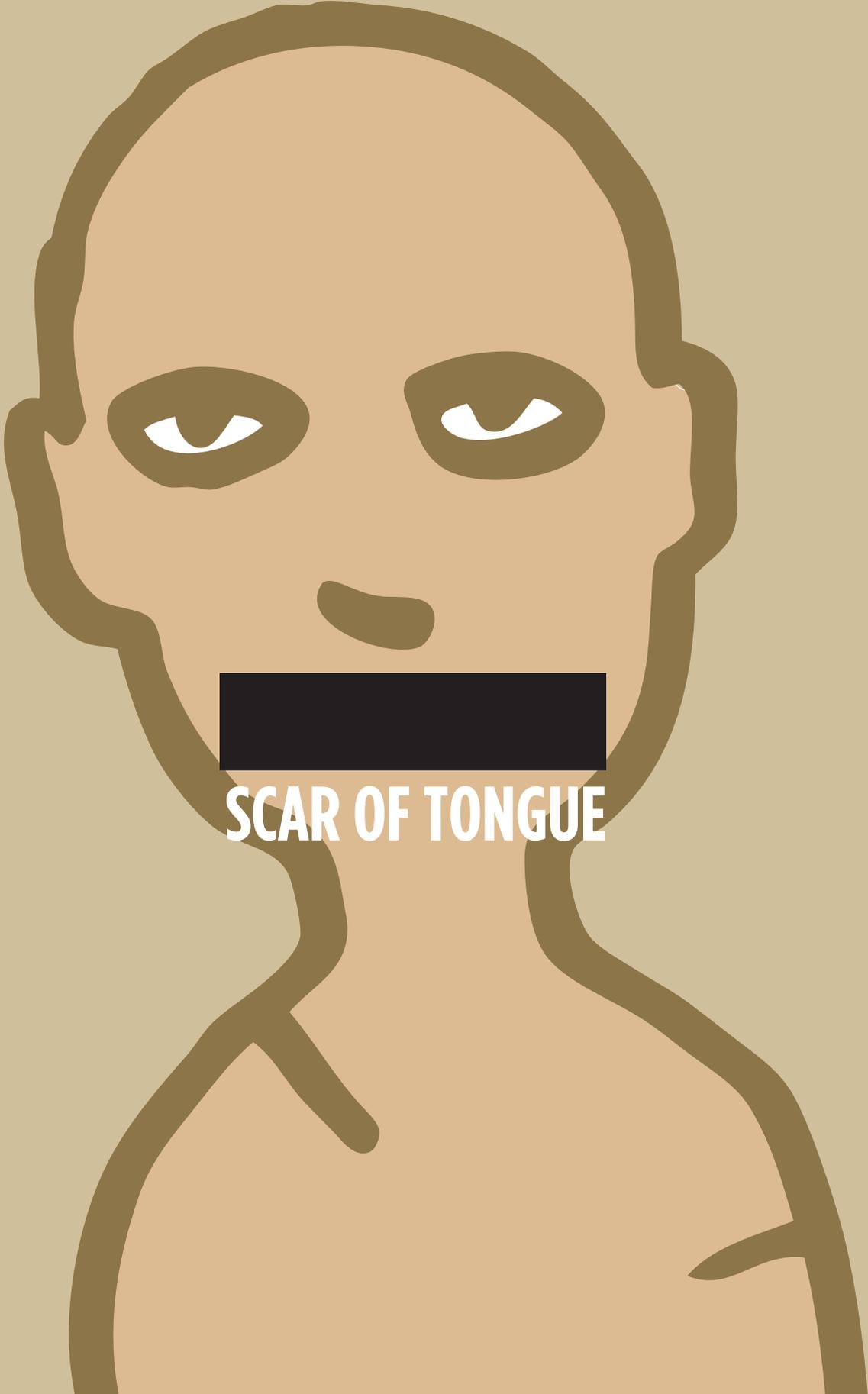


CONSEQUENCES OF THE BAN ON THE USE OF  
MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION AND  
EXPERIENCES OF KURDISH STUDENTS IN TURKEY

VAHAP COŐKUN M. ŐERİF DERİNCE NESRİN UŐARLAR



SCAR OF TONGUE



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**MARCH 2011**

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## CONTENTS

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: NATION-STATE, EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>A. “NATION-STATE” AND “NATIONAL IDENTITY”</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>B. ROLE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN THE BUILDING OF A NATION</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1. Language</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>2. Education</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: NATION-STATE, EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN TURKEY</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>A. ROLE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN BUILDING THE TURKISH NATION</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>1. National Education</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2. Language: Turkish</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>B: LANGUAGE POLICIES IMPLEMENTED IN TURKEY</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>1. The Period 1923-1950</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2. The Period 1950-1980</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3. 1980 and Subsequent Years</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4. Use of the Mother Tongue in the Existing Legislation and in Education</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: ISSUE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION AND KURDISH STUDENTS’ EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>A. FIELD WORK</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>B. FINDINGS</b>	<b>45</b>



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<b>CHAPTER FOUR: EVALUATION OF FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSION</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>A. ISSUES IDENTIFIED</b>	<b>79</b>
1. Lack of Communication	79
2. Beginning life with a 1-o deficit	81
3. Failing and Quitting School	82
4. Stigmatization	83
5. Violence	83
6. Keeping Quiet and Waiting for the Bell	84
7. Informants	85
8. Distinctions between Villages / Slums, Regions and City Centers	86
9. To Be a Kurdish Speaking Teacher or Not To Be	86
10. The Role of Parents	87
11. Language Shift	88
<b>B. ATTITUDES TO THE USE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>C. SUBTRACTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>D. A THEORETICAL APPROACH – THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC AND SOCIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES</b>	<b>92</b>
1. Psycholinguistic Principles Underlying Academic Development of Linguistic Minority Students	92
a. Language Proficiency and Academic Development	92
b. Linguistic Interdependence	93
c. Additive Bilingualism	93
2. Sociological Principles Underlying Academic Development of Linguistic Minority Students	94
a. Understanding Coercive Power Relations	94
b. Identity Negotiation	95
<b>E. RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>96</b>
1. Recommendations Concerning the Educational System	96
2. Social and Cultural Recommendations	99



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<b>CHAPTER FIVE: RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN THE MOTHER TONGUE – COUNTRY EXAMPLES</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>A. CORSICAN LANGUAGE – FRANCE</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>B. BASQUE LANGUAGE – SPAIN</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>C. UYGHUR LANGUAGE – CHINA</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>D. EVALUATION</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>EXAMPLES FROM INTERVIEWS</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>SUBJECT INDEX</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>AUTHOR INDEX</b>	<b>155</b>





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## PREFACE

*Beginning in the 1960s, when the political, cultural and economic demands of various social groups began to be more strongly reflected in the public sphere, the totalitarian policies of nation-states began to falter. In particular, authoritarian practices aimed at creating a common national identity and a single national language began to meet with significant objections. Groups that had been at odds with the prevailing majority on ethnic, linguistic and religious grounds and that had up to that time been kept at a distance from the administrative centre began to demand the preservation and protection of their identities and cultures.*

*These demands were also reflected in Turkey. The concept of citizenship developed by the Republican regime and the imposition of a common identity and lifestyle for people of varying languages, religions and ethnic origins met with significant objection from the late 1980s onwards. After the partial easing of the oppression arising from the coup d'état of 1980 especially, ethnic and religious groups thought of as damaging to national identity established by the capital, Ankara became more visible within society and began to participate more actively in politics. Groups that had not considered themselves part of acceptable society began to put forth demands for their unique character to be socially accepted and preserved. Women rebelled against the dominant male culture and adopt a variety of methods to fight sexist discrimination. Homosexuals drew attention to their oppression; they began to fight to gain equality as citizens with a different sexual orientation both in the private and the public sphere. Islamic circles also became involved, with their demands that women not be deprived of their rights because of their headscarves and that children be brought up in line with their faith. The Alawis challenged the Sunni character of the regime and put pressure on both political and legal mechanisms for the abolishment of obligatory religious lessons in schools. Non-Muslims expressed the necessity of coming to terms with the discrimination they have been subjected to in the past and present and to solve current issues deriving from this discrimination.*

*The demand for the recognition of Kurdish ethnic and cultural identity is of distinctive importance among these demands, which over the years have increased in type and variety. In this context, the most-emphasized demand and the one that forms the predominant part of the cultural rights claim consists of the use of the mother tongue – Kurdish – in education. Kurds base their demands in this area on three main principles.*

*First, the use of one's mother tongue in education is a human right. The framework of much contemporary law identifies education in one's own language as a right and considers the provision of equal services for all citizens as part of the state's responsibility. The state's duty is therefore to fulfill the requirements arising from this right. In Turkey however, throughout the Republican Period, the state has always considered the Kurdish language a threat to its policy of monolingualism; further, the nation has always denied the very existence of Kurdish. The fact that Kurdish is still perceived as a threat constitutes an anachronism at a time when the nation-state model is under serious revision, to say the least. It has now become imperative for Turkey to forgo its past policies and ensure the necessary conditions for the use of the Kurdish language in education.*



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*Second, the use of the mother tongue in education is a “sine qua non” for the preservation and development of the Kurdish language. Language is not only a means of communication; it is also a means of sustaining a culture. That is why the development and flourishing of a culture is directly related to the use of its language. A language used in education renews itself continuously, adapts to changes in all areas of life, leaves room for the development of new concepts, interacts with other languages and acquires richer content. However, when it is forbidden in education and in the public sphere, it remains trapped in daily life; over time it weakens and declines. The Kurdish language is currently faced with this danger and the only way to ward off this calamity is to use Kurdish in education.*

*Third, the use of Kurdish in education will make a positive contribution towards the resolution of the Kurdish issue, the most important issues currently facing Turkey. Different Kurdish political circles have developed very different perspectives for the solution of the Kurdish issue. But the certitude that Kurdish must be used in education is a point on which all Kurdish movements agree. In fact, the use of Kurdish in education is a point on which not only all Kurdish political and non-governmental groups agree, but also one that those who seek democratic methods for the resolution of the conflict also agree on. Findings by academics working in the fields of pedagogy, linguistics, sociology, political science and developmental psychology strongly point to the necessity of this outcome.*

*This requirement and the aforementioned demands constitute the starting point of this study, which aims to set forth the political, social, economic, psychological, educational and linguistic inequality and discrimination arising from the interdiction of using Kurdish in education and to contribute to the development of measures aiming at finding solutions to the outcomes.*

*The first two chapters of this study present the theoretical and historical background of the issue. Particular emphasis has been given to the prevention of the use of the mother tongue in education and to the connection between language and education policies of nation-states. The main thrust behind the emergence and growth of this issue in Turkey has been identified as the Turkish Republic’s historical policy aiming at building a national identity based on a single ethnic character. This chapter also discusses the imposition, via education and language, of this national identity that ignored differences within society and how the eradication of the public visibility of other identities has deepened this wound.*

*Chapters three and four contain a field study and its evaluation. The aim of this study is to present the way in which students, teachers and parents have been experiencing and are harmed by the inability to use Kurdish in education. To elucidate this claim, in-depth interviews were held with Kurdish students who went to school in varying years and places, with both teachers who speak and do not speak Kurdish and who have taught students who were completely unfamiliar with Turkish when they began school, and, finally, with parents. The findings from these interviews have been elaborately analyzed in parallel with local, international and theoretical studies and proposals for solutions to the issue have been presented.*

*Three country examples are examined in Chapter Five [with the aim of] conducting a parallel reading of these proposals. The examples presented by the Corsican language in France, Basque in Spain and Uygur in China, models where minority languages are used in education are debated, taking into consideration their historical and political contexts. This debate also aims at establishing the shortcomings and benefits of these models and what they can offer for the issue taken in this study. We hope that these observations will provide inspirations in the way through the development of models for the use of Kurdish in education.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### NATION-STATES, EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

The present-day state structure is mainly a product of modernity. In the Europe of the 16th and 18th centuries, sweeping changes in almost all areas of social life were brought on by acceleration in industrialization and of the commodification of economic relations, a transition to capitalist economy, a growth in the division of labor, an increase in scientific exploration, rapid urbanization and intense efforts towards democratization. This radical change resulted in a complete transformation of social and political institutions. It therefore became impossible for any institution, especially social and political ones, to preserve their traditional and pre-modern structure.<sup>1</sup>

The process of modernity also brought about a change in the structure of the “state.” The state strengthened its administrative capacity by gathering its territory under a single administration, enabling public participation in administration and establishing the borders of its sovereignty in an absolute way. While eliminating the powers, other than itself, that could use violence, it created new types and mechanisms of violence. The modernity of the state was based on its “central power;” thanks to geographical, legal and political centralization, the modern state acquired a more deterrent power than its predecessors. This power transformed the modern state into one of the elements ensuring that the general process of modernity was spread from Europe to other regions of the world. Furthermore, along with the process it represented, over time the modern state itself also became a universal model for the process.<sup>2</sup>

In comparison to earlier political structures, the modern state, based on centralization and financed via taxes, was able to fulfill necessities arising from social, economic and cultural modernity in a more efficient and functional way. Previous political structures were neither separated via absolute borders, nor did they encourage internal integration or homogenization. Although the feudal elite held vast territories under its command, it only possessed a minimum of military power and a limited capacity to command daily life. Empires had the power to impose taxes on their subjects, but they did not bother to form a cultural homogeneity.<sup>3</sup> However, the modern state covered a precise territory and had absolute power on it. This situation caused the identity of people living on lands with clear cut borders to be cast into a mould and a tendency arose according to which only people with a set identity could lay claim on the lands in question. The modern state therefore began to be identified with an entity called “nation” and the “nation”, an imagined community, came to form the source of the state’s sovereignty.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (London: Yale University Press, 1968), 142.

<sup>2</sup> Peter H. Merkl, *Political Continuity and Change*, (New York: Harper&Row Publishers, 1972), 55.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Calhoun, *Milliyetçilik* (Nationalism), Transl: Bilgen Sütçüoğlu, (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009), 93-94

<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Hayali Cemaatler* (Imagined Communities), Transl: İskender Savaşır, (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 1993). Also Vahap Coşkun, *Ulus-Devletin Dönüşümü ve Meşruluk Sorunu* (The Transformation of the Nation-State and the Issue of Legitimacy), (Ankara: Liberte Yayınları, 2009), 171-177.



