

Language Shift Among the Assyrians of Jordan: A Sociolinguistic Study

Bader S. Dweik^{1, *}, Tareq J. Al-Refa'i²

¹Department of English, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Middle East University, Amman, Jordan

²Department of English, Scientific College of Design, Muscat, Oman

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the sociolinguistic background of the Assyrians of Jordan. It also attempted to explore the domains of use of Syriac and Arabic. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a purposive sample of 56 respondents, covering different age ranges, genders and educational backgrounds, was chosen to respond to the linguistic questionnaire. The instruments of the study were; an open-ended interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire. The overall analysis of the questionnaire and the interviews indicated that the Assyrians of Jordan were witnessing a shift from their ethnic language "Syriac" towards the majority language "Arabic". They consciously placed more importance on Arabic which enabled them to be assimilated in the mainstream society. The assimilation was driven by variety of factors such as seeking security in the society as a result of what they have witnessed in their original regions. Furthermore, the Assyrians of Jordan used Arabic in almost all domains. However results proved that Syriac was still minimally used in certain key domains such as at home with family members and at church. This shift was the result of historical, economic, demographic, linguistic and generational distance.

Keywords

Language Shift, Assyrians, Jordan, Syriac, Arabic, Sociolinguistics

Received: April 12, 2015 / Accepted: April 19, 2015 / Published online: June 8, 2015

© 2015 The Authors. Published by American Institute of Science. This Open Access article is under the CC BY-NC license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

1. Introduction

Recently, indigenous languages have been in the center of interest by many sociolinguists as many of these indigenous languages became endangered. Languages are generally not stable; they are always in a state of constant change and development.

Nowadays, thousands of indigenous languages are spoken by ethnic groups who are usually of a limited number. These ethnic groups are either living in their own homeland where the majority speak another language as the case of the Palestinian Arabs of the 1948, native Americans in the USA and Berbers in North Africa, or migrated for many reasons to other countries where the majority speak another language. This multilingual situation usually leads to conflict which in

turn results in either language maintenance or language shift.

The Assyrians They are called Assyrians or Chaldeans and are called by various different names such as Nestorians, Syrians, Syriac Jacobites, and Arameans. However, "many of these terms are relatively recent; in ancient times the expression generally used was the Church of the East. These recent names evolved as a result of religious and ethnographical problems" (Yildiz 1999, p.22). He also argues that the term "Syriac" derives its origin from Syria. This term was applied by the Greeks to those countries of Assyrian origin situated to the East of the Euphrates. He suggested that this confusion is mainly due to one specific historical fact: Antioch was the capital of Syria and at the same time an important center for the propagation of Christianity, where for the first time the baptized received the name of Christians. (p. 23) Likewise, Younan (2000) defines Aramaic as the

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: drdweik@yahoo.com (B. S. Dweik), tareqrefaee@hotmail.com (T. J. Al-Refa'i)

ancient language of the Semitic family group, which includes the Assyrians, Babylonians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Hebrews, and Arabs. The Greeks called Aramaic by a word they coined, 'Syriac', and this artificial term was used in the West, but not in the East. Modern Eastern Aramaic has sixteen dialects, spoken by Christians and Jews, and a widely spoken western dialect. Modern Western Aramaic is spoken in three small villages north of Damascus, but mixed with words borrowed from Arabic and Turkish. He reported that nowadays, Modern Aramaic, in its various dialects, is spoken in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and the various Western countries to which the native speakers have emigrated, including Russia, Europe, Australia and the United States. (p.4) Finally, he mentions that churches which still use Aramaic as their liturgical language include the Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Maronite Catholic Church.

Yildiz (2000) explains that the Western and Eastern Syriac is the Aramaic language of the church. Syriac which was called Oriental in the old days, can be divided into three main groups such as " Nestorian, Chaldean and Jacobite (Which are all Assyrians). This is the most documented Aramaic dialects in history." (p.39) In his answer to the question "what is the Syriac language and culture, and what are its origins?" Kiraz (2001) assumes that the term Syriac does not reflect a linguistic difference between the several speakers of the language instead; the different names of the speakers have to do with ethnic and religious issues. He defines Syriac as: a form of the Aramaic language which includes many dialects that have been used since the 11th century B.C. the Aramaic language is originally the language of the Aramean people, but it became the lingua franca of the Near East in the 6th century BC. Aramaic continued to be the language in Palestine until after the Islamic conquest in the seventh century. (p.6) About the difference between Assyrian and Syriac, Kiraz (2001) says that the term Assyrian has been used by members of the Assyrian Church of the East as an ethnic designation since the 19th century, and more so after 1900. The term became formally part of the name of that Church in the 1970s. The term is also used by some Chaldeans as an ethnic designation, and by some Syriac Orthodox, especially in the Diaspora, as a national or political affiliation. The term "Syriac" (its native form is *suryoyo*, in Arabic *suryani*) is used by the Syriac Orthodox, Maronites, Syriac Catholics, Syro-Malabarese, Syro-Malankarese and the Mar Thoma Christians to designate their ecclesiastical tradition and by some as an ethnic designation as well.

The term Syriac is also used by Western scholars to refer to

all the Churches mentioned above that employ Syriac as a liturgical language. As the native term *suryoyo/suryani* also translates into the English word, "Syrian." Some used to opt for mistranslating the former terms into "Assyrian" to avoid confusion with a reference to the Arab Republic of Syria. The terms "Assyrian" and "Syriac" are sometimes misused interchangeably, intentionally or unintentionally. This result has caused confusion and unfortunately friction to some extent. In conclusion he says that the mentioned communities share common language and heritage which bond them together, despite their different formal names.

