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The Role of Language and Literature in the Discourse of Azerbaijanism (1960–1980)**

1960–1980 Döneminde Azerbaycancılık Söyleminde Dil ve Edebiyatın Rolü

Abstract

Azerbaijanism represents the national ideology and state doctrine of the Azerbaijani people. As an intellectual and political concept, it began to take shape in the early twentieth century and gained institutional expression during the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920). Although the ideology was marginalized under the Soviet political system, its cultural foundations were preserved and gradually revived toward the end of the century, contributing to the restoration of Azerbaijani statehood. This article examines the role of language and literature within the discourse of Azerbaijanism during the period 1960–1980. The study argues that the national language and literary tradition functioned as essential components in sustaining Azerbaijanist consciousness during the Soviet era. By analyzing selected literary works and broader cultural developments, the article explores how linguistic and literary expression contributed to the preservation of national identity. Particular attention is given to the cultural and political environment that supported these processes and to the historical role of Heydar Aliyev in strengthening the institutional and cultural conditions that facilitated the development of Azerbaijanist discourse during this period.

Keywords: Azerbaijanism discourse, Azerbaijani language, national ideology, national consciousness, literary discourse

Öz

Azerbaycancılık, Azerbaycan halkının ulusal ideolojisini ve devlet doktrinini ifade eden temel kavramsal çerçevelerden biridir. Bir siyasal ve düşünsel yönelim olarak XX. yüzyılın başlarında şekillenmeye başlayan Azerbaycancılık, Azerbaycan Demokratik Cumhuriyeti (1918–1920) döneminde kurumsal bir nitelik kazanmıştır. Sovyet döneminde ideolojik düzlemde sınırlandırılmış olsa da, bu düşüncenin kültürel temelleri özellikle dil ve edebiyat alanında varlığını sürdürmüştür ve yüzyılın sonlarına doğru yeniden güç kazanarak bağımsız Azerbaycan devletinin yeniden kurulmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Bu çalışma, 1960–1980 yılları arasında Azerbaycancılık söylemi çerçevesinde dil ve edebiyatın rolünü incelemektedir. Çalışmada ulusal dil ile edebî

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geleniğin Sovyet dönemi boyunca Azerbaycancı bilincin korunmasında ve yeniden üretilmesinde belirleyici bir işleve sahip olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Seçilmiş edebî örnekler ve dönemin kültürel süreçleri üzerinden yapılan inceleme, dilsel ve edebî üretimin ulusal kimliğin sürekliliğini sağlamadaki katkısını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca bu süreci mümkün kılan kültürel ve siyasal ortam ile Azerbaycancılık söyleminin gelişmesine katkıda bulunan kurumsal koşulların oluşumunda Haydar Aliyev'in tarihsel rolü de değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kavramlar: *Azerbaycancılık söylemi, Azerbaycan dili, ulusal ideoloji, ulusal bilinç, edebî söylem*

Introduction

Like every national idea, the ideology of Azerbaijanism did not emerge instantaneously; rather, it developed through a prolonged historical process and gradually crystallized within the collective consciousness of the people. Rooted in ancient Turkic mythology and Azerbaijani folklore, this worldview was subsequently shaped into a coherent national ideology through the decisive influence of linguistic and literary traditions. The modern Azerbaijani language and the literary heritage formed in this language have withstood the test of centuries and have become stable and fundamental pillars underlying the national idea.

During the medieval period, the struggle for national language and identity unfolded within the broader framework of Islamic civilization. At a time when Persian functioned as the dominant language of poetry and Arabic served as the principal language of science and scholarship, the Turkic language sought to establish its cultural and civic legitimacy. This process of cultural self-assertion is reflected in the works of Azerbaijani poets of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, including Izzeddin Hasanoglu, Qadi Burhaneddin, Imadeddin Nasimi, Jahangir Haghghi, Shah Ismail Khatai, and others. The culmination of this medieval literary development was reached in the poetry of Muhammad Fuzuli, who is widely regarded as one of the most prominent representatives of classical poetic expression within the Turkic literary tradition.