## A. “NATION-STATE” AND “NATIONAL IDENTITY”

The consideration of the state together with the “nation” constitutes one of the major mental and structural changes brought about by the emergence of the modern state. According to Habermas, the fusion of the words “state” and “nation” into “nation-state” occurred after the revolutions of the late 18th century.<sup>5</sup> Heater too states that the separation of the concept of “nation” from its local context and its association with the concept of “state” took place after the 18th century.<sup>6</sup> [The association of the nation with the state brings about the subjection of the group called “nation” to be constructed by the state] The state imprints the nation and confers it a political identity.

The ascription of an identity to the nation is of critical importance for the nation-state. Although together with the acquisition of a modern state structure states acquired a previously non-existent administrative and geographical unity, this was not sufficient. What was necessary was a cultural unity that would complement and guarantee administrative and geographical unity. That is why the state spent a significant part of its energy and means to create symbols of national belonging that transcend bonds of local belonging and to use these to achieve cultural homogeneity.

Leveling cultural differences, constantly instilling the concept of “unity” in ethnic origin, language and religion and thus creating a society that is culturally monolithic became the top priority of all nation-states. Nationalism was the concept that the state employed to create a particular political identity. In fact, nationalism emerged as a political ideology after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when peoples in Europe began to organize themselves as nation-states.

Nationalist ideology contains certain principal postulates, of which there are four according to Smith: the first is the claim that the world is divided into nations, each of which has its own individuality, history and destiny. The second is that the nation is the source of all social and political power and that devotion to the nation is above all other types of devotion. The third is that if people wish to be free, they need to identify with a particular nation. And the fourth is that nations need to be free and secure in order for peace and security to reign in the world.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of these fundamental beliefs, nationalism creates concepts such as “national unity, national identity and brotherhood” and implements the public use of these concepts as widely as possible in order to ensure that the community interlocks around these concepts.

The aim of nationalist ideology is to ensure the state’s political unity, to combine differences under an integrated whole and to complete the process of economic modernization. All state resources are mobilized for this aim. Great armies are formed and a tax system is implemented in order to finance the state budget. The greater part of society is included in this system via schools and the military. A single tradition is identified or invented for language, history, art and daily life and this tradition is given precedence over all other pre-existing traditions. National educational institutions are formed, [standard] languages are imposed, exhibitions and museums are established and

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Öteki” Olmak, “Öteki”yle Yaşamak (The Inclusion of the Other), Transl: İlknur Aka, (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2002), 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Heater, *Yurttaşlığın Kısa Tarihi* (A Brief History of Citizenship), Transl: Meral Delikara Üst, (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 2007), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Millî Kimlik* (National Identity), Transl: Bahadır Sina Şener, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 121.



support is provided for artistic activities, national flags, hymns, symbols and traditions are invented with the aim of achieving a national culture.<sup>8</sup>

In the process of creating a homogeneous national identity superseding all local identities, the ruling class and its culture and institutions are of determining importance. National consciousness is created by the elite and transmitted to the masses via different methods. Ordinary people are expected to identify with the culture and institutions determined by the ruling educated classes, or to avoid openly disagreeing with them; this is what the creation of a nation requires. The historical function of nationalism is to construct a “super-ordinate national identity” above all identities in order to prevent subordinate identities such as family, community and clans from counteracting the state integrity and to make this into a point of focus for the loyalty of all people.<sup>9</sup>

## **B. THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN THE BUILDING OF A NATION**

As of the early 1800s, the process of nation-building, carried out by central organizations holding an enormous power and described as a “consolidated state”<sup>10</sup> by Tilly, indicates that nations are not natural formations but structures that have been constructed and invented. In order for a “unity” to be formed out of diverse communities connected to each other only via loose ties it is necessary to imagine and construct a “nation.”

Nationalism is the doctrine of nation-building. According to the precepts of nationalism, the nation is the natural and most appropriate social unit of political rule and every nation has the right to determine its own destiny. In other words, the nation-state is the ideal form of political organization and every sovereign state must have a single nation.<sup>11</sup> That is why all types of nationalism require a definition of nation. However, since there are no objective criteria to state precisely where or when a nation actually first came into existence, it is very difficult to obtain a definition of a nation that is acceptable by all. In this case nationalist ideology defines nation through reference to a “common culture” and to “language.” Moreover, when elements such as history, traditions, religion and ethnicity are common or shared, these too are considered as an indication of a nation. Nationalism considers all these elements as means that enable a sense of common belonging, it shapes them in line with its aims with the help of state-supported mechanisms and endeavors to consciously create national identities. This is called nation-building.

When nation-building processes are analyzed throughout the history, it becomes clear that when constructing and building nations, all states employ similar means, among which language and education – the subjects of the current research – are of great importance.

### **1. Language**

Language is one of the most important, if not *the* most, point of reference for both individuals and society. Language plays a major role in the shaping of an individual’s identity and it also fulfils important functions in shaping –for

<sup>8</sup> Charles Tilly, *Avrupa’da Devrimler 1492-1992* (European Revolutions, 1492–1992), Transl: Özden Arıkan, (İstanbul: Yeni Binyıl Yayınları), 59–60.

<sup>9</sup> Y. Furkan Şen, *Globalleşme Sürecinde Milliyetçilik Trendleri ve Ulus Devlet* (Nationalism Trends and the Nation-State in the Globalisation Process), (Ankara: Yargı Yayınevi, 2004), 37–38.

<sup>10</sup> Tilly, *Avrupa’da Devrimler 1492-1992*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Erdoğan, “Milliyetçilik İdeolojisine Dair” (Concerning Nationalist Ideology), (*Liberal Düşünce*, No. 15, Summer 1999), 90.



better or worse—social integration. Throughout the history, the use of language for political purposes, in the modern sense, is only encountered in modern times. The transformation of language into the subject and purpose of politics happened in parallel with the emergence of nationalist movements.<sup>12</sup> Because of the importance of language, nationalist ideology has intervened in its development with the aim of designing the public sphere.

Nationalism and its state model, the nation-state, attach specific importance to language. Language has two main implications; language is primarily a symbol; it is the concrete manifestation of the shared identity in nation construction; it is the symbol of “we”-consciousness. The establishment of the “we” consciousness within a nation-state can only be made possible by speaking a single language in the country. When people who speak different “local” languages begin to speak and understand the same “national” language, the slogans and principals of nationalism take root more easily within all social strata. Use of the same language by both the elite and ordinary people ensures that these groups embrace the same general aspirations and feelings and that when necessary they move together with the same purpose. Unity of language is not only important from a political and cultural standpoint, it also meets economic and practical needs, because for a national economy to develop and to be maintained within a country it is necessary for the same language to be valid all over the country.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, language can be a tool used to transform a population with different ethnic identities and languages into the semblance of a coherent whole in the interest of the nation. The more efficiently and widespread this tool is employed, the more inevitable the leveling of divergent attitudes and production (and reproduction) of a standard language and culture based on the principals of nationalism. A connection was initially established between citizenship and language in nation-states. A perfect statement of the connection between citizenship and nationalism as expressed through a common language can be found in John Stuart Mill:

*“Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist.”*<sup>14</sup>

At the time when Mill wrote this, unity of language did not exist in the three major European countries, where very different languages were spoken. When Italy achieved political unification, only two percent of its population was believed to speak Italian. Regarding France, there is data suggesting that in 1789 half of its population did not speak a word of French.<sup>15</sup> Barère, a member of the Public Security Committee in 1794, actually complained as following about this annoying situation:

*“Citizens! A free nation must have a single, identical language... we have seen that the Basque dialect, called Bas-*

<sup>12</sup> Özlem Eraydın Virtanen, “Dil Politikalarının Milliyetçilik Hareketlerindeki Tarihsel Kökenleri” (The Historical Origins of Language Policies within Nationalist Movements), within: *Aurupa Birliği Sürecinde Dil Hakları (Language Rights in the European Union Process)*, copyright: Ebru Uzpeder, (Istanbul: Helsinki Citizens Assembly Publication, Istanbul, 2003), 19.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed analysis of the use of language for economic, political and cultural unity, see: Anderson, *Hayali Cemaatler*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>14</sup> Cited by: Heater, *Yurttaşlığın Kısa Tarihi*, 136.

<sup>15</sup> For example Wright states that at that period French was the mother tongue of only three million people out of a French population of 31 million, and that another three million had limited knowledge of French. Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning –From Nationalism to Globalization*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 31.



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*Breton, and the German and Italian languages have perpetuated the dominance of bigotry and superstition... They have prevented the reform from penetrating nine Ministries and have therefore served the interest of France's enemy.. Abolish this papal empire by teaching the French language... Keeping citizens ignorant of their national language is equal to betraying the country.*<sup>16</sup>

In the same period, the German Empire was carrying out a policy of Germanization on those who spoke Polish, French and Danish. At the time of German unification, the percentage of those who spoke German is estimated to have been around 17 %. Hobsbawm states that Germans and Italians attached more importance to language than other nation-states. According to Hobsbawm, Germans and Italians valued their national language more than, for example, people reading and writing in English valued English: *“From the point of view of the German and Italian liberal middle classes, language constituted an argument of fundamental importance in the formation of a united national state.”*<sup>17</sup>

As language has both a symbolic and instrumental value, all nation-states intervene [in its development] in order to ensure that [social transformation] takes place along the desired monist-standard line. Languages are managed, guided and even re-created. A number of mechanisms are employed to ensure that everyone speaks the national language. With this aim, all state activities are held in a single language and the chosen language is imposed to the people of that country who speak different languages.

[The connections between different languages are identified and the configuration of the language is re-organized via both “status planning” and “corpus planning”].<sup>18</sup> Linguistic rules are thus established and the vocabulary is conferred a national quality and content. While in some languages certain words and concepts are prohibited, scientific research is carried out and institutions are founded with the aim of protecting and developing the chosen language. All these practices have developed in parallel with the nation-state’s project to transform the population.

Language is a cultural element that nationalism has always directed and interfered with, in order to shape the public domain. In the construction of the nation, language was considered on the one hand the indication of a common identity and of the “we” consciousness, and on the other was used as a fundamental tool for the transformation of the population of a nation-state in cases where this creation became political practice.

## 2. Education

Tilly cites the unprecedented efforts of nation-states to impose a single language, cultural practices and a standardized educational system as one of the main characteristics distinguishing a nation-state from other state models.<sup>19</sup> Standardizing education and rendering it obligatory is in fact the most important step towards

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<sup>16</sup> Heater, *Yurttaşlığın Kısa Tarihi*, 136-137.

<sup>17</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *1780'den Günümüze Milletler ve Milliyetçilik* (Nations and Nationalism Since 1780), Transl: Osman Akinhay, (Istanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, 1995), 127.

<sup>18</sup> Ronald Wardhaugh, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, (Blackwell, 2009), 378-383

<sup>19</sup> Tilly, *Aurupa'da Devrimler*, 61-62.



building a nation, because nation-states' fundamental claim is that a country's population is socially integrated and constitutes a meaningful whole.<sup>20</sup> This claim is considered to be fulfilled only via an effective education and school program.

Compulsory education is more effective than other mechanisms in nationalization. Initially, in particular, new national values were not strong enough to compete with prevailing and widely-accepted religious values and traditions. Compulsory education was used to indoctrinate citizens in line with values and objectives identified by the nation-state and over time it ensured that the values and objectives in question become internalized by the wider masses.

The French experience constitutes a good example for understanding the fundamental role of compulsory education and school in the nation-building process. In France, schooling has two missions: one is to instill in citizens' mind the idea that the Republic is placed at the one end of the history and that the country has a strong ability to integrate that has overcome all divisions in the past. The second is to equip people with the capacity to develop opinions freely. People are therefore freed from local and religious ties that limit them and thus become able to make their own decisions and express the general public will, together with other equal citizens such as themselves.<sup>21</sup>

It is possible to say that the education provided in Turkey's schools also has similar purposes. In the Turkish educational system too, national history begins with Atatürk's arrival in Samsun in 1919; the Republic is said to have overcome all kinds of crises and to have been established with great difficulties. Citizens are taught by heart that they owe everything to the Republic and its founder. Likewise, citizens are taught that loyalty to Republican values is the greatest of virtues and they are expected to behave in line with Republican ideology. In compulsory education, every discipline transmits certain values. For example, the main duty of the history classes is to contribute to the creation of the nation-state's primary need, national identity. And the first thing that needs to be done for the creation of a national identity is the creating of an imagined common memory. The teaching of history is designed in accordance with the historical memory needed by the nation-state; events believed to negatively affect the people are either passed over quickly, or ignored, or distorted. On the other hand, events believed to be of critical importance for the memories are parsed in detail and, if necessary, exaggerated.

Copeaux, who studied the teaching of history in Turkey, emphasizes that the historical narrative aims not only at teaching history, but also at creating an emotional bond with the past via the "land," "inheritance" and "martyrs."<sup>22</sup> There is a direct connection between the teaching of history and the matter of citizenship. The idea that this land has been acquired at the cost of ancestors' blood and that they therefore are the owners of an inheritance of great value is instilled in students. They are expected to feel gratitude towards their

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<sup>20</sup> Calhoun, *Milliyetçilik*, 107.

<sup>21</sup> Dominique Borne, "Fransız Eğitim Sisteminde Tarih, Coğrafya ve Yurttaşlık Bilgisi Tasarımı ve Bu Tasarımın Yurttaş Oluşumuna Katkısı" (L'Enseignement de l'histoire en France), within: *Dersimiz Yurttaşlık* (Citizenship Classes): Turhan Ilgaz, (Istanbul: Kesit Yayıncılık, 1998), 158-159.

<sup>22</sup> Etienne Copeaux, "Türkiye'de Tarih Öğretimi ve Yurttaşlık" (The Teaching of History and Citizenship in Turkey), within: *Dersimiz Yurttaşlık* (Citizenship Classes), copyright: Turhan Ilgaz, (Istanbul, Kesit Yayıncılık, 1998), 169 et al.



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ancestors and responsibility for the following generations and this expectation is materialized through the words embedded in history books.

The leading themes of the Turkish historical narrative include the necessity to reclaim the pride of being Turkish – wounded with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – the emphasis on a common history that goes very far back, the frequency of descriptions based on the idea of sovereignty on land of vast extent (“from the Adriatic to the Wall of China”) and the pride felt for the conferral to Turks of a special predisposition to form states (“No nation on earth has built as many states as the Turks”). On the other hand, the history is not only a source of pride; it also plays a role in national defense, because it allows “getting to know the enemy.” Threats and enemies can be both real and imaginary; what matters is to keep the community together via this emphasis on enemies.<sup>23</sup>

“National heroes” and “mythical tales” occupy an important place in the history curriculum of schools. It does not matter whether these heroes and tales actually existed or not; what matters is that the nation-state needs them. The objective of frequently referring to heroes and events in history is not to elucidate historical truths; it is to mobilize future generations in line with values prescribed by the state. That is why history’s duty is to create the heroes needed by the state.

