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Review on the Oral History of Book Publishing in Azeri Turkish Language Over the Past Forty Years: An Educational Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The act of printing serves as a mechanism for disseminating and reusing ideas, which remains pervasive across the lifespan of individuals. A key indicator of societal advancement is the level of book production within a given community. The publication of books plays an indispensable role in steering societies towards the realization of educational, cultural, artistic, scientific, and other objectives. This paper presents a retrospective analysis of the oral tradition of book publishing in the Turkish-Azeri language spanning four decades, adopting an educational approach that delves into the educational and analytical dimensions of this tradition.

Methods: This research employed a descriptive-analytical approach. Data collection was conducted through interviews. The study focused on active publishers within the Turkish-Azeri book publishing domain, with a sample of 12 publishers selected using the purposeful snowball sampling technique.

Results: The vitality of Azeri book publishing is intricately linked to the scholarly and research community, as well as the readership within the Azeri population. These factors are significantly influenced by educational and research policies, as well as the economic and cultural governance of the society.

Conclusions: In general, the outcomes of this study have implications for enhancing the educational facets of book publishing in the Azeri Turkish language.

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Introduction

Printing is a tool for publishing and disseminating ideas, which has been used throughout human life (Moodie & Moodie, 2016). One of the measures of progress in any society is the publication of books. Book publishing has always played a decisive role in societies' path to achieving cultural, artistic, scientific, and other goals (Infelise, 2013). The rate of book publishing is usually a suitable criterion for showing the growth and development of a society in scientific, cultural, and economic terms. Looking at the state of book publishing in the Azerbaijani Turkish language shows that it has always been fraught with fluctuations and has rarely seen peace; to the extent that it has been in extreme confusion and has not achieved a proper understanding of its issues and problems. The first language spoken by humans was Turkish, and many words in today's languages have Turkish roots. 1800 years before Christ, the Hittite Empire was established in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Azerbaijan, and one of the great honors of Turks today is that they descend from that tribe (Pourbahram & Gholami, 2023). Azerbaijani Turkish, like Turkish in Turkey and Turkmen, is a branch of Oghuz Turkish and is spoken not only in Azerbaijan but also in many Turkic-speaking regions of Iran, Iraq, and Eastern Anatolia. This language, like any other language, has several colloquial dialects and a literary language, which is the formal language of Azerbaijan. The oldest written work in Azerbaijani Turkish is the Book of Dede Korkut; four copies of this book have been written between the early 2nd century Hijri to the mid-4th century Hijri. Unfortunately, comprehensive research on the vast works remaining from the Turkish languages has not been done, but existing research has provided an appropriate general overview of these sources. Since these sources have been examined from geographical, historical, or linguistic perspectives, they often have overlapping issues, but overall, this research is useful for evaluating the remaining works (Morvarid et al., 2016; Ridwan, 2015).

The most important event that has occurred in human history is the movement of the pen on paper, therefore, a book can be called a miracle of human knowledge and referred to as the most sacred treasure of human science, as God swears by it in the Quran: "By the pen and what they write;" it facilitates human growth and progress, establishes civilizations, and transfers experiences from one generation to another, which is essentially what a book does. Although today there are other means through which sciences are disseminated among human societies, the book has not yet lost its place and remains one of the most important tools through which human experiences and

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sciences are transferred (Torabi Alamuti et al., 2021). The publishing industry remains an unexplored realm in Iran for unknown reasons. Neither the country's educational system, nor its research system, nor study plans, nor any other activities that generate knowledge, information, analysis, perspectives, and views have assisted in publishing, nor has any clear and well-informed supervision based on scientific foundations and research methods governed it (Babolhavayeji et al., 2011). Publishing books in Iran is arguably the most important and principal cultural industry or one of the most important and principal pillars of culture. Providing the books needed by a society, where more than 80% are literate, can itself, regardless of any other factor, become a productive, employment-generating, active, and influential industry in various aspects of society, while the growth of the country's population, increasing literacy rates, the ever-increasing need to acquire various specializations and skills, and generally the increasing need to study various reading materials in the future outline a scenario that requires policy-making, planning, management, and organization of publishing (Babolhavayeji et al., 2011).