The Azerbaijani Turkic language, elevated to the status of a state language in the socio-political sphere during the rule of Shah Ismail Khatai, attained a high level of artistic refinement in classical poetry through the works of Muhammad Fuzuli. Within this literary tradition, the native language became an effective medium of artistic creativity and intellectual expression. Scholarly literature emphasizes that the poet's deep devotion to his mother tongue enabled the creation of refined and sophisticated poetic forms within that linguistic framework (Səfərli, 2017). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly in the period of the khanates, and later throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the Azerbaijani people experienced complex political transformations, the formation of national consciousness found extensive expression not only in social life but also in the development of the national language and literary culture. In this historical context,

language and literature functioned simultaneously as the principal forces nurturing the national idea and transforming it into an active socio-cultural movement.

The Formation of Azerbaijanist Thought

Prior to crystallizing as a coherent national identity and ideological framework, Azerbaijanism manifested through its various constituent elements—corresponding ideas, symbolic images, and objects of artistic representation—within Azerbaijani literature. The aspirations, dreams, affections, and existential sensibilities of the Azerbaijani people, as well as their reflections on good and evil and their struggles for a just society and humanity, are reflected in folktales, epics, seasonal and ritual songs, proverbs, legends, and myths, and are further articulated through the art of the saz and poetic expression within the *ashiq* tradition.

In the epic of *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud*, the depiction of the life and heroism of Oghuz society reveals the lifestyle, domestic culture, character, psychology, valor, and ethical conduct of the Azerbaijani people. As noted in literary scholarship, the *Dede Gorgud* epics constitute a foundational work reflecting the Azerbaijani people's traditions of national identity and statehood (*Azərbaycan ədəbiyyatı tarixi*, 2020). The epic therefore functions not merely as a literary monument but also as a cultural text through which historical memory, ethical ideals, and social norms are transmitted across generations.

Similarly, in the epic of *Koroğlu*, the idea of Chanlibel embodies a more concrete representation of the social model constructed within the collective imagination of the people. Emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the epic resonates both with the historical struggles of the Azerbaijani people—particularly the Celali movement—and with the popular conception of a free and independent social order grounded in friendship, brotherhood, and justice. Literary scholarship emphasizes that *Koroğlu* exerted a profound influence on the ethical worldview, spirituality, and psychological outlook of the people, serving over centuries as an important moral and educational model reflecting the diversity and richness of national thought (Cəfərov, 2002). Through these literary and folkloric monuments, the formative layers of Azerbaijanist consciousness can be discerned as an evolving system of ethical, cultural, and socio-political meanings that gradually matured into a broader national worldview.

In medieval literature, the idea of Azerbaijanism does not appear directly; rather, it is reflected through sentiments and intellectual orientations associated with Turkic identity and patriotism. Research indicates that although the early concept of Azerbaijanism does not manifest explicitly in the works of major medieval figures such as Qatran Tabrizi, Afzaladdin Khaghani, Mahsati Ganjavi, Nizami Ganjavi, Nasimi, Shah Ismail Khatai, and others, their works nevertheless address related

themes to varying degrees. In particular, moral and didactic reflections on the state, society, governance, and citizenship within the socio-political environment of Azerbaijan indirectly contributed to the emergence of the idea of Azerbaijanism (Əliyev, 2018).

In the literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Azerbaijanist thought began to appear more clearly both in linguistic expression and in socio-political reflection, demonstrating a close connection with popular consciousness and serving as a medium for articulating it. Nizami Jafarov characterizes this period as a renaissance within Azerbaijani historical development, emphasizing that the khanates that emerged on the territories of present-day Azerbaijan following the decline of the Safavid state reflected various forms of Azerbaijani identity and statehood. According to this interpretation, the formation of independent or semi-independent khanates in Azerbaijan during the eighteenth century represented not only an economic and political phenomenon but also a cultural and spiritual development (Cəfərov, 2002).

