

Factors Enhancing Language Use in a Bilingual Turkmen Community in Baghdad

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the factors that enhance language use among the Turkmen of Baghdad. The study attempted to highlight the factors that led them to use their ethnic language and Arabic which is the official language of Iraq in different domains. The researchers selected a one-hundred-participant sample from the Turkmen of Baghdad covering different age, gender and educational background. The instrument of the study was open-ended interviews. Results showed that the Turkmen of Baghdad maintained their ethnic language and used it in different domains of language use. The results also revealed that social, cultural and political factors played a significant role in using their ethnic language in Baghdad. Arabic was used as a daily language of communication in all formal channels related to the government whether it is in education, i.e. schools, universities, in media or in official situations.

Keywords

Language Use, Factors, Turkmen, Baghdad, Bilingualism

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1. Introduction

It is axiomatic that that language interacts with non-linguistic elements such as the society and environment. Such interactions may affect both parties positively or negatively. The resultant outcomes of the interaction between language and society include determining the vitality of the language in the society and the intergenerational transmission of language from grandparents to parents and grandchildren, and the consequent use of that language in the society as well. One of the cases where linguistic and non-linguistic elements bilaterally interact is the Turkmen community in Baghdad whose native language, Turkmen, has been in contact with the mainstream language, Arabic for decades.

The presence of more than one language in the same country may have an impact on the linguistic situation of each language, especially when there is one official language, regardless of the languages of other minorities. On this basis, the researchers decided to investigate the factors that enhance

language use among Iraqi Turkmen of Baghdad.

Many studies have dealt with ethnic minorities in the Middle East, but to the best knowledge of the researchers, studies that have investigated language use are scanty. What distinguishes this study from the previous ones conducted in the Middle East is its focus on the Turkmen of Iraq. Studies conducted in Jordan for example dealt with small ethnic minorities, i.e the Chechens, Circassians, Armenians, the Kurds and the Gypsies etc. The Turkmen of Iraq are considered a large ethnic minority that did not receive the attention of researchers and scholars.

This study is expected to help other researchers who want to conduct studies about similar topics with other minorities either in Baghdad or elsewhere. Moreover, the current study can be helpful to scholars, educators, students as well as members of the selected community.

Results are limited to the sample and to the instruments used in this research. Therefore, the findings of the study may not

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be generalized to all the Turkmen in Baghdad.

Who are the Turkmen of Iraq?

The Turkmen people are one of the minorities that live in Iraq. They are neither Arabs nor Kurds. Their Origins go back to Central Asia before they migrated to Iraq and other nearby areas. The Iraqi historian, Al-Hassany (2013) who described the successive migrations of Turkmen tribes into Iraq, believed that the term 'Turkmen' is applied to those people who have settled on lands separating the Kurdish territories from those of the Arabs. He also believed that the Turkmen are "the remnants of the armies brought by the Ottoman Sultan, Murat V, who recaptured Iraq from its Safawi rulers in 1638 A.D. and who remained in the recaptured territories maintaining a line of communication between the southern and northern Turkic provinces." (p.41)

Menon and Wimbush (2007) mentioned that the Turkmen are "Iraq's third-largest ethnic group after Arabs and Kurds" (p. 137). According to Demirci (1991), the 1957 census put the Iraqi population at 6,300,000 and the Turkmen population at 567,000. The importance of the 1957 census lies in the fact that this was the first and last Iraqi census which allowed the Turkmen people to register themselves as Turks. In other censuses conducted later, the 'Turkoman' category under the section of 'nationalities' was dropped.

According to Al. Hurmizi (2003), the Turkmen did not leave their ancestral lands in one massive migration. However, "they departed their land in successive waves over a long period and eventually settled in the Middle East". (p.10) The Turkmen's first migration took place in 1914 while the largest migration happened between 1959 and 1990 because of the persecution of the Turkmen people at that time. The Turkmen returned to Kirkuk (After the war of 2003) because of the unstable security situation in Baghdad. He maintained that the Turkmen of Iraq live mainly in the cities of Mosul, Erbil and Kirkuk which was the first town to settle in before they were forced to leave it and settle in Baghdad, and in the area around Diyala in addition to a sizeable Turkmen population in Baghdad. The area where the Turkmen predominantly live is called Turkmeneli.