Similar to history, the curriculum of other disciplines is also established on the basis of the state’s principles. Schools are therefore transformed into places where national identity symbols are created, the homeland is sanctified, dying for this land is exalted, tales of invented or discovered and exaggerated heroism are popularized and the official language is standardized and widely promoted. Schools and compulsory education thereby become the most functional tools in the nation-building.

Because of the functionality of schools, the nation-state considers education and the right of education as separate from everything else and attaches more importance to it. According to Gellner, although the state does not refrain from limiting or violating other individual rights, when it comes to the right of education, let alone violating it, it endeavors for everybody to benefit from it. As argued by Weber, the state not only has “monopoly on legitimate violence,” it should also have “monopoly on legitimate education.” Moreover, since people’s ability to find a job, their honor, safety and self-respect depends on the education they receive, holding monopoly on legitimate education is more important and of determining power for the state than holding monopoly on legitimate violence.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “The anti-Turkish propaganda led by Europe in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and consecutive military disasters caused such a trauma that the idea – incorporated into education – that a patriotic alertness against such attacks is a duty is a consequence of that trauma. In fact, the knowledge of history should enable all Turks to respond to such attacks.” Copeaux, *Türkiye’de Tarih Öğretimi ve Yurttaşlık* (The Teaching of History and Citizenship in Turkey), 181.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Gellner; *Uluslar ve Ulusçuluk* (Nations and Nationalism), Transl: Büşra Ersanlı Behar - Günay Gökse Özdoğan, (Istanbul, İnsan Yayınları, 1992), 61-72; Coşkun, *Ulus-Devletin Dönüşümü* (The Transformation of the Nation-State), 247-253.



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## CHAPTER TWO

### NATION-STATE, EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN TURKEY

When the languages of any political unit are examined, language policies and language rights should be addressed together, because they interact with each other both on a national and international level and they also influence individuals' language behavior.<sup>25</sup>

Language policies can be defined as a totality of principles, decisions and practices concerning the languages used within a particular political unit, their areas and regions, their development and the rights to their use.<sup>26</sup> Language policies should not be thought of as consisting only of legal regulations. And language policies should not be equated only with laws determining language rights. Some policies may not include any laws and practices concerning language and may be different from what is stipulated by law. Language policies may be formed directly by the state, by semi-official institutions or by influential people implementing state policy.

The most distinctive feature of language policies lies in the fact that they are carried out in a conscious way. States conduct language policies with the aim of achieving certain objectives. They may endeavour to influence the languages spoken with objectives such as increasing their influence, achieving legitimacy, encouraging or limiting participation, creating a national identity, consolidating it and establishing income distribution. Language policies are influenced by the main tendencies in the state's domestic and foreign policy. For example, political preferences such as internationalization return to origins, isolation or modernization influence language policies. Language policies should not be limited only to policies concerning minority languages. Subjects like the connection between the official language or the majority language and identity and the teaching of foreign languages are also included within language policies.<sup>27</sup>

The literature on language policies indicates the existence of a variety of language policies. This is natural, because many variables are in play for each country, such as the ratio of ethnic minorities to the general population, demographic characteristics, the degree of ethnic tension, the existence of ethnic clashes, if these exist, their violence and whether or not they are ongoing, the minority's ethnic awareness and organization level and whether a part

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<sup>25</sup> Virtanen, *Dil Politikalarının Milliyetçilik Hareketlerindeki Tarihsel Kökenleri*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> H. F. Schiffman, *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*, (London, Routledge, 1996), cited from p.3 by Virtanen, *Dil Politikalarının Milliyetçilik Hareketlerindeki Tarihsel Kökenleri*, 18.

<sup>27</sup> Virtanen, *Dil Politikalarının Milliyetçilik Hareketlerindeki Tarihsel Kökenleri*, 19.



of the ethnic minority exists in another country or not. These variables determine the language policy to be followed and therefore different states' approach to language, their varied solutions and policies. In a study prepared within the framework of UNESCO's MOST Program (Management of Social Transformations),<sup>28</sup> language policies are divided into six main groups:

The first group consists of those few countries where a single language is spoken. A single language policy is implemented in these countries (for example Iceland) and education is conducted in a single language.

The second group consists of countries where a single national language policy is implemented and a single language is used in education. However, this group is different from the previous one in that these countries recognize regional languages and the multilingualism arising from the immigrant class. France and Turkey are considered part of this group. France allows regional languages and permits migrant children to learn their parents' language. As for Turkey, while it implements a single national language policy, it also confers the right of education in the mother tongue to citizens with minority status, in line with the Treaty of Lausanne.

The third group consists of countries like the United States, where the majority language (English) is dominant but it does not have a constitutional or official status. In later stages of schooling, teaching of the mother tongue is used as a means to teach the dominant language better and it allows for bilingual education.

The fourth group covers countries like Belgium and Switzerland, which recognize multilingualism without actually supporting pluralism. Governed federally, these countries argue that speaking certain languages within regions with definite borders does not constitute an obstacle to national unity. These regions are established in line with these languages.

The fifth group is represented by countries like Canada. In these countries, there are two official languages, but there is also the possibility to receive education in other mother tongues.

Countries in the sixth group recognize multilingualism and state that they aim to develop linguistic pluralism, but in practice they endeavour to have a single dominant language in official matters and in communication among groups. The former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia are considered within this scope.<sup>29</sup>

There is a close connection between a preference for one of these policies and the language rights held by the people of a country. Language policies determine not only the language rights of individuals, but also the implementation framework of those rights.<sup>30</sup> In this context, the implementation of language policies at times may constitute a direct source of conflict in a country and at times may function as an effective means to end or minimize such conflict.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.unesco.org/new/index.php?id.191598&L=0>

<sup>29</sup> Süleyman S. Terzioğlu, *Uluslararası Hukukta Azınlıklar ve Anadilinde Eğitim Hakkı* (Minorities and the Right to Education in the Mother Tongue in International Law), (Ankara, Alp Yayınevi, 2007), 100-102.

<sup>30</sup> Mustafa Koçak, *Çokkültürlülük Açısından Dil Hakları* (Language Rights from the Perspective of Multiculturalism), (Istanbul, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Unpublished Doctorate Thesis, 2010), 153.



## A. ROLE OF EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE IN BUILDING THE TURKISH NATION

In the Republican period, the political organization of Turkey was determined by elite military-civilian bureaucrats. The aim of this group, educated during the *Tanzimat*, or Reform Period and which wished to pursue the Westernization and modernization movement initiated by the intellectuals of the time, was to create “a nation-state that has reached the level of contemporary civilizations.” This aim could only be achieved through an authoritarian model that would transform society from top to bottom. In fact the Kemalist movement began to implement an authoritarian program from 1925 onwards, when it achieved absolute sovereignty in the political arena.<sup>31</sup>

The Kemalist movement perceived its time as constituting a historical split; it therefore created a new identity for the people and based it on the exclusion of the previous identity.<sup>32</sup> This new identity was built on two main codes: secularism and nationalism. Secularism aimed at state and society to be purged of Islamic references and for the adoption of non-religious and Western values for state and society. As for Nationalism, this was the ideology aiming at obtaining a nation-state out of the society left over from the empire. The founding elite saw the “community” system and the multicultural structure of the Ottoman Empire as the main reasons for its collapse. That is why they endeavoured to create a new nation based on a single ethnic identity, in order for the newly-founded state not to meet the danger of being divided up.

But what was the identity of this nation going to be? Which identity would this nation be built on? This question had been debated since the Reform Period and possible answers included the “Ottoman” and “Muslim” identity. But for the founders of the Republic, the answer to the question “Who are we?” was “We are Turkish, we are the Turkish nation,” and this was based on the idea that the policies of being Ottoman and Islamic had been unsuccessful.<sup>33</sup> Although in the Republican discourse the term “Turkish” was said to emphasize an independent super-ordinate identity above all cultural and ethnic identities in society, in reality the meaning of “Turkish” was that one ethnic identity was accepted and imposed over all other ethnic identities.

Turkey was not an ethnically homogenous country, but Kemalist ideologues developed an ethnic-racial definition for the nation. They claimed that all inhabitants of Turkey, past and present, consisted of Turks.<sup>34</sup> In order to form a basis for this claim, they began to implement a process of Turkification in all fields of daily life, from arts to politics, from education to trade and from culture to sports. The architects of this aggressive Turkification program used all possible opportunities to present being “Turkish” as a source of superiority and not being “Turkish” as a shortcoming, a loss and even a source of embarrassment. For example, according to Mahmut Esat Bozkurt:

<sup>31</sup> “As of the declaration of the Law for the Establishment of Public Peace in March 1925, the form of government of Turkey consisted of a single authoritarian party, and was therefore clearly a dictatorship.” Erik Jan Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi* (Turkey, a Modern History), Transl: Yasemin Saner Cönen (Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2007), 257.

<sup>32</sup> Etyen Mahçupyan, *Türkiye'de Merkezîyetçi Zihniyet, Devlet ve Din* (Centralist Mentality, State and Religion in Turkey) (İstanbul, Patika Yayınları, 1998), 296.

<sup>33</sup> Engin Işın & Bora İşyar, “Türkiye'de Ulus-Devlet ve Vatandaşlığın Doğuşu” (The Nation State and the Emergence of Citizenship in Turkey), within: *Türkiye'de Çoğunluk ve Azınlık Politikaları: AB Sürecinde Yurttaşlık Tartışmaları* (Majority and Minority Policies in Turkey: the Citizenship Debate in the EU Accession Process), Compiled by Ayhan Kaya & Turgut Tarhanlı (Istanbul, TESEV Yayınları, 2005), 96.

<sup>34</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Türkiye'de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?* (Islam, Secularism and Nationalism in Turkey: Who are the Turks?), Transl: Özgür Bircan (Istanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2006), 91.



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*“The Turkish revolution should belong to real Turks only... The worst of Turks is better than the best of non-Turks. The ill fortune of the Ottoman Empire in the past lay in the fact that its destiny was generally ruled by people other than Turks.”<sup>35</sup>*

Being “Turkish” is a condition for being employed by the state, because those who do not hold this identity are not to be trusted. According to Bozkurt: *“Let us not assign the affairs of the Turkish state to anybody but Turks. Nobody but real Turks should head the affairs of the Turkish state... Turks must definitely be in charge of the affairs of the Turkish state. We will not trust anybody but Turks.”<sup>36</sup>*

Right after the suppression of the Ağrı Rebellion and before the election of 1931, when addressing the electorate in Ödemiş situated within his electoral district, Bozkurt explains very clearly his reason for being a member of the Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, CHF):

*“With the work it has carried out up to now, this party has restored the Turkish nation, the original masters, to its former position. Let friends and enemies hear: I believe that the Turks are the masters of this country. Those who are not real Turks have only one right in the country of the Turks, and that is to be servants, to be slaves.”<sup>37</sup>*

The use here of the term “real Turk” should be emphasized. The term “real Turk” excluded both non-Muslim minorities and Muslim communities who did not define themselves as “Turkish” – especially Kurds – from the circle of Turks. In 1926 then Minister of Foreign Affairs Tevfik Rüştü Saraçoğlu expressed clearly the cabinet of ministers’ earnest attitude towards Kurds:

*“From the point of view of their own (Kurdish) cause, they have a low cultural level, their mentality is backward, they cannot be included in Turkey’s general political structure... Since they are not at an economic level to carry out their struggle for life in competition with the Turks, who are more advanced and have a higher level of culture, they will decrease in number and die out... Those who are able to go will migrate to Iran and Iraq, those who stay will be subject to the principle of the inability of the weak to survive.”<sup>38</sup>*

The “real Turks” are those who are Turks from the point of view of language, culture, ideals and blood. In this sense the concept of “real Turk” was used by Atatürk too: for example, talking with tradesmen from Adana on March 16, 1923, Atatürk spoke about the historical evolution of the Turkish character in the Adana region and said that the Turks were the “real owners” of the region:

*“Armenians cannot stake any claims on this prosperous country. Your country belongs to you, to the Turks. This country was Turkish in the past, therefore it is Turkish now and it will be Turkish forever... These fertile places are the land of real Turks.”<sup>39</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Ahmet Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene* (Happy is He Who Can Say That He is a Turk), (Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2004), 209.

<sup>36</sup> Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 210.

<sup>37</sup> Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 210.

<sup>38</sup> David McDowall, *Modern Kürt Tarihi* (A Modern History of the Kurds), Transl: Neşenur Domaniç (Istanbul, Doruk Yayınları, 2004), 277.

<sup>39</sup> Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 211.



The members of the founding elite expressed ideas of this kind many times. The meaning of these words is clear: only real Turks hold the right to benefit from the blessings and possibilities of this country. Those who do not hold this identity will either clear out or will be subject to assimilation. Following the Sheikh Said Rebellion, İsmet İnönü left no room for doubt when he expressed his determination on this subject in 1926, during the Second Congress of the Turkish Centers (*Türk Ocakları*):

*“We are openly nationalist... and nationalism is our sole element of unity. No other element (ethnic group) can hold any influence other than the Turks. No matter what happens, our duty is to transform into Turks all those within the country of Turks who are not Turks. We will cut away the elements that will oppose Turks and Turkishness. The quality we will seek the most in those who serve the country will be Turkishness.”<sup>40</sup>*

Many methods were employed to transform non-Turks into Turks, but education and language policies played a key role in this program of assimilation.

## 1. National Education

Wallerstein points out that in order to create national identities and keep them alive, almost all nation-states have made education compulsory and have attached critical importance to linguistic homogenization. In the initial stages of their foundation, nation-states require only that fundamental state activities, such as legislation, execution and jurisdiction be carried out in a single language, but in the long term they endeavour to ensure through education that this language is used in all social transactions.<sup>41</sup>

In general nation-states confer a “national” character to education and this nationalized education is expected to produce two main results. The first is to build a national identity that is above local, religious, ethnic and cultural connections and that acts as the focus of true loyalty. The second is to ensure that the national identity is established throughout society and that it is internalized by all. In this context, national education plays a role in building, organizing and spreading the national identity.

The fundamental aim of education is to provide adults of the future with professional knowledge and skills and to transform them into useful and productive members of society within the economy. The nation-state reserves this economic role for education but it also confers a national role to education, with the aim of providing the citizens of the future with awareness of the nation and patriotism, as well as creating cultural homogenization throughout the country.<sup>42</sup>

Education has played a prominent role in Turkey’s nation-building process too. According to Zürcher, who points to the continuity between the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the first period of the Republic, the belief that education was a major impulse behind social transformation was common to both the fol-

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<sup>40</sup> Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 155-156.