From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, the intellectual paths opened by Mirza Fatali Akhundzade and Hasan bey Zardabi, the founder of the national press, led to the emergence of Azerbaijani theatre, journalism, a new secular education system, and a renewed cultural life. During this period, a generation of prominent enlighteners began to reflect on the fate of the homeland and to search for ways to overcome colonial domination. Writers, poets, and publicists explored Azerbaijani social realities in their works and turned them into subjects of intellectual reflection, thereby contributing to the development of ideological Azerbaijanism.

During the same period, the issue of the nation's name gained particular importance in the press and public discourse. The artificial designation "Transcaucasian Tatars," introduced within the framework of imperial administrative terminology, was gradually replaced by the concepts of "Azerbaijani Turks" and "Azerbaijanis." This transformation illustrates that the ideology of Azerbaijanism did not emerge suddenly at the beginning of the twentieth century but developed gradually within socio-political thought. In this context, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920) appeared on the historical stage as a significant culmination of the national independence movement, within which the Azerbaijani language and literature played an important role.

After the establishment of Soviet power in Azerbaijan, many writers and literary figures whose works were closely connected with national ideals faced repression during the Stalinist period. Numerous intellectuals were executed, exiled, or subjected to severe political pressure. While the inability of certain writers to align with socialist realist expectations constituted one factor in this process, the broader mechanisms of repression extended far beyond literary disagreements. As a result,

Azerbaijani romantic and realist literary traditions continued to preserve elements of national consciousness despite the restrictive ideological environment.

Among those affected by this wave of repression were not only classical Azerbaijani writers and intellectuals but also poets and authors associated with the new Soviet cultural framework, as well as representatives of socialist ideology. Research on the period notes that several literary and intellectual figures were persecuted, imprisoned, or forced into exile as a result of the political climate of the time (Elçin, 2010). Between 1930 and 1950, Azerbaijani writers worked within an extremely restrictive totalitarian environment. Nevertheless, literature continued to preserve elements of national consciousness and cultural continuity. It has been noted that despite the severe social conditions of the time, Samed Vurghun demonstrated the ability in Azerbaijani poetry to address major social themes through a synthesis of romantic and popular stylistic elements (Həbibbəyli, 2017). One of the factors contributing to the rise of patriotic sentiment in the literature of the 1930–1950 period was the war against German fascism. Within the broader framework of defending the Soviet state, literary works of this period expressed ideas of sacrifice, collective struggle, and loyalty to the homeland, which in turn strengthened motifs of patriotism within literary production.

Overall, although the ideology of Azerbaijanism existed under the constraints of the Soviet political system, literature indirectly preserved the Azerbaijani national concept and contributed to sustaining national consciousness. At the same time, the treatment of this concept in literature during the totalitarian period of Stalinism differs from that of the subsequent post-Stalin era. Consequently, the literary works of 1930–1950 and those of 1960–1980, produced under different historical conditions, reflect notable differences in the expression and interpretation of Azerbaijanist themes.

The Azerbaijani Language as a Key Component of Azerbaijanism

One of the fundamental attributes of national identity is the mother tongue. Like every national idea, one of the principal components of the ideology of Azerbaijanism is the struggle for the national language. Beginning with *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud*, the Azerbaijani language—one of the Turkic languages that, through a long historical process, reached the level of a developed literary language—gradually became one of the essential cultural foundations of national identity. During the period of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918–1920), the Azerbaijani language attained the status of a state language and thus became one of the central attributes of national statehood.