2. Review of Literature

Many sociolinguists have discussed and elaborated on language contact in general and language maintenance and language shift in particular such as Fishman (1964, 1989), Weinreich (1974), Ferguson (1981), Clyne (1982), Hoffman and Cais (1984) and many other scholars and researchers.

(Fishman cited in Matras, 2009) predicts that the process of language shift in an immigrant context "complete over three generations. However because of factors which slow down

the rate of language shift, this may not be true for all communities". (p.50)

Fishman (1989) believed that cultural and linguistic change is inevitable and natural. He mentioned that language is indexical and symbolic of ethno-cultural behavior. As ethnicities meld, change or absorb and replace one another, it is inevitable that the languages of these ethnicities will be modified as well. Language change, per se, in the usual linguistic sense of alteration in "lexicon, semantics, syntax and phonology, is, of course, always ongoing, particularly between languages in contact". (p.67)

He recognized that partial language shift is possible. In such situations, the ethnic language is replaced only in certain areas of interaction "and a new pattern of inter-generational continuity is then stabilized". (p.178)

Fillmore (2000) stated that there are internal and external factors that lead to the loss of the native language. The internal force for this choice is the preference for social acceptance and conformity to the dominant group, and the necessity to communicate with those members. On the other hand, the external pressure comes from the sociopolitical reason in that the society opposes differences, divergence, and aliens (p. 208). He also mentioned that there is a role for family to play in minority children's first language maintenance.

Parents should be encouraged to find time to talk with their children, read to them (if this is a practice in the culture of the home), and teach them things that interest educated members of their group. Families that come from cultures with a rich oral tradition will have many stories and histories to share with the children. Teachers should encourage them to use these materials and to regard them as equal to written materials that other families might use with their children at home. (p. 209)

In the Jordanian context, Al-Refai (2013) investigated the language situation among the Assyrians of Jordan. This study aimed to investigate the domains and situations where the Assyrians of Jordan use both Syriac and Arabic and explored their attitudes towards each language. Moreover, the factors that either helped them to maintain their language or shift to Arabic were emphasized. The sample of the study consisted of 56 respondents. The instruments of the study were a community profile, open-ended interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Results showed that the Assyrians of Jordan are witnessing a shift towards the majority language "Arabic". They used Arabic in almost all domains. Syriac is still minimally used in the church and home domains. Additionally, results showed some historical and social, economic, political, demographic factors that enhanced language shift. Moreover, results indicated that the

habitual use of Arabic and generational distance had a vital role in language shift.

In the case of Yemen, Dweik and Nofal (2013) attempted to shed light on the factors that support the use of the Indian ethnic languages among the Indians of Yemen who live in the city of Aden, Yemen. The theoretical framework of the study was based on Fishman (1989). The researchers posed three questions concerning the background of the Indians of Yemen, their proficiency in Arabic and the Indian Ethnic languages and the factors that have helped them maintain the Indian ethnic languages. The selected sample included 86 respondents who were selected purposively to respond to a three-section language questionnaire. The results revealed that attitudinal, linguistic, social and political factors have helped the Indians of Yemen to maintain their ethnic languages. Results also indicated that while they are skilled in listening and speaking their ethnic languages, they are not competent in reading and writing. In contrast, they have good command in Arabic four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In Iraq, Dweik and Al-Obaidi (2014) explored the factors that enhanced the maintenance of the Syriac language among the Assyrians who constitute a large ethnic community in Iraq. The researchers used informal interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire. A convenient sample that consisted of 150 participants was selected. Results indicated that the Assyrians have been relatively successful in maintaining their ethnic language despite the long-term contact with many languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish and Persian. The factors that helped maintain the Syriac language included using it at home with family members and relatives, the church, the tight social relations, the media, the positive attitudes they exert towards it and internal marriages.