This study aimed to describe the sociolinguistic background of the Assyrians of Jordan and to investigate the domains in which they use both Syriac and Arabic. To achieve the aforementioned objectives, this work attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What is the sociolinguistic background of the Assyrians of Jordan?
2. In what domains do the Assyrians of Jordan use Syriac and Arabic?

Although many studies were conducted on ethnic minorities and their language situation in the Middle East and Jordan by scholars such as Kittaneh (2009), Al-Khatib (2010), and Dweik & Nofal (2014) and Dweik, Nofal & Qawasmeh (2014), there is shortage of research conducted on the Assyrian communities in Jordan, Syria and Palestine. Apparently, these communities were ignored by researchers just because they represented very small communities who in some cases were not recognized. Attention was given to Muslim ethnic communities who sought peace and security in these countries because of religious and social discrimination in their native countries such as Chechens, Circassians, Gypsies and the Kurds. Therefore, this study may generally enrich the sociolinguistic studies in Jordan, the Middle East and the world at large. In addition, it may fill a gap in the Assyrian historical, social, linguistic and religious literature as well as the main non-linguistic variables that affected the continuation of language use in their ethnic community.

2. Review of Literature

The terms language shift and maintenance refer to a choice made by a society as to which language will be used for certain functions. This choice may lead to the death of a language, leaving no speakers of the language, or death of the language in a specific community only. If this shift does not occur, or if it occurs only in certain domains of a society, then some degree of language maintenance occurs. (Dunlap, 1995)

Tsitsipis (2009) defines language shift as the replacement of

one or more languages in community's repertoire by language which is socially more powerful... Language shift is the outcome of both outside forces stemming from regional, national and global conditions as well as locally determined agencies. Although the linguistic codes of the communities are in constant process of change in general, language shift includes socio-historical conditions in order to take place. (p.1) Yildiz (2000) states that most Aramaic speaking groups are losing their native languages gradually in struggle with Arabic. This language is most preserved in the region of north Mesopotamia while the majority of the Assyrians are struggling "to maintain their identity in exile, which does not always permit them to organize themselves and thus promote their culture, history and, above all, their language." (p.26) Fishman (1966) defines language maintenance and language shift as a field that is concerned with language change and language stability. He points out when there is a language contact between different speakers; their language may be changed or maintained according to many factors as social, cultural or psychological ones (p.424). He sets three major topical subdivisions in discussing language maintenance and shift. These subdivisions are (1) the habitual language use at more than one point in time or space under conditions of intergroup control, (2) the psychological, social or cultural processes related to stability or change in habitual language use under conditions of intergroup contact, and (3) the behavior towards language in contact settings.

Fishman (1972) presents one of the most common definitions of language shift. It takes place when the younger members of a minority speech community no longer speak the language of their parents, but speak a dominant majority language instead. The language of the parents is therefore not passed on to the next generation. Conversely, language maintenance occurs when a language continues to be used across generations despite the presence of other languages also being used by a community – the kind of stable diglossia. In addition, Ferguson (1981) defines language shift as "the change in regular use or mother-tongue status of one language to another in a speech community." (p.530) while language maintenance is defined as "preservation of the use of a language by a speech community under conditions where there is a possibility of shift to another language." (p.530) Fishman (1989) discusses three resolutions that can be considered the outcome of languages in contact. He discusses the status of immigrant languages when they are in contact with the host languages. He gives three possibilities for the fate of languages in contact. The first possibility happens when the indigenous language (e.g. English in England) interacts with an intrusive immigrating language (e.g. Arabic); here the intrusive language is lost. The second resolution occurs when an indigenous language (e.g.

American Indian language) interacts with an intrusive immigrating language (e.g. English); here the indigenous language is lost. The third and final possibility occurs when an indigenous language (e.g. Arabic in Jordan) interacts with an intrusive immigrating language (e.g. Chechen in Jordan); the result is that both languages are maintained.

Holmes (2001) argues that intermarriage highly leads to language shift; similarly, when people seek to improve their economic conditions in another place as a result of adopting the host language, and the negative attitudes towards the ethnic language also speed up the process of language shift. Moreover, when a host language is used in most of the domains, immigrants are forced to use the host language. Add to this, the demographic factors that play a role in language shift. Finally, when people live in an urban place, they use the host language but when they live in their ethnic community isolated from the majority, they may maintain their ethnic language like Ukrainians in Canada.

Odisho (1999) investigated the Assyrian language maintenance and erosion among the Assyrian immigrants in the United States across three generations. The researcher employed the observation technique to investigate the shift to English within three generations of an Assyrian immigrant family. The results showed that most of the second generation became bilingual speaking their ethnic language and the majority-group language while with the third generation, English became dominant in almost all aspects of life and it replaced their ethnic language dramatically.

Furthermore, Dweik (2000) focused on the linguistic and cultural maintenance among the Chechens of Jordan. In his study the researcher used a random sample of 100 subjects to fill out a questionnaire about their linguistic and cultural maintenance. The results of the study showed that the Chechens of Jordan have maintained their language and culture. Moreover, the findings proved that the Chechens showed positive attitudes towards their ethnic and national Jordanian identities.

