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Language Shift Among Speakers of Kalhuri Kurdish in Iran

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Abstract

In the multicultural and multiethnic context of Iran, Farsi is the only official and the most prestigious language. This article investigates sociolinguistic factors fostering a radical language shift from Kalhuri Kurdish to Farsi in Kermanshah, the largest Kurdish city in Iran. This shift has raised many social and cultural controversies within the Kurdish community. Data was gathered through a questionnaire focusing on attitudinal, economic and social factors affecting the shift. The participants were one thousand native Kurdish speakers in Kermanshah. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and item percentage. The findings revealed that social, personal and economic factors contributed to the shift, with economic concerns outweighing the other factors. In discussion and conclusion, we deal with the implications of the findings.

Keywords: Language policy, Language shift, Kalhuri Kurdish, Economic concerns, Farsi

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Introduction

Based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children must be allowed to speak their own language and to practice their own culture and religion. However, due to assimilatory policies applied and mandated by many nation-states with a view to unifying their peoples and also to keep their cultural and linguistic integrity, opportunity for children to become bilingual or multilingual is on a sharp decline. Such policies thwart cultural and linguistic openness. If raised in a diverse culturally rich context, bilingual children enjoy two sets of ideas and traditions (Kaplan, 2015). Bilingualism enables greater tolerance for differences and is said to diminish racism (Kluger, 2013). In many countries the driving motivation for pro-local activists and scholars is closely related to the idea that if children learn their mother tongue, it will yield better academic outcomes than learning in a less familiar language. Research on language learning strongly confirms the pedagogical advantages of using local languages (Trudell, 2016), and it is clear that bilingual learners have the advantage of developing more successful communication skills and using the target language more conventionally (Babayiğit, 2020). However, the phenomenon of language shift is common in bilingual and multilingual societies (Baker & Jones, 1998; Fishman, 1997). As Jagodic (2011) rightly puts it “the process of language shift does not end, it develops from generation to generation” (p. 195).

For about a century Farsi, linguistically and culturally has been the grand narrative of multiethnic, multilingual Iran and “Farsiization of non-Farsi peoples continues to be the building block of the IRI’s language policy” (Sheyholislami, 2012:21). The lack of political and social unity among minorities in Iran to oppose their denial, culturally and linguistically, has brought about demographic and linguistic upheavals among Iranian peoples, notably in the years after the Islamic revolution and the consequent boom of mass and social media (Vali, 1995). The Iranian government’s strict loyalty to the “One-nation, one-language policy – started by Reza Shah and continued in the years after the revolution, has reached beyond the borders of Iran” (Sheyholislami, 2012:27). This assimilatory policy was, and is accompanied by other facilitators, among them the Iran-Iraq war; in which nothing but ‘being Iranian’ mattered. War was in itself a threat to all minorities, since their existence was overshadowed by a larger, more important sacred and propagated entity, “being Iranian.” It was at this point that “Farsi” seemed to unify people from different walks of life, different religions and different linguistic inclinations within Iranian borders.

The Kurdish population plays an important role in the Iranian political and social context. Kurds make up the largest intermingled social, economic, cultural, and lingual complex in Iran, and have a discernible effect on Kurds in neighboring countries. Despite the historical assimilatory policies imposed on them, Kurds in Iran have increasingly gained a better understanding of themselves (Vali, 1995). During the years after the Islamic revolution in 1978/79 and due to special military and regional circumstances, the whole Kurdish society has been gradually downgraded to plain political issues (Karimi, 2017). This politicization has made Iranian Kurds reluctant to deal with social, linguistic and cultural changes in any form, whether in written form such as publishing books or articles, or finding oral expressions such as in demonstrations, at least within their geographical habitats. Any such expression would end up either in imprisonment or harsh repression due to national security concerns. Years of military and cultural conflict in the Kurdish parts of Iran, in the aftermath of the revolution, brought about an Iranian (Farsi) or Kurdish nationalist dichotomy. Shiite Kurds have mainly displayed an interest in taking the Farsi side; apparently because the Islamic revolution made Shiism the basis of “the collective consciousness of the nation and the foundation of its sovereignty” (Safran, 2008:171). Shiite Kurds may consider themselves to be culturally and historically Kurds, but their religious affiliation to the central ruling parties of Iran, during the past forty years, has seemingly been instrumental in lowering the importance of their linguistic identity in comparison to their religious and national identity. Also, it is known that language reflects culture of a society; hence, traditions and ways of life among the nations are revealed (Babayiğit, 2020). Serajzadeh, et al. (2017) suggest that having a unified Kurdish national identity that defies Iranian nationalism and sovereignty, is what that has constructed the basic principles of being a Kurd for Sunni Kurds in Kermanshah province. On the other hand, Shiite Kurds have a preference for Iranian sovereignty, and a strong desire for abiding by Iranian nationalism. Mohammadzadeh (2011) also suggests that ethnicity among Iranian Kurds is strictly connected to subdialects, religion and a sense of discrimination thus making Kurdish ethnicity less important to Shiite Kurds than their Sunni and Yarsan counterparts.