Language functions as a key factor in social consolidation and the formation of collective identity. In contemporary political discourse it has also been emphasized that language unites the population and constitutes one of the most important attributes of statehood, together with national

symbols such as the flag, the coat of arms, and the anthem (Azərbaycan Prezidenti İlham Əliyev yerli televiziya kanallarına müsahibə verib, 2026). During the Soviet period, despite ideological and political pressures, the Azerbaijani people succeeded in preserving the functioning of their language within cultural and literary life. Azerbaijani writers continued to create literary works in their native language, Azerbaijani children were educated in it at schools, and books were widely read in Azerbaijani. The poetic works of Samed Vurghun, including the well-known poem *Azərbaycan*, contributed to the expression of patriotic sentiment and national consciousness through the medium of the Azerbaijani language. Likewise, the literary heritage of figures such as Hüseyn Javid, Ahmad Javad, and Mikayil Mushfiq was created in Azerbaijani and became an integral part of the cultural memory of the people.

The characters in Jafar Jabbarli's dramatic works, who struggle for a modern and progressive social life, express their ideas and aspirations in the Azerbaijani language. The prose language developed by writers such as C. Mammadguluzade and A. Haqverdiyev was later continued and enriched by authors including Y. V. Chamanzaminli, Suleyman Rahimov, Mirza Ibrahimov, Mir Jalal, Ali Valiyev, Abulhasan, and Anvar Mammadkhanly. In poetry, works such as Suleyman Rustam's *Janub Şeirləri* addressed themes of linguistic and cultural unity, linking the idea of the mother tongue with the integrity of the homeland.

During the Soviet period, the issue of Southern Azerbaijan also played a significant role in raising awareness of the importance of the mother tongue. In Southern Azerbaijan—present-day Iranian Azerbaijan—millions of Azerbaijanis lacked opportunities to receive education in their native language, and the Azerbaijani language faced various restrictions. This situation became an important theme in literary discourse both in the northern and southern parts of Azerbaijan. In the South, the poet Shahriyar composed his well-known poem *Heydarbaba* in Azerbaijani, while in the North, Samed Vurghun addressed similar concerns in his poem *Yandırılan kitablar*, reflecting on the destruction of Azerbaijani-language books.

Poetry devoted to the mother tongue frequently expressed national consciousness and functioned as a form of cultural resistance to linguistic assimilation. The poems titled *Ana Dili* written in different years by Bakhtiyar Vahabzade articulate a deep emotional and cultural attachment to the Azerbaijani language, while other works address the challenges faced by the language under historical conditions of political and cultural pressure. Through these poetic reflections, the mother tongue emerges as a central symbol of cultural continuity and national dignity (Vahabzadə, 2004).

In his poem *Vusalda Hicran*, written as an address to the Southern poet Sahand, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade highlights the inseparable relationship between homeland and language. By referring

metaphorically to a long historical separation, the poet evokes the experience of a nation divided across political boundaries and reflects on the marginalization of the Azerbaijani language in certain historical contexts (Vahabzadə, 2004). The poetry of Khalil Rza Ulutürk also demonstrates a strong commitment to the protection of the mother tongue as a fundamental component of national identity. In works such as *Ana Dili*, *Laylam Mənim*, *Narəm Mənim*, and *Riyakər*, the poet portrays the Azerbaijani language as a cultural fortress that preserves historical memory and collective dignity. This poetic tradition was later continued by Sabir Rustamkhanli, whose works emphasize the endurance and vitality of the native language within the historical experience of the Azerbaijani people.

Khalil Rza repeatedly revised and expanded his poem *Ana Dili*, later publishing it under the title *Laylam Mənim*, *Narəm Mənim*. Despite ideological pressures, the poet preserved the central theme of the work, presenting the mother tongue as an enduring spiritual connection between generations and as a key element of national identity (Rza, 1980). In Khalil Rza's poetic worldview, the Azerbaijani language symbolically encompasses the historical memory, geography, and cultural heritage of the nation. References to places such as Göygöl, Qoşqar, the Maiden Tower, the Caspian Sea, Shahdagh, and Tabriz function as markers of collective identity, while literary authorities and historical figures appear as guardians of cultural continuity. Within this symbolic framework, language becomes an enduring foundation of national dignity and cultural survival.

