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Language choice and patterns of usage among Kurdish speakers of Duhok: An empirical intergenerational study

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1 Introduction

It is well-known that the historical Kurdish speaking region is divided between four countries, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, each of which has pursued different policies on Kurdish, ranging from prohibition of the language to various degrees of tolerance (Sheyholislami 2015). Outside of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Kurdish generally has little or no official status, and correspondingly lacks institutional support. The causes and consequences of this state of affairs have been extensively discussed in the literature, with reference to political ideologies, to education policies, and to international linguistic human rights. Notably, most of the readily accessible literature deals with the Kurds of Turkey (Çağlayan 2014; Haig 2004; Haig & Öpengin 2014; Öpengin 2012; Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak 1995, among many others). For the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, however, where Kurdish has been an officially-recognized language in education and the public sphere for many decades, there is surprisingly little reliable research available on even the most basic issues of language choice and language attitudes.¹

¹For example, in 2012, a special edition of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* was dedicated to Kurdish, but contained no contribution on Iraq (Sheyholislami et al. 2012).

The present study targets language choice and language attitudes among Kurdish speakers in the multi-lingual city of Duhok² (Kurdistan Region of Iraq). While the main language of wider communication in Duhok city is the Bahdini dialect of Kurmanji, several languages (Bahdini, Sorani, Arabic, and English) have been used as the language of instruction in education during different periods of time, yielding an age-graded, multi-lingual community. Within such a community, different languages are selected for different settings (with different interlocutors, and in different contexts), and exercising language choice seems to be a natural, automatic and unplanned process, with obvious parallels to the choice of an appropriate register, genre, style, medium, or tone of voice in any communicative setting (Dweik & Qawar 2015). To date, no empirical sociolinguistic research of this nature has been conducted in Duhok, or indeed in any urban center of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In this chapter, we present the first results of an ongoing research project that focuses on the sociolinguistic variable of age, across a variety of attitudinal and usage-based parameters.³ We have opted to look at age, because age has been generally less researched than other social variables such as gender, ethnicity or social class, and because age is crucial to understanding the link between language variation and change (Llamas 2007; Milroy & Gordon 2003). As Llamas (2007: 69) puts it:

The treatment of age in sociolinguistic studies is influenced, to a degree, by a primary concern with language change or with language variation. Variationist, quantitative studies investigating language change in progress may approach chronological age as a methodological device with which to group speakers and to measure sociolinguistic differences across age groups.

Our preliminary results indicate that certain aspects of language usage and attitudes do correlate with age, though it is mainly the oldest age cohort (over 50) which differs significantly from the rest, and additional effects of gender are also apparent. We present our initial results with a minimum of descriptive statistics at this stage, and will restrict ourselves to identifying what appears to be some major trends, while deferring more complex analysis to the later stages of this project.

²We have adopted this spelling of *Duhok* in accordance with the official usage of the Duhok municipal authorities.

³We are extremely grateful to the many people of Duhok that participated in the interviews, and to an anonymous reviewer for extensive comments on earlier versions of this paper. We of course bear the sole responsibility for the remaining shortcomings.

In Section 2, we briefly outline the current language situation in Duhok city, and in Section 3 we summarize the main developments with regard to language of instruction in schools of the region. Section 4 outlines the project background and data sources and methodology, while Section 5 presents a selection of quantitative findings that have emerged so far. In Section 6, we close with a prospective outlook for future research in this direction.

2 Bahdini dialect in Duhok City

Within the Kurdistan region of Iraq, two varieties of Kurdish are spoken, Sorani and Bahdini. Sorani, also called ‘Central Kurdish’, is spoken by the majority of the Kurds, while Bahdini is spoken by around one million speakers. Linguistically, Bahdini belongs to the southeastern dialect group of Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish), according to the classification of Öpengin & Haig (2014).

While Sorani has an established written standard and is well represented in education and the media the status of Bahdini is complex and has seldom been considered in the literature. The following factors conspire to render Bahdini sociolinguistically disadvantaged in various ways:

- Within the context of the Iraqi state, and of international relations to other states, all varieties of Kurdish are disadvantaged in comparison to Arabic.
- Within the context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Bahdini is the less-prestigious variety of Kurdish, when compared to Sorani.
- Within the context of Kurmanji (to which Bahdini belongs): Bahdini differs from the widely-accepted “standard variety” of Kurmanji, as codified in the grammar of Bedir-Khan & Lescot (1970), through a number of lexical and morphological features, which inhibit mutual intelligibility with speakers from the northerly dialects of Kurmanji, and have yet to be reliably analyzed. Thus, it is stigmatized as non-standard, dialectally divergent within Kurmanji itself.
- The vernacular of Bahdini is heavily overlaid with Arabic loans, further heightening the perceived distance to more-widely used varieties of Northern Kurdish, and adding to the stigmatization as an “impure” variety of Kurdish.

- Bahdini is written with the Arabic script, which inhibits participation in the trans-national, pan-Kurmanji cultural space, carried by the Roman alphabet-based Bedir-Khan & Lescot standard. The Arabic-based standard for Bahdini has not attained the same range of acceptance, or of standardization, as the Roman alphabet norm.

