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Sociolinguistic situation of Kurdish in Turkey: Sociopolitical factors and language use patterns

Abstract: This article aims at exploring the minority status of Kurdish language in Turkey. It asks two main questions: (1) In what ways have state policies and socio-historical conditions influenced the evolution of linguistic behavior of Kurdish speakers? (2) What are the mechanisms through which language maintenance versus language shift tendencies operate in the speech community? The article discusses the objective dimensions of the language situation in the Kurdish region of Turkey. It then presents an account of daily language practices and perceptions of Kurdish speakers. It shows that language use and choice are significantly related to variables such as age, gender, education level, rural versus urban dwelling and the overall socio-cultural and political contexts of such uses and choices. The article further indicates that although the general tendency is to follow the functional separation of languages, the language situation in this context is not an example of stable diglossia, as Turkish exerts its increasing presence in low domains whereas Kurdish, by contrast, has started to infringe into high domains like media and institutions. The article concludes that the prevalent community bilingualism evolves to the detriment of Kurdish, leading to a shift-oriented linguistic situation for Kurdish.

Keywords: Kurdish; Turkey; diglossia; language maintenance; language shift

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1 Introduction

Kurdish in Turkey is the language of a large population of about 15–20 million speakers. Yet, it has rarely been the subject of formal sociolinguistic description. The existing literature (Hassanpour 1992; Akin 1995; Haig 2004; Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes 2008; Coşkun et al. 2011) has discussed in detail the modality of restrictions on the private and public usage of Kurdish in Turkey,

naming state attitudes and policies towards Kurdish under terms like “linguicide”, “glottophagie” and “invisibilization” practices. However, what remains relatively absent is research on the speakers’ perspectives about the vitality of their language and on issues of language maintenance and shift. To address this research gap, this study is informed by two questions: (1) In what ways have state policies and socio-historical conditions influenced the evolution of linguistic behavior of Kurdish speakers? (2) What are the mechanisms through which language maintenance versus language shift tendencies operate in the speech community?

This article thus tries to establish the complex array of interrelations between language use and choice patterns of Kurdish speakers in Turkey and socio-political factors of the language situation to the extent that they relate to the “speaker” and “language”. The existing literature has mostly backgrounded these factual aspects as mere setting/context, whereas in this study these factors are foregrounded as crucial elements behind the current linguistic situation. Here the key constructs related to minority language situations such as diglossia, language vitality and language maintenance and shift are discussed. A background section presents an overview of the objective/factual conditions of the language situation in Turkey. I then analyze the linguistic behavior and perceptions of the speakers in respect to the domains of language use, interlocutors, and speakers’ generation, gender, and level of formal education. Finally, the extent to which the factual aspects of the linguistic context are reflected in the linguistic behavior and perceptions of the speakers is assessed. The article concludes that the mainly unfavorable sociopolitical conditions have led, and continue to lead, to community bilingualism evolving to the detriment of Kurdish, a shift-oriented linguistic situation. Nevertheless, I suggest that the phenomenon is not a wholesale one and that there are mechanisms through which the language shift tends to be reversed, for instance through media and cultural and political activism.

2 Conceptual framework

Minority language situations are often studied by referring to a set of socio-political factors supposedly influencing the maintenance and shift of minority languages (Kloss 1966; Giles et al. 1977; Edwards 1992). Language maintenance is a speech community’s use of its first language in a number of domains in a contact situation (Yağmur 1997: 18); it regulates within-community communication (Fase et al. 1992) and protects against external attitudes (Grenoble and

Whaley 2006: 13). In reverse, language shift refers to a stage in the relationship of the community to its language during which the members of the community have either partially or completely abandoned the usage of the native language (Winford 2003: 14–17). Language shift is typically a gradual process and it necessarily implies changes in societal norms. Thus, as implied in Fase et al. (1992: 7), it can be best understood by studying the mechanisms that govern societal norms and changes in them. A number of models have been developed to understand those overarching mechanisms. The construct of “ethnolinguistic vitality” (EV henceforth), proposed in Giles et al. (1977), aims at exploring and systematizing the role of socio-cultural factors on language maintenance, language shift and language loss. The concept is defined as the socio-structural factors that make a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations (Giles et al. 1977: 307). The EV of a group is made up of three cover factors, namely *status*, *demographic* and *institutional support and control*. A group with high values on these factors will have a high ethnolinguistic vitality, thus tending to maintain its language and preserve its distinctive group characteristics; conversely, a group with low values on most will end up with a low EV; thus it will tend to assimilate and consequently may cease existence as a distinctive collective identity (see Landry and Allard 1994). Furthermore, in order to systematize the role of individual perceptions of the socio-structural factors on language behavior, Bourhis et al. (1981) proposed a Subjective Ethnolinguistic Vitality Questionnaire (SRVQ), designed to obtain the subjective assessment of group members on the vitality factors both for their own group and for one or multiple other groups coexisting in the context. The EV has been used in many countries and with many language groups, and developed substantially further.

In addition to the typological models, constructs such as “diglossia” and “domain analysis” help to better understand the individual and interactional bases of linguistic behavior. Domain is conceived as “cluster of social situations typically constrained by a common set of behavioral rules” (Fishman 1972 [1968]: 263). Linguistic behavior of members of a speech community is assumed to be governed by such sets of situational constraints. Diglossia, in turn, refers to a relatively stable stage in which the languages of the contact situation are functionally separated across a set of social domains and communicative situations (see Ferguson 2003 [1959]; Fishman 2003 [1967]). In this configuration, the variety that is used for more prestigious functions such as education, media and market is the *high* variety, while the variety used in more intimate domains and functions such as intra-familial communication, friendship and neighborhood is the *low* variety. When the functional separation of the languages is no more respected, the low language inevitably follows the path to shift (Fishman 2003 [1967]: 360)

and bilingualism tends to be temporary and transitional (Edwards 1994: 85). However, a number of authors working around “*conflit linguistique*” (Jardel 1982; Kremnitz 1991; Boyer 1997) take issue with the “harmonizing” interpretation of diglossia. For these scholars, the existence of a high and a low variety within a community inevitably presupposes conflictual relationships, characterized by concurrence, dominance, and violence (Boyer 1997: 6–14). The present study illustrates the difficulties with stable functional separation of languages in that, as it will be seen, not only the high language Turkish has started to exert its presence in low domains but also the low language Kurdish aspires to high domains and functions.

In addition to diglossia, domain analysis and ethnolinguistic vitality, I employ Edwards’ (1992) typological model, which proposes eleven categories/perspectives: demography, sociology, linguistic, psychology, history, politics, geography, education, religion, economy and media. Each factor is analyzed according to the “speaker”, “language” and “setting”. For instance, the geographical classification of linguistic situations makes three basic distinctions: (1) “unique minority” vs. “non-unique minority” depending on whether the language is unique to one state or is spoken in several; (2) “adjoining” vs. “non-adjoining” depending on whether members of speech community are geographically connected or not; (3) “cohesive” vs. “non-cohesive” depending on the extent of internal spatial cohesion among speakers of a speech community within a state (Edwards 1992: 39). The assumption is that minority strength will vary according to the three dimensions of the model. Thirty-three items formulated as specific questions also guide the analysis (Edwards 1992: 50) and provide comprehensive data and insights into aspects such as history and background of speech community, numbers and concentrations of speakers, degree and type of language transmission, the nature of maintenance or revival efforts, degree of autonomy or “special status” of the area, the relationship between language and economic success, and the association between language and identity. The model was found especially useful for the analysis of non-migrant situations (Clyne 2003: 45) and developed to include a further category of “literacy” (Grenoble and Whaley 1998). In what follows, I also discuss some of these categories.¹

¹ The “Language vitality and endangerment” model (UNESCO 2003) is another useful typology for assessing the vitality of a given language. For a concise presentation of the model see Grenoble and Whaley (2006: 3–12). For the model see: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/pdf/Language_vitality_and_endangerment_EN.pdf (accessed 6 February 2012).