<sup>41</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *Liberalizmden Sonra* (After Liberalism), Transl: Erol Öz (Istanbul, Metis Yayınları, 1998), 130-131.

<sup>42</sup> Birol Caymaz, *Türkiye’de Vatandaşlık: Resmî İdeoloji ve Yansımaları* (Citizenship in Turkey: the Official Ideology and its Reflections), (Istanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2008), 12-13.



lowers of the Party of Union and Progress and the Kemalists.<sup>43</sup> Both groups believed that education – or rather national education – played a key role in the transformation of society. In the period of the foundation of the Republic, in a speech given to teachers in Samsun in 1924, Atatürk stated very clearly that education in Turkey would be “national:”

*“When the term ‘education’ is used by itself, everybody draws a different meaning from it. If we are to talk about it in detail, education has a variety of aims and objectives. For example there are religious education, national education and international education. All these types of education have different aims and objectives. All I can say for sure here is that the education that the Republic of Turkey will provide to the new generation will be a national education and I will not dwell on any of the others.”<sup>44</sup>*

A national education must have an agenda. What is meant by agenda is “a culture that is distant from the superstitions of old times, from foreign ideas that have nothing to do with our intrinsic characteristics and from all Eastern and Western influences and that is in harmony with our national and historical character. Because the completion of our national cause is only possible through such a culture.”<sup>45</sup> It is inevitable for a national education expressed in these words to divide thoughts into “national thoughts in harmony with our structure” and “foreign thoughts in conflict with our structure,” to defend national thoughts against foreign thoughts, regardless of their content and to reject communication and interaction among cultures.

On May 25, 1925, then Prime Minister İsmet İnönü gave a speech to teachers from the Teachers’ Association. He explained in detail the national educational approach put forth by Atatürk and expressed very clearly the direction the Kemalist regime was taking:

*“We want to provide national education. What does this mean? We can explain this via its opposite. If they ask us what the opposite of national education is, we can say that it is religious education, or international education. The education that you will provide is not religious or international but national. This is what the system is...” After having defined the system, İnönü goes on to explain his expectations: “We can consider national education as consisting of two parts, on the basis of its political and national content. There is a Turkish nation that confers this land its Turkish characteristic. However, this nation is not yet displaying the aspect of a single nation that we would like to see. If this generation works consciously and seriously, under the guidance of science and life and dedicates its life to this aim, the political Turkish nation can become a nation that is completely Turkish from a cultural, intellectual and social point of view.”<sup>46</sup>*

The expectation here is obvious: a culturally, intellectually and socially integrated Turkish identity has not yet been created and diversities exist within society. The duty of the education army is to work day and night to abolish these diversities and create a Turkish nation. İnönü goes on to explain how this should be done:

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<sup>43</sup> Caymaz, *Türkiye’de Vatandaşlık*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> İsmail Kaplan, “Millî Eğitim İdeolojisi” (The National Education Ideology), within: *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasî Düşünce – Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik* (Political Thought in Modern Turkey – Volume 4: Nationalism), (Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 789.

<sup>45</sup> Kaplan, *Millî Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 789.

<sup>46</sup> Kaplan, *Millî Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 791.



*“Foreign cultures should all melt away within this single nation. Different civilizations cannot exist within the mass of this nation. All nations on earth necessarily represent a single civilization. We are openly proposing to those who consider themselves attached to communities other than the civilization of the Turkish nation that they unite with the Turkish nation. But this should not be in the form of a blend or of ‘confederated’ civilizations, but of a single civilization. This homeland belongs to that nation and to that nationality. We are not saying this in words only, we are not putting forth this idea just for the sake of it; this policy will form the life of this land. If we are going to exist, we are going to exist as a single nation. This is the general aim of the system we call national education.”<sup>47</sup>*

Kaplan states that four main conclusions can be drawn from this speech, which he defines as having had a historically influential role in Turkey’s educational life: the first is that although Turkish national education is said to be against both religious and international education (in the sense of the Ottoman system which was not based on any specific ethnic origin), the real opposition is to an international education. The second is that designing the “political Turkish nation,” that is to say, a nation governed by the Turks and based on the principle of the unity of land, is not sufficient from the point of view of the new regime. A nation should be a unity based on a single culture and way of thinking. The existence of a variety of cultures on the same land is not acceptable.<sup>48</sup> The third is that other cultures have to negate themselves and melt away within the Turkish culture. A way of thinking that recognizes the existence of different nations and languages and considers them a cultural richness is distant from Kemalism. The fourth is that national education constitutes the method of choice for transforming the present “political Turkish nation” into an integrated and mature nation. *“The general aim of national education is to blend or assimilate “foreign cultures” and thereby build the united Turkish nation. National education is the means to be used for the adoption of this national policy and for it to become a behavioral norm.”<sup>49</sup>*

Tunçay, too, makes similar observations; concerning the characteristics of education in the Kemalist single-party period, he draws attention to three interrelated points: first, the Republican elite who wished to become Westernized expected education both to play an active role in erasing everything related to the Ottoman/Islamic past and to lead in the transformation of the country. Second, education was conferred the role of propaganda for the regime, a role that contradicted the real aims of education. *“Teachers became Kemal’s (Atatürk’s) most loyal propagandists.”* Third, efforts were made to replace traditional religious education with a secular national education, but racism came to play an important role in education as part of nation-building in Turkey.<sup>50</sup>

In Turkey’s modernization process, national education was ascribed the duty of political as well as of general education and teachers were requested to act as political propagandists imposing the revolution’s ideals on the masses. Kemalist ideologues did not refrain from stating this clearly. This state of affairs was valid for both primary education and for higher educational institutions. For example Kazım Nami Duru expressed this situation as follows:

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<sup>47</sup> Kaplan, *Milli Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 791.

<sup>48</sup> “Türklük fikri, yalnızca bir siyasî ideal değil, aynı zamanda etnik bir inşanın adıdır.” (The idea of Turkishness is not only a political ideal, it is also the name of an ethnic construction.) Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 155.

<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, *Milli Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 791-792.

<sup>50</sup> Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Tek-Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması* (The Foundation of the Single Party Rule in the Turkish Republic) (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1999), 239-240.



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*“We cannot accept impartiality. We wish to bring up our children in accordance with (these) fundamental principles of our party and of our state. Our party is the Turkish nation itself.”<sup>51</sup>*

A similar approach was espoused for universities. Having established the general aim of education as bringing up “revolutionary children loyal to the Republic” who adopt and support the Republican ideology, the Republican regime endeavoured to transform universities into institutions of indoctrination, which, rather than produce knowledge and conduct scientific research, defend the regime, train the generations who will defend the regime and conduct propaganda for the same. This was the justification for the “university reform” carried out in 1933. The *Darülfünun* (TN: later the Istanbul University), which had kept its distance from the changes brought by the Republic and which did not carry out the propaganda expected from it, became the object of criticism of the Kemalist elite. Moreover, since some of its teachers did not adopt the “Theory of Turkish History,”<sup>52</sup> the abolishment of this institution became inevitable. Even a scientific institution was unable not to accept completely the regime’s theses. Falih Rifkî Atay wrote as follows:

*“We cannot accept either impartiality or incompetence. Even if the Darülfünun is only a scientific institution, during exceptional periods of reforms it is responsible for sacrificing its characteristics as a scientific institution and serving the reforms and for giving priority to its duty of instilling the reforms in people’s minds and spirits.”<sup>53</sup>*

In conclusion, we can say that national education in Turkey is used as a tool to transmit “Turkish” identity and the values believed to form this identity both to children, who are the citizens of the future, and as far as possible to adults.<sup>54</sup> The aim of the whole system of national education has been and continues to be to abolish different identities, to subject everyone to the Turkish identity and to ensure through ideological orientation that this identity is a source of pride.

## **2. Language: Turkish**

There is a close connection between a country’s language policies and the emergence and development of nationalism in that country. In parallel with the emergence and institutionalization of nationalism, the debate on language also developed and specific language policies were implemented.<sup>55</sup> That is why in order to conduct sound research into the language policies of a country it is necessary not to overlook the history of nationalism in that country. This historical background is of primary importance in the identification of language policies, the shaping of practices and the establishment of the framework of citizens’ rights.

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<sup>51</sup> Tunçay, *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nde Tek-Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması*, 240.

<sup>52</sup> For the development of the thesis of official history in Turkey, see: Büşra Ersanlı Behar, *İktidar ve Tarih* (Power and History), (İstanbul, Afa Yayıncılık, 1996)

<sup>53</sup> Seval Yaman, “Üniversitelerde Tasfiye Geleneği” (The Tradition of Tasfiye in Universities), *Radikal* 2, 10.12.2006.

<sup>54</sup> “We can observe that in this context Republican education proceeded in two ways. The aim was on the one hand for national education, which targets children, to become more efficient and widespread, and on the other for the population to be educated and equipped with the values of the new order.” Caymaz, *Türkiye’de Vatandaşlık*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> M. Berk Balçık. “Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları” (Nationalism and Language Policies), within: *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasî Düşünce* – Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 777.



In Turkey, especially with the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy and the Party of Union and Progress's rise to the power, a nationalist movement based on Turkism gained power against the concepts of Ottomanism and Islamism. The nationalists who envisaged that the Ottomans' imperial policy was coming to an end were seeking a more concretely defined national concept. Language acquired great significance at this point.<sup>56</sup> In the period when Turkism came to the fore, authors such as Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura began to refer to the existence of pre-Islamic Turkish ethnicity. According to them Turkishness still existed and the Turkish language, which had been successfully preserved, constituted the best proof for this. *"There were attempts to respond to the identity crisis put forth especially by administrators and by intellectuals and to the need for a new 'we,' for the definition of a socio-political identity, through cultural formations where language played a main role. Important steps were taken under the rule of the Party of Union and Progress for the simplification of Turkish and for its use in the Empire's official correspondence, and in the fields of education and economy."*<sup>57</sup> This policy, initiated by the Party of Union and Progress, reached its peak under Kemalist rule. In this context, language played two important roles in Turkish nationalism.

First, language was the most important element of an identity. In other words, the state would be based on the "Turkish" identity and being Turkish depended on speaking "Turkish." The Turkish language was the hallmark of being Turkish. Up to the moment when it rose to power, the Kemalist movement showed great sensitivity to religious subjects and established a connection between national culture and national identity via religion. But when the opposition was abolished and political power was consolidated, the Kemalist movement began to implement a radical policy of secularization and to replace religion with language. From now on language would be among the main elements to replace religion in the formation of identity.<sup>58</sup>

The clearest reference to the determining role of language in the development of ethnic Turkish identity can be found in a statement made by Atatürk. For him, the Turkish nation is a pure and homogeneous whole and this nation has a single language: Turkish, the most beautiful, rich and easy language in the world. *"The Turkish language, the heart and mind of the Turkish nation, is a sacred treasure that contains the morality, the traditions, the memories, the interests, in short, everything that forms the Turkish nation."* Since everything that forms the Turkish nation is preserved via the Turkish language, speaking Turkish is the first and absolute condition for belonging to this nation.<sup>59</sup>

Speaking Turkish constitutes the most important element in the reply given to the question of who Turks are. For example, in 1923, in answer to the question of who Turks are, Hamdullah Suphi, a leading supporter of Turkism at the time, said, *"Those who speak Turkish, are Muslim and are proud to be Turkish are Turks."*<sup>60</sup> In a

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<sup>56</sup> Even during the period of Sultan Abdülhamit, there was great interest for the national and racial aspects of language as demonstrated by the following statement below by Şemsettin Sami: "The language spoken is the main indication and principle of belonging to a nation or race; it is common to all of its individuals. A people speaking a language constitute a nation and a race. That is why all nations and communities wishing to guarantee their racial existence are forced to correct, straighten out and improve their language." Nazan Maksudyan, *Türklüğü Ölçmek* (Measuring Turkishness), (Istanbul, Metis Yayınları, 2005), 66.

<sup>57</sup> Balçık, *Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları*, 780.

<sup>58</sup> Virtanen, *Dil Politikalarının Milliyetçilik Hareketlerindeki Tarihsel Kökenleri*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Kaplan, *Milli Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 790.

<sup>60</sup> Hüseyin Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları* (Ulusçuluk and Language Policies in Turkey), (Istanbul, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004), 193.



paper presented at the Second Congress of Turkish History, Ali Fuad Başgil placed the Turkish language in first place when defining the “*Turkish nation*.” “*The Turkish nation consists of citizens who speak Turkish, who carry Turkish blood in their veins or who believe to descend from Turks, whose forefathers have experienced the good and bad days of Turkish history or who have adopted those memories, who are attached to Turkishness with their heart and soul and who state that they are Turkish.*”<sup>61</sup>

The belief that “Turks are those who speak Turkish,” results in two interconnected conclusions: the first is that those who do not (or cannot) speak Turkish are not Turkish; the other is that the state needs to do whatever is necessary to transform these people into Turks. In fact Atatürk says that it is impossible to consider as Turkish those who do not speak Turkish: “*If people who do not speak Turkish claim to be part of the Turkish culture and community, it would not be right to believe in them.*” He then goes on to instruct the Turkish Centers, whose main mission was to build the “*Turkish nation*.” “*The primary duty of the Turkish Centers is to endeavor to transform such elements into real Turks who speak our language.*”<sup>62</sup>

Second, language was seen as the most important factor for guaranteeing national unity.<sup>63</sup> Turkey’s multi-ethnic structure and the fact that different languages were spoken on these lands constituted a major obstacle before recognition of the Turkish identity as a collective bond. The movements initiated after 1925 by the Kurds, who insisted on speaking their own language, especially deepened the concern felt by Kemalists. The regime had a steadfast opinion on language: in order to establish and preserve the nation’s unity and to prevent anything from damaging it, everyone had to speak the same language.

That is why the policy implemented was two-sided. On the one hand, Turkish was more widely used in the public sphere. The adoption of Turkish as a mother tongue, the Turkification of minority names, the requirement to speak Turkish in the public sphere were all political means aimed at imposing the use of Turkish by the entire population. Concurrently, a number of measures were adopted to limit the use of languages other than Turkish. We can cite a few examples to better understand the mentality behind these measures.

After the Sheikh Said Rebellion of 1925, the state immediately set up a commission and prepared the “Eastern Reform Plan.” According to the plan, the top priority of the central government in Ankara was to ban public use of the Kurdish language in order to put an end to the Kurdification of regions where Turks and Kurds lived together.<sup>64</sup>

As a result of the mobilization of the Kurds, the Turkish Centers began to show a special interest in the Kurds and their language. In a congress held in 1926, “*speaking languages other than Turkish in the lands of the Turks*” was heavily criticized. They requested the government to “*punish those who insisted on speaking languages other than Turkish.*” In this congress the Turkification of Kurds was also dealt with. The prevailing opinion held that it would be easy to

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<sup>61</sup> Maksudyan, *Türklüğü Ölçmek*, s. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Mesut Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu* (The Kurdish Issue in State Discourse), (İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2006), 177.