Despite the modest overall status of Bahdini, it remains the main language of everyday communication for most of the Kurds living in the traditional Bahdini regions. Our research focuses on Duhok city, one of the main centres for Bahdini, located in Duhok Governorate, in the north-west of Iraq. Duhok governorate forms the western governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and has a strategic location at the intersection of Syria, Turkey, and Iraq (Tovi & Badi 2010). Duhok Governorate has an area of about 9755 km², and an estimated number of inhabitants of more than one million (Tovi & Badi 2010). The majority of the people are Sunni Muslims, but there are also a large number of Christians of different denominations, in addition to many Êzidi people. Duhok governorate is divided into seven districts: Duhok, Zakho, Amedi, Semel, Akre, Shixan and Bardarash (Tovi & Badi 2010).

3 Education system in Duhok City

With the establishment of the Iraqi state after the First World War, Kurdish people made demands to use their mother tongue as a medium of instruction in education. In 1930, the Iraqi parliament drafted new legislation to create the “Local Languages Law”, in which linguistic minorities, such as Kurds, were granted some linguistic rights in their region (Sheyholislami et al. 2012). However, the primary goal of mother tongue education in Kurdish was not achieved until the late 1950’s, with the exact extent and nature of implementation varying according to sources. In the 1960’s, education policy shifted again to Arabic, but in the 1970’s, again a brief period of education in Kurdish (Sorani) followed within a framework of an autonomy programme for the Kurdish region. However, Kurdish was used in schools for only five years, and afterwards all Kurdish schools were abolished and replaced by Arabic schools.⁴ This continued until 1991 when Kurdistan proclaimed its autonomy.

In 1992, following the establishment of the Kurdistan region of Iraq, Kurdish was made the official language of the region. However, until the mid-

⁴Tovi, M. (June 5, 2016, personal communication).

1990's, standard Kurdish in Iraq, including Duhok city, meant Sorani Kurdish. This means that for the Kurdish people in Duhok City, they were still using a language in education which was not their mother tongue, and which for many children is, initially at least, largely incomprehensible (Haig 2007). Attempts were made to introduce Bahdini, the mother tongue of people in Duhok, into the curriculum in 1996 when the Duhok Assembly and Board of Education requested that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Erbil assist them in implementing Bahdini instead of Sorani in schools, starting with grades one to three. By 2002, Bahdini was the medium of instruction for grades one to six. By 2012, the Board of Education in Duhok completely replaced Sorani with Bahdini in all the school grades (Sheyholislami 2015). However, uncertainty continues to prevail, and since 2003, many private schools have been opened in Duhok, where the language of instruction is English. English is in many ways an obvious choice, as it sidetracks some of the political issues that are inevitably associated with the main local languages (Arabic, Sorani Kurdish, Bahdini Kurdish), though of course English is far from being politically or ideologically 'neutral' (recall Iraq's colonial heritage under the British mandate in the first half of the 20th century, and the association of English with the American military presence in Iraq). In the 2015–2016 academic year, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq began a trial phase to change the language of instruction from Kurdish to English, but restricted it to the subjects of mathematics and the natural sciences.⁵ Several schools have been selected from each city to implement the new system, and courses have opened for teachers to learn the new curriculum and English language. From the academic year 2016–2017, it is intended to apply the plan to all schools in Kurdistan region of Iraq. From 2011 onwards, some departments in different public universities (e.g. Soran University and Duhok University) have started to use English as the sole language of instruction in a number of degree programmes, such as sociology and political science (Sheyholislami 2015). In a new communiqué posted on their website, the Ministry of Higher Education in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq underscores the importance of English and outlines how the ministry in the last two years has been strengthening its efforts for English as a second language and the language of science.

⁵Suleiman, W. (June 7, 2016, personal communication).

4 Background and methodology of the study

After this brief overview of language choice and status in the education system of Duhok, we present some findings from an ongoing investigation into language attitudes and language usage among Bahdini speakers in Duhok and its environs (Mustafa In prep). Specifically, this paper addresses the following questions:

1. Do differences in age correlate with different levels in the degree of Arabic words used in the lexicon?
2. Do age differences correlate with attitudes towards choice of different languages in education?
3. Do age differences correlate with differences in the extent to which the Kurdish language is considered important for Kurdish identity ('being Kurdish')?

The data stem from a survey carried out with 108 adult speakers of Bahdini Kurdish (see Table 2 in the Appendix for a breakdown of all participants across age and gender). As we were particularly interested in the respective effects of different languages in education, we split our sample into three age cohorts: 'Generation one', aged between 18–30, have had their whole school education in Kurdish (N=34, 16 males and 18 females). The second group, labeled here 'Generation two', consists of persons aged between 31–50 who had their schooling in Arabic with one subject in Kurdish (N=40, 22 males and 18 females). The third group, 'Generation three', includes speakers over fifty years of age who had Arabic as the language of education in school (N=34, 16 males and 18 females). The choice of these three age groups thus approximately reflects the major changes in language of education across the last 50 years. We deliberately excluded speakers under 18 to minimize possible maturation effects in the data. We are well aware of the inherent problems in any kind of age divisions among adults; in an overview of the relevant literature, Eckert (1997: 165) notes that "adulthood has emerged as a vast wasteland in the study of variation", reflecting a general lack of consensus on the impact of age on patterns of language usage among adults. As mentioned, our division into three groups is dictated by the hypothesis that changes in language of education may have affected language use. It is nevertheless notable that the three divisions adopted here correspond to the divisions of young adult,

middle-aged, and older speakers that are widely adopted (though seldom explicitly justified) in much sociolinguistic research.