Oshana (2003) investigated the cultural identification, linguistic competence, and religious participation of the Assyrian adolescents in Chicago and how these factors influenced their ego identity. A non-probability sample of 101 Assyrian American adolescents was chosen from the first and second generations. The participants volunteered to complete two surveys. The researcher also interviewed three participants in depth. The results indicated that there is a strong relationship between cultural identification and identity status but there was limited relationship between identity status and linguistic competency. Furthermore, results showed that religious participation had a very important role in the Assyrian language maintenance and

both religion and language were very important to adolescents' ego identity.

Dashti (2004) investigated the language situation among the Kuwaiti Ajams. This study aimed at investigating whether the Kuwaiti Ajams maintained their ethnic language or shifted to the majority language. Participant observation and ethnographic recorded conversations techniques were adopted to obtain in-depth analysis of Farsi maintenance and shift among Kuwait Ajams. The researcher analyzed the social networks of each family when examining their language choice. Results showed that the grandchildren's generation of the two families has shifted from Farsi to Arabic due to several factors such as "migration, religion and intermarriage which are relatively important. Consequently, it could be argued that Farsi in Kuwait is likely to be extinct within the next one or two generations." (p. 29)

Sofu (2009) investigated language shift or maintenance in three Arabic-Turkish bilingual families through deep interviews held with third-generation representatives of each family. The aim of this research was to describe the language shift and maintenance in the southern part of Turkey where a lot of people were bilingual Turkish-Arabic speakers. Information about three generations of the families in this study was collected through structured interviews with family members belonging to the third generation who were themselves graduate students. The shift from Arabic to Turkish was observed in the first and the second generations due to many reasons of which: education, contact with monolingual families, type of jobs and mobility. However, the third generation was more language conscious and saw the maintenance of their language as a way to preserve their cultural identity.

Al-Khatib and Al-Ali (2010) studied the level of language and cultural shift among the Kurds of Jordan. The researchers investigated the shift and highlighted the socio-demographic factors enhancing it. The sample of the study was one hundred Jordanian Kurds who arrived in Jordan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The data used were collected through questionnaires, structured interviews and observations. The results proved that the Kurds of Jordan experienced a shift towards Arabic which led them to lose their ethnic language.

Gabsi (2011) examined the situation of Tunisian Berber from a linguistic and sociolinguistic perspective. The study had three goals; First, to give an assessment of the problems and the challenges facing Tunisian Berber Second, to describe the extent of shift towards Arabic. Third, to suggest some directions for future studies of Tunisian Berber and strategies to stimulate its revival. Data were collected in three separate fieldwork trips to Douiret from November 1996 to January

2000. Data were also collected in the neighboring Chninni and Ouirsighen. Results showed that Tunisian Berber identified some fundamental factors of the attrition of Berber in Tunisia. Some of these factors were sociolinguistic, for instance negative language attitudes and lack of institutional support. The Berbers viewed their language rather as mere second language undeserving of affection. By contrast, there were no negative feelings towards Arabic even though its encroachments mean that their mother tongue now faces extinction.

Dweik & Nofal (2014) investigated the Indian community in Aden, Yemen. The sample of this study included 100 Indians of Yemen who were selected purposively. Only 86 participants responded to a language questionnaire highlighting the factors that influenced language as well as the domains of language use. The results showed that some of the Indians of Yemen maintained their ethnic language in speaking and listening. Results also proved that non-linguistic factors such as home and family played a significant role in preserving their ethnic language.

Dweik & Al-Obaidi (2014) investigated the language situation among the Chaldo-Assyrians in Baghdad. The study aimed to explore the factors that support the use of Neo-Aramaic and Arabic. Data were collected through employing three instruments: interviews and a questionnaire distributed to 135 participants. The findings of the study showed that the Chaldo-Assyrians maintained their language over a long period of time. Results also proved that Arabic was used for various functions and Neo-Aramaic was used in a variety of social domains, such as home and religious settings. Additionally, results showed that there is a strong relationship between language maintenance and non-linguistic factors such as home, religion and positive attitudes towards the ethnic language.

Dweik, Nofal & Qawasmeh (2014) investigated language use and language attitudes among the Muslim Arabs who lived in Vancouver/Canada. A sample of (70) Muslim Arabs was selected on grounds of convenience. The selected participants represented different age groups, gender and educational background. The main instrument used in this study was a sociolinguistic questionnaire that comprised three different sections: demographic background, language use of Arabic and English in different domains and language attitudes. Results showed that Arabic and English are used side by side in different domains. They also pointed out that the Muslim Arabs of Vancouver were proud of their Arabic identity and their Arabic language and culture and that Arabic was still being maintained among the second generation of Muslim Arabs in Vancouver. It also indicated that English symbolized their Canadian identity and was considered a good instrument for achieving their educational and financial aspirations.

3. Methodology

The population of the study was all the Assyrians of Jordan who arrived in Jordan from Turkey during World War I and those who came from Palestine after the Israeli war of 1948. Fifty six participants were selected to serve as the sample of the study. Two sampling techniques were used in choosing the participants. First, the 'snowball' sampling technique which was implemented especially for the interviews which involved accessing subjects via asking members of community to name other members they knew who shared the same characteristics relevant to the study Chadwick,

Bhar& Albrecht(1984). Second, a convenience sampling technique which was used for the distribution of the sociolinguistic questionnaire where the researchers accessed members of the community upon their availability was used. This technique was based on the 'social network' model proposed by Milroy and Milroy (1978) which enabled the researchers to approach the subjects via a third party. Four Assyrians assisted the researchers in the distribution and collection of the sociolinguistic questionnaire among other Assyrians such as neighbors, friends and relatives. The sample of the current study contained participants, covering different demographic variables as shown in Table (1) below.