Babolhavayeji et al. (2011) investigated the book publishing industry in Iran from 1979 to 2008, using documentary, descriptive, and analytical methods. They assessed all books published within this 30-year period to explore trends and changes in the industry. Data was collected using checklists and analyzed with statistical methods such as percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation coefficient to test specific hypotheses. The findings revealed that a total of 560,339 books were published during the study period, with a significant increase in the annual publication rate—from 1,863 books in 1979 to 56,893 in 2008. Of these publications, 23% were translations and the remaining 77% were original works. The majority (51%) of the books were first editions. Geographically, approximately 77% of the publishing activity was concentrated in Tehran, with the remaining activity spread across other provinces. The number of publishers grew by about 10% annually. The results indicated that, with the exception of some years, the publication industry generally saw progressive growth during the study period. Religious books and computer science, information, and general works were the most and least published categories, respectively. The study confirmed two hypotheses with 99% confidence: there is a significant relationship between the average price of books and total book circulation, and between the number of active publishers and the yearly book supply.

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Rava and Bigdeli (2018) conducted a study on the state of book publishing in Bushehr province between 2001-2011 and the state of printing and printing houses. This research is of the documentary type and the study population includes all books published during the years 2001-2011. For statistical analysis, descriptive statistical methods including percentage and average, as well as diagrams to describe the book's characteristics were used. This research has used several databases for the census of published books, and ultimately the Book House Institute's database was identified as the most complete database in the field of books. The research findings showed that between the years 2001-2011, 334 book titles were published in Bushehr province. The highest number of published books was 60 titles in 2003 and the lowest number was 6 titles in 2011. Also, the books in the fields of literature and religion each with 111 and 82 titles had the most published books, and the books in the fields of philosophy and psychology with 1 and 2 titles had the least published books. Among the published books, 58.9% of the books were translated, 41.9% of the books were original, 88.6% of the books were first print and 11.3% were reprints. The level of publishers' activity in 2003 with 65 and in 2011 with 7 publishers had the highest and lowest activity of publishers in Bushehr province. By providing more publishing facilities in the provinces and supplying the necessary books for students, students, and researchers, it is possible to increase the literacy rate of the community, further expand the culture of reading, the educational system, and the acquisition of specialties and skills.

Nowruzy and Hashemi (2023) stated although researchers have given considerable attention to certain aspects of book publishing, such as the economic aspects, there has been a notable gap in research regarding book regulations in post-revolutionary Iran. This study sought to address this gap by conducting in-depth interviews with publishers and translators to investigate the regulatory framework governing book publishing in Iran. The aim was to uncover hidden facets of book publishing regulations and assess the impact of their implementation. The findings revealed that one of the primary challenges faced by translators and publishers is the inconsistency in decisions made by censors, which may stem from a lack of transparency in publication regulations.

The publishing industry for Azerbaijani Turkish language books has encountered numerous challenges and opportunities over the years, necessitating a thorough examination of its landscape (Moradi, 2020; Salehi et al., 2018; Shoghpour et al., 2022). This research seeks to identify the key factors influencing the process of book publishing in the Azerbaijani Turkish language during the

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specified period. It aims to delineate and understand the core issues and challenges that have hindered the growth and quality of publishing in this linguistic context. By analyzing these factors and challenges, the study also endeavors to propose practical solutions and strategic actions that could enhance the efficacy and reach of book publishing in Azerbaijani Turkish. Addressing these aims, the research questions focus on uncovering the significant factors that have shaped the publishing processes, diagnosing the persistent problems within this sector, and recommending actionable measures to ameliorate these issues, thereby fostering a more vibrant and successful publishing environment for Azerbaijani Turkish literature.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the dynamics within the Turkish-Azeri book publishing sector. The focus was to gain insights into the experiences and challenges faced by publishers within this specific cultural and linguistic context. The participants consisted of active publishers specializing in Turkish-Azeri literature. A total of 12 publishers were selected through a purposeful snowball sampling technique. This method was chosen to ensure that the participants were well-acquainted with the intricacies of the publishing industry in this niche market. Each selected publisher was asked to recommend other publishers who also specialize in Turkish-Azeri texts, thereby expanding the sample through their professional networks. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for in-depth discussions and provided flexibility to explore topics that emerged during the interviews. The interview guide was developed based on preliminary research and included questions about the publishers' experiences, the regulatory environment, market dynamics, and challenges specific to Turkish-Azeri publishing. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was conducted in a location convenient for the participant, including their offices or remotely via digital platforms when in-person meetings were not feasible. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity in handling and reporting the data. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data, involving a careful reading of the transcripts to identify common themes and patterns related to the study's objectives.