Again, In Jordan, Abdelkhalik (2014) conducted a study on the Turkmen's of Jordan language proficiency in Turkmen and Arabic, their use of Turkmen and Arabic in their daily interaction, the Turkmen's cultural aspects which they preserved and the factors that helped them to preserve their ethnic language and culture. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers followed the case study approach and utilized pilot questionnaire, semi-structured interviews as well as observation and chose a sample of five Turkmen families living in different parts of Amman - Jordan. The findings of the study indicated that the Turkmen of Jordan have preserved their culture in many aspects such as their life style, their clothing, their food and their marriage traditions. Additionally, the study revealed that the factors that helped them to preserve their ethnic language and culture include family, media, lack of education, their refusal of external marriages and their partial isolation from the Jordanian society.

3. Method

The population consisted of the Turkmen of Baghdad in general. A sample of 100 was selected purposively from different areas in Baghdad. The demographic background information about the participants' general background included data such as gender, age, religion, marital status, residency, level of education and the language of mother and father.

The researchers used informal interviews which are considered one of the most important means of gathering more reliable information that a questionnaire may not present and can give the researchers the chance to ask further questions and to observe the interviewee expressions, feelings, their tone of voice, hesitations while answering the questions.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to be analyzed. One of the researchers conducted the interview herself taking into consideration that the time and the place of the interview should be convenient to the participants. She set the date and time of each interview in advance. At the beginning of each interview, the researchers introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the study and its objectives. Then, they asked the interviewees different questions dealing with their history, religious organizations, social activities, residential distributions, and their linguistic background.

Initially, unstructured interviews were conducted with four key personalities from the Turkmen of Baghdad such as Mr. Thabt Ghafoor (Head of the Turkmen Front, Baghdad branch), Mr. Mahmoud AL. Bayati, Mr. Aaidn Abed Al. Ghafoor (employee in Kurdistan Bank, Baghdad branch), Maj. Aasgr Ali Mehdi in Iraqi army. (See Appendix A)

Then, structured interviews in the form of a questionnaire were distributed to 96 participants to provide their opinion on the factors that enhance the use of their ethnic language and Arabic as well. The interviewees were very helpful and welcoming. They provided the researchers with wide and valuable information. (See Appendix B)

4. Results of the Study

4.1. The Factors That Have Helped the Turkmen of Baghdad to Use Their Ethnic Language

Results reported in Table (1) present some factors that support the use of the Turkmen. While 98% of the participants believe that the family has a major role in maintaining their ethnic language, only 2% of them are undecided. All of the participants (100%) believe that living in a neighborhood with a majority of Turkmen is a positive

step that helps them to maintain their ethnic language. Furthermore, the results show that 98% of the participants believe that the internal marriage among the Turkmen ethnic group helps them preserve their ethnic language and just 2% disagree. Similarly, 96% believe that the continued suffering

of the Turkmen over years made them insist on maintaining their own ethnic language. Moreover, the overwhelming majority of them, (98%), believe that the strong family ties among the Turkmen help maintain their ethnic language.

Table (1). Factors that Support the Use of the Turkmen Language.

Items	SD %	D %	Un %	A %	SA %	Total %
Factors that support the use of the Turkmen language	-	-	2	60	38	100
Family has a major role in maintaining the Turkmen language.	-	-	-	44	56	100
Living in a neighborhood with a majority of Turkmen helps to maintain the Turkmen language.	-	2	-	34	64	100
Internal marriage among the Turkmen ethnic group helps them to preserve their ethnic language.	-	2	2	48	48	100
The Continued suffering of the Turkmen over years made them insist on maintaining their own ethnic language.	-	-	2	42	56	100
Strong family ties among the Turkmen ethnic group help maintain the Turkmen language.	-	-	4	40	56	100
Attending cultural activities in the Turkmen language such as rituals, and marriages are helpful in maintaining Turkmen language.	-	4	6	26	64	100
The pride in the Turkmen ethnic origin helps maintain the ethnic language	-	-	-	46	54	100
The nature of the place of residence in special lanes for Turkmen helps much to maintain the Turkmen language	-	-	-	48	52	100
The degree of social cohesion among the Turkmen helps a lot to maintain the Turkmen language	-	-	-	54	46	100
The large number of the Turkmen population in Iraq and specific in Baghdad helps maintain the Turkmen language.	4	6	12	44	34	100
The presence of Turkmen’s political parties has a role in maintaining the Turkmen language.	-	-	2	54	44	100
The presence of social clubs of the Turkmen has a role in maintaining the Turkmen language.	4	-	6	50	40	100
The educational policy in Iraq promotes ethnic groups to learn the languages of their ancestors.						