It is lamentable that the number of those who have significantly contributed to publishing major works on Iranian Kurds in general and on their language in particular does not exceed a handful (Anonby, 2004; Hassanpour, 1992; Jahani, 2005; Kalan, 2016; Sheyholislami, 2010, 2011). A review of the materials on the Kurds suggests that interest in Kurdish affairs tends to be ‘heavily skewed with the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey receiving the

most attraction, compared to the Kurds of Iran and Syria' (Ahmadzadeh & Stansfield, 2010:11). The less documented, less analyzed status of the Kurds in Iran yet bears another less developed issue within itself: the endangered status of Southern Kurdish and its subdialects mainly spoken in Kermanshah and Ilam provinces, and some parts of Hamadan and Sanandaj provinces. The only major work on Kurdish language in Iran in general, and on sociolinguistic aspects of Southern Kurdish was done by Weisi (2015); there are however, a few other works on Southern Kurdish dialects (Karimi Dostan, 2009; Ranjbar, 2015) which are mainly on the grammatical and structural aspects of these dialects. The various dialects that make up Southern Kurdish, for example Kalhuri, Laki and Feili, suffer from discriminatory policies, locally within the Kurdish community itself, and nationally within the Iranian context at large. Moreover, there are no major journals or newspapers published in Southern Kurdish. There are a few hours of Southern Kurdish TV and radio programs in Ilam and Kermanshah provinces. Even though the programs broadcast by Kurdish satellites are mostly in Sorani and Kurmanji dialects, and little attention is paid to Kalhuri.

Historically, Kurds have used Farsi/Farsi to trade and communicate with other Iranian peoples. Many bilingual people employ code-switching as a language shift since they feel more comfortable, secure and relaxed (Babayiğit, 2020). Thus, the mainly trade-based code switching behavior of Kurds has gradually ended up in the selection of Farsi as the first language of the new generation. Farsi is now the language of home, education, marketing and trade in some cities in Kurdish speaking areas of Iran; among them is Kermanshah. It is the largest Kurdish city in Iran with a population of 950,000 in 2016 (Iranian statistical center). It is home to three major Kurdish language dialects namely Sorani, Kalhuri and Hewrami. During the years after the revolution, Kermanshah has seen a change from being a mainly Kurdish-speaking city into an overwhelmingly Farsi-speaking city. The main drives stimulating the shift may vary in nature and scope, but the result is a rapid eradication of Kermanshahi (Kalhuri) Kurdish. Many people are abandoning daily use of their mother tongue and this trend has penetrated villages and smaller cities around Kermanshah city. In public places such as bookstores, restaurants, clinics and classrooms, people are welcome in Farsi and any conversation that follows would be in Farsi unless one of the participants switches to Kermanshahi (Kalhuri) Kurdish. This code-switching is then very often ignored or unwelcome by Kermanshahi Kurds, often resulting in the face of threat and shame. This study aims at shedding light on some sociolinguistic factors that allegedly play a role in this trend.