Khalil Rza Ulutürk's dedication to national cultural values and the ideals associated with Azerbaijanism was reflected not only in his poetry but also in the diaries and personal reflections he kept throughout his life. In these writings he emphasized the importance of nurturing national consciousness among younger generations and highlighted the responsibility of writers and educators in preserving cultural identity (Əsgərli, 2012). Archival materials and correspondence associated with the poet further illustrate the tensions between official ideological expectations and the intellectual aspirations of writers working within the Soviet cultural environment. These documents reveal the challenges faced by literary figures who sought to preserve national cultural values while operating under political constraints, and they demonstrate the persistence of Azerbaijani ideas within literary discourse (Əsgərli, 2012).

The National Leader's Perspective on Language and Literature in Azerbaijanism

Heydar Aliyev attached great importance to the role of language and literature in the formation and development of the ideology of Azerbaijanism and undertook concrete steps to promote the development of the Azerbaijani language and literature during all periods of his leadership in Azerbaijan. When Heydar Aliyev assumed leadership of Azerbaijan in 1969, Russian functioned as the

dominant language of official socio-political and administrative communication within the Soviet Union. On November 2, 1969, during the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Azerbaijan State University, the National Leader delivered a speech in Azerbaijani, thereby initiating a new tradition of using the national language in official public communication. The head of the republic began to address large audiences, representatives of the national intelligentsia, and the general public in Azerbaijani, ensuring the broader public use of the national language in official contexts. As noted in scholarly research, language gradually expanded beyond everyday communication and literary expression and gained wider application in social life, including administrative and public spheres (Hüseynova, 2019). This development represented an important step toward strengthening the Azerbaijani language as a medium of public discourse, governance, and national identity.

During the Soviet period, several attempts were made to secure the recognition of the Azerbaijani language as the state language within the republic, while intellectual circles continued to advocate for the protection of the national language. Despite opposition from the central Soviet authorities, the Azerbaijani language was officially recognized as the state language in the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic adopted in 1978. This decision reflected the political determination and authority of Heydar Aliyev in promoting the national language within the existing political framework (Axundova, 2007). In the period of independence, under new historical circumstances, the issue of the name and status of the Azerbaijani language was again widely discussed at the national level. The provision defining Azerbaijani as the state language was subsequently included in the Constitution of the independent Republic of Azerbaijan adopted in 1995.

Throughout different stages of his political activity, Heydar Aliyev supported the development of the modern Azerbaijani language and paid particular attention to the advancement of Azerbaijani linguistics. The strengthening of linguistic research institutions, the encouragement of scientific studies devoted to the Azerbaijani language, and the recognition of scholarly works in this field were among the measures reflecting this policy. In the years of independence, additional steps were taken to strengthen the institutional and legal foundations of the Azerbaijani language and to expand its role in education, science, and public administration.

Heydar Aliyev also emphasized the decisive contribution of literature to the development of the Azerbaijani literary language. In his statements, he underlined the significant role played by writers, poets, literary scholars, and linguists in shaping and advancing the modern Azerbaijani language (Əliyev, 2023). He recognized literature as an important cultural force capable of fostering national

consciousness and strengthening collective identity. Consequently, during his leadership he consistently supported the development and dissemination of contemporary Azerbaijani literature.

According to Heydar Aliyev, literature has historically played a crucial role in awakening national feelings and strengthening national self-awareness among the Azerbaijani people. Through their works, poets and writers contributed to the development of national consciousness and to the broader process of cultural revival within society (Əliyev, 2023). This perspective demonstrates the close interrelationship between literature, language, and the ideology of Azerbaijanism.

During his leadership of the republic, Heydar Aliyev regularly participated in congresses of Azerbaijani writers, delivered speeches, and emphasized the importance of mobilizing literary creativity for national cultural development. Research on this period notes that the preservation of the national language was already a priority during the earlier stage of his leadership, and in the period of independence this policy was further strengthened through initiatives aimed at the development of the Azerbaijani language (Hüseynova, 2019). This continuity demonstrates Heydar Aliyev's consistent approach to safeguarding and promoting the Azerbaijani language as a key element of cultural policy and national identity.