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This process included coding the data in an iterative manner, categorizing codes into broader themes, and refining these themes to align with the research questions.

Results

Analysis of the First Research Question: What factors have played a role in the publishing process of Azerbaijani Turkish language books during the research years?

In terms of books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, the situation has improved from before. This means that in previous years, for various reasons, organizations and institutions did not show much interest in purchasing Azerbaijani Turkish books in bulk. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in bulk purchases of these books. Previously, Azerbaijani Turkish books were often overlooked, and it was said that such books could not be purchased. Fortunately, there has been a positive shift in the perspectives of most organizational and institutional leaders towards these books, and this is evident in the overall volume of purchases. These books are bought for administrative staff, and sometimes, purchased books are given as gifts to guests and visitors. This, in turn, contributes to the market's growth.

Broadcasting: From the broadcasting sector, it is expected that they will make it easy and straightforward to advertise books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language. This would help these books to become better known in society, serving as a moral support for the publishers of such books. Banks and financial institutions, by providing appropriate loans, can make a significant contribution to the publishers of Azerbaijani Turkish books, as most publishers face liquidity problems. Overall, all institutions and social organizations, with their intellectual support, guidance, and advice, should pay special attention to the publishing of Azerbaijani Turkish books, to participate in advancing the publishers' goals.

Economic Situation: Azerbaijani Turkish books are popular among the youth, but the economic situation of the people on one side and the capabilities of virtual spaces have caused these books not to sell well. Of course, the drop in print runs is not exclusive to Azerbaijani Turkish books but affects other books as well, excluding textbooks and educational materials from schools and universities. We see that the number of bookstores in most cities is decreasing day by day, and bookstores are closing. On the other hand, publishers are increasingly shirking their responsibilities. At a minimum, it is expected that a portion of the substantial capital allocated to

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the Persian Academy should be dedicated to Azerbaijani Turkish books. Our expectation from the stakeholders and officials is that they genuinely support this influential sector in culture, science, politics, art, etc. It is not enough for them to merely talk about it at various events. Publishers of books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, who have significantly contributed to the country's culture, literature, art, and science, expect timely support. A publisher contributes to the production of knowledge in society. If they encounter problems in their work, the entire society will suffer. The publishing field for Azerbaijani Turkish language books has always been sensitive, and the relevant officials in this field need to act with awareness of these sensitivities. In my opinion, the administration of guidance and culture in provinces that issue publishing licenses for Azerbaijani Turkish books should have decision-making independence and not have to consult everything centrally. This process is time-consuming and costly. Those involved in issuing publishing licenses for Azerbaijani Turkish language books should receive the necessary training and possess at least a basic understanding of this field.

Analysis of the Second Research Question: What are the issues and challenges in publishing books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language during the research years?

Publishing requires fundamental changes and transformations, which have occurred in recent years. For example, if we consider technological changes, we will realize that the book publishing industry has transformed significantly compared to previous years, and publishing in the Azerbaijani Turkish language has been affected by these changes. The advancements in the book publishing industry have manifested in the appearance of books, print quality, images, binding, etc. For instance, if you compare a book published 40 years ago with one published recently in terms of physical quality, you will realize the extent of the changes and transformations in the publishing of books, including those in the Azerbaijani Turkish language.

Transformation in Book Publishing: The most significant transformation in book publishing, especially in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, occurs when it becomes an economic activity that generates profit. If we can invigorate the economic and financial cycle of books, a transformation will occur. However, if a publisher invests and does not have assurance of a return on investment, they will gradually become discouraged, and an undesirable event may occur. In other words, the publisher loses the motivation to continue working in their enterprise. Thus, book publishing,

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instead of progressing, faces decline. Therefore, it appears that the relevant agencies and responsible organizations need to come to the aid of book publishing. Sensible planning, logical and strategic regulations should be prepared and organized. The government should support publishers. Various administrations should be obligated to purchase books in bulk from publishers to provide financial assistance. Public libraries should be expanded and strengthened. Different organizations and agencies should pay special attention to books and reading in their cultural programs. In other words, the culture of books and reading should become a part of people's lives. I believe these activities, though small examples of a vast array of expectations, if implemented, would allow book publishing, especially in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, to enjoy satisfactory progress.