Key: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, Un: Undecided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree.

Moreover, 96% believe that attending cultural activities in the Turkmen language such as rituals, and marriages is helpful to maintain their ethnic language. Also the majority of the participants, (90%), believe that their pride in ethnicity helps them to maintain their language. It is also reported that 100%, believe that social cohesion among them as well as the large number of their population in Iraq, particularly in Baghdad, help a lot to maintain their ethnic language. However, 78% believe that political parties play a role in maintaining the Turkmen language, 12% are undecided and 10% disagree. Conversely, 98% confirm the importance of social clubs in maintaining the Turkmen language. Finally,

90% believe that the educational policy in Iraq encourages ethnic groups to learn the ancestors’ languages.

4.2. The Factors That Support the Use of Arabic

Table (2) below shows the factors that support the use of Arabic. 96% of the participants find that Arabic is useful for getting a job. Similarly, 94% believe Arabic is an important language in order to communicate with the other constituents of the Iraqi society.

Table (2). Factors that Support the Use of Arabic.

Items	SD %	D %	Un %	A %	SA %	Total %
Factors that support the use of Arabic	-	-	4	66	30	100
Arabic is generally useful for getting a job.	-	2	4	62	32	100
Arabic is important to communicate with the constituents of the Iraqi society.	-	-	-	60	40	100
Learning Arabic is necessary because it is the language used in schools and universities.	-	-	-	56	44	100
Arabic is the official language of the country.	-	2	-	44	54	100
Arabic is the language of Islam and the Holy Quran.	12	24	16	22	26	100
Arabic is the language of my childhood and I am emotionally attached to it.	-	6	18	50	26	100
Arabic is the language that is in line with modern life.	-	2	12	60	26	100
Arabic is the language that is considered the most effective in the community.	-	2	8	60	30	100
Arabic is the language that unites the Iraqi society.	-	-	8	56	36	100
Arabic is the language used in communicative with other fellow Arabs in the Arab world and the world at large.						

Key: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, Un: Undecided, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree.

Also, the results confirm that all the participants, 100%, support learning Arabic and believe that it is important and necessary because it is used in schools and universities. Similarly 100%, consider Arabic the official language of the country. Similarly, 98% regard Arabic the language of Islam and the Holy Quran. Furthermore, 48% agree that Arabic is the language of childhood and 36% disagree whereas 16% are neutral. However, only 6% do not consider Arabic the language that is in line with modern life while a large number of them, (76%) believe so.

The results also reveal that 86% of the participants assert that Arabic is the language which is considered the most effective in the community. Moreover, results show 90%, of the participants confirm that Arabic plays a significant role because it unites all the Iraqi society. Finally, the results assert that 92% take into consideration that Arabic is the language used in communication with other fellow Arabs in the Arab world and the world at large.

5. Discussion

Results reported in Table (1) show the factors that help and support the use of the Turkmen language. These factors include social, cultural and political ones. The great majority of the Turkmen emphasize the important role of the family, the strong family ties and the internal marriage that exists among members of the Turkmen ethnic group. These are some of the most important factors that helped them to maintain their ethnic language (Turkmen language) despite the presence of an ancient and great language as Arabic. This result agrees with Fillmore (2000) and Dweik & Al-Obaidi (2014) who reported that there was a role for family to play in ethnic language maintenance.

The continued suffering that the Turkmen people faced for many centuries also played an effective role. Similarly, the pride in the Turkmen ethnic origin has the greatest impact on maintaining their ethnic language. This result corresponds with that of Al-Rifa'e (2013) who commented on the political factors and their role in language maintenance and shift.

All participants assert that the numerical power of the Turkmen community in Iraq and particularly in Baghdad is an important factor in preserving their ethnic language. Although most of the Turkmen believe that living in special neighbourhoods helped maintain their ethnic language, actually, the majority of them live in the same neighborhoods side by side with the Arab majority and they still maintain their native ethnic language. This result is in line with Dweik and Nofal (2013) in that the community they studied lived in

isolated neighbourhood but later on members of the community settled in mixed neighbourhoods. However, it is comparable with that of Abdelkhaliq (2014) who concluded that the Turkmen of Jordan isolated themselves from the Jordanian community.