3 The factual dimensions of Kurdish in Turkey

3.1 Geographical and historical contextualization of the community and the language

The sociolinguistic context treated in this paper, Turkish or Northern Kurdistan, corresponds to the east and southeast regions of Turkey with predominantly Kurdish concentration. It is bordered by Kurdish regions of Iran, Iraq and Syria (see Figure 1). The region occupies around 30% of Turkey (TESEV 2006: 34). It is mountainous with vast plains in certain parts. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers and mines are of geopolitical value (Yildiz 2006: 65–77). The European Commission (2004: 39) estimated the Kurdish population in Turkey to be between 15–20 million, which amounts to 20–25% of the population of Turkey. As for the population living in Kurdish region, TESEV (2006: 34) states it as 15% of the total population. In 2003, the birth rate was estimated in the Eastern Anatolia region as 3.8, and in the south-eastern Anatolia region as 4.2, whereas in all of Turkey it is 2.3 (TESEV 2006: 36). Despite the high birth rate, the rate of population growth in the Kurdish region is thought to be under the average of Turkey because of migration to western parts of the country.

Until the 1950s, Kurds inhabited predominantly rural areas, but the advent of mass production in the agricultural sector has led to a constant flux of migration. The most important reason for the Kurdish migration, though, has been the armed conflicts between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and the Turkish army. This resulted in the evacuation of 3,438 villages and the deportation and migration of 4 to 4.5 million Kurdish-speaking citizens between 1989–1999 (Göç-Der 2001: 8; Bozarslan 2009: 70–71). Kurdish population, thus, has been increasingly concentrated in urban areas of the region and in western cities of Turkey.

The modern history of the region is shaped by a categorical denial of Kurdish identity after the founding of Turkish Republic in 1923. The republican project of creating a homogenous Turkish nation imposed Turkish identity to all subjects (see Bozarslan 2009: Ch. 2). Thus, the existence of Kurds was officially occulted (Yeğen 1999) or invisibilized (Haig 2004) and all the references to Kurdishness were banned and stigmatized (Akin 1995). Under such circumstances, Kurdish reaction often mobilized as a number of armed revolts between 1921–1938, which mostly ended up with brutal repressions and the deportation of large groups of Kurds (Bozarslan 2009: 39–43). As a result, the political and public sphere became more and more sensitive and closed to any form of Kurdishness, stigmatizing references to Kurds.

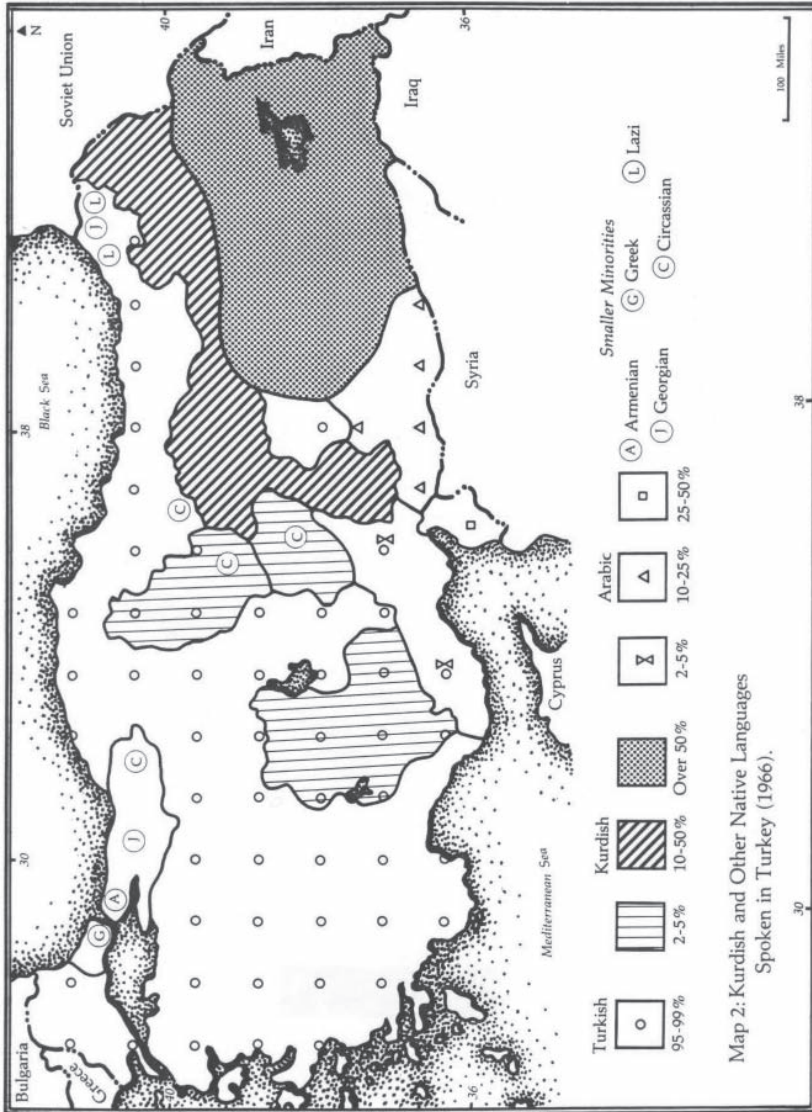


Fig. 1: Kurdish and Other Native Languages Spoken in Turkey (Hassanpour 1992: 4)

As for language, with the spread of Islam in Middle East starting from the 7th century AD, Arabic grasped most of the high functions of languages of the region. Under the Kurdish principalities of 17th century Kurdish was valued among the governing elites. This led to the establishment of Kurdish literary tradition (Bruinessen 1989: 43). However, the secondary status of Kurdish even during this era can be inferred from several facts (see also Bruinessen 1988). For instance, in his Kurdish romance *Mem û Zîn*, written in 1695, Ehmedê Xanî complains that Kurdish is not granted the value it deserves (Khani 2010: 35). Furthermore, Kurdish had the status of an auxiliary or transitory language for the learning of Arabic within the *medrese*-based education system (Zinar 1998). Rich (1836) makes similar observations on the status and functions of Kurdish during his two years stay (1819–1820) in Kurdistan:

Kurdish language prevails over the entire country from Armenia on the North to region of Baghdad on the South, and from the Tigris on the West to Azerbaijan on the East. . . . The Kurds commonly use Persian or Turkish in their written communications. In the schools which they have here and there, a little Persian and Arabic is taught, but not the smallest portion of their vernacular tongue. (Cited in Edwards [1851: 121–123])

From the second half of 19th century, after the collapse of all Kurdish principalities, Kurdish was patronized by cultural and political associations established at the turn of the century and by an important number of poets writing principally in Central Kurdish. Through this period, Kurdish retained its limited status in the *medrese*-based educational system. During this period the first books and magazines and the first newspaper in Kurdish were published in Istanbul and other central cities of Middle East. Some twenty books in Kurdish were published between 1844 and 1923 (Malmisanij 2006: 18). However, following the founding of the Turkish Republic, with the reforms and revolutions promulgated in 1924 and 1925 (see Zeydanloğlu, this issue), any activity aiming at the usage and development of Kurdish was banned. Therefore, the development of Kurdish, including corpus planning required for adapting to the modern and urban life, had to take place outside Turkey.