Challenges in Printing and Publishing: Challenges can be divided into two categories: those related to pre-printing and those related to post-printing. During the publishing stages, when we reach the point of obtaining a printing license, we face numerous problems with censorship. Most censorships are not based on established rules and principles; instead, they involve personal tastes and preferences, causing discouragement among publishers. For instance, one censor may find an issue acceptable while another does not. Generally, censorship is not conducted according to the law; either there is no law, or it is not followed in practice, but rather decisions are made based on personal preferences. It is frustrating that the law is not properly enforced. For example, a word that was acceptable yesterday is not allowed today. Not that they are acting according to a new law, but rather they make decisions based on personal tastes and preferences regarding certain topics and individuals. We know that around the world, it may happen that opponents and supporters of book publishing do not follow a consistent approach. It is natural and acceptable that the law should be followed. However, here, an unreasonable biased perspective exists. For example, whether individuals are for or against Azerbaijan affects book publishing. We clearly see a biased approach and influence in this matter, affecting the granting of printing licenses.

Orthography: Another issue before printing relates to orthography, which also comes back to acting based on personal taste and not using the law. Usually, the convention is that any foreign word entering a language is adapted according to the existing rules of that language and used accordingly. For example, consider the name Mohammad. When it enters the Turkish language, it is generally written and pronounced as "Memed," but the same name, when used for the Prophet

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Mohammad (PBUH), is written and pronounced as "Mohammad." There are many such examples in all languages. In Iran, censors insist that the name Mohammad should always be written and pronounced as "Mohammad." Or another example is the name Fatemeh, which is usually pronounced "Fatema" in Turkish. It is expected that censorship would allow it to be written and pronounced as "Fatema." There are many such examples. In reality, they do not allow words that have entered the Turkish language to be adapted and used according to the existing rules of Turkish grammar. These decisions apply not only to Arabic words but also to words in English, French, German, Russian, etc. In fact, it seems that censorship requires all words to first be adapted to Persian and then entered into the Turkish language. The goal is to ensure that a word is written and pronounced in Turkish in the same way it is in Persian, which has caused many problems. In fact, this expectation is unreasonable, illogical, and biased. Unfortunately, this biased perspective also exists for Turkish words like "spoon" and "plate." Censorship expects that such words, as they are written and pronounced in Persian, should be written and pronounced in the same way in Turkish. Generally, censorship expects all words to be Persianized before entering the Turkish language, which is the ultimate display of lawlessness. Even for words that have Turkish roots and have not entered Turkish from another language, they hold this view. It seems that the most important principle in using words, whether foreign or native, is their Persianization. This practice causes significant harm to the Turkish language.

Post-Printing Phase: The second category of problems returns to the post-printing phase, where we face numerous challenges in publishing and distributing the books. Regarding the marketing and advertising of books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, there are many obstacles in the way of publishers. The lack of a thriving market for Azerbaijani Turkish books has caused a recession in this area, resulting in most publishers facing liquidity shortages.

Analysis of the Third Research Question: What are the proposed solutions and actions to improve the situation of book publishing in the Azerbaijani Turkish language?

In advancing book publishing, we must use the timely and appropriate ideas of thinkers and philosophers who have spent their lives in this field and have gained experience. These individuals may not have academic degrees, but they carry a wealth of successful experiences in publishing books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, which will be highly effective in the development and

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progress of this field. Another factor that will aid in the development and flourishing of book publishing, especially in the Azerbaijani Turkish language, is the creation and expansion of academic programs in printing and publishing at various educational levels. With this approach, publishing activities would be conducted scientifically and academically, leading to progress in the field.

Publishers should consider the preferences of their audience when publishing books that meet their informational needs. Indeed, this principle is innovative; the publisher chooses and continues their path based on the desires of the audience. They must pay more attention to both the content and appearance of the books to ensure they are satisfactory from the audience's perspective. A publisher never allows themselves to publish a low-quality book, as it would damage their reputation and have a long-term negative impact on the book market.