In many Kurdish populated areas of Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, an ethnonationalist movement based on language identity is solidifying itself in its military, cultural and lingual aspects. However, Kermanshahi Kurds in Iran have chosen – if not too strong a word – to *surrender* to the dominant language and culture. While many Kurds in the countries mentioned above are inclined to manifest a “resistance policy” towards suppressive policies of their country, Kermanshahi Kurds embrace an acceptance policy, which in the eyes of other Iranian Kurds is seen as betraying the ethnic, lingual and cultural identity of the Kurds as a whole (Serajzade, Ghaderzadeh, & Rahmani, 2011). Though nostalgic manifestations of Kalhuri Kurdish have become more popular in public and on local TV stations in recent years in the form of festivals, shows, poetry and music, this does not seem to be sufficient to reverse the situation or raise awareness regarding its endangerment (Bouchard, 2019).

Employing a sociolinguistic approach, the aim of this study is to unveil the dominant social, cultural, economic and linguistic factors which have made parents choose Farsi as the first language of their children in Kermanshah. Therefore, based on the researchers’ long term experiences and understanding of the prevailing language shift, two research questions are raised:

Q1: What effects do parents’ personal opinions and attitudes towards Farsi and Kurdish have on choosing Farsi as the first language of their children?

Q2: What social, cultural, and economic factors encourage parents to choose Farsi as the first language of their children?

A Background to Language Shift

Within the field of linguistics, sociolinguistic studies have gained prominence in recent years. These studies primarily focus on the relationship between language and social context in which they exist. In the words of Wardhaugh (2015) “sociolinguistics is the study of our everyday lives”(p.1). The concept of language shift, was coined by Fishman (1926-2015). According to Baker (1980), it refers to “a change from the use of one language to the use of another language” (p. 73). Fishman (1991) considers language shift to enjoy a progressive essence by which a speech community gradually ceases to use a language in favor of another one. Kembo-Sure (1999) defines language shift as “a process in which the speakers of one language begin to use a second language for more and more functions until they eventually use only the second language” (p. 13).

Language shift is a global phenomenon occurring in almost all multilingual communities. It usually follows the same pattern and the difference is in the pace and scope of the shift. The shift could be temporary or permanent. Regarding the latter, the native speaker completely abandons his/her language while in the former the shift is on temporary basis, though it may last for weeks or even years (Babane & Chauke, 2016). Occurring in bilingual or multilingual settings, it is the result of complex political, social, economic and cultural situations where the dominant language is associated with superior status, prestige and social success (Holmes, 2014). Extensive scholarly contributions to different aspects of language ideologies such as social class, language revival and bilingualism have fueled hot debates and discussions on minority language rights, language planning and language policies (Brubaker, 2004; Chakrani, 2013; Kalan & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2016; Lai, 2010; Santello, 2015)). The main concern comes from the current status of many very widely-spoken languages that happen to be unofficial (Barrena et al., 2007). In spite of having hundreds or even thousands of speakers, they are subject to severe vulnerability, critical endangerment and even gradual extinction. Understanding the very complex interplay of racial, linguistic and ideological factors in every shift may help maintain the endangered language (Bouchard, 2019).

Conflicting attitudes on the use of national or local languages among the speakers of an endangered indigenous language could reflect their mental state and feeling they have about the language varieties surrounding them (Mirhosseini & Abazari, 2016). A shift from one indigenous language to another, may be judged either desirable or tragic, largely depending on who is passing judgment (Weisi, 2015). It is “invariably to the social conditions that one must look to understand the attitudes and values” fostering any language shift (Paulston & McLaughlin, 1994:20). According to Mufwene (2017) a shift could be interpreted at times as a process to respond to socioeconomic changes or benefits from the shift. The mentalist-behaviorist approaches to language shift could possibly provide the basic foundations of resistance-acceptance policies among the speakers of a minority language; while some people consider the shift as a modern approach to a better guaranteed social life, others may see it as an assimilationist approach targeting the hearts, minds and real existence of an indigenous language and its speakers’ loyalty (Mirvahedi, 2016).