3.2 Kurdish in modern times: confrontation with the urban space

The works of *Hawar* circle led by Celadet Ali Bedirkhan and his colleagues based in Syria and Lebanon; presented mostly in the journals *Hawar* (1932–1943), *Ronahî* (1942–1945), *Roja Nû* (1943–1946) and *Stêr* (1943–1945), mark a turning point in

the corpus development of Kurdish aimed at rendering the language more compatible with the emerging requirements of new language use domains (see Matras and Reershemius 1991). Yet, because of the illegality of Kurdish in the public sphere, the influence of their innovative efforts on the use of Kurdish remained mostly negligible until the 1980s. Thus, even if the works of the *Hawar* circle provided the basis for codification of Kurdish in Roman script, based on the Botan variety, the lack of institutions for implementing language norms² has in practice resulted in a partial standardization with a large array of intra-lingual variation in orthography, vocabulary and grammar. During the period after the 1980s until the turn of the last century, the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden and other western European countries has been the center for terminological modernization and material development in Kurdish (see Scalbert-Yücel 2007). The marginalization of Kurdish in Turkey shows also in the number of books published in Kurdish. In Sweden alone 657 books in Kurdish were published between 1974 and 2005 (Scalbert-Yücel 2007: paras. 24–31), whereas around 632 books were published in Turkey during more than one and a half century (1844–2006) (Malmisanij 2006: 22), with over half of them within the five years between 2001 and 2006.

With the partial abolition of the categorical ban on private and public usage of Kurdish in 1991, the venue for introducing a more functional and up-to-date linguistic code to large components of the Kurdish community was opened. Despite the repressive context of the 1990s, in addition to Kurdish cultural centers, an institute in Istanbul and Kurdish publishing houses, the first weekly newspaper (*Welat*) in Kurdish was published in this period. The start of the first Kurdish satellite TV-channel in 1995 (*MED TV*) was an efficient medium for the implementation of language norms elaborated throughout the century (Hassanpour 1998). This presumably also led the Kurdish speakers to develop more positive perceptions on Kurdish by attributing new perceptual and practical functions to it in educated and widely urban daily life. This evolution in the situation of Kurdish was accelerated by the legalization of “regional languages” in private institutions in 2003. Hence, a number of other factors and developments, mostly recent, have influenced the normalization of Kurdish, such as the opening of private Kurdish courses in central cities of Turkey and Turkish Kurdistan, more than one hundred books published in Kurdish annually, the publication of over 15 literary, political and research magazines, the increase in the number of Kurdish TV-channels (see Sheyholislami 2010, 2011), a strong presence of Kurdish virtual media, and eventually the establishment of institutes and departments at Turkish universities

² For instance, only a total of twenty books in Kurdish appeared in Turkey from 1923 to 1980 (Malmisanij 2006: 19).

aiming at studying Kurdish language and literature, as well as the start of the public TV-channel *TRT 6* in Kurdish. Nevertheless, the normalization of Kurdish is hampered also by the fact that Kurdish has almost never been a full-fledged “urban” language, or the language of administration and formal education.³ This is further reflected in the kind of incompatibility between Kurdish and the city in modern times. For instance, as my own research indicates, until the last quarter of the last century, Kurdish or other non-Turkish inhabitants of Diyarbakir (Diyabakır), the biggest Kurdish city today, would rarely use or value Kurdish in the city center. In the same vein, in Şemzinan (Şemdinli) district of Hakkari, a small and isolated town until half a century ago, some families immigrating from surrounding villages took themselves to be the city-dwellers as they were in contact with the few symbolic state institutions in the district (see Erdost 1986); thus, although Kurdish was the indispensable means of communication in the district, they were often quite reluctant to transfer Kurdish to their children. Here, despite the absence of any real contact with speakers of Turkish, solely because of the way they perceive the concept of the “city” and “public institutions”, they partly shifted to Turkish as the means of intra-familial communication. These two cases illustrate the problematic confrontation of Kurdish with the city while at the same time affirming the widely held claim that the city promotes or reinforces monolingualism or linguistic homogenization (see Calvet 1994).

Furthermore, despite a strong will for sorting out linguistic norms (see Zêrevan 1997; Aydoğan 2006), in the absence of formal education in Kurdish and systemic means of installing linguistic norms, one can observe much variation in Kurdish orthography, vocabulary and grammar. This is surely not unfortunate in itself. However, the constant incorporation of new vocabulary and the increase in multiple forms for one meaning or one structural function render it difficult for ordinary readers or spectators to keep up with the evolution of the language. On the other hand, a strict application of purist linguistic norms and using a large number of neologisms and borrowed words might in the special oppressed situation of Kurds instigate a state of “linguistic insecurity” among the speakers in regard to their linguistic proficiency and fluency in Kurdish (see Öpengin 2009: 59–61). Furthermore, Kurdish-Turkish language contact is maximally asymmetric. Thus, convergence phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing, marked word order, calques and structural convergence, that are sometimes seen as instances of linguistic regression in the speakers’ linguistic competences (see Myers-Scotton 1992), are recurrent phenomena in daily discourse (see Güçin and

³ See Bruinessen (1988) for an evaluation of the status of Kurdish in 17th century and Celîl (2002: 10–13) for an account of a 19th century Kurdish principality where Armenian is used for education and administrative issues.

Öpengin 2008) and written language (see Aydoğan 2007). Tan (2008: 92), reflecting on frequent code-switchings in ordinary speech, states that in some Kurdish cities a hybrid language (*zimanekî dureh*) has emerged.

3.3 Economic and institutional stigmatization of Kurdish

The Kurdish region has often been given as an example for *underdevelopment* (Jafar 1976). In spite of its important geopolitical position (see O'Shea 2004: Ch. 1), including the abundance of energy and water resources, legal regulations and infrastructure deficiencies (TESEV 2006: 21) do not allow the realization of the economic potential of the region, especially when it comes to commerce with neighbouring countries. TESEV (2006: 21) reports that 60% of the population in the region lives under the poverty threshold and that the poverty is systematically transmitted to the following generations. The Index of Human Development for 2004 situates Turkey on 94th rank whereas the provinces with a predominant Kurdish population, with their 631 index value, are ranked on 124th, similar to the index value of Morocco TESEV (2006: 16).