While the sample is reasonably balanced across age and gender, under the prevalent fieldwork conditions it was not possible to achieve a balanced sample across other social variables, such as socioeconomic class, level of education, religious and tribal (*aşîret*) affiliation (for example, among the respondents, there are 13 members of the Êzidi community, 6 males and 7 females), as this would have involved screening a much larger pool of potential respondents in order to obtain sufficient respondents. In the metadata obtained from each participant, however, extensive additional information on speaker background has been systematically recorded, so the impact of these factors can be controlled for in later analyses. In the present context, we restrict ourselves to investigating the main independent variables of age and gender.

The methodology involved a three-part sociolinguistic interview, comprising of (i) a free speech section, (ii) a picture-naming task, and (iii) a questionnaire with sections on language choice in different communicative domains, and media consumption. The interviews were conducted in Duhok and the neighbouring townships of Sharya, Akre, Zakho and Bamerne by a female native speaker of the region. The content and methodology for the three parts is as follows:

1. In the free speech section, respondents were asked to describe the last wedding celebration they had attended, and to comment on wedding celebrations and how they had changed in Duhok in general. Additional questions were prepared (e.g. regarding food, dance, dress customs, etc.) in the event of participants' ceasing their accounts too quickly, but in most cases the topic proved highly suitable, and participants were readily able to talk freely for about 10 minutes.
2. The picture-naming task was based on a set of 42 pictures, of which 32 were target items while the remaining 10 were distractors. All the pictures were colour-printed and bound into a book format, so that the interviewer simply turned the pages, and the respondents named what they saw. The pictures represent objects that typically triggered a lexical choice between an Arabic vs. a Kurdish word, and which were deemed sufficiently familiar to all speakers.
3. A questionnaire consisting of four main parts: The first part contains questions regarding language choice in the media, the second concerns

language choice according to interlocutor, the third part is about language choice in social domains, and the last part concerns language attitudes.

All interviews were conducted in colloquial Bahdini with no special attempt to avoid Arabic elements on the part of the interviewer, and recorded from start to finish in a non-compressed data format (WAV). Questions were administered orally and answers entered into the forms by the interviewer, because many of the respondents cannot read or write. A total of 108 interviews were conducted although some data had to be excluded from certain analyses, for example when a picture was not properly recognized, or when a question was misunderstood.

The data were collected through a snowball sampling method, based on the interviewer's own social network. This methodology has obvious advantages and disadvantages. From a conceptual perspective, it is somewhat problematic because the sample is not randomly selected. However, from the perspective of fieldwork conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan, where familiarity and trust are crucial to enabling interviews to be conducted in a domestic setting, it is probably the only practicable method for reaching an adequate number of participants within a reasonable time-frame (see Milroy 1987, cited in Rasinger 2013, for discussion).

5 Research questions and results

5.1 Use of Kurdish in the picture-naming task

The first question concerns the correlation between age and choice of Kurdish or Arabic, when there are two words available for one meaning. We hypothesize that the older speakers, whose education was primarily through the medium of Arabic, will have higher levels of Arabic and lower levels of Kurdish in their lexical choices than younger speakers who have undergone education through the medium of Kurdish. We quantified "use of Kurdish" by calculating the number of Kurdish words used in the picture-naming task.

The picture-naming task minimized the verbal input of the interviewer, avoided the problems of a translation-based stimulus, reduced possible accommodation to the interviewer, and yielded a rich structured data set in a short time (about one minute with some interviewees); we refer to, e.g., Schmid & Köpke (2009) on picture-naming tasks as a data source for assessing lexical knowledge. Typical examples of the pictures that were used include

a picture of a restaurant, which could be named either *met'em* (Arabic) or *xwaringeh* (Kurdish). The Kurdish version of this word is quite transparent and has been used for many years (since the beginning of the establishment of the Kurdish Region in Iraq) in media and education, and is regularly written on the relevant signs outside restaurants. However, both the Arabic and the Kurdish word remain in use in everyday life. Another example is the picture of the flag, which could be named either *'elem* (Arabic) or *ala* (Kurdish). The Kurdish version of this word has also been used for many years in education and media. It is used each Thursday in schools when the flag is raised, but again, in everyday usage, the Arabic and the Kurdish words continue to coexist. Another example is 'teacher', which could be *mua'lim* (Arabic) and *mamosta* (Kurdish). Note that folk perceptions of etymology are not necessarily in line with philological facts. Thus for the meaning 'street' the Arabic word is widely used (*şari'*), but more recently, *cade* has been introduced through Kurdish-language media, and is assumed by most people to be a word of Kurdish origin. However, etymologically it is actually also of Arabic origin. For our investigation, we have taken common perception as the criterion for word origin. In most cases, the member of the word pair that we designate as 'Kurdish' is one that has been more recently introduced, primarily through Kurdish-language media and education. Our investigation monitors the degree to which speakers of different age groups recall and use these words.