Table (1). Distribution of the Participants as per their Demographic Data.

		Sex		Total
		Male	Female	
Age	(20 – 29)	9	7	16
	(30 – 39)	5	7	12
	(40 – 49)	9	6	15
	(50 – 59)	4	5	9
	60 and above	3	1	4
	Total	30	26	56
Marital Status		Male	Female	Total
	Single	14	10	24
	Married	16	15	31
	Widowed	0	1	1
	Divorced	0	0	0
	Total	30	26	56
Occupation		Male	Female	Total
	Business	9	7	16
	Education	2	3	5
	Medical field	0	0	0
	Civil service	3	5	8
	Handcraft field	8	0	8
	Student	2	0	2
	No occupation	3	6	9
Other	3	5	8	
Total	30	26	56	
Education		Male	Female	Total
	Elementary	1	1	2
	Secondary	4	7	11
	Diploma	8	10	18
	Bachelor degree	14	8	22
	Master	2	0	2
	Ph. D	1	0	1
Total	30	26	56	
Residency		Male	Female	Total
	Assyrian neighborhood	0	0	0
	Arab neighborhood	23	22	45
	Mixed neighborhood	7	4	11
	Total	30	26	56

3.1. Instruments of the Study

To accomplish the objectives of the study, the researchers utilized two instruments. These instruments were interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire.

3.2. Interviews

The researchers relied heavily on the interviews to gather data for the following reasons. First, it helped gather the

sociolinguistic background of the community and get deep insight in the language situation among the Assyrians of Jordan. Finally, the interviews helped construct the linguistic questionnaire.

The interviews were open-ended and were conducted informally with a number of figures from the community who had different religious, economic, social and educational backgrounds. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Upon the convenience of the interviewees' time and place,

the researchers set the date and time for each interview in advance.

At the beginning, the researchers introduced themselves and gave a brief summary of their research and its objectives. Then, they asked the interviewees various questions related to their history, the time they reached Jordan, the waves of migration they experienced, the reasons that led them to leave their original regions, the estimated number of the Assyrians of Jordan, the social and religious organizations, and their linguistic background. During the interviews, several questions were raised, which in turn helped the researchers to gain valuable information about the community.

3.3. The Sociolinguistic Questionnaire

The designed questionnaire was created specifically to meet the purpose of the study. The questionnaire was based on similar previous questionnaires designed by researchers who investigated ethnic minorities in the Arab world and in the West such as Dweik (2000), Jamai (2008), Martin (2009), Kondakov (2011), Dweik & Nofal (2014) and Dweik & Al-Obaidy (2014).

The questionnaire comprised two parts; the first was the demographic one which aimed to describe the social and the linguistic background of the respondents. The second part which included six sections was designed to provide the information needed in order to answer the questions of the study.

The second part, titled "domains of language use", aimed at finding the situations in which the participants used each language. Six domains were listed; namely home and family, church, media, neighborhood and friends, workplace and finally emotional self- expressions. The participants were asked to choose the suitable answer from the following options:

Only Syriac	Mostly Syriac	Both Syriac & Arabic	Mostly Arabic	Only Arabic
-------------	---------------	----------------------	---------------	-------------

The family and home part consisted of ten different family members and occasions, such as father, mother, family meetings, etc... Five items focused on language use at the church. They asked questions about the languages used in prayers and with different people such as the priest and fellow prayers when discussing religious matters. The media part contained three items listed to get information about the languages used when interacting with media such as TV, radio and the internet. Moreover, one open-ended question was listed to ask about the participants' knowledge of any international magazines or organizations that are concerned with Assyrians. The part related to the neighborhood and friends consisted of three items. Three other questions

concentrated on language use among different people in the workplace were used when discussing different topics. The last four items in this section dealt with the language used in inner speech and when expressing emotions such as happiness, anger and confusion.

4. Results

The first question of this study is "what is the sociolinguistic background of the Assyrians of Jordan?"

The Assyrians of Jordan came originally from the upper Mesopotamia (TurAbdin region south-east of Turkey and the surrounding villages such as Azach, Midyat, Maserte, Mardin and nearby areas). The Assyrian population of that area was forcibly dislocated and massacred by Ottoman and Kurdish forces during World War I. It was reported that these massacres were part of the Ottoman campaign against the Christian minorities of the Empire (E, Anz, personal communication, February 19, 2013). As a result, they left their villages and arrived in Jordan in two waves:

During the first wave (1915 - 1918), few families arrived in Jordan and settled in different cities such as Madaba, Ajloun, Amman and Zarqa. Those families lived a simple life in very simple houses and practiced their religion in other Christian churches such as the Roman Orthodox church.