A detailed analysis has yet to be undertaken of the extent to which the linguistic profiles of Kurds relates to their economic inferiority,⁴ but it can be stated that the relationship between language and the economic market in Turkey grants hardly any social capital value to Kurdish: the official language Turkish is the sole linguistic medium indispensable for economic and social success. Apart from the official measures on imposition of the usage of Turkish in much of the public sphere, the repressive state politics and denigratory efforts of dominant discourses seem to have created a perceptual and practical aura in which the usage of Kurdish is associated with poverty and some sort of economical backwardness whereas the usage of Turkish is considered the given norm. The knowledge of Kurdish rarely yields any economic profit whereas it is practically impossible to do any work without a certain level of competence in Turkish, other than occupations exclusively in a village context. Hence, a recovery or reversal of language shift in this domain will surely rely on speakers' integrative motivations (Gardner 1983: 203). This is indeed observed in the region. Most politicized circles of the Kurdish community have recently undertaken conscious efforts to render Kurdish visible in the market by practices such as using it in the work and marketplace, by naming their stores in Kurdish, sporadically publishing and distribut-

⁴ For a study indicating a relationship between linguistic capital and income among the Kurdish and Arabic women in Turkey, see Smits and Gündüz-Hoşgör (2003).

ing users' manuals and leaflets of municipality services in Kurdish, and opening positions in municipalities and research institutions that require good command of spoken and written Kurdish. Likewise, new TV-channels in Kurdish and the establishment of Kurdish language and literature departments in several universities in the Kurdish region in Turkey may well contribute to the creation and prospects of job opportunities related to the usage of Kurdish.

As the institution par excellence for the application of the republican conditions, the school also has served as an efficient tool for official discourse to relegate Kurdish to devalued domains and to replace it with Turkish (see Üngör, this issue). At present, Article No 42 of the Constitution states that no language other than Turkish shall be taught to Turkish citizens as a mother tongue in education establishments (see Zeydanlıoğlu, this issue). Naturally no school support to Kurdish exists. Yet, within the frame of reforms to harmonize with European Union membership conditions, in August 2003, the law assured the right of private learning of "regional languages". Following this reform, seven private courses for teaching Kurdish were opened in Istanbul and in some big cities in Kurdish region. However, because of a series of political, legal and economic concerns, these courses were not able to survive and in August 2005, the directors of the courses announced the closure of their establishments. This experience may seem as a defeat of private Kurdish teaching or as an indication of indifference of the speakers vis-à-vis the study of their language, yet it is equally possible to consider, as Haig (2004: 140) does, the measures imposed as attempts of a total exclusion of Kurdish from the educational system. The courses nevertheless distributed certificates to 1,179 language learners, and 1,780 learners were registered to their programs when they were closed down (Akin 2007: 35).

Being excluded from education and teaching domains, Kurdish has been taught illegally since the mid 1990s by Kurdish cultural organizations in big cities. For instance, *NÇM (Navenda Çanda Mezopotamya-Mesopotamia Cultural Center)*, a Kurdish cultural center founded in 1991 in Istanbul, has held many Kurdish courses. Moreover, the Kurdish Institute of Istanbul, founded in 1992, has constantly organized Kurdish courses to create a potential cadre of language teachers. The director of the institute declared in 2009 that there were about 4,000 learners following informal Kurdish courses⁵ offered by their institute and TZPKurdi,⁶ a civil movement for Kurdish linguistic and cultural activism

5 Data retrieved from the Istanbul Kurdish Institute's website: <http://www.enstituyakurdi.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=192> (accessed 12 June 2009).

6 The organization directs language and literacy teaching in Kurdish under local language associations called *Kurdi-Der* in a number of Kurdish towns. In 2010, it started to organize an annual "school boycott", during the first week of the school year. The boycott condemning the

established in 2006. Despite the presence of certain activism in the domain of Kurdish teaching, it is worth reminding that most of these activities take place on a voluntary basis and that a large part of the instructors and learners spare their spare time to attend these courses. Moreover, the instructors are not formally educated in teaching Kurdish; thus, they rely mostly on their own personal competence in Kurdish and transpose their knowledge in their respective domains to the teaching of Kurdish. The shortage of teaching material for Kurdish is yet another obstacle. Lastly, these teaching activities do not address young learners; in general the ultimate aim is to teach literacy in Kurdish.⁷ It is important to keep in mind that these difficulties mostly stem from oppressive state policies and heavy consequences of using Kurdish at individual level and on daily basis (see Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes 2008).

3.4 The politicization of the language: double-faceted folklorization

The state politics have been investigated elsewhere (see the References). Here I shall discuss the politicization of language and its consequences within the Kurdish community. Repressive state politics and denigratory representations of Kurdish language and community by Turkish academia (see Akin 1995; Haig 2004) and media (see Erdoğan 2002) have created negative attitudes and perceptions among the mainstream community vis-à-vis the Kurdish language. A less known manifestation of this is in the perceptions of Turkish speakers of dialects. Demirci and Kleiner (1999: 267) show that Turkish speakers from Bursa found the Turkish spoken in Eastern regions (i.e. mainly by Kurds) the least correct and least pleasing dialect of Turkish. The respondents hold the most negative perceptions on the dialects and people of this region (i.e. they are “harsh”, “backward” and “illiterate”). Besides, the authors indicate that the negative perceptions must have been influenced by the mother tongue of the people from this region, i.e. mainly Kurdish and Arabic (Demirci and Kleiner 1999: 272).

ban on education in Kurdish at schools was widely supported in its first edition in 2010 and created debates in the public sphere, however for the following year both the participation to the event and its influence on the public debates diminished substantially.

See: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/news/turkey/3168.html> (accessed 11 October 2011).

See also: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=boycott-receives-partial-participation-in-eastern-turkey-2010-09-20> (accessed 11 October 2011).

⁷ Information on TZPKurdi is mostly drawn from my interviews with language activists in the field, in Diyarbekir, in March 2009.

An increasing political consciousness among Kurds since the 1960s, parallel to the urbanization of large blocks of Kurdish populations, has added an integrative dimension to Kurdish. Thus, in the absence of capital value of Kurdish in urban contexts, the transfer of language to new generations was also motivated by identity-related concerns. Only recently, since the 1980s, mainstream Kurdish politics has introduced the language and a discourse on linguistic rights in its intra-community propaganda and its political agenda addressing the government. The active usage of Kurdish was, however, hardly ever promoted and it was mostly excluded from the activities of Kurdish political circles (Haig 2004). This fact of instrumentalizing the language for extra-linguistic projects supports Fishman's (1977: 25) claim that language can serve as a departure point for activation and celebration of and call for any ethnic activity. However, the process may lead to a kind of folklorization of Kurdish, paradoxically led by Kurdish political actors themselves.⁸ Hence it may function as yet another means to create negative perceptions of Kurdish and eventually contribute to the language shift.

Since the second half of the 1990s, the increasing visibility of Kurdish in the public sphere and in political domains has added to the development of positive perceptions regarding Kurdish among its speakers and other components of society in Turkey. At this stage, Kurdish political movements primed a political discourse around cultural rights. Kurdish became a genuine issue for diverse interest groups. Kurdish writers explicitly criticized Kurdish political circles for not using and not promoting Kurdish while, at the same time, within Kurdish society the slogans such as *Zimanê me rûmeta me ye* [Our language is our honor] or *Dilimiz kimligimizdir* [Our language is our identity] were frequently invoked. However, the problematization of the language as the principal index of identity in itself may not necessarily render a direct increase in its actual usage (Fishman 1992: 401; Fishman 1999; Scalbert-Yücel 2007). An associated language⁹ can be limited to the identification and political argumentation dimensions without bearing a real impact on usage. Nevertheless, the outcomes of this activism and rise in linguistic consciousness have resulted, among others, in the multiplication of language associations and the establishment of an organization of civil activism for the promotion of language (see Note 6). Furthermore, since the 1999 elections, pro-Kurdish politics has showed a greater presence in the domain of Kurdish cultural activities. After the 2009 elections, 100 municipalities in the Kurdish region

⁸ According to Haig (2004: Note 37), even “Öcalan [the leader of PKK] considered traditional Kurdish culture to be backward and the language, in its present state, inadequate.”