Results reported in Table (2) show the main factors that help and support the use of Arabic by the Turkmen. These factors are religious, economic and social. The vast majority of the Turkmen are Muslims, so they use Arabic beside their native language (Turkmen language) because it is the language of the Holy Quran. Furthermore, most of them use Arabic in prayers and when they talk with the worshipers. Such a result corresponds with Fishman (1989) who stipulated that the ethnic language is replaced only in certain areas of interaction "and a new pattern of inter-generational continuity is then stabilized". (p.178).

All participants use Arabic in all domains in addition to their ethnic language because it is the official language and the language of the majority in Iraq. Therefore, they must learn it in order to get jobs. It is also important in all educational fields.

Socially, almost all participants affirm that Arabic is the language of modern life. It is the language of civilization. It is the most effective language in the Iraqi society because it unites all Iraqi people who belongs to different religions, cultures and minorities. In addition, Arabic is the language used to communicate with other Arab communities all over the world. This result confirms with the results of Dweik & Nofal (2013) and Dweik & Al-Obaidi (2014) who show the importance of Arabic in uniting all members of society.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the overall results of the interviews revealed that the Turkmen community of Baghdad have used their ethnic language in many informal domains. This language use has been triggered by a variety of extra linguistic factors. These factors have included social, cultural and political ones; namely (1) the role of the family, the strong family ties and the internal marriage that exists among members of the Turkmen ethnic group, (2) the continued suffering that the Turkmen people faced for many centuries, (3) the pride in the Turkmen ethnic origin has the greatest impact on maintaining their ethnic language, (4) living in special neighbourhoods, and (5) Finally, the role of the Iraqi Government and its educational policies. On the other hand, the factors that have helped and supported the use of Arabic by the Turkmen have included religious, economic and social factors.

Appendix

Appendix A

Unstructured Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the factors that have enhanced the use of the Turkmen language in Baghdad?
2. In your opinion, what are the factors that have support the use of the Arabic language among the Turkmen of Baghdad?

Appendix B

Structured Interview Questions

1. To what extent do you agree that each of the following factors has enhanced the use of the Turkmen Language?

Factors that enhance the use of the Turkmen language	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Family has a major role in maintaining the Turkmen language.					
Living in a neighborhood with a majority of Turkmen helps to maintain the Turkmen language.					
Internal marriage among the Turkmen ethnic group helps them to preserve their ethnic language.					
The continued suffering of the Turkmen over years made them insist on maintaining their own ethnic language.					
Strong family ties among the Turkmen ethnic group help maintain the Turkmen language.					
Attending cultural activities in the Turkmen language such as rituals, and marriages are helpful in maintaining the Turkmen language.					
The pride in the Turkmen ethnic origin helps maintain the ethnic language					
The degree of social cohesion among the Turkmen helps a lot to maintain the Turkmen language					
The nature of the place of residence in special lanes for Turkmen helps much to maintain the Turkmen language.					
The large number of the Turkmen population in Iraq and specifically in Baghdad helps maintain the Turkmen language.					
The presence of Turkmen's political parties has a role in maintaining the Turkmen language.					
The presence of social clubs of the Turkmen has a role in maintaining the Turkmen language.					
The educational policy in Iraq promotes ethnic groups to learn the languages of their ancestors.					

2. To what extent do you agree that each of the following factors support the use of Arabic?

Factors that support the use of Arabic	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Arabic is generally useful for getting a job.					
Arabic is important to communicate with the constituents of the Iraqi society.					
Learning Arabic is necessary because it is the language used in schools and universities.					
Arabic is the official language of the country.					
Arabic is the language of Islam and the Holy Quran.					
Arabic is the language of my childhood and I am emotionally attached to it.					
Arabic is the language that is in line with modern life.					
Arabic is the language that is considered the most effective in the community.					
Arabic is the language that unites the Iraqi society.					
Arabic is the language used in communicative with other fellow Arabs in the Arab world and the world at large.					

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