<sup>63</sup> For the use of language as a means to guarantee national unity and especially for the importance of distinguishing a national language from the languages spoken in neighboring countries, see: Wallerstein, *Liberalizmden Sonra*, 131.

<sup>64</sup> For the text of the plan, see: Belma Akçura, *Devletin Kürt Filmi* (The Kurdish Film of the State), (Ankara, Ayraç Yayınları, 2008), 42-50. Also Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 36-37.



resolve the matter because Kurds did not have a language or a culture. However, when a delegate from Mardin reported, in a meeting held in 1927, that they had been unsuccessful in convincing the Kurds to speak Turkish, the Turkish Centers began trying to implement different strategies in the Turkish and Kurdish areas of Anatolia. “Accordingly, the Turkish Centers will ‘help Turkish youths to develop intellectually and physically’ in regions outside the east of Anatolia and will endeavor to ‘realize the national ideal by imposing the Turkish culture’ in eastern regions.”<sup>65</sup>

A classified circular issued by the Ministry of the Interior in 1930 held governors responsible for ensuring that “Turks speaking foreign dialects” acquired Turkish as a mother tongue and were included in the Turkish community. Governors were responsible for identifying the appropriate method and means to fulfill this duty. The common points of this policy were as follows:

- Identifying the names and numbers of villages speaking the foreign dialect;
- Distributing the population of the smaller of these villages to Turkish villages in the area;
- Preventing those who speak the foreign dialect from establishing new villages and districts;
- Appointing civil servants to areas inhabited by those who speak the foreign dialect from among Turks who do not speak that foreign dialect;
- Making it clear that speaking Turkish and being a “pure Turk” is not only a matter of pride but also a source of profit;
- Encouraging Turkish girls to marry Turks who do not speak Turkish;
- Disparaging the costumes, songs, dances, weddings and other traditions of those who speak the foreign dialect, Turkifying the names and titles of people and of their families, never referring to them as Bosnian, Tatar, Circassian, Laz, Kurdish, Abkhasian, Georgian, Turcoman, Pomak, etc., changing the names of the villages in that dialect, forcing people to speak Turkish at home and among themselves and to say “I am Turkish” from the heart.

In short, “the Turkification of their languages, traditions and ideals, associating them with the history and the destiny of the Kurds is an important national duty for all Turks.”<sup>66</sup>

The message conveyed by all of these policies is very clear: in Turkey there are some who do not speak Turkish, but if they cannot speak Turkish then they cannot be Turkish; in order to be Turkish they must speak Turkish. The opposite is unimaginable, because “a person living among us who cannot speak Turkish cannot be trusted. If those whose mother tongue is not Turkish wish to participate in the political and social life of the country, they must abandon their mother tongue and switch to Turkish.”<sup>67</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, 177-178.

<sup>66</sup> See: İskâna Tâbi Tutulanların ‘Türkleştirilmesi’ Uygulamasına İlişkin Gizli Genelge, No. 1/28, Ankara, 1930” (Confidential Circular on the ‘Turkification’ of Those Subject to Settlement, No. 1/28, Ankara, 1930), Mehmet Bayrak, *Kürtler ve Ulusal Demokratik Mücadeleleri Üstüne Gizli Belgeler-Araştırmalar-Notlar* (Secret Documents-Studies-Notes on the Kurds’ Democratic Struggle), (Ankara, Özge Yayınları, 1993), cited from 506-509 by: Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 289.

<sup>67</sup> Kaplan, *Milli Eğitim İdeolojisi*, 790.



In the building of the Turkish nation-state language has therefore been used in a very functional way, to fabricate Turkish national identity, to guarantee national unity and to transform society. That is why language has always been of critical importance.<sup>68</sup>

## B. LANGUAGE POLICIES IMPLEMENTED IN TURKEY

The history of the Republican Period in Turkey can be seen as the history of the regime's attempt to purify and standardize Turkish through a number of institutions, and making it the dominant language throughout the country. The Republican Regime implemented the single language policy with such force via laws, institutions and pressure so that for many years only Turkish came to mind when reference was made to "mother tongue" or "education in the mother tongue."<sup>69</sup>

Turkey's language policies seeking political and cultural homogeneity can be examined in three periods.

### 1. The Period 1923-1950

The language policies at the time of the founding of the republic present a number of historical crossroads. The adoption of Turkish as the official language in the Constitution of 1924 formed the highest legal confirmation that Turkish was the main factor in the determination of the nation's socio-cultural content. This constituted the grounds for the policies of assimilation or exclusion for minorities of the same religion but of different ethnic origin and who spoke another mother tongue, as well as for non-Muslim minorities.<sup>70</sup>

The Law on the Unification of Education, passed in March 1924, carried out the complete secularization of education<sup>71</sup> and also constituted a significant part of Turkification and homogenization efforts. Through this law educational institutions and the language of education became centralized. Kurdish schools, institutions and publications, sects and lodges were accordingly prohibited. While education was aimed at standardizing the population, paradoxically, the rate of schooling was kept low in Kurdish regions, the chief reason being the fear that a Kurdish middle-class would emerge along with a Kurdish national consciousness as a result of education. In fact, as a prime example of this way of thinking, Necip Bey, Minister of National Education and MP for Mardin said: "Do we want today's armed Kurds to appear before our children tomorrow as intellectuals?"<sup>72</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Balçık, *Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları*, 787.

<sup>69</sup> Necmiye Alpay, *Anadili, Yabancı Dil ve Eksiltici İkidillilik, Uluslararası Katılımlı Anadilde Eğitim Sempozyumu -1* (Mother Tongue, Foreign Language and Subtractive Bilingualism, International Symposium of Education in the Mother Tongue), (Ankara, Eğitim-Sen Yayınları, 2010), 83-84.

<sup>70</sup> Balçık, *Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları*, 783.

<sup>71</sup> Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 272. "Mustafa Kemal attached great importance to the secular education of young people. He considered education a strong tool for transforming the minds and spirits of people in a society where the literacy rate was around ten percent." Kemal Kirişçi & Gareth M. Winrow, *Kürt Sorunu, Kökeni ve Gelişimi* (The Kurdish Question and Turkey), Transl: Ahmet Fethi (İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2007), 112.

<sup>72</sup> Bahar Şahin, "Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği Uyum Süreci Bağlamında Kürt Sorunu: Açılımlar ve Sınırlar" (The Kurdish Issue Within the Context of Turkey's Harmonization Process to the European Union), in: *Türkiye'de Çoğunluk ve Azınlık Politikaları*, Derleyenler: Ayhan Kaya & Turgut Tarhanlı, (İstanbul, TESEV Yayınları, 2006), 127.



The adoption of the Latin alphabet constituted the sharpest move in the regime's language policies. This was such a sensitive issue that it was led step by step by Atatürk. In the summer of 1928 a commission headed by Atatürk himself prepared a report on this matter and on August 9 the President of the Republic announced officially for the first time that the Ottoman alphabet—heretofore consisting of Arabic or Persian characters—would be replaced by “Turkish letters.” A promotional campaign was announced and in the following months Atatürk travelled throughout the country, explaining the new letters and insisting that everyone rapidly learn these letters and teach them to other citizens. On November 1, a law was passed by parliament stipulating that the new alphabet become compulsory in public communications as of 1929.

Ostensibly there were reasonable grounds language-wise for the transition from the Arabic to the Latin alphabet. According to proponents, the Latin alphabet was more appropriate for Turkish; it would thus facilitate literacy and increase its rate. However, the real reason for this forceful and rapid transition was ideological: *“This change was another way to break off Turkish society's ties with the Islamic traditions of the Ottomans and of the Middle East and lead it towards the West.”*<sup>73</sup>

The rapid execution of the change in alphabet and its widespread acceptance among the population provided encouragement for those who wished to carry out language reforms. The extreme nationalist spirit of the 1930s provided ease of movement to those who wished to simplify the language. Proponents of cleansing the Turkish language from all “foreign” words, starting with Arabic and Persian words, sought to create a new language – “Öztürkçe” or Pure Turkish – free of “foreign” elements. The Language Congress that met at the time put forward the Sun-Language Theory as an intellectual basis for the work it carried out.

This theory, which gained official status at the 3rd Language Congress, was based on two ideas. The first posited the Sun as the starting point for the first sounds and words and emphasized its meanings and derivatives in Turkish. The second considered the Turkish language and race as the source of all European languages and civilizations and claimed that all other languages were derived from Turkish.<sup>74</sup>

It was clear that these two ideas complemented the Theory of History. The Theory of Turkish History, first introduced during the first Turkish History Congress in 1932 (the second took place in 1937), traced Turkish history back to the beginning of time and exalted the Turks as a “race.” This theory also claimed that the Turks had an innate ability to found and rule states and always founded great civilizations and that Turks had had a deep influence over other major civilizations. This thesis erased once and for all the 600 year-old Ottoman history and replaced it with *“legends from the dark ages”* and *“the nonsense that we have existed since pre-history,”* in Cemil Meriç's words.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye'nin Tarihi*, 275. “...it is clear that the real aim behind this correction was to get rid of Ottoman-Islamic traditions and increase the pace of modernization.” Tunçay, 232. “The practical ease to be provided in reading and writing by the change of alphabet had been expressed by many people, but very few had deemed it likely that this change would mean the abolishment of the past and a cultural merge with the West... The alphabet reform, as presented by Atatürk, was the condition for “eradicating the mistakes of the past” and “standing with world civilizations.” Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 201.

<sup>74</sup> For the Sun-Language Theory see: Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 246 et al.

<sup>75</sup> Cemil Meriç, *Sosyoloji Notları* (Sociology Notes), (Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 1993), 168.



Thus the Theory of Turkish History, described as the “rediscovery of the history of the Turkish nation,” constituted the foundation for the Sun-Language Theory. One of the “truths” that the theory attempted to prove concerned language:

*“The language of Turks has influenced all other major languages on earth. At the root of this language there is the force of nature. Humans initially drew power from the sun, and so did language. The language must be cleansed of the Arabic and Persian words added later.”*This part of the theory was developed during the Turkish Language Congress; in the second Turkish History Congress it was put under the discipline of history.<sup>76</sup>

Theories on history and language thus completed one another. The claim that Turkish was the source of all languages, the attempts to prove the continuity of Turkish language and race and the sun-language connection all aimed at providing secular solutions to the language issue. This was based on the atheistic power of the sun in primitive communities. In fact Şemsettin Günaltay, an intellectual from the Republican period, went to the heart of the theory when he said, “*the Sun-Language Theory has saved the Turkish language from the shackles of Islam.*”

The excessive claims of both the history theory and the language theory were abandoned after the 1940s, but it is imperative for two reasons to keep these theories in mind; firstly because the school textbooks still contain traces of these theories;<sup>77</sup> and secondly because these theories show the historical phases Turkish nationalism has gone through and the degree to which its assumptions can reach in the building of national identity.<sup>78</sup>

Another event to highlight about the wider use of Turkish is the “Citizens, speak Turkish!” campaign. This campaign was established during the annual congress of the *Darülfünun*’s Law Faculty Student Association, held on January 13, 1928. According to the statement adopted by the congress: “*Speaking a language other than Turkish in Turkey means violating Turkish law.*” Aiming to implement this decision immediately, the Student Association obtained the necessary permission from the authorities and put up banners reading: “Only Turkish Must Be Spoken in the Land of the Turks” and “Citizens, Speak Turkish” on ferryboats, trams and other mass transportation vehicles. The campaign began as a reaction to the mother tongues of non-Muslim minorities; over time its scope expanded and its intensity increased.<sup>79</sup> Both non-Muslims and Muslim communities whose mother tongue was not Turkish were obliged to speak Turkish in public areas. As a result people who spoke little Turkish attempted to speak Turkish in public, even if poorly. The campaign began in January and started to lose its momentum by mid-April. However, from time to time there were attempts to revive it; it unsettled minorities but was not terribly successful in forcing them to adopt Turkish.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Büşra Ersanlı, “Bir Aidiyet Fermanı: Türk Tarih Tezi” (The Decree of Belonging: the Thesis of Turkish History), within: *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasî Düşünce* – Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik, (Istanbul, İletişim Yayınları, 2002), 803.

<sup>77</sup> Zürcher, *Modernleşen Türkiye’nin Tarihi*, 278.

<sup>78</sup> Balçık, *Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları*, 785.

<sup>79</sup> “The ‘Speak Turkish’ campaign was particularly intense in Mersin, where there was a large Arabic-speaking community and a number of Muslim migrants from Crete who spoke Greek... In Mersin, people who did not speak Turkish were so disliked that some young participants at a Community Centre meeting held in July 1934 proposed to beat up people who did not speak Turkish and thus force them to speak Turkish.” Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 95.

<sup>80</sup> Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 283-284; Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 286-288; Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 94-100; Şahin, *Türkiye’nin Avrupa Birliği Süreci Bağlamında Kürt Sorunu*, 127-128.



For Turkish to become more widespread, other languages needed to be put out of use. However, as long as elements who did not speak Turkish shared the same environment and were not in contact with the dominant language, it was for all intents and purposes impossible to prevent the use of other languages by law. The Settlement Law No. 2510 dated 1934 concerned the issues of migration and population, but it also aimed at creating a single language community. In fact then Minister of the Interior Şükrü Kaya openly expressed this sentiment during the debate on the law in parliament: “*This law will create a country that speaks a single language, thinks the same and feels the same.*”<sup>81</sup> Naşit Hakkı Uluğ, MP for Kütahya, said: “*(The Settlement Law), which will instill the pride and honor of being Turkish into those who live on these lands, has the privilege of being one of the principal laws of this revolution.*”<sup>82</sup>

Through this law the population of Turkey was divided into three groups: a) People who speak Turkish and are of Turkish ethnic origin, b) People who do not speak Turkish but are considered of different Turkish cultures (migrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus, such as Albanians, Circassians, Pomaks and Tatars) and c) People who do not speak Turkish and do not belong to the Turkish culture. The last group was used mainly to refer to Kurds and Arabs. The law divided Turkey into three parts: the first area, inhabited by people who spoke Turkish and was of Turkish ethnicity, could receive migrants. The second area covered people whose Turkishness needed to be strengthened through culture and language policies. The third area consisted of regions that were completely closed to civil settlements for security reasons.<sup>83</sup>

According to Beşikçi, the real aim of the Settlement Law was directed against the Kurds; this law was passed to subject Kurds to assimilation into the Turkish identity.<sup>84</sup> According to Yeğen, [the Settlement Law is a unique text that shows that the Kurdish issue was interpreted by a perception-language conditioned by the state’s centralization issue].<sup>85</sup> Çağaptay too states that the Kurds constituted the main focus of this law. The government implemented a three-stage plan for the Turkification of Kurds. The first stage consisted of settling Turks in the first area, where it was forbidden for Kurds to settle. This step would enable Ankara to form a Turkish front within the Kurdish area in the east. The second stage consisted in settling Kurds in an area where they would cohabit with the Turks. The Kurdish population would therefore melt into the Turkish population and would become assimilated. If the desired results were not achieved through these policies, in the third stage the Minister of the Interior would be able to take more drastic measures such as transferring Kurds elsewhere or depriving them of citizenship.<sup>86</sup>

Although the Settlement Law, which emphasized Turkish ethnicity and the Turkish language, was aimed mainly at Kurds, the Republican Regime was not interested only in Kurds. While the law was being debated in parliament, Ruşeni Bey, an MP, without openly referring to the Jews, complained that the government

<sup>81</sup> Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 287.