⁹ A language that is always associated to an ethnic identity (Eastman and Reese [1981], cited in Scalbert-Yücel [2006: 134]).

are led by elected officials from the pro-Kurdish political party, creating a “special status” for the region as they are, in a way, a local Kurdish power. Although systematically hindered and penalized (see Zeydanlıoğlu, this issue), the contribution of these local powers has been manifold; the most important practical ones include the annual Diyarbekir Arts and Culture Festival, which serves as a venue for the presentation of many kind of Kurdish cultural productions, and the annual “Diyarbekir Literature Days,” which also gathers a two-day conference for specialists and language activists to discuss the actual problems of the language. Moreover, a number of other cultural festivals and dozens of books, especially addressing the younger readership, and proceedings published by municipalities, are increasingly important contributions to the language planning of Kurdish in Turkey.

As for those Kurds not engaged in any cultural or political Kurdish activism, the language seems to be reconciling and even imposing itself as an indispensable component of their Kurdish identity thanks to official overtures on Kurdish language and culture. This case is obviously parallel to Wurm’s argument (2002, cited in Grenoble and Whaley [2006: 27]) that a change from negative to more positive attitudes and policies at the national level can result in positive change to the vitality of local languages.

4 Survey on language use and choice, language proficiency and perceptions

The overview of the objective aspects of the language situation of Kurdish in Turkey shows that the vitality of the language is heavily weakened by factors such as historical low language status of Kurdish and century-long measures against its public manifestations. However, the language, as the main component of cultural rights discourse, is now going through a process of valorization. Apart from being established as the main index of ethnic identity within the community, efforts of language revitalization and *de facto* recognition as well as the application of some cultural rights have positively influenced the position of Kurdish and the perceptions of it both within and outside the community. Yet, the brief evaluation says little on the micro-sociolinguistics of the situation, i.e. individual speakers’ and speech community’s relationship with the languages in their repertoire. Given that institutional language policies have waged a relentless campaign of Turkification (see also Üngör, Zeydanlıoğlu, both this issue), intensified by social changes within Kurdish community, one would not expect high rates for maintenance-oriented language use patterns and linguistic proficiency and per-

ceptions. These untouched issues in the literature are addressed in this empirical study.

4.1 Instrument and informants

The data on speakers' language use and choice and linguistic proficiency and perceptions were collected in a questionnaire-based survey, with theoretical underpinnings in Fishman's concepts of diglossia and domain analysis (2003 [1967], 1972 [1968], 1991). Bourhis et al.'s (1981) subjective ethnolinguistic vitality is used to devise some *ad hoc* questions addressing the perceptions of the speakers on important recent developments.

The survey, restricted to the Kurdish region in Turkey, was conducted in three contexts: in Diyarbakir (urban); Şemzinan county of Hakkari (semi-urban); and three villages of Şemzinan (rural). The questionnaire includes 79 items, grouped in 4 sections: (a) background information on the informant and his/her family; (b) language use and choice with respect to interlocutor, topic, communicative setting, media; (c) speakers' perceptions of recent developments; (d) speakers' self-evaluation of their proficiency in Kurdish and Turkish (speaking, understanding, reading and writing). The questionnaire was administered in Turkish (but items were mostly orally presented in Kurdish) to a sample of 76 speakers from 18 families. The variables such as setting, gender, and partly age and education level were controlled.

The data are analyzed in the form of frequency tables and graphics to identify the general tendencies. Chi-square tests are applied to the data to explore the nature of the relationship between identified variables of the study. However, for space concerns, only succinct descriptive statistics are presented, along with summaries of important alignments. Given the limited coverage of the survey, the summarized linguistic tendencies are meant to be indicative, rather than representative of the general language situation in the region.

4.2 Findings and analysis

4.2.1 Language use in respect to the identity of the interlocutor

The language use varies drastically according to the interlocutor, yet the exclusive usage of Kurdish is most frequent in the communication between grandparents, parents and children. Figure 2 indicates that 95% of the respondents speak exclusively in Kurdish to grandparents. Kurdish is also the main medium of

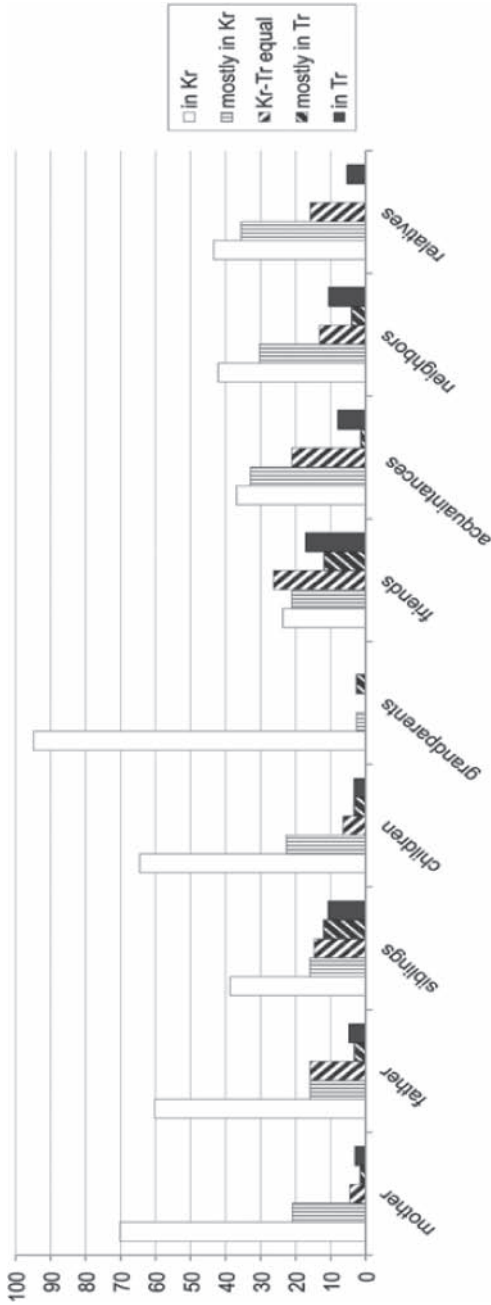


Fig. 2: Language use according to interlocutor (in %). (Tr = Turkish; Kr = Kurdish)

addressing to the mother, with 70% of “only in Kurdish” and 20% “mostly in Kurdish”, while 40% of respondents use Turkish in different degrees in their conversations with their father. Kurdish seems to be the principal language of parents to raise their children: only 10% of the parents say they use Turkish more than or as much as Kurdish. However, only 39% of the respondents speak to their siblings only in Kurdish; communication between siblings favors the introduction and installation of Turkish in the home domain.