In the current context, the methodology worked smoothly with the first and the second generations, but with the older generation, some unforeseen difficulties arose. Some of the elderly people had difficulties with the task due to poor eyesight and could not properly recognize the pictures, while others needed additional explanation to help them name the pictures. Furthermore, not all the stimulus pictures proved equally suitable. For some, respondents were unsure of the intended item, or named the wrong part of the picture. To minimize these effects, we excluded all items from the stimulus set which yielded this kind of ambiguous or uninformative response more than four times. This left 20 items on which the following analysis is based. In addition, we excluded the responses of two informants (two women, 83 and 71 years old), because most of their answers were not interpretable due to eyesight or other difficulties.

The percentages of Arabic, Kurdish, and mixed responses (i.e. respondents supplied two words, one from each language), distinguished according to generation, are shown in Figure 1; see Table 3 in the Appendix for the absolute figures.

In order to compare these groups, we used the *t*-test for independent samples, taking the respective means from each group in the value ‘Kurdish’, and compared them pair-wise. The results are provided in Table 1.

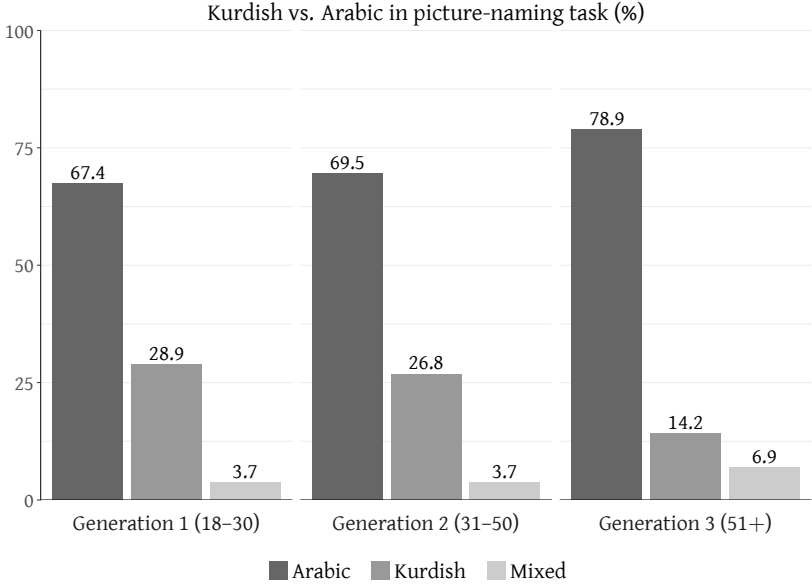


Figure 1: Percentage of Kurdish and Arabic responses in a picture-naming task, by age.

Table 1: Comparison of group means (choice of ‘Kurdish’) in the lexical decision task, using the *t*-test

Generations	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Significance
Gen. 1 and Gen. 2	0.48216	0.315576	not significant at $p < 0.05$
Gen. 2 and Gen. 3	2.69367	0.004419	significant at $p < 0.05$
Gen. 1 and Gen. 3	2.97019	0.002093	significant at $p < 0.05$

According to the *t*-test, the difference between Generations 1 and 2 is not significant, but the difference between the oldest generation (Generation 3) and the other two is highly significant ($p = 0.004419$ and 0.002093 , respec-

tively). This indicates that there has been a shift towards an increased use of Kurdish – at least under the conditions of our investigation – among adults of fifty years and younger. Breaking down the results according to respondent gender yields the figures given in Figure 2.

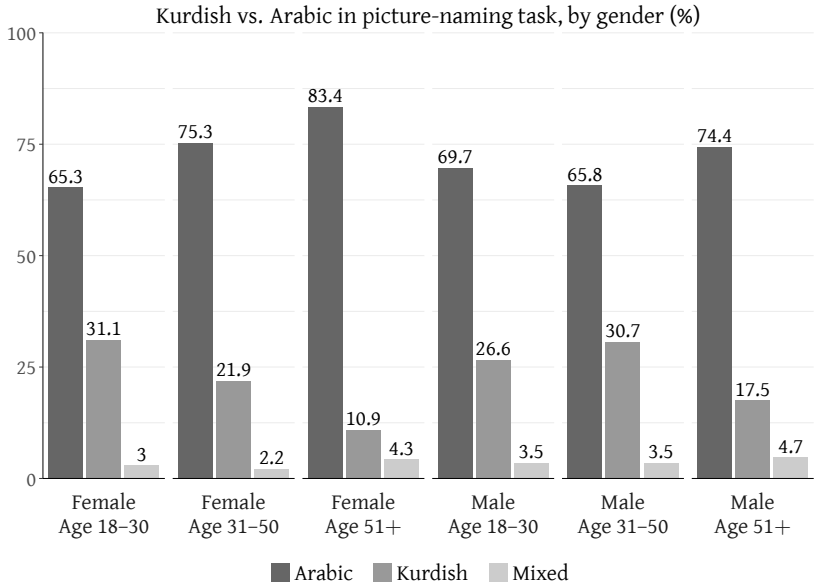


Figure 2: Percentage of Kurdish and Arabic responses in a picture-naming task, by age and gender.