<sup>82</sup> Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 141.

<sup>83</sup> Kirişçi & Winrow, *Kürt Sorunu*, 116-117.

<sup>84</sup> İsmail Beşikçi, *Kürtlerin Mecburî İshânı* (The Forced Settlement of Kurds), (Ankara, Yurt Kitap Yayın, 1991)

<sup>85</sup> Yeğen, *Devlet Söyleminde Kürt Sorunu*, 138-139.

<sup>86</sup> Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 142-144.



was unable to assimilate the Jews. Ruşeni Bey was also troubled by the vast number of migrants who were brought over from the Balkans and the Caucasus during Ottoman times, were settled in different areas of the country but who still did not speak Turkish; therefore, they had preserved their ethnic identities. Minister Şükrü Kaya attempted to pacify Ruşeni Bey by stating that assimilation of the migrants was one of the objectives of this law.<sup>87</sup>

The Surname Law was another striking regulation that assisted in nation-building. The importance of the Surname Law was that it sought to conceal subordinate identities such as religion, sect and class and to internalize the single national identity. From this point of view the Surname Law was compatible with language reform, as well as with the Kemalist principles of secularism, populism and nationalism.<sup>88</sup> Prior to the Surname Law, newspapers and magazines had initiated a major campaign arguing for the changing of people's names and surnames along with place names. The republic wanted Turkishness to be known, to be visible and audible, therefore both non-Muslims and Muslims were impelled to adopt a pure Turkish name. Mahmut Esat stated that if non-Muslim minorities wanted to be considered Turkish they had to be assimilated among the Turks; for this they needed to speak Turkish and adopt a Turkish surname. Otherwise their Turkishness would be nothing more than *"the Turkishness of the Ottoman Bank"* and they would be destined to remain merely *"nominally Turkish."*<sup>89</sup> According to Hüseyin Kazım, who changed his name to "Yılmaz," the time had come to get rid of the Arabic and Persian names that had oppressed the Turkish consciousness for so many centuries. *"Newborns in particular should be given Pure Turkish names. While Mehmeds and Alis die, Bozkurts, Alps should be born and multiply."*<sup>90</sup>

The Surname Law No. 2471 came into force in 1934 with the aim of meeting these expectations. The first clause stipulated that all Turks *"are obliged to have a surname as well as a first name"* and the third clause stated that *"names... and surnames of foreign races and nations cannot be used."* During the debate in parliament, Refet Bele, MP for Istanbul objected to this clause:

*"If a man's name belongs to a foreign race, if he is not from my race and wishes to use a name from his own race, I would prefer to see him as he is, with a seal on his brow."* Minister Şükrü Kaya explained the need for this clause as follows:

*"As for foreign names, the greatest duty of a country is to annex everybody living within its borders to its own community and to represent them... Why should we continue to call them Memed the Kurd, Hasan the Circassian or Ali the Laz? To start with, this would indicate the weakness of the dominant element. If a man feels even the slightest difference, let us remove him from schools and communities and that man will become as Turkish as I am and will serve his country. There are many men from foreign races who have served the country in this way. Why should we keep them away? Why should we refer to them as foreigners, as if they had a seal on their brow?"*<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Kirişçi & Winrow, *Kürt Sorunu*, 117.

<sup>88</sup> Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 256.

<sup>89</sup> Yıldız, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene*, 210.

<sup>90</sup> Sadoğlu, *Türkiye'de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 257.

<sup>91</sup> Çağaptay, *Türkiye'de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 98.



The Surname Law was a new tool for the assimilation of non-Muslims and Muslims who were not Turkish. It triggered a new period dominated by intense nationalism on the matter of surnames. Community Centers played an active role in this process and initiated a campaign encouraging the use of Turkish names. As soon as the law forcing citizens to take Turkish surnames came into force, people began to have their surnames registered. While some people were allowed to keep their surnames, registry offices did not recognize surnames that were not Turkish or did not sound Turkish. In order to correct this situation, the government issued a Surname Regulation on December 20, 1934 (Official Gazette No. 2805) and prohibited the registration of surnames ending with “*yan, of, ev, viç, is, dis, pulos, aki, zade, mahdumu, veled and bin.*” This regulation made it impossible for names in Armenian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian and other Slavic languages and for surnames in Greek, Cretan, Persian, Georgian and Arabic to be registered. The law stipulated that citizens of all religions and ethnic origin acquire surnames in Turkish. This obligation was met with great turmoil among both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. Many Jews had to change not only their surnames but their first names as well.<sup>92</sup>

Geographical units also received their share of this policy of mass Turkification. The issue of changing place names of foreign origin into Turkish names first arose in the Ottoman Empire, under the Party of Union and Progress, when the Regulation on Migrants came into force in 1913. This regulation stated that new settlements for migrants should be given “*appropriate names.*” World War I caused an acceleration in the systematic change of non-Turkish place names. A [decree] sent by Enver Pasha to troops on January 5, 1919 asked that names of provinces, districts, villages, mountains and rivers in languages such as Armenian, Greek and Bulgarian be “*translated into Turkish.*” Work conducted on the basis of this [decree] ceased following a second [decree] issued on June 15, 1916. In the meantime, many village and town names had been changed into Turkish.<sup>93</sup>

The first proposal for the nationalization of place names after the War of Independence was made during Session No. 117, held on December 20, 1920, by Sırrı Bey, MP for Izmit, who complained that “*there are still places in the country that do not have national names.*” Some places were thus named after figures of the War of Independence, while the names of some who had fallen from favor were changed again. In 1922 a number of settlement names were changed into Turkish.<sup>94</sup>

In 1925 many settlement names in Georgian were completely changed as a result of a decision made by the Provincial Council. Following Circular No. 8589, issued by the Ministry of the Interior towards the end of 1940, the name-changing process acquired an official identity. Through this circular, “*names of settlements and of natural sites in foreign languages or of foreign origin, whose use causes great confusion, were changed into Turkish.*” In response to this circular, lists of place names in “foreign” languages were prepared by governors and sent to the ministry. However, this project came to a halt because of World War II and the name change did not take place. In 1949, the change of place names acquired legal ground via Provincial Administration Law No. 5442.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Çağaptay, *Türkiye’de İslâm, Laiklik ve Milliyetçilik: Türk Kimdir?*, 98-99.

<sup>93</sup> Sadoğlu, *Türkiye’de Ulusçuluk ve Dil Politikaları*, 257-258.

<sup>94</sup> Ayşe Hür, “Tez Zamanda Yer isimleri Değiştirile!” (“Place Names to be Changed At Once!”), *Taraf*, 01.03.2009.

<sup>95</sup> Harun Tunçel, “Türkiye’de İsmi Değiştirilen Köyler” (Villages in Turkey That Have Undergone Name Changes) (Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi, Cilt 10, Sayı 2), 27.



## 2. The Period 1950–1980

The language policies, institutions and mentality of the Republican Period took deep root. For this reason, no major changes took place in language policies in subsequent periods. From some points of view governments established after 1950 outdid their predecessors. For example, the Democratic Party (DP), which followed relatively more “liberal” policies, took a major step in the change of place names. A “Specialized Board on Name Changes” was established in 1956 and, apart from some interruptions, it operated until 1978. In 1978 it was closed down on the grounds that “*place names of historical importance had also been changed.*” During the period that the board was active, approximately 75,000 place names were examined and 28,000 of these were changed. Between the years 1965-1970 and 1975-1976, the board worked also on the change of natural sites. As a result, it changed approximately 2,000 names and published these in the form of a book. Following an interruption of five years the board set to work once again in 1983, in accordance with a new regulation, and changed the names of another 280 villages.<sup>96</sup>

According to Tunçel, over 12,000 villages in Turkey have undergone a name change. In other words, the names of approximately 35 % of villages in Turkey have been changed. What stands out the most in these name change operations is that the names that were not Turkish or were believed not to be Turkish and names that caused confusion were the first to be dealt with and changed.

*“... the names of villages containing the words red, bell and church have been changed. Village names containing words such as Kurd, Georgian, Tatar, Circassian, Laz, Arab and migrant have also been changed to prevent the emergence of separatism within their environment... Some of the village names that have been changed include also names that were not in Turkish. It is normal for many villages and other places in Anatolia to have been given names in Arabic, Persian, Kurdish, Laz, Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Circassian, etc... When the map prepared with this aim is examined, it is interesting to note that the villages that have undergone a name change are distributed all over the country, though not in a uniform way. In respect to other regions, a heavier concentration of these places stands out in the Black Sea, Southeastern Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia regions.”<sup>97</sup>*

Following the military coup of 1960, the Turkish Language Institution issued circulars encouraging the use of Pure Turkish. The distinguishing trait of this period was the political pluralism that now obtained, pluralism which was reflected onto the language policy. Alongside supporters of Pure Turkish, opposition criticizing language reform and accusing it of severing communication among generations also arose. Between 1960 and 1980, in accordance with the ideology of the group in power, either there were renewed attempts to intervene in the language, or these attempts were prevented. For instance, under the Party of Justice (*Adalet Partisi* – AP), attempts to purify the language were stopped; under the Nationalist Front (*Milliyetçi Cephe* – MC), the use of Pure Turkish was forbidden in some institutions. However, in 1977, under the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – CHP), the situation was reversed. During these periods a majority of authors supported language reform and played a major role in the use of new words in daily life.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Tunçel, Türkiye’de İsmi Değiştirilen Köyler, 27.

<sup>97</sup> Tunçel, Türkiye’de İsmi Değiştirilen Köyler, 28-29.

<sup>98</sup> Balçık, Milliyetçilik ve Dil Politikaları, 786.



### 3. 1980 and Subsequent Years

The military coup of September 12, 1980 attempted to take control not only of the entirety of country but also of its language and language rights. As with other constitutions, the 1982 Constitution prepared by the coup leaders stipulated Turkish as the official language. However, unlike other constitutions, this clause was not to be amended, nor shall its amendment even be proposed. Article 26 of the constitution regulating freedom of thought and expression and Article 28 regulating freedom of press, contained the terms “*language forbidden by law*” and threatened reprisals for expression in a forbidden language. On the other hand, according to Article 42 of the Constitution, “*no other language than Turkish may be used or taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens in education and training institutions.*” The use of languages other than Turkish as a mother tongue in education was thus made impossible.

Law No. 2932 best expresses the perception of language in the period following 1980. It passed in October 1983. This law primarily prohibited the use of Kurdish. However, the term “Kurdish” was such a bogey word for the *coup* leaders that the law managed to express the ban on Kurdish without actually using the term “Kurdish.” According to Article 2 of the law:

*“It is forbidden to express, promote or publish thoughts in any language apart from the primary official language of states recognized by the Turkish State.”* It is clear that this article was written with great care and taking into consideration certain objectives. According to Oran, there were two aims to this text: the aim of the statement “*any language apart from the primary official language*” was to rule out Kurdish, Iraq’s secondary official language. As for the statement “*states recognized by the Turkish State,*” its aim was not to recognize a potential future Kurdish state and therefore the Kurdish language that would be its official language.<sup>99</sup>

The general objective of the law was expressed as “*protecting the indivisible unity of the state with its territory and its nation, national independence, the Republic, national security and public order.*” In order to achieve this objective, the law banned all possible activities that could be held in Kurdish and even the production of records, cassettes and other audio-visual materials in this language.

*“A ban of this kind affected primarily the educated and active classes, but the military rulers went a step further and reminded even illiterate people that all traces of the Kurdish identity had been banned. In December 1982, the Minister of Education reminded all province governors that in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia folk songs could be used for ethnic or separatist purposes and that songs should therefore be sung in Turkish only. Although instructions of this kind were routinely ignored, violators at times received punishments that would constitute an example for others.”*<sup>100</sup>

Significant pressure was exercised on the use of Kurdish in daily life too. The coup leaders’ attitude towards Kurdish was so harsh that not even detainees and convicts were permitted to speak Kurdish with their families. When family members who did not speak Turkish spoke with their children in Kurdish they would be beaten and asked either to keep silent or to communicate via signs. Likewise, in tribunals, Kurds were not

<sup>99</sup> Baskin Oran, “Ulusal Egemenlik Kavramının Dönüşümü, Azınlıklar ve Türkiye” (The Transformation of the Concept of National Sovereignty, the Minorities and Turkey), within: *Anayasa Yargısı* (Constitutional Jurisdiction), C.20, (2003), 61.

<sup>100</sup> McDowall, *Modern Kürt Tarihi*, 563 et al.



given the possibility of conducting their defense in their mother tongue; in court records Kurdish was referred to as “a language that cannot be understood.”

The blockade on language that began with the foundation of the Republic and reached its apogee with the *coup* of 1980 only began to ease after the 1990s. Two factors were influential at this point: the first was that Kurdish and Islamic groups began to exercise pressure on the state for its concept of national and homogeneous identity. In parallel with the spread of multicultural demands all over the world, a number of groups in Turkey raised objections to the state’s imposition of a pseudo-identity and began to fight for their demands to be heard. This resulted in a partial easing of the state’s oppressive identity policy. The second factor consisted of relations between Turkey and the EU. Particularly following Turkey’s acceptance as a candidate for the EU (in December 1999), the intensification of relations between Turkey and the EU played a positive role in the abolishment – at least partial – of bans preventing the expression of different identities and languages from Turkish legislation.