Turkish is used along with Kurdish more frequently in out-of-family interactions. Around 50% of the communication with friends, acquaintances, neighbors, and relatives takes place in two languages. Turkish is especially important in conversations with friends and siblings, respectively 38% and 34%, compared to visibly higher rates of Kurdish use, respectively 55% and 66%.

Kurdish is used in a much higher degree within the immediate social environment and with relatively older people whereas the usage of Turkish is reinforced in out-of-family interactions. The increasing function of Turkish in communication among friends implies that Turkish has partly become the language of out-of-house socialization. It should also be noted that the use of Kurdish increases when the parents, especially the mother, speak to the children. A decline of 10% is observed when the children address their parents. It is probably caused by a code-switching by children when they speak about issues that they are more at ease when they speak in Turkish, such as school. However, the discrepancy is significant for it implies the beginning of a transformation in intergenerational communication patterns. At the same time it points to a generational and gender-related tendency in respect to language use: among older generations, women are more loyal to Kurdish than men.

4.2.2 Topic dependent language use

Although Kurdish is present in all sorts of discussion topics, it is especially widely used when it comes to daily and cultural issues. Turkish is rather present in social (40%) and, to some extent, religious topics (28%). As the modern terminology of politics, sports, education, etc. is usually introduced in Turkish via schooling and TV programs, an important part of speakers use Turkish on these themes, whereas the availability of the terminology for daily, cultural and religious issues promotes the usage of Kurdish. Furthermore, relatively important presence of Turkish in religious topics must be indicative of a transformation in the relationship of language with religion rendered by the spread of urban conceptions of religion in the community. Lastly, although Kurdish is dominant in all topics, the usage of Turkish, especially alongside Kurdish, points that

functions of languages in contact are not strictly separated across discursive themes.

4.2.3 Language use across social domains

Among the social domains of language use (cf. Figure 3), the home remains the domain where the usage of Kurdish is the highest (70%) and the exclusive usage of Turkish the lowest (5%). Although remarkably less frequently used, Turkish is present for 65% of the informants in this intimate domain. The usage of Turkish probably takes place mostly among siblings.

The usage rates of Kurdish systematically decline in social domains such as neighborhood (60%), workplace (50%), and marketplace (48%). A bilingual is usually not expected to stick to the exclusive usage of one language, but in a stable diglossic situation language use is supposed to be mostly determined by the given domain. Thus, low exclusive usage of Kurdish in neighborhood (22%) may mean that Turkish has exerted its presence, though in relatively lower degrees, in 78% of the communication taking place in a domain traditionally associated to the usage of Kurdish. Kurdish is slightly more prevalent than Turkish in the market, nevertheless the default language of starting a conversation in the marketplace must be mostly Turkish. School with 90% and public institutions with around 70% of Turkish usage mostly exclude Kurdish. Some 15% to 20% of communication in these two domains is held in Kurdish. It corresponds mostly to informal correspondences, but at the same time it points to a violation of the func-

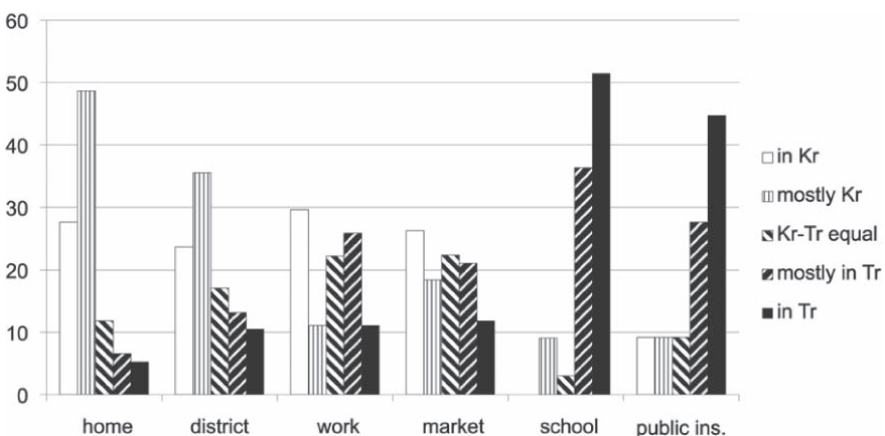


Fig. 3: Language use across social domains (%). (Tr = Turkish; Kr = Kurdish)

tional compartmentalization of languages in contact for, in this case, the low language Kurdish starts to make its presence felt in domains traditionally associated to the usage of high language Turkish.

The general tendency is to stick to the functional separation of the languages. This is reflected in the fact that the high language Turkish is more widely used in formal domains while the low language Kurdish is preferred rather in intimate domains. This is mostly in line with Fishman's (2003 [1967]) interpretation of diglossia and domain analysis. However, the alternate usage of both languages is also widespread in low domains while a certain usage of the low language is seen in high domains. These facts may indicate that Kurdish follows the path of a language shift, but they also show that the unstable linguistic context allows Kurdish to exert some presence in high domains reinforcing the tendency to reverse the shift.

4.2.4 Language choice in media

The speakers show a mixed profile when it comes to the language in which they watch TV programs. 92% of the speakers watch TV programs in both languages, with a certain dominance of Turkish. TV and its principal function of disseminating popular culture must be a significant impetus in the introduction and installation of the usage of Turkish in the most intimate domain of language use. Yet, television in Kurdish is a relatively recent phenomenon. In this sense, the remarkable share of Kurdish in TV programs indicates that Kurdish has appropriated an important aspect of modern culture and widened its usage into a new domain.

More than half of the speakers declare that they never watch TRT6, the public TV station in Kurdish launched by the government in January 2009. Most of the informants hold a negative approach to it on such grounds that the government wants to make use of it to weaken Kurdish politics, that the channel does not use Kurdish properly, that there is too much state intervention in it. Opening TRT6 has not motivated the informants to watch more TV programs in Kurdish, yet it has substantially influenced the perceptions of the speakers on Kurdish: some 37% think that it will contribute substantially to the development of Kurdish language and culture; more than half believe that the prestige of Kurdish in the public domain has improved, that Kurdish will be better accepted in Turkish society and that Kurdish will be better transferred to the children. The ideas about and reactions to the opening of TRT6 show that perceptions of evolutions around Kurdish language and culture are highly politicized and shaped by speakers' political affiliations and convictions.

Listening to radio turned out to be a negligible variable, as more than half of the informants never listen to the radio at all. Most informants prefer listening to music in Kurdish, with more than half sometimes listening to music in Turkish as well. Kurdish appears to be strongly present in language choice in music. This is expected since music remains one of the most obvious fields in which Kurdish cultural and political identification is exercised and enjoyed (see Kanakis 2006).

4.2.5 Language of reading in the absence of literacy in Kurdish

Some 12% of the sample is orate (see Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty 2008: 11) while 12% is semi-literate in Turkish. The percentages increase to 48% orate and 32% semi-literate in Kurdish. Thus, only 4 informants read newspapers also in Kurdish while 31 informants (49% of the sample) read in Turkish. Kurdish has only a symbolic usage in reading books. The predominance of Turkish in literacy and reading is explicit, reinforcing the status of Kurdish as the language of oral interactions. The scarcity of journals and books in Kurdish and their limited availability have a restrictive influence on the development and spread of literacy in Kurdish. There is a parallel between the sociopolitical conditions and speakers' language use and choice in literacy-related activities since such activities in Kurdish are hardly ever "rewarded" (see Fishman 1980). Hence, the absence of literacy in Kurdish caused by the ban on education and teaching of Kurdish determines from the outset that Turkish will be the preferred language over Kurdish when it comes to all forms of written activity.