Among the frequently cited causes influencing language transfer, one can account for migration, trade, commerce, education, and state policy oriented factors. The following oppositional dichotomies which are seen as proxies for state policies could attribute greatly to current language shift circumstances; a. discriminative vs tolerant, b. multilingual vs

monolingual, c. egalitarian vs restrictive, and d. pluralistic vs assimilationist (Kaplan, 2015). In each case, the position taken by the government may dramatically interfere, hinder or block the endeavors made by scholars, language experts and minority language rights activists. Enjoying a significant importance in fostering or preventing language shift is the loyalty of speakers to their own language who are numerically weaker or socially less powerful than the speakers of the other language. Reversing language shift framework which has the assumption that children must learn to speak the native language if it is going to survive relies heavily on the loyalty of the speakers to their mother language (Weisi, 2015).

Nation building necessitates regularizing and regulating linguistic forms (Heller & McElhinny, 2017). Many emerging nation-states in Europe, Africa and Asia needed monolingualism to assure cohesion. They needed all the citizens to speak one language, accept one culture and one system of government (Kaplan, 2015). For instance, in the 1930s, the Sun Language theory was introduced by Turkish nationalists to homogenize the diverse ethnolinguistic context of Turkey. In Iran, Reza Shah (1878 –1944) stipulated the mandatory European fashion style and followed the one-nation, one-language policy. Kaplan (2015) claims that, in the years preceding the First World War, English encapsulated the patriotic, economic, artistic and cultural forces in the USA.

Methodology

Procedure

First, some pre-interviews were conducted involving one hundred informants. The purpose of pre-interviews was to extract the needed items for the questionnaire. The pre-interviews fell well within a semi-structured type; participants were allowed to talk freely unless they fundamentally diverted from the main subject. Then, the questionnaire was developed based on interviewees' ideas, as well as using items from previous questionnaires. A pilot study was run to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. The reliability was obtained via Chronback Alpha as 0.803. The validity was also checked by some experts in the field. Finally, the finalized version of the questionnaire was given to 1000 participants.

Instruments

The data was collected using a questionnaire. Using a set of fifteen five-point scale items, it included items about social, attitudinal and economic factors. The questionnaire was

constructed using interviews and some previous questionnaires investigating ethnic minorities elsewhere in the world (Dweik & Nofal, 2013; Kondakov, 2011; Martin, 2009). The adopted questionnaires were modified to be in accord with the particular context of the study. It included four main categories; each including a set of items. It was distributed in a time span of five months. A pilot study was run to check the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. A reliability coefficient of 0.803 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha Reliability which was higher than the cut-off value of 0.70 in social sciences. To validate the questionnaire, it was checked and refined by some experts in both Kurdish and Farsi. To see whether there was a relationship between the factors outlined in the questionnaire and speaking Farsi to children, Asymptotic Significance was calculated for all and each item. Using the Likert Scale, each item was assigned to five alternatives; strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (UD), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with values ranging from five to 1 respectively. Table 1 demonstrates the categorical classification of the questionnaire.

Table 1 Categorical classification of the questionnaire

	Category	Item No
1.	Participants' attitudes to Kurdish	Items 9, 11, 12, 13, 14
2.	Participants' attitudes to Farsi	Items 1, 3, 6
3.	Economy and future life of children	Items 2, 4, 5
4.	Familial and other social factors	Items 7, 8, 10, 15

Participants

The questionnaire was distributed among 1000 men and women, equally divided by gender. The prerequisites for participants to receive the questionnaire were that they a. had children b. were native speakers of Kermanshahi, and c. did not transfer their own native language to their child/children. A snowball sampling was employed to identify subsequent receivers of the questionnaire. All the participants were residents of Kermanshah. Demographic information including job, education and age of the participants was also gathered through oral questions and taking notes. All the participants were assured that the data would be used by the researcher solely for academic purposes.