Although the mean values shown in Figure 2 are suggestive of gender-specific differences within each generation, a *t*-test comparing the two genders within each generation yields no significant differences in the numbers of Kurdish items chosen. This is in part due to the small absolute values for each group (between 16 and 22, see Table 2, Appendix), which approach the widely-assumed lowest limit of 10 values per sample for applying the *t*-test.

Discussion: Considering first only generational differences (cf. Figure 1), there is a significant difference between the oldest generation and the two younger generations, with the older generation using an overall lower number of Kurdish words in their lexical choices. This is in line with the initial

hypothesis that those who underwent socialization and early education in an Arabic-based system will retain higher rates of Arabic in their lexicon, while younger speakers exposed to Kurdish language education will have adopted more Kurdish words.

With regard to gender effects, we do not find significant intra-generational differences, though we note that this may also be an artifact of the small sizes of the compared groups. Given that Arabic and Kurdish differ in terms of status, one might have expected greater gender-based differences. It has often been noted that women avoid “stigmatized variants” (Labov 2001: 266) in their speech to a greater degree than men do (Trudgill 1972, see Labov 2001: 263–272 for discussion). While Labov’s claim is based on men and women’s use of linguistic variables in a monolingual context (e.g. the choice between *-ing* and *-in* on English verb forms), the basic principle is also applicable to language choice. In other words, we would expect that if there is a prestige imbalance among the languages used in a multi-lingual setting, women will be statistically more likely to choose the higher-prestige language than men. Gal’s (1979) case study of language choice among Hungarian/German bilinguals in Austria reveals that women are more likely to prefer German (associated with higher external prestige) than Hungarian, though the difference is only significant among the youngest generation (Gal 1979: Ch. 6). Similarly, Çağlayan (2014) underscores the role of women as leading the shift towards Turkish in Kurdish/Turkish bilingual families in Diyarbakir.

However, the Duhok example cannot be directly compared to the latter two case studies. With regard to the choice between German and Hungarian in the context of contemporary rural Austria, or between Turkish and Kurdish in Turkey, there is no doubt which language has the higher prestige in terms of social mobility, professional advancement, and economic opportunity. In the Duhok case, however, we witness a much more complex setting, where Arabic is the language of wider communication and cultural prestige in the context of the Iraqi state, and the broader Islamic cultural sphere, yet Kurdish enjoys local prestige, and since the establishment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, has been intensely promoted by the regional government, and linked to the cause of Kurdish nationalism. The picture is thus considerably more complex, and is unlikely to be accountable in terms of a mono-causal effect of gender-related differences in response to external prestige. The lack of any clear directionality across the genders that we find in our data may thus reflect the lack of (or shifting nature of) a prestige asymmetry among the languages concerned, but this requires confirmation over a larger sample, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

5.2 Language choice in education

The second part of our study here concerns speakers' preferences for the language of instruction in schools. Among the responses, three options were overwhelmingly preferred: English, Bahdini, and English together with Bahdini; the raw figures are provided in Table 4 in the Appendix, and only distinguish these three options.⁶ We consider the responses to this question to be an important indicator of language attitudes, and probably a more reliable measure of genuine attitudes than questions that overtly target such attitudes (e.g. 'Do you have a positive attitude to language X?', or similar). Of course this question also involves self-reporting on a highly politicized issue, and is thus not without its drawbacks, and in a more convenient field-work setting, other methodologies such as matched-guise techniques would have been preferable. But given the constraints of the interview setting, the range of options for obtaining reliable information on this topic was fairly limited. Despite the methodological challenges, this question turned out to yield interesting and not obviously predictable results. Note that only a few informants entered "Arabic" as a preference (cf. Footnote 6), indicating the general rejection of Arabic-based education, presumably reflecting the continued perception of Arabic as a symbol of political and cultural oppression, although other reasons may also be relevant.

The Fisher's Exact Test of the difference between Generations 1 and 2 with regard to choice of English, and choice of Bahdini, reveals a Fisher exact value of 1, which is not significant at $p < 0.05$. The difference between Generations 2 and 3, however, is highly significant (Fisher exact value 0.006484). Figure 4 gives the results according to gender differences in each group. Due to the small numbers in each group, we have not conducted significance testing.

Discussion: Considering Figure 3, it is evident that the main generational difference lies between Generations 2 and 3. In this case, there is a striking increase in preference for English, either as the sole medium of education, or in combination with Bahdini. While around 23% of the oldest generation chose either English, or English and Bahdini, this figure rises to over 67% in the youngest respondents. Interestingly, the preference for English-only is more pronounced in Generation two than in Generation 1. There is also

⁶Among the marginal options which were excluded were participants who chose Arabic and English, or Arabic with English and Bahdini, and another one who chose Latin. None entered Sorani as a preference.

a slight, but consistent, difference between the genders with regard to attitudes towards English. In all generations, English is a more popular choice for women than for men. Although the differences within each generation do not reach statistical significance, it is notable that in each generation, the difference is in the same direction. Whether this can be interpreted in terms of the tendency for women to prefer languages associated with social mobility, as discussed above, remains an open question.