4.2.6 Language proficiency

Language proficiency is shaped by a clear difference in written and oral language abilities. The speakers usually declare that they are competent in understanding and speaking rather than in writing and reading in both languages. However, while almost 80% of the speakers claim language proficiency sufficient to take up a conversation in Kurdish, only about 20% declare a relative ability in reading and writing in Kurdish. The tendency to demonstrate higher levels of proficiency in oral competences is valid also in Turkish, yet different from Kurdish, high levels of written language competences are claimed in Turkish. Only about 20% declare that they do not possess sufficient competence to conduct written activity in Turkish.

The comparison of declared relative overall language proficiency¹⁰ in Kurdish and Turkish shows that 30% of the speakers claim a better mastery of Kurdish than Turkish, whereas 10% claim a better proficiency in Turkish. Around 51% of the speakers think that they have a better command in Kurdish while 31% are better in Turkish. 18% do not see any difference between their competences in the two languages. One can infer from this comparison that the majority does not perceive a seriously low level of overall language proficiency in Kurdish. It also shows that bilingual language proficiencies are quite heterogeneous.

4.2.7 Patterns of linguistic behavior

The general tendencies and respective importance of the languages were described across a number of variables above. Here an effort is made to see whether the heterogeneity of language practices and competences has a significant relationship with variables such as context of living/socialization, gender, generation and education. A correlation is considered to be significant if its chi-square value is below 0.05 (i.e. $p < 0.05$). Once the chi-square test is applied, the observed and expected frequencies are compared and interpreted.¹¹ Note that only some of the descriptive statistics are presented here.

Context as a determinant in language maintenance. No significant relations are revealed between the context and the language in which the informants address their mother ($p = 0.33$), their father ($p = 0.58$) or their friends ($p = 0.49$). These linguistic practices are thus not correlated with the context. Yet, the context is significantly related to the language in which the informants speak to their siblings ($p = 0.038$). The comparison of observed and expected frequencies shows that the semi-urban context is where the usage of Kurdish among siblings is the lowest. Turkish is more present among siblings in urban than rural contexts.

The context is especially determinant in language use - across domains, with significant relations with home ($p = 0.0009$) (see Table 1), neighborhood ($p = 0.05$), and the marketplace ($p = 0.02$).

¹⁰ The “overall language proficiency” here refers to the linguistic proficiency that the speakers “declare” to possess. In the questionnaire, the informants were asked to evaluate and compare their own “general knowledge and ability” in Kurdish and Turkish. The methodological concern behind this was to consider speakers’ perspective by leaving it to the speakers to decide upon what counted as decisive component(s) of language proficiency.

¹¹ Note that “observed frequency” corresponds to the frequency of occurrence in the present survey whereas “expected frequency” is hypothetical and would occur if there were no influence of the independent variable on the compared dependent variable.

Which language do you speak at home?												
	Observed frequency						Expected frequency					
	A	B	C	D	E	Total	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Rural	9	12	5	1	0	27	7.46	13.14	3.20	1.78	1.42	27
Semi-urban	1	19	3	2	0	25	6.91	12.17	2.96	1.64	1.32	25
Urban	11	6	1	2	4	24	6.63	11.68	2.84	1.58	1.26	24
Total	21	37	9	5	4	76	21	37	9	5	4	76

* A = in Kurdish; B = mostly in Kurdish; C = in Kurdish-Turkish; D = mostly in Turkish; E = in Turkish; $p = 0.0009$: significant

Table 1: Language use in the home domain across contexts*

The semi-urban context differs from others by the quasi-absence of the exclusive usage of Kurdish in the home domain; the alternate use of the two languages at home is the most widespread here. The exclusive use of Kurdish has the highest rate in the urban context; yet compared to rural context, a slightly higher presence of Turkish is seen in urban context. As for the neighborhood and the marketplace, the urban context clearly differs from others by the strong presence of Turkish. The semi-urban context has more balanced language use in these domains while in the rural context Turkish is categorically excluded and Kurdish is prevalent.

This can be summarized as follows: Kurdish is the strongly dominant language of most of the domains in rural context; the semi-urban context remains one where the alternate usage of the two languages is widespread; and the urban context is where the exclusive usage of either one of the languages is most obvious, with its distinguishing feature being the very low Turkish use at home and comparatively high use of Turkish in out-of-home social domains.

There is also a significant relation ($p = 0.04$) between context and linguistic proficiency in Kurdish. Rural context has the highest rates, relatively inferior proficiency in urban context while the lowest rates are seen in semi-urban context. Language choice in TV programs and music is not significantly related to the context, which indicates that these instruments of popular culture homogenize certain cultural practices across different social contexts.

Gender and language proficiency. Gender has turned out to hold significant relations with dependent variables such as relative proficiency in Kurdish ($p = 0.018$) and language of fluent and comfortable expression ($p = 0.04$). See Table 2.

Obviously the number of women who declare to have a better proficiency in Kurdish than in Turkish is much higher than men. Only half of men think that

**How would you evaluate your relative proficiency in Kurdish
compared to your proficiency in Turkish?**

	Observed frequency						Expected frequency					
	A	B	C	D	E	Total	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Men	1	4	8	7	16	36	0.95	9.95	6.63	7.58	10.89	36
Women	1	17	6	9	7	40	1.05	11.05	7.37	8.42	12.11	40
Total	2	21	14	16	23	76	2	21	14	16	23	76

* A = much weaker; B = weaker; C = equal; D = better; E = much better; $p = 0.018$: significant

Table 2: General proficiency of informants in Kurdish in respect to the gender*

they have a better proficiency in Turkish. The same tendency is observed on the variable of language of more comfortable expression. However, this tendency does not hold among the new generation of women since 7 out of 9 women who consider that they have a better command and ease of expression in Turkish are informants younger than 20 years old. This result implies that Turkish also becomes the language of close network communication among the women of the young generation. Furthermore, although Kurdish remains the language of linguistic security for a majority of women, it has clearly lost this communicative function for a good half of male speakers. Finally, gender did not show significant relationship with other variables such as language in which the informants speak to their neighbors ($p = 0.079$) or language choice while speaking of daily issues ($p = 0.21$).

Generation related language use and choice. The generation of the informants is clearly the most discriminatory factor, for almost all of the chi-square tests in which the generation is taken as independent variable turned out to hold significant relations. Hence the age of informants, categorized into three generations (i.e. <20, 20–40, >40), is significantly related to “the language spoken to siblings” ($p = 0.00001$), “the language spoken to friends” ($p = 0.000$), “the language choice in TV programs” ($p = 0.00001$) and finally to “the language proficiency in Kurdish” ($p = 0.000$).