Results

Frequency, validity and cumulative percent for all items were achieved. Means were calculated for all categories and were compared to each other according to gender, education level and age of the participants. A binominal test was also run to see if the observed results differed from what was expected by the test or not. Eight items tried to elicit information about participants' positive or negative attitudes and feelings towards their native language. Item 9 directly challenged the participants' self-image. It disputed over their seemingly deep-in-believed language identity by trying to induce them to deny their original ties to Kalhuri Kurdish. Interestingly, both SD and D enjoyed the same high percentage of 39% which together made up 78% of all. 12% were in total harmony with the claim proposed by the item and 10% had no idea. The assumption that Kalhuri Kurdish was non-prestigious in item 11 was considered to be an important factor in making Farsi the first language of Kermanshahi children. 80% of participants rejected the idea of non-prestigious status of Kalhuri Kurdish to influence their choice of Farsi as their children's first language. Just a minority (about 7%) accepted the idea and 13% preferred not to take any side. Items 12, 13 and 14 also represented a high percentage of disagreement from the participants. One major conclusion about the attitudes of parents towards Kalhuri Kurdish (KK) was that majority of them displayed an interest in using Kalhuri Kurdish in their daily life.

Another aspect to be taken seriously was to check out the participants' attitudes towards Farsi (ATF); the only official and widely-used language in Iran. Items 1, 3, and 6 tried to elicit answers regarding participants' attitudes towards Farsi, a language that is penetrating deeply into the strongholds of many indigenous Iranian languages due to popular media and its official use. The questions involved the future prospects of marital life, implying that Kermanshahi Kurds would like to marry Farsi native speakers, and had more self-confidence while talking in Farsi. In each case, whether they considered themselves to be native speakers of Farsi or they wanted to marry a Farsi native speaker, the implication was stable; they preferred to talk in Farsi and speaking in Farsi seemed to be better for them in different ways.

In Item 1, the participants' mother tongue was asked. As noted above, one of the prerequisites for taking the questionnaire was that they had to be a native speaker of Kalhuri Kurdish. However, among those who answered No, there was a cumulative 34% choosing

“A” or “SA”, which was an astounding result. One could claim that the null hypothesis of the item was rejected and not all the participants considered themselves to be native Farsi speakers. The idea that the “participants enjoyed more self-confidence when they were speaking in Farsi” was an assumption outlined in item 3. Out of all, 21% had no idea, 51% cumulatively had chosen D or SD and 28% agreed to the assumption. It is worth-noting that those who chose SA were more than those who had chosen SD by 5%. In item 6, the participants’ attitudes and tendency towards having a partner whose first language was Farsi was asked. The answers were various and bore a 33% difference, with D answers at the top by 40% and a minimum of 7% of SD answers. A noticeable 24% were still in dilemma, which was close in percentage to those who had agreed or strongly agreed; about 29%.

Social and Economic Factors

Item 2 focused on the children’s future and their possible prosperity if they were taught in Farsi as their first language. As it was expected, the majority of the participants chose either “A” or “SA”. School, university, and educational issues were the focus of item 4. A big majority of the participants (79%) agreed that educational concerns were a major reason behind the trend. A significant 0.00 supported the idea that there existed a direct relationship between the two. Item 5 asked whether conducting a family on Farsi-style basis would guarantee a better economic life in future or not. 48% disagreed and 13% preferred to disagree strongly. Just a minority of 4% strongly agreed. The general result was that choosing Farsi as the first language of children was to guarantee a better life for them in future.

Four items in the questionnaire focused mainly on social factors, which seemed to make the language shift inevitable. With item 7, the role of mass media was investigated. The role was supposed to convince parents to teach Farsi to their children so that it could help them utilize the mass media better. As expected the answers circled about the positive pole, with a cumulative 71% in agreement. Just 13% disagreed and claimed the lack of such a factor. Item 8 attracted 94% as “As” and “SAs”. It was in this question that we observed a minimum rejection of 4% to the claim posed by Item 7. The same item considered the official and public use of Farsi in different governmental and non-governmental organizations as a basic element for families to choose it as the first language of their children. Moreover, the asymptotic significance verified the existence of the relationship. Item 10, typically of a social essence asked about the social influences, which we might have on each other as relatives, neighbors, or friends. Many rejected the existence of such an influence, cumulatively about

69%; 13% chose the opposite with a considerable amount, 19% in dilemma. The social and familial category embedded in item 15 tried to magnify women's power as an active and decisive role in determining children's first language. A majority of 55% chose "No", making them stronger than those who had chosen "Yes", about 31%.

