics, whether foreign or national words are preferred, and if foreign words are preferred, in what quantity and for what reasons. Each genre's self-expression manifests in how it demands specific content from language based on its requirements, or in other words, the conditions it sets to maintain its existence when using the language.

In the 15th-16th centuries, stylistic determination emerges in the literary language. The stylistic elements that were merely noticeable in previous centuries become clear, functional features in this period. Stylistics become differentiated, and the literary language begins to function with its full characteristics. The literary language manifests as lexical, phonetic, and grammatical elements distinguished from vernacular within uniform orthographic and orthoepic requirements. This selection varies in quality. Initially, this selection process involves abandoning simpler elements in favor of literary-cultural components. Subsequently, each stylistic approach selects elements from this literary-cultural component that suit its content.

In the 15th-16th centuries, Azerbaijan's literary language reaches the second stage of selection, transforming into a system of styles. At this point, the selection process extends beyond the vernacular; the approach to foreign language elements also becomes a matter of choice. The

amount of foreign language material, its comprehensibility in the speech environment, and the use of lexical or grammatical borrowings (or both) serve as differentiating factors in determining stylistics (Hajiyev, 2012, pp. 240–241).

XI century literary language and foreign lexicon

A brief examination of 16th-century Azerbaijani poetry reveals an abundance of foreign lexicon, specifically Arabic lexical units. As mentioned, the 16th century represents a special stage in the development of Arabic lexicon in literary language history. This abundance has its linguistic foundations and was determined by socio-political, ideological, philosophical, and literary factors in 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language.

Without delving into the well-known public-political-philosophical landscape of the period, it can be stated that during this century, Islamic religion, Muslim culture, and Islamic spirituality reached what scholars describe as a renaissance stage. Islamic religion became fully established in all Eastern countries, not only in political, economic, and ideological aspects but also in terms of spiritual influence. This naturally affected the literary process, along with all areas of life, including language and literary genres that served as means of expression for the literary process.

Azerbaijan, being an inseparable part of the East and having Islamic ideology established in its medieval geopolitical territory, reflected this ideology and its associated vocabulary in literature created within this geographical and political area, regardless of the language of composition. This process significantly influenced Azerbaijani literary language and literature. With the establishment of Safavid power in Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani literary language and literature reached the level of leading Eastern languages and literatures. As it integrated into the general literary processes of the East, foreign lexicon became increasingly prevalent, particularly in the initial periods. Simultaneously, literary forms, genres, lexical factors, and literary themes from Eastern literature were incorporated into Azerbaijani literature, with poets quickly mastering these genres' formal features and creating outstanding works.

Regarding literary language stylistics, the selection of linguistic elements is crucial. In the 15th-16th centuries, two linguistic manifestations became evident. The first linguistic manifestation is characterized primarily by the abundance of foreign language elements – both lexical and grammatical. This includes standardized expressions and sentences from foreign languages. This manifestation has both poetry and prose branches. The poetry branch comprises classical poetry genres such as masnavi, qita,

tarjiband, tarkibband, mukhammas, murabbe, rubai, ghazal, and others. While each of these genres has its distinctive features, they share common characteristics. This does not imply that the balance of borrowed elements (lexical-grammatical) remains constant across all works within these genres or among different poets. This balance can vary according to author, topic, genre, and section (Hajiyev, 2012, pp. 242–243).

Examining the literary genres circulating in 16th-century Azerbaijani literature reveals that individual genres developed rapidly and reached their peak through poets such as Basiri, Habibi, Khatai, Fuzuli, Sururi, Shahi, Haqiri, and Rahmati. While the ghazal genre maintained its position as the leading poetic form, other forms - including masnawi, qasida, mukhammas, takhmis, murabbe, mustazad, and rubai - played crucial roles in forming the period's leading genres and stylistics, as well as individual writers' styles. Indeed, this broadly represents the general picture of 16th-century literary language. Some researchers occasionally approach this picture from a different perspective, choosing not to emphasize the activity of styles and literary genres within the literary language, their degree of language usage, or their relationship to foreign lexical units. They sometimes hesitate to present the abundance of foreign lexicon as a characteristic of other genres. These facts and examples cannot be ignored, however, as certain literary and artistic genres demanded greater use of Arabic lexical units and contributed to their abundance. Some of these genres even played leading roles during specific periods of our literary history.

Therefore, it would be incorrect to treat these genres as mere episodic facts of our literary history and process, or to suggest they left no lasting impact. Naturally, as in all periods, each genre may become either a product of a particular era, a leading genre, or neither. For instance, a genre might be more productive in quantity and quality during one era while becoming archaicized in another. This is natural. However, using this fact to dismiss a genre with indifference represents an incorrect approach. If a genre becomes the leading genre of any era, it indicates that the time period, literary-artistic process, and literary language required that genre, and the literary process sought expression primarily through it. In this context, classical book stylistics came to the fore in the 16th century, with its associated genres becoming more active. This development appears more related to the era's evolution, timing, and literary process, which consequently necessitated the introduction of foreign units in the language - specifically, the abundance of Arabic lexical units and words.