Discussion

Most publishers believe that there have been good advancements in the appearance of Azerbaijani Turkish books, such as print quality, images, paper, binding, etc., compared to the past. These publishers believe that the technology used in book printing has seen significant advancements compared to previous years. Modern printing and binding machines are now used. Manual typesetting has been set aside, and computerized typesetting is utilized. The quality of the paper used is much different from the past and is used for printing books, which prolongs the useful life of the books. Overall, the quality of printing and publishing of books in the Azerbaijani Turkish language has improved compared to the past. Most publishers believe that with the advancements made in the printing and publishing industry, the quality of Azerbaijani Turkish books has also benefited from these advancements. Comparing recently published books with those published in the early years following the Islamic Revolution, we can see significant differences in print quality in all respects.

According to some publishers despite the advancements made in the physical quality of Azerbaijani Turkish books, publishers are not fully satisfied with the content of these books. Most publishers of Azerbaijani Turkish books are dissatisfied with the content, attributing this to various factors. These studies are consistent with the findings of this study (Mahdiani & Mortazavi, 2003; Rava & Bigdeli, 2018; Shoghpour et al., 2022).

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Publishers express concern that the range of subjects covered by books published in the Azerbaijani Turkish language is notably narrow, primarily focusing on literature and religion, with little representation in fields such as the basic and pure sciences. This lack of subject diversity contributes to an imbalance in the content available in Azerbaijani Turkish. There is a consensus that expanding into broader subjects including practical and basic sciences could help address this gap. Moreover, many publishers feel that the review and censorship process for books in Azerbaijani Turkish, particularly in areas like literature, religion, and social sciences, is overly stringent. They report a perception that there are deliberate efforts to slow down the publication process, potentially to discourage authors and publishers from continuing their work. Concerns are also raised about the qualifications of those reviewing the books; many reviewers are seen as lacking the necessary expertise, leading to unscientific and biased assessments that are more reflective of personal views rather than objective criteria.

The strictness observed by censors, especially concerning the linguistic details of Azerbaijani Turkish, such as writing style and sentence structure, is another area of concern. Publishers argue that the lack of qualified reviewers at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance significantly affects the quality of published books. Errors introduced by underqualified reviewers not only fail to correct existing mistakes but often exacerbate them, which publishers believe might be unintentional or intentional. To improve the situation, publishers advocate for the employment of knowledgeable and expert individuals who understand the nuances of the Azerbaijani Turkish language, including its literary and geographical history. They argue that employing skilled professionals in the field could leverage the strong existing laws and regulations more effectively, thereby enhancing the quality of publications and fostering better trust between publishers and reviewers. This alignment with skilled and knowledgeable personnel is crucial for elevating the standards of book publishing in the Azerbaijani Turkish language.

The findings of this study underscore significant insights into the educational aspects of book publishing in the Azeri Turkish language. By identifying the narrow scope of subject matter and the rigorous censorship processes, this research highlights the critical areas where improvements are necessary. Enhancing the diversity of topics covered and streamlining the review process could potentially elevate the educational value of publications and broaden their appeal and accessibility.

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Such improvements are not just beneficial for expanding the knowledge base available in Azeri Turkish but also for fostering a richer cultural and educational landscape. The study clearly points towards the need for a more inclusive and liberal approach to book publishing in Azeri Turkish, suggesting that doing so could significantly contribute to the educational development within this linguistic community.

While the study provides valuable insights, it does come with limitations that must be acknowledged. The reliance on qualitative interviews, though insightful, may incorporate subjective biases of the participants and does not capture a broader quantitative measure of the issues at hand. The study's focus on a specific linguistic region may also limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts where different dynamics might exist.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating a larger, more diverse sample and employing quantitative methods to provide a broader statistical understanding of the publishing landscape. It would also be beneficial to conduct comparative studies across different linguistic groups to discern unique versus common challenges faced in the field of book publishing. Additionally, investigating the impact of implementing the suggested improvements on the educational outcomes of Azeri Turkish publications could provide concrete evidence to support policy changes and industry practices. Such studies would be instrumental in creating a more robust framework for supporting and enhancing book publishing in minority languages.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

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