Mean Comparison of the Categories

To get a better picture of the findings, means achieved for each category based on demographic data including, educational degree and gender of the participants were compared to each other. The less the value, the less the acceptability of the ideas and presuppositions posed by the items. That is to say that if the value fell below 2, it could mean simply that the idea suggested disapproval. But if the value moved upward to 2 at least, and 5 at most, then the idea had gained some sort of acceptability among the participants; hence the higher the value, the more the degree of acceptance.

The means achieved for all 4 categories were calculated and compared based on the gender of the participants. In all 4 categories women got higher scores. This could mean that women thought differently regarding the different categories. For example, in ATK, men showed to oppose the underlying hypotheses by gaining a score of 1.836; that is, men considered themselves to be Kurds. They would like to speak Kurdish more, had no social fear if they were to be known as Kurds, and finally they were worried about their language being endangered. On the other hand, women by getting 2.11 out of 5 had jumped over the border line and had entered the realm of supporters of the hypotheses. Although the difference does not seem to be much (0.28), it was enough to place women on the other pole. Therefore, women could be judged as being reluctant to believe in their own native language. They considered themselves as not belonging to the Kurdish native community, and were concerned that speaking Kurdish might worsen their social status. In all other categories women tended to show a greater and wider acceptance of the implied or direct ideas of the items. Both men and women got more than 2% in ATF, sufficient to make them so-called "fans of Farsi." Men gained the lower score (2.63%), while women got 3.29% and rejected the null hypotheses which claimed there existed no relation between respondent's interest in Farsi and speaking Farsi to children. Of the highest importance for both genders were the economy and future life plus social and familial issues with means of 3.50 and 3.05 respectively. This indicated that for both, the economic and social issues were the first priorities.

Regarding the educational degrees of the participants, the results showed that in ATK those who held an MA degree or higher exceeded 2, whereas those with diplomas gained less than 2. With some case exceptions, those who held the MA or higher degrees got the highest scores in all the categories. Economy again got the highest score with juniors reaching 3.55 as the highest score. In no other category except ATK, was a score less than 2. Economy and ATK aside, the other categories enjoyed a relatively similar popularity among the participants. No tangible difference in the means was observed regarding the age of the participants in all the categories.

Among the most influential factors in the choice of Farsi as the first language of Kermanshahi children, were economic and social factors. Also, regarding attitudes, Kermanshahi parents showed an interest in preserving their own language. To see whether these outcomes could be relied on or not, a binominal test was run.

Table 2 A binominal test for hypotheses

		Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	Exact Sig. (2-tailed)
dichotomized H1	Group 1	.00	770	.77	.50	.000(a)	.000
	Group 2	1.00	230	.23			
	Total		1000	1.00			
dichotomized H2	Group 1	.00	240	.24	.50	.000(a)	.000
	Group 2	1.00	760	.76			
	Total		1000	1.00			

As table 2 shows, in this test a comparison was made between those who agreed versus those who disagreed with the ideas outlined in the items. Eight items dealt with personal attitudes of the participants towards Farsi and Kalhuri Kurdish (H1) and the rest focused on economic and social factors (H2). For the first hypothesis 77% disagreed and 23% agreed, which was both significant and meaningful. This indicated that participants had rejected the ideas expressed in H1 and the related items. For the second hypothesis, we had 24% of disagreement versus 76% agreement. This showed an overall acceptance of the

second hypothesis and the ideas expressed in the related items. So, economic and social factors were playing the main role in persuading the parents to choose Farsi as the first language of their children.

Discussion and Conclusion

“An endangered language will progress if its speakers increase their wealth relative to the dominant community” (Crystal, 2014:132). Understandably then, as much as the economic power of communities increases, different aspects of their culture happens to be accepted more easily by its members and other communities respectively, their language just one of them. Conversely, in circumstances when the community is striving for its basic needs, even thinking about language maintenance or revival seems like an irrelevant luxury.