The second wave (1948) happened when large numbers of Assyrian families left Jerusalem and Bethlehem as a result of the mass displacement of all non-Jewish people in Palestine under pressure by the Israelis in 1948 (E, Anz, personal communication, February 19, 2013). The Assyrians sought living in peaceful areas near holy places. They found their destination in Palestine because it embraced several holy places such as the Church of Resurrection in Jerusalem and the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. So, large number of the families headed towards Palestine. Some of them went directly and others stopped in Syria, Lebanon or Iraq for several years and finally they all gathered in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Then, after the Israeli occupation of Palestine in 1948, they were oppressed and displaced as the Israelis treated all the non -Jewish people in Palestine as their enemies (M, Bursheh, personal communication, February 3rd, 2013). As a result, they moved to Jordan as is the case of all the Palestinians at that time. At the beginning, the Assyrians lived together in Al- Muhajerren area in Amman (literary translated as immigrants). Then, when the "Syrian School" and the "Syrian Church" (as they were called at that time) were established in Al-Ashrafiah area in Amman, large number of the families moved to live in the neighboring area. But after their economic status improved, they moved to live in several western neighborhoods in Amman (E, Anz, personal communication, February 19, 2013).

All the Assyrians of Jordan are Christians; the majority are Orthodox who follow the "Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate" in Syria. The "Syrian Orthodox Church" in Amman was built in 1959. Until that time, the Assyrians lived in Jordan without a church; instead they followed the "Monastery of St. Mark for Syrian Orthodox" in Jerusalem to which they sent their children in order to learn religion and Syriac. A priest used to come to Jordan from Jerusalem on Sundays to hold prayers and to take care of the civil and religious affairs of the Assyrians in Jordan. The situation remained unchanged until they were able to build their own church in Al-Ashrafieh area in Amman and the first head of the church was father Botros Toma. In 2010, a new large church was built in Al-Sweifieh neighborhood (B, Toma, personal communication, February 28, 2013).

All the Assyrians of Jordan speak Arabic fluently as they all receive their education in public and private schools and universities where Arabic is the first and official language. In addition, they speak a Neo-Aramaic dialect. There are two relatively different varieties of Syriac; the standard written language and the colloquial one (Dweik, 1986). Nowadays, A scanty number of the Assyrians mainly speak two Neo-Aramaic dialects namely Western and Eastern. The Eastern dialect which they call "Madenkhaya" or Swadaya is mainly spoken by the Eastern Assyrians especially the Chaldeans and Nestorians while the Western dialect which they call "Toroyo" or "Ma'reboyo" (Toroyo means the mountainous and Ma'reboyo means the western in the Aramaic Language) is mainly spoken by the Orthodox and the Catholic Syrians and the Maronites (M, Bursheh, personal communication, February 3rd, 2013).

At church, prayers and ceremonies can be read in one of three different forms of language (this process is called "Gersony"); Syriac, Arabized Syriac (Syriac words written in Arabic alphabets) and the last one is translation of the ceremonies into Arabic (A, Jeries, personal communication, March 9, 2013).

The Assyrians of Jordan are devoted to work. They usually achieve great success in most fields they work in. As soon as they reached Jordan as refugees escaping from oppression and displacement, they started to work in every possible field to support their families. They worked in agriculture, handicrafts, and in construction and painting. After that, they joined hands with the Jordanians and became an integral part of the community and ran various kinds of businesses. To name some of the successful figures; Michelle Marto served as the Minister of Finance in 1999. Currently, the Major General Michelle Hanna serves as the Director of the

Department of Finance in the Arab Jordanian Army. It is also worth mentioning that there are many well-known Assyrian businessmen in Jordan; for example, one of the biggest auto glass factories in the region is owned by Mr. Edmond Anz. Similarly, a leading car-radiator factory in the Middle East is owned by Mr. Jamil Estefan. Dr. Anwar Jeries, the hydrogeology professor at Mu'tah University is an Assyrian educated figure. Religiously, the Head of the Council of Churches in the Middle East is George JamilHaso.

The Assyrians, like other ethnic communities in Jordan, have established their own cultural and social associations. The Syrian Orthodox School was established in Al-Ashrafieh region in Amman in 1950 where they sent their children to learn, in addition to the public curricula, the Syriac language and religion. Before the establishment of the Church in Amman, the prayers were held in the school which later, in 1990, was closed due to financial problems.

In 1950, "The Syrian Orthodox Charity Association" was established. It was a charity concerned with observing the school, taking care of the church and helping the poor either Assyrians or others. The administrative body of the Association consisted of ten members elected by the Assyrians of Jordan for a two-year period and then these ten members elect the Association Head (W, Neme, personal communication, March 12, 2013).

Internationally, some organizations and magazines concerned with the Assyrian affairs were established in several places. For example, the World Council of Arameans (WCA) is an international organization situated in the Netherlands which is dedicated to serve the interest of the Aramean (Syriacs) all over the world. Additionally, there are two religious and social magazines; The Patriarchate Magazine which is a monthly magazine issued by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus and Al-Hikma which is issued in Jerusalem. Those magazines contain articles and essays in Arabic and Syriac. Moreover, the Assyrians watch mainly two Assyrian TV Channels namely Suryoya and Suryoyo.

The second question of this study is "In what domains do the Assyrians of Jordan use Syriac and Arabic?"

This question focuses on the languages used by the respondents in various domains including home, neighborhood, workplace, church, media and emotional self – expressions. The respondents are asked to choose one among five choices indicating the language used in each domain. The results are presented by combining the two choices "Arabic" and "only Arabic" together and "Syriac" and "only Syriac" together.

Table (2). Language Use at Home and among the Family Members.