A comparison of actual values and expected values across three generations in Table 3 points to a familiar pattern of language shift across generations that can be summarized in three points: (1) a quasi-total exclusion of Turkish among speakers over 40 years; (2) prevalent alternate usage of the two languages with slightly higher rates for the usage of Kurdish among speakers of 20–40 years; (3) relatively higher usage of Turkish among speakers below 20 years. The usage of Kurdish in interactions with friends is radically weaker among the respondents below 20 years. This means that generational language shift is reinforced by the

In what language do you speak to your siblings?												
Observed frequency						Expected frequency						
	A	B	C	D	E	Total	A	B	C	D	E	Total
<20	6	7	8	4	7	32	12.37	7.68	4.69	3.84	3.41	32
20–40	7	10	3	5	1	26	10.05	6.24	3.81	3.12	2.77	26
>40	16	1	0	0	0	17	6.57	4.08	2.49	2.04	1.81	17
Total	29	18	11	9	8	75	29	18	11	9	8	75

* A = in Kurdish; B = mostly in Kurdish; C = Kurdish-Turkish; D = mostly in Turkish; E = in Turkish; $p = 0.00001$: significant

Table 3: Language choice when speaking to siblings across generations*

restrictions on the usage of Kurdish in domains outside the home. As for media, all three generations watch TV programs in two languages. However, the young generation is distinguished by a general predominance of Turkish TV channels, the intermediary generation (20–40) has a more or less balanced alternate language choice with a certain weight of Kurdish, and finally, the informants from older generation rarely consult Turkish TV channels in Turkish. The same tendency of language shift in respect to the generation is observed also in the language proficiency of the informants: language proficiency in Kurdish is high among the speakers over 40 years, it is relatively weaker among speakers from 20 to 40 years, and the younger speakers have obviously higher proficiency ratings in Turkish than in Kurdish.

Education level and language practices. The education level of the informants also plays an important role, with many of the tested variables, such as “the language of more fluent expression” ($p = 0.0004$), “language use when speaking to friends” ($p = 0.0006$), “language use when discussing social topics” ($p = 0.01$). It can be inferred from Table 4 that informants with no formal education are exclusively fluent and comfortable in Kurdish but as the level of education increases, Turkish becomes the language of more fluent expression. Thus, informants who have completed high school or undergraduate levels are far more comfortable when expressing their thoughts in Turkish.

Informants who have not had formal education use mainly Kurdish in interactions with friends. As the level of formal education increases, the tendency shifts to use more and more Turkish. Yet, the tendency is counteracted by wider use of Turkish among the informants from the category of primary school. This is related also to the generation; since 6 out of the 8 informants from primary level education category who declare to have a better command in Turkish and speak to friends more in Turkish are from the younger generation (see *Generation*

In which language do you express your thoughts more comfortably

Education level	Observed frequency			Expected frequency		
	Kr	Tr	Total	Kr	Tr	Total
Uneducated	17	0	17	10.74	6.26	17
Primary	17	8	25	15.79	9.21	25
Secondary	5	3	8	5.05	2.95	8
High-school	7	10	17	10.74	6.26	17
Undergraduate	2	7	9	5.68	3.32	9
Total	48	28	79	48	28	76

* Kr = Kurdish; Tr = Turkish; $p = 0.0004598$: significant

Table 4: The language of better expression across formal education levels*

related language use and choice). I conclude that education and generation factors together make up a determinant dimension of language use and choice patterns of Kurdish speakers as indicators of relatively wider usage of and proficiency in Turkish.

5 Discussion and conclusion

The parallel analysis on the objective dimensions of minority status of Kurdish on one hand and daily linguistic practices and perceptions of speakers of Kurdish on the other hand points to a tight correspondence between sociopolitical conditions and the actual dealings of the community members with their heritage language in their in-group interactions. It was shown that several sociopolitical dimensions are apt to reinforce the ethnolinguistic vitality of the speech community such as (1) the geographical position of the Kurdish minority as a trans-border cohesive linguistic continuum of the same speech community, (2) demographical and historical majority status of the community in the region leading to a decisive association of language with the territory and reinforcing the discourses on cultural heritage preservation, (3) the works on the corpus planning of Kurdish that have assured partly-standardized and widely followed written Kurdish, albeit with its difficulties, (4) the wider liberalization and democratization processes in the last two decades that have fostered a communicative space within which the chances for a fair share in representation is higher (5) and finally, the decades-long cultural and political activism carried out by Kurdish people and organizations that has culminated in assuring a special status for the region where the relative and limited political autonomy could substantially contribute

to the language planning of Kurdish. On the other hand, there are those socio-political aspects that have led and continue to lead to the subordination of Kurdish to Turkish such as (1) the largely oral status of Kurdish throughout previous centuries, (2) the strict measures against its public usage and its absolute and continuing exclusion from the educational system for almost a century, (3) the changes introduced by urbanization among the Kurds leading to radical transformations in societal norms, (4) and the unfavorable position of Kurdish in the linguistic market resulting in the almost total invisibilization of its written usage while at the same time diminishing substantially its presence in the marketplace and in the domain of economy in general.

As for the patterns of language practices and language perceptions of speakers, in parallel with the above points, it is shown that Kurdish is no longer the default language of communication for all of its speakers: the younger the speakers are, and the more formally educated and out of the immediate social networks, the less Kurdish they use. The setting, rural vs. urban contexts, is also shown to be significant, for the higher use and proficiency rates in rural contexts decrease among urban populations, pointing to a more advanced and rapid process of language shift in the urban context. As for gender, while use of and proficiency in Kurdish is clearly higher among women, this tendency does not hold among younger generations of women speakers. It is further shown that the perceptions of speakers on recent developments relating to linguistic and cultural rights are mostly shaped in line with political tendencies. Sociopolitical conditions are further reflected in the symbolic rates of literacy and written activity in Kurdish, reaffirming the principally oral status of Kurdish while at the same time consolidating the role of Turkish as the language of written activity.

It is attested that, in line with the objective conditions of the language situation, there is a tendency among the majority of Kurdish speakers to stick to functional separation of languages in respect to communicative settings and domains. However, the situation is not an example for stable diglossia because the spread and consolidation of Turkish in low domains and, in return, the robust degree of Kurdish-language consumption in high domains like media, and its emerging presence in institutions are not conform to the functional compartmentalization of languages. In this sense, the generational shift observed as the prevalent tendency in this study is also counteracted by new and urban modes of language maintenance and linguistic perceptions. It is evident that the language situation does not fit into a “harmonizing” conception of diglossia nor can it be seen as a simple decline along generations, since the very specific dynamics of language shift and attitudinal change are indeed apt to end up with a relative reversal of the ongoing shift and to provide further circumstances for the development of the language. This is indeed manifest in growing importance of Kurdish as the princi-

pal index of identity and its emergence in domains and communicative settings usually ascribed to the use of Turkish. Nevertheless, the state of affairs of the community-language relationship do point to a non-stable linguistic context in which the dominant language, Turkish, has imposed a considerable presence in the domains and communication situations traditionally associated with the usage of Kurdish. In this, the situation of Kurdish in Turkey can be concluded as an example of a prevalent societal bilingualism without a stable diglossic functional separation of languages. It is also an example of a continuing process of language shift in which the prevalent community bilingualism evolves both to the detriment of Kurdish and to its further valorization in the public sphere. Further research that relies on a more representative corpus and that accounts for factors such as intra- and inter-regional migration may better grasp the dynamic nature of the language situation and help to conceptualize the rapid evolutions in the field.

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