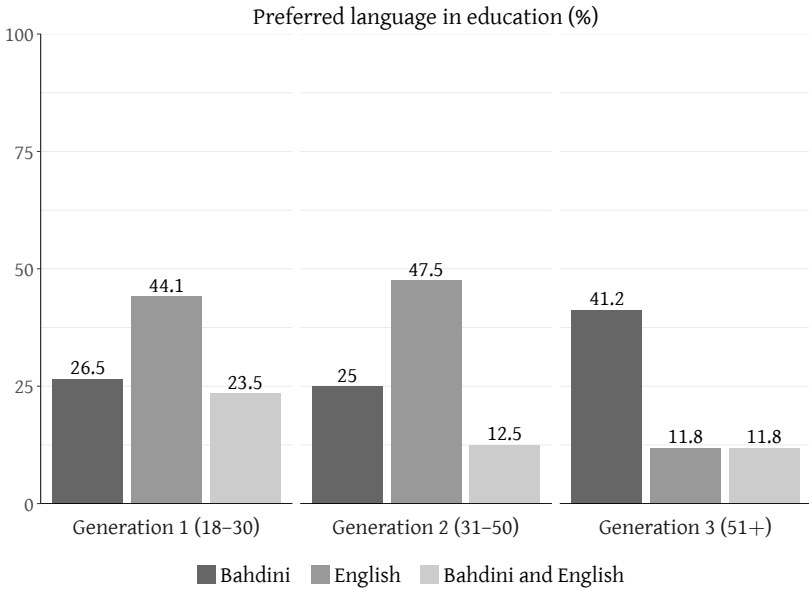


Figure 3: Preferred language in education, by age.

The increased preference for English among the younger two generations is probably a result of the higher proportion of university-educated respondents, who are familiar with the prestige of English as the international language of science and internet-based communication, hence a vehicle for upward mobility and social advancement. The Kurdistan Regional Government has provided many scholarships for students working in different fields to do their higher education abroad and has heightened the perception of English as the key career choice in academic and professional settings (Barbarani 2013). It may also reflect disappointment with the implementation

of Kurdish language education in the education system, with English providing a compromise solution, still preferable to the ideologically stigmatized Arabic option, but avoiding the practicability issues that Kurdish language education faces. There is a growing demand for (and availability of) private schools in which the language of instruction is English (Barbarani 2013). In the youngest generation, it is noteworthy that Bahdini is still favoured by around 37% of the male respondents, while only around 16% of women choose this option.

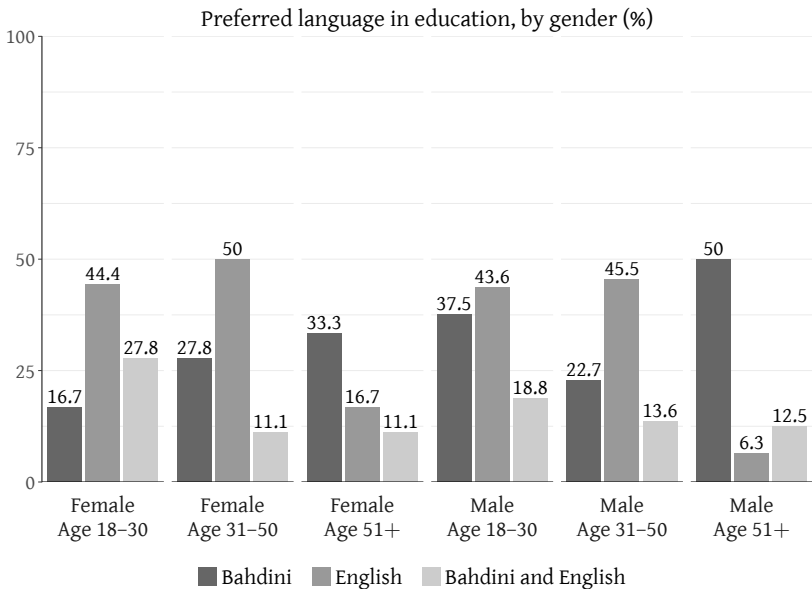


Figure 4: Preferred language in education, by age and gender.

5.3 Is Kurdish important for Kurdishness?

The final data we look at here concern the role of the Kurdish language for Kurdish identity. In the questionnaire, we asked the question in terms of ‘whether it is important to speak Kurdish in order to be a Kurd’, because dealing with abstract academic concepts such as ‘identity’ is not practicable in this fieldwork situation. This question is intended to complement the pre-

ceding one, which refers to language choice in education. Figure 5 gives the respective percentage of yes/no answers to this question for each generation, while Figure 6, provides the same information broken down for gender.