Questions What language do you use when you talk	Only Syriac%	Mostly Syriac%	Both Syriac and Arabic%	Mostly Arabic%	Only Arabic%	Total%
to your relatives during a phone call?	1	0	2	13	84	100
to your grandfather?	2	0	2	17	79	100
to your grandmother?	2	0	2	23	73	100
to your other relatives?	2	0	2	28	68	100
to your children?	0	2	2	14	82	100
at family meetings?	0	2	2	30	66	100
to your father?	2	0	4	21	73	100
to your brothers and sisters?	2	0	4	14	80	100
to your spouse?	2	0	4	10	84	100
to your mother?	2	2	4	26	66	100

Results in Table (2) above show the languages that the respondents use at home and when they talk to family members. Results indicate that the overwhelming majority of the respondents, 95 %, use Arabic at home with their family members and relatives and only 2% use Syriac while 3% use both languages. The results presented in Table (2) also show that 97% of the respondents speak Arabic when they talk to their relatives during a phone call. Moreover, when the respondents are asked about the language they use when they talk to their grandfathers, 96% of them choose Arabic while only 2% use Syriac and 2% use both languages. The same percentage, 96%, is shown for the language used when talking to grandmothers, to children, to other relatives, and at family meetings.

Regarding the language used with their fathers, 94% of the respondents prefer using Arabic while only 2% use Syriac

and 4% use both languages. Similarly, 94% of them use Arabic when they talk to their brothers and sisters and, again, 94% of the married respondents speak Arabic to their spouses. Finally, results from Table (1) above indicate that 92% of the respondents speak Arabic to their mothers.

With regard to church and religion domain, results from Table (2) below indicate that 77% of the respondents use Arabic and 9% use Syriac while 14 % use both languages.

Table (3) below shows that 88 % of the respondents use Arabic when they discuss religious subjects outside the church, 80% use Arabic when they talk to the priest or the clergyman, 75% to use it with their fellow worshippers at church. Finally, the least use of Arabic is shown when the respondents pray and supplicate at church while 64% of them use Arabic, 25% use Syriac and 11% use both languages.

Table (3). Language Use at Church.

Questions What language do you use	Only Syriac%	Mostly Syriac%	Both Syriac & Arabic%	Mostly Arabic%	Only Arabic%	Total%
in the religious meetings outside the church?	0	4	8	27	61	100
when you talk to your fellow worshippers at church?	2	5	18	14	61	100
when you talk to the priest or clergyman?	2	11	17	18	52	100
when you pray and supplicate at Church?	11	14	11	21	43	100

Despite the fact that the percentage of using Arabic in this domain is relatively high, it is still low compared to other domains. These results can be justified in light of the fact that the original language of the prayers at church is Syriac but due to the fact that most of the Assyrians are not proficient in

Syriac, as pointed out in Table (1), the prayers are written in what is called "Gersony"; three different forms of language, Syriac, Arabized Syriac (Syriac words written in Arabic alphabets) and the last one is translation of the ceremonies into Arabic.

Table (4). Language Use at Workplace.

Questions What language do you use:	Only Syriac%	Mostly Syriac%	Both Syriac and Arabic%	Mostly Arabic%	Only Arabic%	Total%
when you discuss general topics with your colleagues at work (weather, sports, politics etc.)?	0	0	0	11	89	100
with your fellow employees?	0	0	2	23	75	100
with your boss to discuss business and technical matters?	0	0	3	33	64	100

Table (4) above indicates that the respondents use mainly Arabic in the workplace domain where 96% use Arabic 4%

use both languages and none of them use Syriac. Results show that all the respondents,100%, use Arabic when

discussing general topics with their colleagues at work, 98% of them use Arabic with their fellow employers and 98% use Arabic when discussing technical matters with their boss.

Table (5). Language Use and Emotional Self-Expressions.

Questions	Only Syriac %	Mostly Syriac %	Both Syriac and Arabic %	Mostly Arabic %	Only Arabic %	Total %
What language do you use:						
when you are confused or stressed?	0	0	2	14	84	100
when you express happiness?	0	2	2	7	89	100
when you express anger?	0	2	2	14	82	100
in your dreams?	0	2	4	14	80	100

Similarly, Table (5) above presents results for the language used by the respondents when they express emotional reactions and unconscious feelings. Results prove that Arabic is dominant again where 96% of them use Arabic and only 4% use both languages. Also, Results indicate that 98% of the respondents use Arabic when they are confused

or stressed; 96% of them use Arabic to express happiness or to express anger and 94% also use Arabic in their dreams.

Again, results presented in Table (6) below indicate that Arabic is dominant in the neighborhood and friends domain. The vast majority of the respondents, 95 %, use Arabic and none of them uses Syriac while only 5% use both languages.

Table (6). Language Use in the Neighborhood and with Friends.

Questions	Only Syriac%	Mostly Syriac%	Both Syriac & Arabic%	Mostly Arabic%	Only Arabic%	Total%
What language do you use:						
When you buy grocery?	0	0	2	5	93	100
With your neighbors?	0	0	5	11	84	100
When you meet friends in the neighborhood?	0	0	8	29	63	100

When they are asked about the language they use in this domain, 98% of the respondents prefer to use Arabic when they buy their needs; 95% use Arabic when they talk to their neighbors and 92% of them use Arabic when they meet their friend in the neighborhood.

Results in Table (7) below show that the respondents favor Arabic in the 'media domain'. Results point out that none of

them uses Syriac in this domain. The overwhelming majority, 91 %, uses Arabic and 9% use both languages. Results also show that none of the respondents favors using Syriac in the media domain while 93 % of them favor Arabic when they listen to radio; only 7% listen to the radio in both languages Arabic and Syriac. Also, 90% favor Arabic when they watch TV, and 89% browse internet by using Arabic.