Turkey saw important legal amendments come to light at this time. Some of these are as follows:

\* In 1991 Turkey abolished Law No. 2932 which considered Kurdish a banned language. In 2001 the expression “language prohibited by law” was removed from Articles 26 and 28 of the constitution.

\* As part of the Second Harmonization Package dated April 9, 2002, the concept of “banned language” was removed from the Law on the Press.

\* As part of the Third Harmonization Package, dated August 3, 2002, the freedom to broadcast in different languages on radio and television was regulated. Article 8 of Law No. 3984 on the Foundation and Broadcasts of Radio and Television was amended through this package and broadcasts “in different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in daily life” were permitted. Concurrently, Law No. 2923 on the Teaching of Foreign Languages was amended so as to permit the teaching of said languages and dialects and the possibility of obtaining private instruction.

On July 19, 2003, broadcasts in different languages and dialects on national radio and television acquired legal status. However, these broadcasts were very limited in length and their content was significantly restricted so as not to provide instruction in these languages and dialects. In addition, children’s programming was not permitted. Moreover, this regulation also included bureaucratic obstacles that effectively created deterrents to flouting the law; these included such examples as requiring broadcasting corporations to provide simultaneous translation or daily reports.)

\* As of June 2004, the Turkish Radio and Television (Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu, TRT) began to broadcast radio and television programs in Bosnian, Circassian, Arabic, Kurmanci and Zazaki.<sup>101</sup>

\* On January 1, 2009, TRT-6, a 24 hour channel in Kurdish began to broadcast. (However programs for children on TRT-6 fall within the scope of banned programs.)

\* In June 2009, the Ministry of Justice amended the “Statute on the Administration of Criminal Execution

<sup>101</sup> Şahin, Türkiye’nin Avrupa Birliği Süreci Bağlamında Kürt Sorunu, 149-150.



and on the Implementation of Punishment and Security Measures,” thus permitting detainees and convicts to conduct phone conversations in Kurdish.

\* In April 2010, Article 58 of the Law on Elections, which “forbids the use of languages and writing other than Turkish in radio and television broadcasts and other election propaganda” was amended and the freedom to use Kurdish during elections was granted. (However, the ban in Article 81/c of the Law on Political Parties still stands.<sup>102</sup>)

#### 4. The Use of the Mother Tongue in the Existing Legislation and in Education

Although these recent positive developments have somewhat alleviated the pressure on languages other than Turkish, legislation in Turkey still contains regulations that prohibit the use of the mother tongue in education. Turkey follows three paths to preventing the use of the mother tongue in education: (I) It preserves clauses in domestic law preventing the use of the mother tongue in education, (II) When acceding to international treaties on fundamental rights and freedoms, it has expressed reservations concerning clauses stipulating the use of the mother tongue in education, (III) It refrains from acceding to treaties dealing with language rights and banning discrimination based on the language of education.

I. Freedom of education was regulated in the Constitutions of 1924 (Article 80) and of 1961 (Article 21/2), but these did not include any clauses regarding the language of education. Article 42 of the Constitution of 1982 regulated the right of general education, but, unlike the constitutions of 1924 and 1961, prescribed a ban regarding the language of education. According to this clause, “no language other than Turkish can be used or taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens in educational institutions.” The primary language is therefore Turkish. Another clause of this constitution stipulates that “the principles that educational institutions teaching foreign languages and foreign language medium schools will follow are regulated by law. Clauses of international treaties are reserved” and allow for an exception.<sup>103</sup> According to this, it will be possible to conduct education in languages other than Turkish in situations arising from accession to international treaties. Two treaties currently ascribe responsibility to Turkey concerning education: these are the Lausanne Peace Treaty, which regulates minorities’ right of education in their mother

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<sup>102</sup> Article 81/c: Political parties may not use any language other than Turkish in the writing and publication of their statutes and programs, in congresses, in indoor or outdoor meetings, in demonstrations and in propaganda; they may not use or distribute banners, signs, records, audio or visual tapes, leaflets and declarations written in languages other than Turkish; they may not behave indifferently if these acts are carried out by others. However, it is possible for the state and programs to be translated into a foreign language other than the prohibited languages.

<sup>103</sup> Apart from constitutional clauses there are many other legal texts dealing directly or indirectly with the issue of the use of the mother tongue in education. Some of these are as follows: Law on the Unification of Education, Law on National Education, Law on Private Education Institutions, Law on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and on the Learning of Different Languages and Dialects by Turkish Citizens, Law on the Teachers of Turkish and Culture Lessons in Minority Schools, Regulation on Private Education Institutions Connected to the Ministry of National Education, Regulation on Private Armenian High Schools and Secondary Schools, Regulation on Armenian Primary Schools, Bylaw for Armenian Schools in Istanbul, Bylaw for Greek Schools in Istanbul, Regulation on the Learning of Different Languages and Dialects Traditionally Used by Turkish Citizens in Daily Life, Regulation on the Opening, Closing and Naming of Institutions Connected to the Ministry of National Education, Regulation on Discipline Matters and Awards in Secondary Schools Connected to the Ministry of National Education, Regulation on Primary Education Institutions Connected to the Ministry of Education, Directive on Foreign Schools, Regulation on The Ministry of National Education’s School Text Books and Education Tools.



tongue, and the Treaty of Friendship between the Turkish Republic and the Kingdom of Bulgaria.<sup>104</sup>

In short, apart from the minorities listed in the Lausanne Treaty and in the Treaty of Friendship with Bulgaria, Turkey does not recognize the existence of any other minorities. And according to these two treaties, minorities in Turkey consist of non-Muslim Turkish citizens of Greek, Armenian, Jewish and Bulgarian origin. Thus, only these minority groups hold the right of education in the mother tongue and it is not possible for any other group to use their mother tongue in education.

II. When Turkey accedes to international treaties, it expresses reservations concerning national legislation. For example, Turkey has expressed reservations regarding Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which concerns the rights of children belonging to minority or indigenous groups,<sup>105</sup> on the grounds that it holds the right to interpret this clause in line with the clauses and the spirit of its constitution and of the Lausanne Treaty.

Turkey has also expressed reservations regarding Article 13 of the UN Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights, regulating the “right of education.” It has reserved its right to implement paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 13, which stipulate the “freedom of individuals and of organizations to found and manage educational institutions,”<sup>106</sup> within the framework of Articles 3, 14 and 42 of the constitution.

Turkey has also expressed reservations regarding Article 27 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights concerning the protection of minorities.<sup>107</sup> It has reserved the right to implement this article in line with the clauses and procedures of its constitution and of the Lausanne Treaty. According to these reservations, Article 27 is only accepted in terms of the groups recognized as minorities within the Lausanne Treaty.<sup>108</sup>

III. In addition to treaties to which Turkey has expressed reservations, there are also some important legal [charters] that Turkey refrains from acceding to. The first and most important of these is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992. This charter contains the right to the use of relevant languages in education, the legal sphere, the media, cultural activities and economic and social life.

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<sup>104</sup> Terzioğlu, *Uluslararası Hukukta Azınlıklar ve Anadilde Eğitim Hakkı*, 181-182.

<sup>105</sup> Article 30: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

<sup>106</sup> Article 13/4: No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph 1 of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

<sup>107</sup> Article 27: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

<sup>108</sup> İdil Işıl Gül, “Eğitimde Erişim: Eğitimde Ayrımcılık Yasağı ve Fırsat Eşitliği” (Access to Education: Prohibition of Discrimination in Education and Equality of Opportunity), within: *Eğitim Hakkı ve Eğitimde Haklar* (The Right to Education and Rights in Education), Compiled by Işık Tüzün, (İstanbul, Eğitim Reformu Girişimi Yayını, 2009), 51-52.



The second is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1995. The convention, which does not contain a definition of “minority” because an agreement between the parties could not be reached, bans discrimination against minorities. Minorities are accorded rights individually, rather than as a group. The decision of which groups should be considered minorities is left to the discretion of acceding countries. During the submission of ratification documents, states are responsible for informing the Council of Europe which articles of the convention will be valid for which minority groups in the individual country. Ample power of discretion is conferred to states through the consideration of special circumstances in the implementation of the convention. But the Framework Convention is nonetheless important in that it is the first multilateral document with legal binding power on the general protection of national minorities. Furthermore, articles 5.1, 6, 9.1, 10, 11 and 12 concerning language rights, and especially the article 14, which regulates the right of education in the mother tongue, are of particular importance. Turkey has not acceded to either of these treaties.

The third is the Convention against Discrimination in Education, adopted by UNESCO (United Nations’ Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). This convention, which aims at abolishing all kinds of discrimination in education, was adopted on December 14, 1960 and came into force on May 22, 1962. According to the convention, parties undertake to abolish all laws and all administrative directives containing discrimination in education and to put an end to all such administrative practices. Article 5.1.c of the convention, which prescribes as a fundamental principle that children receive religious and moral education in line with their families’ beliefs and that no individuals or groups are forced to receive education not in conformity with their own beliefs, reads as follows:

*c. It is essential to recognize the right of members of national minorities to carry on their own educational activities, including the maintenance of schools and, depending on the educational policy of each State, the use or the teaching of their own language, provided however:*

*i. That this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minorities from understanding the culture and language of the community as a whole and from participating in its activities, or which prejudices national sovereignty;*

*ii. That the standard of education is not lower than the general standard laid down or approved by the competent authorities; and*

*iii. That attendance at such schools is optional.*

Turkey has not acceded to this treaty, which does not allow for any reservations (Article 9).

The fourth is Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits discrimination in the enjoyment of general rights. The protocol consists of six articles and, according to Article 1, the enjoyment of any right set forth by law shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, color, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status and no one shall be discriminated against by any public authority. This protocol, prepared on November 4, 2000 in Rome, came into force on April 1, 2005, when ten countries ratified it. Turkey signed



the protocol on April 18, 2001, but is not yet considered a party to it as it has not yet ratified it.

Since Turkey refrains from eliminating language bans from the legislation, makes reservations concerning certain clauses of treaties dealing with the right to use the mother tongue in education and does not accede to certain treaties, language-based discrimination continues. According to the dominant paradigm in Turkey, if education in the mother tongue is permitted, it will damage national identity; protecting the country's unity will thus become impossible. That is why the demand to use languages other than Turkish in education is still considered "the most unacceptable demand" by governments in Turkey, quite aside from political affiliation. Such demands are dealt with harshly. Two important events of the early 2000s underline the state's antagonism to the use of the mother tongue and especially to Kurdish.

The first of these events occurred in November 2001, when a group of primarily students at Istanbul University submitted a request for elective Kurdish lessons to the university administration. The petition movement which began in Istanbul found great favor in universities and secondary schools throughout the country and quickly spread. As of February 14, 2002, students from 24 universities throughout Turkey had submitted 11,837 signatures to petitions and were joined by thousands of primary and secondary school students and their families, demanding that Kurdish be taught in elementary and secondary schools. The state reacted very violently to petitions concerning elective Kurdish lessons; 1,359 people were taken into custody, 143 people were arrested pending a trial and 46 people were dismissed from their educational institution.<sup>109</sup>

The second event consisted in the closure case against the Education and Science Workers' Union (Eğitim-Sen) for having included the "right of education in the mother tongue" in its statute. In the Statute Congress held in September 2001, Eğitim-Sen placed the following article in its statute: Eğitim-Sen "advocates that all individuals of the community hold the right to equally and freely enjoy a democratic, secular, scientific and impartial education in their own mother tongue." The Governorship of Ankara warned the union concerning this article and requested its amendment. When the Union did not carry out the requested amendment, the Governorship petitioned the Office of the Chief Prosecutor for the Republic in Ankara, whereupon Eğitim-Sen replaced the words "in their own mother-tongue" with "in the mother tongue of individuals" and the issue was resolved. In March 2002 the Office of the Chief Prosecutor reached a "decision of non-prosecution" on the members of the union's executive board. The Ministry of Labor and Social Security also sent a letter to the union stating that "the change in the statute had been examined and that nothing had been found contrary to law" and the case was thus closed.

However the Office of the Chief of General Staff intervened and on June 27, 2003 sent a letter signed by Lieutenant General Köksal Karabay, Chief of Operations for the Office of the Chief of General Staff, to the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. The letter requested that "the Ministry state that the union statute is in conflict with the laws and with the constitution and that the necessary initiatives be made for the statute to be amended." Whereupon the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, which had previously stated that "nothing had been found contrary to law," asked the Governorship of Ankara for amendment of the statute. The governorship eventually filed a closure case for the union, which did not amend the statute.

<sup>109</sup> For details on the petition campaign see: Kerim Yıldız&Koray Düzgören, *Bir Dilin İnkârı: Türkiye'de Kürtçe Hakkı* (The Denial of a Language: The Right of Kurdish Language in Turkey) (London, Kurdish Human Rights Project Publication, 2002)



The Second Court of Labor of Ankara, dealing with the case, decided to reject the closure case in line with the ECHR, but this decision was repealed by the Ninth Civil Chamber of the Appeals Court. The Appeals Court explained as follows the grounds for its decision: according to the ECHR, the freedom to found associations may be restricted with the aim of ensuring national security, territorial unity and public order; according to legislation, no language other than Turkish can be taught to Turkish citizens.”

Therefore, when the use of the mother tongue in education is in question, political, military and civil bureaucracy, as well as judicial authorities, all show extreme sensitivity and resistance to this demand. This stance against the mother tongue prevents the possibility of different cultures within the community from developing and places in a disadvantaged position those with a mother tongue different from the majority language. The multifaceted issues that Kurdish students experience during their education generally arise from two fronts: the first of these is the high rate of poverty in Kurdish-majority regions and the insufficiency of state investment in education combined with improper educational policies. Because of poverty, it is difficult for children to begin school and pursue an education. Due to insufficient investment and improper policies in these regions, children are unable to enjoy educational benefits like children from other regions. According to data compiled by the Ministry of National Education, in the school year 2008/2009, while in the whole of Turkey the average number of students per classroom was 32 and per teacher, 23, in Southeastern Anatolia the average number of students per classroom was 44 and per teacher, 30. The situation in secondary schools is even worse. In Turkey, the average number of students per classroom in secondary education is 29 and per teacher, 18, whereas the country’s most crowded classrooms, with 43 students, are in Southeastern Anatolia. The average number of students in this region is 27. (In Diyarbakır, the average number of students per classroom is 53 and per teacher, 28.)<sup>110</sup> The number of teachers in the region is seriously inadequate. As a result, some provinces in the region are continuously placed at the bottom of country rankings in central examinations conducted throughout the country.