Speaking of Kurdish populated areas of Iran reminds one of very high rate of unemployment, smuggling, illiteracy and sanitation issues (Ghasemi, 2008; Hussein, 2001; Pour Ahmad, et al., 2003). The widening economic gap between the central parts of Iran to that of borderline provinces such as Kermanshah, Ilam and Kurdistan, and the tangible inequality of the opportunities and governmental funds to modernize and industrialize these provinces, has played a very major role in politicization, radicalization and suppression of ethnonationalist identities among the Kurds of Iran (Entessar, 1992; Vali, 1998). It would be surprising to note that Kermanshah has been statistically one of the top three provinces in the country with the highest rate of unemployment, crime and drug use. It has suffered the lengthy Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) and as a direct consequence the province enjoys a very poor infrastructure. The blurred perspective of parents towards the future could contribute to their strict adherence to the economic well-being of their children at the expense of any loss, whether ethnical, linguistic or social.

In speaking of Dimili Kurds of Turkey, Todd (1985:vi) asserts: “Speakers of Dimili are Kurds psychologically, socially, culturally, economically and politically.” The outcomes of this study could statistically convince anyone that Kermanshahi Kurds are Kurds socially, culturally, psychologically but not economically and politically. Sunni versus Shiite sectarian practices among Kurds rather than ethnicity practices, partially determine the degree of integration into state-favored policy of assimilation by Shiite Kurds or social resistance by Sunni Kurds. A close religious and ideological tie between the people who speak Kalhuri Kurdish and Farsi speakers (mainly involving central provinces of Iran, speaking standard Farsi, as advocated by national TV and radio channels) who are more advanced, creates an

ideal image of them in the minds of Kermanshahi speakers. This removes the hostility among them and the new-coming language and culture is accepted willingly. It seems that religious affiliation of Kermanshahi Kurds is effective in decreasing the political exclusion of the Shiite Kurds of Iran in general (Serajzadeh, et al., 2011). Thus the Shiite Kurds of Kermanshah would “emphasize their common religious identity at the expense of their ethnolinguistic one” (Tezcür & Asadzade, 2019:3) if they are going to gain economic benefits. This is to say that prioritizing economic factors obstructs the possible positive effects of other relevant factors such as social, psychological and cultural ones. The core of the matter is that, choosing to speak Farsi to children and scarifying ethnolinguistic identity would eventually lead to language loss and consequently to cultural and heritage loss (Brown, 2009).

It seems that Kurds in many parts of Iran utilize the mass media in Kurdish to solidify and unite their ethnic identity (Koivunen, 2002). The contradiction hits when the results of this study reveal that Kermanshahi Kurds oppose mainstream Kurdish ethno-nationalism because a major reason for this shift is due to the desire to have their children use Farsi mass media more efficiently. A majority of Kurds in Iran have chosen to resist hegemony of the Farsi language and culture by various means such as naming their children in Kurdish, learning the writing system in Kurdish and establishing NGOs. The Kurds in Kermanshah, although marginalized and deprived just like Sunni Kurds in many respects, seek a way out of their dilemma through integration and assimilation into the dominant culture and language.

As the study shows, two major obstacles that hinder Kermanshahi Kurdish from being passed on to the younger generation are the economy and education. It is widely believed that without familiarity with Farsi right from the start, before going to school, children will face major problems in learning and understanding the curriculum content. Public opinion in Kermanshah supports the idea that a better education requires full mastery of Farsi. The counterexample that invalidates this concern comes from the Azeri speaking population in Iran, where the majority of families use Azeri in various situations at home and school, with 90% of them passing on their language to their children (Mirhosseini, 2016). There is no report, research or set of data to support any superiority of performance at school or higher levels of education by Kermanshahi monolinguals over Azeri or other Kurdish speaking bilinguals in Kurdish speaking cities like Marivan or Sanandaj where children are not taught Farsi before starting school.

Social factors are yet another major driver to block the transfer of Kurdish to the younger generation. Access to greater social mobility resides in access to the more prestigious, more powerful official language of Iran. As many Kurdish speakers in Kermanshah believe their native language cannot accommodate them in the new social contexts, they may subsequently sideline it. This implies that, to them, Kermanshahi Kurdish is not capable of coping with the newly emerging opportunities that are built upon and depend on the privileged national language. For a better communication to take place, which may bring about a better social status, it is necessary for parents to teach and prepare their children in Farsi, without being burdened with learning a native language perceived to be useless. It is strongly believed that positive feelings about one's own language fosters its maintenance, while negative feelings mainly result in language shift and finally into language demise (Agyekum, 2009). In an interview about the usefulness of Kurdish, a mother told me: "Where and how is this awkward language going to help my child!?" (Personal audio recordings archive).