Table (7). Language and Media.

Questions	Only Syriac%	Mostly Syriac%	Both Syriac & Arabic%	Mostly Arabic%	Only Arabic%	Total%
What language do you use:						
In what language do you listen to the radio?	0	0	7	18	75	100
In what language do you watch TV?	0	0	10	27	63	100
What is the language of the internet websites that you browse?	0	0	11	25	64	100

To conclude, results from tables 1-6 prove that the majority of the Assyrians of Jordan use Arabic at home among family members; at Church with the celebrant and fellow worshippers, at the workplace with fellow workers; in the neighborhood with neighbors; in the emotional self-expressions such as dreaming and cursing and in the media domain especially when listening to radio stations and watching television programs. However, a scanty number of the respondents still use Syriac in the church and at home with family members.

5. Discussion

Results related to the domains of language use prove that the

Assyrians of Jordan use the host language (Arabic) in almost all the domains. The results reported in Table (2) concerning language use at home show that the overwhelming majority of the Assyrians of Jordan choose Arabic to communicate at home with several members of the family.

This may indicate that the Assyrians of Jordan are losing their ethnic language in one of the most important domains of language use which is the home and family domain. This result could be analyzed in the light of Fishman (1989) who claims that "what begins as the language of social and economic mobility ends, within three generations or so, as the language of the crib as well, even in democratic and pluralism-permitting contexts" (p. 206). Since the sample of

the study belongs to the third or the fourth generation, this fact proves the validity of Fishman's claim.

Results in Table (3) prove that a great number of the Assyrians of Jordan use Arabic at church when discussing different topics with different people such as clergymen and fellow worshippers.

Despite the fact that the percentage of using Arabic in this domain is relatively high, it is still low compared to other domains. These results can be justified in light of the fact that the original language of the prayers at church is Syriac but due to the fact that most of the Assyrians are not proficient in Syriac, as pointed out in Table (1), the prayers are written in what is called "Gersony" which means using three different forms of language; Syriac, Arabized Syriac (Syriac words written in Arabic alphabets) and the last one is translation of the ceremonies into Arabic.

Results reported in Table (4) show that the Assyrians of Jordan use mainly Arabic in the workplace when talking to different people and while discussing several types of topics. This result could be explained by the fact that the Assyrians work in different workplaces that demand the use of the mainstream language which is Arabic. This result also indicates that they are integrated in the Jordanian community.

Results reported in Table (5) concerning language use and emotional self-expression show that Arabic is mostly used in psychological situations such as when dreaming, when angry or confused and when happy. Almost the majority of respondents indicate the use of Arabic when they dream, confused or angry and when they want to express happiness. This result may indicate that the Assyrians of Jordan regard Arabic as their first language. This result is in line with Fishman (1966) who emphasizes the role of psychological processes in maintaining or losing ethnic languages.

Similarly, results shown in Table (6) indicate that the Assyrians of Jordan use Arabic when they interact with different people in the neighborhood for several purposes. This result may be justified by the fact that the Assyrians of Jordan do not live together in their own neighborhoods but they are spread all over Amman. At the beginning, they were gathered in certain regions such as Al-Muhajereen and Al-Ashrafeieh but as their economic status improves, they moved to live in more prestigious suburbs in Amman.

Again, Results shown in Table (7) indicate that the vast majority of the respondents use Arabic in the media domain. Despite the existence of a well-known Assyrian TV channel called Suroyo, Arabic is still the predominant language used in media because this channel is transmitted in Arabic and Syriac and the Assyrians of Jordan prefer using Arabic when watching it. Additionally, "Al- Hikma" magazine is a cultural

and religious Assyrian magazine published in Arabic and contains some articles written in Syriac.

This result agrees with Lucca et al.(2008) who states that religion does not seem to be a valid motivation for maintaining Arabic among the Moroccans in Italy. However, this result disagrees with Oshana(2003) who concludes that the religious affiliation has a very important role in the Assyrian language maintenance.

These results prove that the host language (Arabic) is used in all the domains of language use. Results also prove that Syriac is minimally used in such domains as church, home and among family members. These results support the findings of Holmes(2001),Dweik (1986) and Odisho(1999) who maintain that shift occurs when the host language is used in most of the key domains.

The results indicate that the Assyrians of Jordan are witnessing a state of language shift towards the majority language (Arabic). These findings agree with Yildiz(2000) who mentions that most Aramaic-speaking groups are losing their native language gradually in struggle with Arabic and it agrees with Fishman (1989) who suggests that when an intrusive (minority) language comes in contact with an indigenous (majority) one, the minority language loses its influence to the majority language. Finally, it agrees with the studies of Dashti (2004) who investigated the language situation of the Kuwaiti Ajams, Al-khatib (2010) who investigated the language shift among the Kurds of Jordan, Brobely (2000) who investigated the language shift and maintenance of the Romanian minority community in Hungary. All these results concluded that the ethnic intrusive language shifted towards the majority language.

The results of the overall study reveal that Assyrians of Jordan speak Arabic fluently as they receive their education in public and private Jordanian schools and universities where Arabic is the language of instruction. Regarding Syriac, results indicate that a scanty number of them speak Syriac, especially while praying in the church. Moreover, Results show that the Church is the only place where they use their ethnic language, side by side with Arabic, while praying.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study revealed that:

1. the Assyrians who have been living in Jordan for almost three generations have assimilated themselves in the Jordanian community and shifted to the use of the mainstream language, Arabic. This is clear as the majority of them understand, speak read and write Arabic with ease. On the other hand, a scanty number of them know their ethnic language.