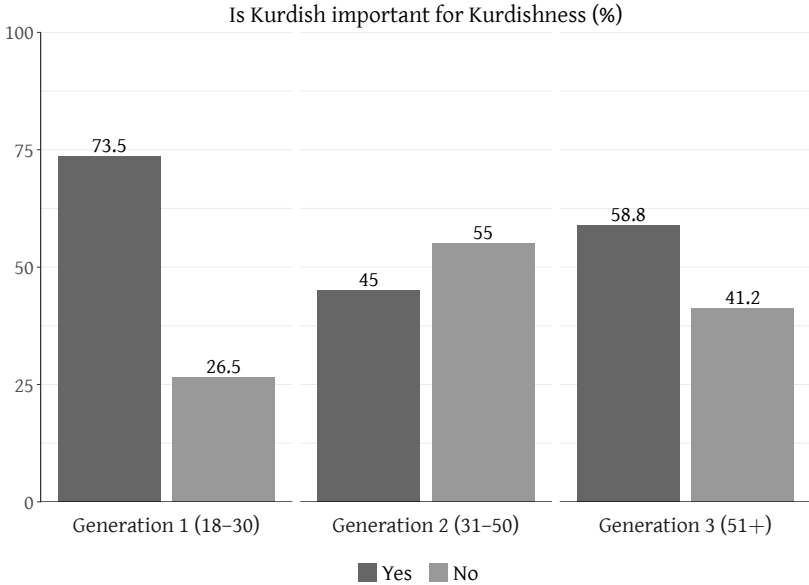


Figure 5: Responses to the question *Is Kurdish important for Kurdishness?*, by age.

With regard to generational differences, a Fisher’s Exact Test yields a very significant difference between generations one and two (Fisher exact value 0.018227), while the difference between Generations two and three does not reach significance (Fisher exact value 0.253964). The difference between the two endpoint Generations one and three also does not reach significance (Fisher exact value 0.21424). We have not tested the intra-generational gender differences (Figure 6) for significance due to the low absolute values in some of the cells (cf. Appendix, Table 5).

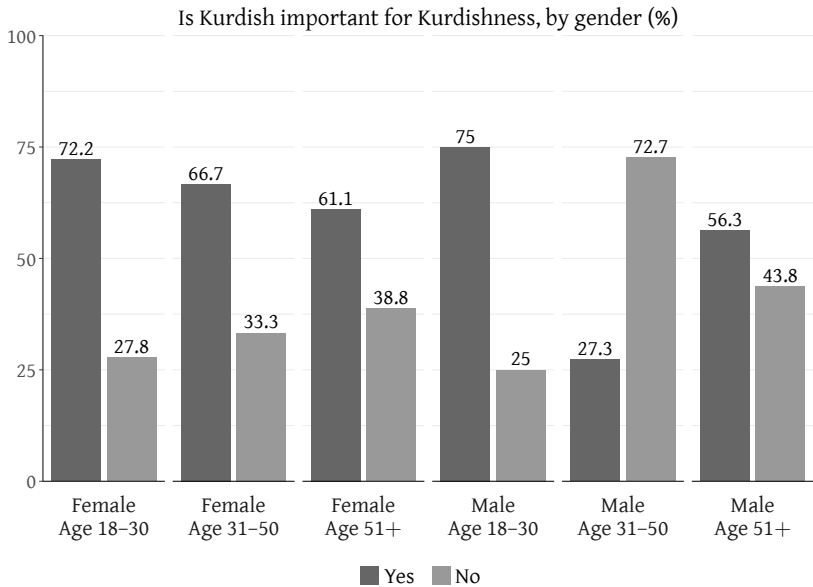


Figure 6: Responses to the question *Is Kurdish important for Kurdishness?*, by age and gender.

Discussion: In a simple world, we might have expected a correlation between the importance attached to knowledge of Kurdish for ‘being Kurdish’ (Figure 5), and choice of Kurdish as a medium of education (Figure 3). The results do not confirm this expectation. Figure 5 shows that the younger generation attach significantly more importance to speaking Kurdish than Generation two. Yet in Figure 3 above, we see that the younger generation is significantly less in favour of education solely in Bahdini than the older generation. For the youngest generation, then, active command of Kurdish is apparently linked to a notion of Kurdishness (approximately three quarters of the respondents in this group answered the question with ‘yes’), but this belief is not matched by a desire to promote Kurdish as a language of education.

The data also reveal a striking effect of gender in Generation 2. In the other age cohorts, a majority considers that knowledge of Kurdish is important for being Kurdish, but in Generation two, fewer people overall share this view, and the breakdown of the group according to gender (Figure 6) reveals that it is the men of this age group that overwhelmingly responded with 'no'. Note also that the same group (males 31–50) show a general dispreference for Kurdish in education, with only some 23% of respondents choosing this option (cf. Figure 4), the lowest among any of the male groups in our sample. We can only speculate on the reasons for the lack of importance attached to the Kurdish language among members of this group. A glance at Table 2 in the Appendix reveals that most of the males recruited to this cohort are in their thirties, i.e. born in the 1980's, and would have experienced the traumatic and violent period around the transition to autonomy in their childhood, and the early days of autonomy as young adults. It is possible that this may have negatively impacted on their attitudes towards the Kurdish language, but this awaits a more detailed study of this group, with a larger sample. However, piloting this question in our investigation has unearthed a potentially very significant age and gender effect with regard to attitudes towards language and identity.