The suppressive language policy that Iran has pursued since 1925 has left the speakers of non-Farsi languages two choices; assimilation or resistance (Sheyholislami, 2012:44). The closure of all the possibilities to gain official status and depriving the language of accessing the means of revitalization and recovery has blurred Kurdish language credibility in the eyes of its speakers in Kermanshah. Language insecurity and facing threat, in cases where the native language is used, apply strict psychological constraints on the use of native Kermanshahi Kurdish. Participants' emphasis on the use of Farsi in social contexts reveals the detachment of the speakers to their own language. It is through such a policy that homogeneity and erosion of cultural diversity can be achieved (Badashian, 2010:8). One participant while filling out the questionnaire in response to my question about the reasons for choosing Farsi as the first language of her son asserted:

You know whenever I see a mother singing a lullaby to her child in a heavenly, tranquilizing tone in Farsi on TV and then I compare it to the harsh abrupt screams of Kurdish mothers when trying to lullaby their children to sleep, as it usually happens in our neighborhood, I feel totally ashamed of talking Kurdish to my child" (Personal audio recordings archive).

There are for sure some other elements that have an effect on this trend. Kermanshahi scholars, university professors and teachers suffer an immense public criticism for showing no interest in preserving their native language for it is commonly believed that literacy and education prevent language endangerment. This criticism is mainly from educated people

from other parts of Iranian Kurdistan who have been very active in their endeavors to preserve and maintain Kurdish language and culture, for example by enrolling students for a BA course in Kurdish Language and Literature at Kurdistan University in Sanandaj. Known publicly as the most successful people within their own community, the Kermanshahi elite consider their speaking in Farsi to be a cornerstone of their success. This makes the choice easier for the public. Children have the right to use and enjoy the new and upcoming opportunities. A better and more successful life will cover up for a loss in other respects, whether ethnical, lingual or cultural. Gradually then, people become absorbed in the dominant socio-economic systems. This is in harmony with the words of Kaufman (1988) who claims that when languages come into contact, it is not one language that competes the other, but in fact it is the sociolinguistic background of its speakers which is utterly decisive in the competition.

An action such as leaving and deserting an ancestral language, which in isolation appears evil, acquires a completely different connotation when placed in certain settings, and the right setting is a unique ideology propagated by the privileged members of elite class. An elite group may not be noticeable horizontally, but are at the top vertically.

The starting point for any language shift is language assimilation (Agyekum, 2009). The Kurds in Kermanshah are fed in all respects by the central Farsi-speaking peoples. Computer software, movies with Farsi subtitles, organizational and official names and labels pour into a developing city like Kermanshah. This brings about numerous changes in language domain. Because of language contact, some words come into Kurdish language from other languages, but they are used under Kurdish grammar rules (Karacan & Khalid, 2016). This, however, is not the case with Kermanshahi Kurdish. New vocabularies are coming in with no immediate equivalents in Kurdish pave the way for more changes in the future, not only in vocabulary but also in syntax. This is accelerated by the numerous similarities between Farsi and Kurdish. A glance at Kurdish dialects also tells us that actual vocabulary is retained, but that the same vocabulary is used in different ways as time progresses (Karacan, 2019). In the case of Kalhuri Kurdish, it seems that many words which have an almost similar pronunciation in Farsi and Kurdish soon change to be pronounced in Farsi, since Farsi is used frequently in everyday life and is more familiar to the ears.

Kurdish contemporary discourse of victimization and sentimentalism is no longer sufficient to pave the way for the fulfillment of a strong ethno-nationalist discourse, so as to encompass all political and social fractions within the Iranian Kurdish communities. In conclusion, the present researcher favors a constructive (and not a primordial) approach to

identity and ethno-nationalism. Otherwise, governmental apparatus constructing state-favored identities are likely to suppress the fading Kurdish sense of loyalty, patriotism and sentimentalism in the blink-of-an-eye.

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