2. the Assyrians use the mainstream language, Arabic, in almost all domains of language use, especially at home, and with family members which is an indication of complete language shift.

References

- [1] Al-Khatib, M. and Al-Ali, M. (2010). Language and cultural shift among the Kurds of Jordan. *Sky Journal of Linguistics*, 23(1), 7-36.
- [2] Dweik, B. & Al-Obaidi, T. (2014). Language contact language use and attitudes among the Chaldo- Assyrians of Baghdad, Iraq: A Sociolinguistic Study. *Journal of Advances in Linguistics*. 3(3), 219-231
- [3] Brobely, A. (2000). The process and factors of language shift and maintenance: A sociolinguistic research in the Romanians minority community in Hungary. Retrieved august 19 2012 from <http://rss.archives.ceu.hu/archive/00001155/01/167.pdf>
- [4] Chadwick, B., Bahr, H. & Albrecht, S. (1984). *Social science research methods*. Prentice-Hall: England.
- [5] Dashti, A.(2004). Language maintenance or shift? An ethnographic investigation of the use of Farsi among Kuwaiti Ajams. *Arab Journal of Humanities*. Retrieved July 27, 2010 from <http://pubcouncil.kuniv.edu.kw>
- [6] Dunlap, S. (1995). Nationalism, native language maintenance and the spread of English: A comparative study of the cases of Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation) University of Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico. Retrieved February 13th 2013 from <http://ponce.inter.edu/vl/tesis/sharon/diss.html>
- [7] Dweik, B. (1986). *Research papers in applied linguistics*. Hebron: Hebron University Press.
- [8] Dweik, B. (2000). Linguistic and cultural maintenance among the Chechens of Jordan. *Language, Cultural and Curriculum*. 13. (2). 184-195.
- [9] Dweik, B. Nofal, M & Qawasmeh, R. (2014). Language use and language attitudes among the Muslim Arabs of Vancouver/ Canada: A sociolinguistic study. *International Journal of Linguistics and Communication*. 2 (2), 75-99.
- [10] Ferguson, C., Heath, S., & Hwang, D.(1981). *Language in USA*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Fishman, J. (1966). *Language loyalty in the United States*. The Hague: Mouton and Co.
- [12] Fishman, J.(1972). *the sociology of language*. Rowley: Newbury House.
- [13] Fishman, J. (1989). *The rise and fall of the ethnic revival: Perspectives on language and ethnicity*. New York: Mouton.
- [14] Gabsi, Z. (2011). Attrition and maintenance of the Berber language in Tunisia. *Int'l. J. Soc. Lang*, 211(1), 135-164.
- [15] Holmes, J (2001) *an introduction to sociolinguistics*, New York: Longman.
- [16] Jamai, A. (2008). *Language use and maintenance among the Moroccan minority in Britain*.(Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation). University of Salford: UK.
- [17] Kiraz, G. (2001). Assyrian or Syriac?: common language and heritage, different denominations. Retrieved on September 13, 2012 from http://www.midyatcity.com/articles/as-syr_kiraz.doc
- [18] Kondakov, A. (2011). *Koch survey wordlists and sociolinguistic questionnaire*. India: SIL International
- [19] Lucca, D., Masiero, G. and Gabriele(2008). Language socialisation and language shift in the 1b generation: A study of Moroccan adolescents in Italy. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 5 (1), 53-72.
- [20] Martin, N. (2009). *Arab American Parents' Attitudes toward their Children's Heritage Language Maintenance and Language Practices*. (M.A thesis). University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: USA. Retrieved from https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent?id=uuid:15b293f9-982f-445f-9add-400e48ad38b4&ds=DATA_FILE
- [21] Milroy, J. and Milroy, L. (1978). Belfast: Change and variation in an urban vernacular. In P. Trudgill (Ed.). *Sociolinguistic patterns in British English* (pp. 19-36). London: Arnold.
- [22] Dweik, B & Nofal, M. (2014). Language maintenance among the Indians of Yemen: A sociolinguistic study. *International Journal of Arabic English Studies*. 13 (1), 89-112.
- [23] Odisho, E. (1999). Assyrian language maintenance and erosion in U.S: A World War immigrant family case study. *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 13 (1), 3-15.
- [24] Oshana, D. (2003). Cultural identification, Linguistic Competency, and Religious Participation as Mediating Constructs in the Development of Ego Identity among Assyrian American Adolescents.(Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation) .Loyola University: Chicago.
- [25] Sofu, H. (2009). Language shift or maintenance within three generations: Examples from three Turkish-Arabic speaking families. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 6 (3), 246-257.
- [26] Tsitsipis, L. (2009). *Language shift and Maintenance*. Retrieved from <http://www.eolss.net/Sample-Chapters/C04/E6-20B-09-02.pdf>
- [27] Yildiz, E. (1999). The Assyrians: A historical and current reality. *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 13 (1), 15-30.
- [28] Yildiz, E. (2000). The Aramaic language and its classification. *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies*, 14 (1), 23-44.
- [29] Younan, P. (2000). *History of Aramaic*. Retrieved from <http://www.peshitta.org/initial/aramaic.html>.