The responses of the younger generation, on the other hand, seem to reflect a fairly solid association of Kurdish language with Kurdish identity, stable across both genders. Whether this reflects a genuine conviction among the respondents, perhaps interpretable as a degree of success for the promotion of the Kurdish language in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, or simply growing awareness of the issue of identity among the younger generation, and a desire to present themselves as 'pro-Kurdish' in the interview situation, cannot be answered with certainty. Regardless of the causes, however, there is clearly a very significant shift in behaviour with respect to this issue that marks the younger generation from the two older ones.

6 Conclusion

This pilot study investigates the relationship of language use and language attitudes among Kurdish speakers in Duhok, focusing on age-based differences. We have only considered the impact of two independent variables at this point, age and gender, but even this has revealed a complex picture that invites more detailed investigation. Nevertheless, certain trends emerged as fairly robust, and may serve as an anchor for future research. First, we were

able to show that the generation of over-fifty-year-old speakers use significantly fewer Kurdish words in a lexical decision task than younger speakers. Whether this result reflects genuine usage, or performance in a monitored setting (where younger speakers may have been consciously avoiding non-Kurdish items) is difficult to ascertain. Whichever explanation (or combination thereof) is ultimately responsible, we can nevertheless state with some confidence that age does indeed impact on linguistic behaviour. With regard to language attitudes, we also found age effects, though to some extent in contradictory directions: on the one hand, speakers from the youngest generation are significantly more likely to consider knowledge of Kurdish to be important for 'being Kurdish' than the oldest generation (Section 5.3). On the other hand, the youngest generation actually expresses less support for Kurdish as a medium of education than the oldest generation (Section 5.2). We tentatively interpret this in terms of the practical difficulties that have been experienced by the younger generations (and their children) in the nascent Kurdish language education system.

Suggestive evidence of gender effects have also been found, though they do not reach significance, in part due to the low absolute figures involved when age cohorts are split according to gender. A gender effect that was consistent across all three generations was a higher preference for English as a medium of education among women than men. This may reflect the tendency noted in other studies (Gal 1979) that women are more likely to choose languages that offer greater prestige than men are, but this would require a larger sample in order to be verified, though more research is required to verify these effects, and to address their underlying causes.

Our research indicates cross-generational differences, both in language usage (levels of Arabic in the lexicon) and in attitudes. The ongoing analysis of other person-related factors (media consumption, language usage according to domains) will yield a more complete picture of what is evidently a very dynamic linguistic ecology. Additionally, the linguistic variables that can be identified in the free speech sections of the interview (not analysed here) will add a further layer to our understanding of inter-generational language change in Duhok. We hope that our work will stimulate further research on the multilingual context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and that the evidence-based approach reported here may inform future policy-making in the field of language choice in education.

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Appendix

Table 2: Breakdown of all respondents across ages and genders

Generation 1			Generation 2			Generation 3		
Age	N Male	N Fem.	Age	N Male	N Fem.	Age	N Male	N Fem.
20	1	0	31	4	0	51	1	1
22	1	5	32	5	2	53	1	3
23	1	1	33	2	2	54	1	0
24	1	1	35	1	1	55	0	1
25	4	0	36	3	1	56	1	0
26	2	0	37	2	1	57	1	1
27	1	4	38	0	2	58	0	2
28	0	1	39	1	1	59	1	0
29	1	1	40	0	1	60	0	2
30	4	5	41	1	1	61	1	1
Sum	16	18	42	0	1	62	1	1
			43	0	1	63	0	1
			44	1	2	64	0	2
			46	1	0	67	1	0
			48	0	1	69	1	0
			49	1	0	70	1	1
			50	0	1	72	1	0
			Sum	22	18	73	2	0
						74	1	0
						75	0	1
						79	1	0
						82	0	1
						Sum	16	18

Table 3: Raw figures (group means) for Section 5.1 (language choice in the picture-naming task)

	Generation 1 (18-30)		Generation 2 (31-50)		Generation 3 (> 50)	
	Male (N=16)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=22)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=16)	Female (N=16)
Arabic	13.93	13.05	12.95	15.05	14.87	16.68
Kurdish	5.31	6.22	6.13	4.38	3.5	2.18
Mixed	0.56	0.55	0.77	0.38	0.75	0.68

Table 4: Raw figures for Section 5.2 (language choice in education)

	Generation 1 (18-30)		Generation 2 (31-50)		Generation 3 (> 50)	
	Male (N=16)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=22)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=16)	Female (N=16)
Bahdini	6	3	5	5	8	6
English	7	8	10	9	1	3
Bahdini & English	3	5	3	2	2	2

Table 5: Raw figures for Section 5.3 ('Is speaking Kurdish important for Kurdishness?')

	Generation 1 (18-30)		Generation 2 (31-50)		Generation 3 (> 50)	
	Male (N=16)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=22)	Female (N=18)	Male (N=16)	Female (N=16)
Yes	12	13	6	12	9	11
No	4	5	16	6	7	7