Heydar Aliyev also attached special importance to the classical literary heritage of the Azerbaijani people. Efforts to promote classical authors and literary traditions were directed toward preserving historical memory and strengthening cultural continuity. The erection of monuments to classical figures, the celebration of anniversaries of major literary personalities, and the establishment of house-museums dedicated to prominent writers served to maintain the national cultural heritage and to introduce it to new generations.

Among the important cultural initiatives supported during this period were the commemorations of significant anniversaries associated with Azerbaijani literary history, including the anniversary of Imadeddin Nasimi, the anniversary of Nizami Ganjavi, the celebration of the epic *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud*, and the anniversary of the classical poet Muhammad Fuzuli. These events contributed to the international recognition of Azerbaijani cultural heritage and strengthened awareness of national literary traditions.

Heydar Aliyev also emphasized the role of literature in the formation of the independent Azerbaijani state. In his speeches and public reflections, he addressed the works of classical and contemporary writers such as Jalil Mammadguluzade, Huseyn Javid, Ahmad Javad, Jafar Jabbarli, Samad Vurghun, Suleyman Rustam, Rasul Rza, Bakhtiyar Vahabzade, Mammad Araz, Khalil Rza Uluturk, Ismayil Shikhly, Yusif Samadoghlu, Anar, Elchin, and other authors, highlighting their

contributions to national culture and intellectual life. At the same time, he encouraged the active participation of literature in the broader process of independent state-building.

Overall, the language and literature policies implemented by Heydar Aliyev, together with his consistent efforts to strengthen national cultural institutions, formed an important component of the doctrine of Azerbaijanism. During his leadership, alongside measures aimed at the development of Azerbaijan's economy and social life, cultural policy—particularly language and literature—occupied a significant place and contributed to the consolidation of an independent Azerbaijani state and society.

Conclusion

In the formation of the Azerbaijani people's national consciousness and in the emergence of the ideology of Azerbaijanism, several historical and cultural components played a decisive role. Alongside ethnic awareness, ancient Turkic mythology, Azerbaijani folklore, attachment to the homeland, and patriotic ideals, language and literature functioned as central elements in shaping the ideological and cultural foundations of the nation. Beginning with the epic tradition represented by *Kitabi-Dədə Qorqud*, the Azerbaijani language and the literary works created in this language have for centuries articulated the collective identity of the people and supported the continuity of their cultural life.

Throughout different historical periods, the development of the Azerbaijani language and literature occurred within changing cultural and political contexts. During the medieval era, they evolved within the broader intellectual and cultural environment of the Islamic East. In the nineteenth century, they continued to develop under the influence of new intellectual currents associated with Europe and the modern world. In the twentieth century, despite the political limitations of the Soviet system, Azerbaijani language and literature continued to contribute to the preservation of national consciousness and indirectly supported the formation of the ideology of Azerbaijanism.

The analysis of literary processes during the period from the 1960s to the 1980s demonstrates that attention to the issue of the mother tongue became a central factor in the preservation and expression of national identity. Writers and poets not only contributed to the development of the Azerbaijani language through their literary works but also promoted its broader cultural and social use. Discussions surrounding linguistic identity were reflected in literary works addressing the theme of Southern Azerbaijan and the idea of a historically divided Azerbaijan, as well as in texts expressing broader concepts associated with Azerbaijanist thought.

The formation of the cultural and intellectual environment that supported this literary engagement with language and national identity was also influenced by broader political and cultural policies. In particular, the initiatives undertaken by Heydar Aliyev played an important role in

strengthening the status of the Azerbaijani language. As a result of these efforts, the Azerbaijani language was officially recognized as the state language in the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic adopted in 1978.

In the broader historical perspective, the contribution of the Azerbaijani language and literature to the preservation of national consciousness and to the strengthening of national identity represents an important factor in the restoration of Azerbaijani statehood in 1991. Language and literature thus function not only as cultural expressions but also as key instruments in sustaining the ideological and historical continuity of the Azerbaijani nation.

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