Interestingly, the stylistic forms (higher, religious, preaching, poetry and prose, clerical, scientific) that readily

incorporate Arabic and Persian words into literary language, willingly embracing them and seeking to legitimize them, proved least valuable from a historical perspective. These styles either lacked future development or underwent fundamental changes in essence and character. Although these stylistic forms emerged successively, generating a large community of writers, readers, and listeners, and connecting different social strata, they failed to become the foundational trends that guided development in the early period of Azerbaijan's literary language history. Nevertheless, in the 16th century, we observe the use of Arabic and Persian words in various odes, examples of *nat*, *minajat* and *sajli* prose, religious-preaching poems (*nafas*'), scientific commentaries, treatises, and letters. The proportion of foreign words and expressions in these stylistic forms and literary formats exceeded that found in the finest examples of secular literature and classical poetry stylistics (Habibayli, 2007, pp. 288–289).

While 16th-century religious-philosophical-mystical poetry contains a higher quantity of Arabic lexical words compared to secular poetry, this observation is somewhat superficial. Foreign vocabulary is not significantly less prevalent in secular poetry; rather, the presence of Arabic lexical words is simply more apparent in religious poetry. This distinction, whether concerning worldly or gnostic love, relates to the content and essence of love itself. In classical literature, worldly and gnostic love are separated by a narrow margin, as it often becomes challenging to distinguish between the two. This difficulty arises because the same concepts, lexical units, and words sometimes describe both gnostic and worldly love.

Therefore, attempting to differentiate between the lexicon of gnostic and worldly love, or claiming that Arabic lexical units are more prevalent in one than the other, seems unconvincing. It is inappropriate to regard the language of gnostic, religious-philosophical, sectarian poetry with indifference due to its content and genre while favoring secular poetry's language for expressing conventional "rose-nightingale" themes. It is equally incorrect to suggest that words and phrases with similar content are comprehensible in one text but unclear in another. Undoubtedly, most borrowed words and compositions were unfamiliar to the general readership and listeners of the 16th century, having not penetrated the common language. This was largely because most foreign words related to religious-superstitious concepts, ruling class ideology, pompous phrases, and repeated definitions and exaggerations. The formality of these mentioned stylistic forms made this possible, as they were essentially and objectively distant from public life (Habibayli, 2007, p. 292).

In our opinion, this thesis is difficult to accept. The claim that "most borrowed words and phrases were unfamiliar even to the wide readership and listeners of the 16th century" seems questionable. Given that Islamic religion, Muslim culture, Islamic spirituality, and Islamic ideology were fully established in the 16th century, even uneducated and illiterate people were familiar with approximately sixty to seventy percent of this lexicon. Admittedly, one cannot deny the existence of obscure lexicon, petrified expressions, and content unclear to the masses during this period. However, it would be incorrect to separate those who understood this content from the general population or present them as "representatives of another people." The stylistics of oral folk literature expressing the people's language - the "simple lexicon" - formed one direction of the Azerbaijani literary language, while the complex lexicon determined another. The living vernacular language direction was crucial for preserving and developing the Azerbaijani language's existence. Similarly, classical book stylistics was equally important in elevating Azerbaijan's literary language to the level of leading Eastern languages, enabling its use in science, lore, international correspondence, and other domains.

Therefore, we cannot fully agree with certain theses expressed in the following opinions:

The foreign words and expressions mentioned should be viewed not as a language fact but as a stylistic fact. Words and compositions considered acceptable within these stylistics do not serve live communication or embody the 'real consciousness' of the scribes and writers who use them. Many are not real concepts that became jargon among religious circles and privileged 'tradesmen classes' (A. Damirchizade), becoming fashionable through misuse, but rather a vocabulary collection expressing religious-superstitious mystic attitudes, judicial claims, and convict's humility. (Habibayli, 2007, pp. 292–293).

Every living language's existence and scope of activity unite two main tasks: serving as the primary means of communication and as 'reality of thought,' 'practical real consciousness.' This applies equally to the polished, standardized literary form of the language. This raises a natural and logical question: to what extent is it correct to consider foreign word-type borrowings within these texts as normal vocabulary units of the literary language?" The lexical-semantic content, valence, and compatibility of borrowed words in the dictionary prevent us from considering them as full-fledged vocabulary units of the literary language. (Habibayli, 2007, pp. 291–292).

CONCLUSIONS

Our extensive discussion of Arabicisms in classical book stylistics should not suggest that Arabic lexical words were absent from oral folk stylistics. It can be confidently stated that Arabic lexical words were present in both the oral folk literature and classical book stylistics of 16th-century Azerbaijani language, playing a significant role in forming their artistic figures. The works of our great poet Shah Ismayil Khatai, who successfully merged classical book and oral folk literature stylistics, serve as an excellent example of this phenomenon. While Arabic-Persian words - specifically Arabic words - are notably abundant in the classical book stylistics branch of Shah Ismail Khatai's creativity, these Arabic words also appear in his works written in folk stylistics. This demonstrates how arbitrary the division between classical book stylistics and oral folk stylistics in literary language truly is. In the work of our great master Shah Ismail Khatai, we clearly see both stylistics combined in one person, in one creator. The poet excelled in both styles, proving that these styles neither opposed nor interfered with each other. Thus, we can observe how both branches of 16th-century Azerbaijani literary language formed a unified whole in Shah Ismayil Khatai's work.

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