*“This situation prevents both Kurdish children living in this region and other children whose families have been appointed to this region from benefitting equally from the right of education and results in their falling much behind their peers in their future life. But education is one of those fundamental public services where the state is responsible for providing equal access and opportunity to all of its citizens.”<sup>111</sup>*

The second reason is that Kurdish children are deprived of their mother tongue in education. In the interviews held during the field study (the next chapter) with children whose mother tongue is Kurdish, it has been observed that Kurdish children who have not been permitted to use their mother tongue in education and who have been forced to receive education in a language they do not know encounter a variety of problems. It has also been observed that Kurdish students who have difficulty in communicating, who are not able to express their feelings and thoughts as they wish, who feel excluded from the community, who are not in complete control of the unfamiliar language and who in the meantime forget or are not able to develop their own mother tongue have a strong impression of being backward and of falling behind.

<sup>110</sup> Milli Eğitim İstatistikleri, Örgün Eğitim 2008/2009 (National Education Statistics, Formal Education 2008/2009), Republic of Turkey, Ministry of National Education, Directorate of Strategy Development, (Ankara, 2009), 15-18.

<sup>111</sup> *Kürt Sorununun Çözümüne Dair Bir Yol Haritası: Bölgeden Hükümete Öneriler* (A Roadmap for a Solution to the Kurdish Question; Policy Proposals from the Region for the Government) , TESEV Research (Istanbul, 2008), 32.



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This loss, for which the state is directly to blame, weakens people's loyalty to the system and prepares the ground for an environment of conflict. *Vis a vis* this situation there are two approaches that Turkey can adopt: the first is for Turkey to ignore Kurdish demands for the use of the mother tongue in education and to turn its back on the negative consequences arising from the failure to meet these demands. As it has generally done since the foundation of the Republic, Turkey can continue to pursue policies containing strong assimilationist elements and wait for Kurdish demands to fade away over time and for the related issues to disappear. This is one possible path to be taken, but it is not a way out. On the contrary, this path would result in a deepening of the wound and in the further damage to social stability.

The second approach is for Turkey to take into consideration general tendencies toward education throughout the world and to take necessary measures to set the necessary grounds for the use of the mother tongue in education. The state should refrain as soon as possible from prohibiting the use of Kurdish and other languages in education and should prepare the necessary environment for the language in use throughout the country (Turkish) to be taught along with other languages, in line with demands. The achievement of societal peace in Turkey is closely related to the transformation of education to an approach that recognizes differences and embraces them. In order for such a transformation to take place, the followings need to be done in the legal area:

- Turkey should amend Article 42 of the Constitution and should provide a constitutional guarantee for the use of the mother tongue in education.
- Starting with the Law on National Education, legislation regulating the field of education should be amended and the use of the mother tongue in all education institutions should be permitted.
- Turkey should remove all of its reservations from international treaties advocating language rights and stipulating the use of the mother tongue in education.
- Turkey should ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education and Protocol No. 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights.



## CHAPTER THREE

### ISSUE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION AND KURDISH STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Some research has been recently conducted on the use of the mother tongue and especially of Kurdish in education. Among these, the “Report on the Importance of the Mother Tongue and Education in the Mother Tongue,”<sup>112</sup> prepared by Eğitim-Sen and the “Report on Bilingualism and Education,” prepared by Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaşı on behalf of ERC,<sup>113</sup> present quite valuable information on the language and educational situation of students whose mother tongue is not Turkish, and of Kurdish students in particular. These studies compile the findings of many researchers who have studied students belonging to oppressed linguistic minority groups. They state that the mother tongue plays an important role in the educational and social lives of these individuals. Likewise, the “Report on Education as a Means of Social Reconciliation,”<sup>114</sup> prepared by Fırat and Atlı on behalf of the History Foundation, is an exceptional and significant study examining examples of discrimination in education in the context of the Kurdish issue and on face to face interviews held with people of different social groups.

Taking these reports as a starting point, in order to fill some of the gaps left previous studies, taking them a step further and finding answers to some pressing questions, the current study was conducted on the psychological, educational, linguistic and social issues faced by students whose mother tongue is Kurdish as a result of their inability to use Kurdish during their education and the prohibition of this language. In other words, the study endeavored to discover what children whose mother tongue is Kurdish experience when the bell rings and they enter a classroom where, for the first time in their lives, they are obliged to speak Turkish.

In this study the terms “mother tongue in education” and “mother tongue-based bilingual education” are used instead of the terms “mother tongue education” and “education in mother tongue”, which are used frequently in public debates and in majority of existing literature in Turkey. The main reason for this preference lies in the belief

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<sup>112</sup> Eğitim Sen, “Anadilinin Önemi, Anadilinde Eğitim” (The Importance of the Mother Tongue, Education in the Mother Tongue), Eğitim-Sen Yayınları, Ankara, 2010, 5-32.

<sup>113</sup> Müge Ayan-Ceyhan and Dilara Koçbaşı, “Çiftlililik ve Eğitim” (Bilingualism and Education) *Eğitimde Haklar II Projesi* (Education Rights Project), Sabancı University Educational Reform Initiative Report, İstanbul, 2009.

<sup>114</sup> Bahar Fırat and Altay Atlı, “Toplumsal Uzlaşma Aracı Olarak Eğitim? Alan Araştırmasından Notlar” (Education as a Means of Social Reconciliation? Notes from a Field Study), paper presented at the International Symposium on the Restructuring of Education for Social Peace (June 19-20, 2010), İstanbul, 2010.



that the terms “education in the mother tongue” is generally considered to suggest monolingual education in public debates over the issue. On the other hand, the terms “mother tongue in education” and “mother tongue-based bilingual education” are intended to point directly to multilingualism and cultural pluralism. From this point of view, the objective of this preference is for these terms to provide new perspectives in future debates and studies on this subject in Turkey.

## A. THE FIELD WORK

In this part of the study, interviews were held with 43 people in four different groups.<sup>115</sup> The first group consisted of people who began school in different periods and places, whose mother tongue is Kurdish and who attempted both to learn Turkish and acquire literacy in this language simultaneously. The second group included teachers who do not speak any Kurdish and who, in different periods and places, have taught Kurdish children who did not speak any Turkish. The third group consisted of teachers who are Kurdish and speak Kurdish and who have taught children whose mother tongue is Kurdish. The last group consisted of parents who speak only Kurdish and whose children go to school. Below are the findings that emerged from these interviews. After presentation of the findings, the study will explore how these findings can be examined under certain themes commonly mentioned by the interviewees and what they show us in accordance with the existing literature. At the end of this chapter, taking these findings, the international literature on this subject and the conceptual framework as a starting point, proposals on Turkey’s current educational system, as well as social and cultural proposals, will be presented.

## B. FINDINGS

### Group 1: Starting school without knowing any Turkish and receiving an education in an unfamiliar language

In-depth interviews were held with 13 people in the first group. All of these people, some of whom had begun school in the ‘80s and some in the ‘90s, stated that they encountered Turkish for the first time when they went to school. Some of them are now university students and some are self-employed. Although they have been living in Diyarbakır at the time of the interviews, they had attended primary school in different parts of the geography where Kurds live historically.

All of the people interviewed stated that when they began attending primary school they knew no Turkish or only “a few words” which they were not completely sure about their meanings. For example, Sabahat, who began primary school in Midyat, in 1985, said as follows:

*...you know some words, but not enough to form sentences. You attempt... how can I say it, you attempt in a way to form a concept using those words as a starting point. The sentence you form may not be accurate, but you attempt to understand it.*

Ahmet encountered Turkish for the first time, at a primary school in Çermik. He recounts the following:

*Our mother tongue was Kurdish. We first encountered Turkish at primary school. I thought the whole world spoke Kurdish, I didn't know whether other languages existed or not.*

<sup>115</sup> The names used for the interviewees in this study are not real. They are pseudonyms.



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All of the people interviewed said that the vast majority of students in their classrooms were Kurdish and that Turkish was not spoken with anyone other than teachers. Rojhat said as follows:

*Because of the area where we lived, we always spoke Kurdish. All of our friends spoke Kurdish. We spoke Kurdish both during classes and outside. We only spoke in Turkish with our teacher. We had to force ourselves as much as we could...*

Rojhat said that although most of his friends spoke only Kurdish, most students could not speak to each other in the classroom because speaking Kurdish was forbidden. They had to wait and go outside to speak. In this context, Dilgeş said the following:

*We did not speak Kurdish at school. We did not speak at all in the classroom; we only spoke Kurdish when we got together outside. We could only started to speak Turkish when we were 8-9 years old, up to then we didn't know any Turkish...*

Many people said that as they did not speak Turkish and were not permitted to speak Kurdish they had to choose to keep silent. Being silent bored some, who wanted school to end as soon as possible so that they could go home. They said that at first they only had to wait until the break; when they left the classroom they were able to relax. Later, they were not permitted to speak Kurdish in the breaks either. This meant that the wait to speak went from a relatively manageable 40 minutes to the end of the day when classes ended. They therefore spent five to six hours every day “waiting silently.” One interviewee said that the first word in Turkish he learned was “silence,” that every time he heard that word he felt guilty because it made him think he had done something wrong. Some other interviewees said that in such situations they developed different methods to communicate with their friends. For example Ahmet said:

*At school we were able to speak with our friends in our mother tongue during school breaks. Later on, in second grade, they restricted that too. “We can't teach them Turkish like this. Turkish has to be the dominant language in all fields.” I think it was 1996. When they exercised this restriction during the breaks too, almost no one spoke and we attempted to communicate with gestures and facial expressions. We developed a sign language as a second language. We more or less understood what we meant. That's how the process worked. Our common language was a sign language. When we looked each other in the face we were able to understand more or less what we meant or what we wanted to do. Anyway, during those 40 minutes we got very bored. We wished school would be over and we could get out and run away...*

Many of the people interviewed spoke of similar complaints, that although their mother tongue was Kurdish, they had to learn to read and write in Turkish, a foreign language to them. The main complaints included difficulties in communicating with the teacher and in general self-expression. For example, Rojhat had this to say:

*We simply sat there and looked at the teacher. We didn't understand anything anyway. I wanted to ask something but I couldn't. I had a friend, I asked him, can you translate it into Turkish, can you tell me what it is, so in this way I could ask the teacher what I don't understand.*

Gülbahar, who stated that she experienced similar communication problems, said:



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*...there was a distance among us because we were not able to express ourselves. Even when we had a problem, we couldn't say it. We had some friends who were not doing well financially, either they had a torn collar or something else, and they couldn't express themselves. The teacher would shout at them and it looked as if the children had been naughty or they were impervious to the scolding. Instead, maybe they couldn't afford clothes and they couldn't say it, or they had other problems at home or regarding the classes or the homework, but they couldn't say it. Because teachers spoke in Turkish, the children didn't understand which homework they were supposed to do and so frequently they couldn't do any homework...*

Osman had the following to say:

*Our teacher didn't speak Kurdish. That was our main problem. We just couldn't communicate. It was impossible even to catch each other's eyes, because he was from a different world and we were from a different world, even if we looked at each other we didn't understand each other.*

The majority of students who began school with teachers who did not speak Turkish said that because of the lack of communication they were not able to understand their teacher; this made them frightened and tearful. For example, Ruşen says the following:

*...when I first started school I began to cry because I didn't speak any Turkish. The teacher speaks Turkish and you don't understand anything, so you begin to cry.*

Some experienced “funny” incidents because they didn't speak the same language as their teachers and they couldn't understand each other. For example Dilgeş says the following:

*...funny things happened sometimes. Years have gone by, so I don't remember them very clearly, but especially during primary school I frequently ended up saying words in Kurdish because I didn't speak Turkish. The fact that some students could not speak out of shame or fear resulted in negative consequences. This is a terrible example, but some children wet themselves because they couldn't say that they needed to go to the toilet.*

Deniz, who mentioned similar problems, recounted the following:

*...this is what happened once: the teacher called our friends to the blackboard. He began by asking them: “Did you wash? Did you wash your face and hands? Did you brush your teeth?” When asked, our friends immediately said “No, I didn't, I swear I didn't, I swear on my religion I didn't,” as if blamed for something. Later we understood what was going on.*

Some people said that when they began to write they generally did not know what they were writing because the meaning of the words they were writing was unfamiliar to them. Likewise, others said that when they began to read they did not understand the meaning of the texts.

On the subject of teachers' reaction to the lack of communication, almost all students said that teachers who did not speak Kurdish displayed a negative attitude towards them, that they did not attempt to understand them. On the contrary, they blamed the students for not speaking Turkish. For example, Sidar says the following:



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*We couldn't speak Kurdish in the classes of Turkish teachers. We were scolded and asked whether we were swearing..*

*The teachers too were in a place where the language spoken wasn't their language, the people weren't their people. They acted negatively. There was no affection. They kept beating us. They would teach us the lessons and then leave. Sometimes we would give them things. We would give them flowers. When those flowers shed their petals or they were thrown in the rubbish bin, we felt as if we had been thrown away. At that age, that was our psychological state. That is to say, we felt very negatively... The flowers being thrown away... We didn't speak the language; that was how we expressed ourselves...*

Similarly, Ahmet recounted the following:

*...sometimes the teacher too got exasperated. "I keep explaining, don't you understand?" We really didn't understand. We didn't speak, we just looked at him. In the village, they always kept telling us that we needed to respect the teacher, that he had come here to teach us things, that we needed to do our lessons, do this and that, but as we didn't understand what he was telling us we tried to keep quiet. This partly turned us into passive students. We mainly kept quiet, we tried to keep quiet.*

Many people said that because they could not understand what was being said, they were accused by their teachers of having cognitive difficulties, which were in fact simply communication barriers. For example, Sabahat says:

*Our teacher had belittled us, asking us, "Why do you have cognitive problems?" I told him it was not a cognitive problem. If you send a student abroad who doesn't speak English and put him in an educational environment there, it's clear that he will have difficulties.*

It becomes clear that in parallel to these attitudes, the students' cultures and identities were also negated through their language. Teachers frequently used expressions that ignored the students' culture and identity. For example, Lezgin has the following to say:

*...we had a teacher from Izmir who said: "You are people who don't want to learn Turkish." She was also our class teacher. And she was also our science teacher. I always got 2 (grade) in science class. But I was a very successful and determined student. I experienced many problems. I also had problems in English class in high school. Our English teacher was a woman from Kazakhstan who was a Turkish nationalist. She made things difficult for us. In secondary school, science class brought my grade point average down. In high school, English class brought it down. That teacher always said: "There actually is no such thing as Kurdish; this is Turkish that has been Kurdified." So what she meant was that the people in the East have evolved Turkish into Kurdish. That's when I reacted to her...*

On the other hand, most of the people interviewed said that during various stages of their primary school education they were also taught by Kurdish teachers who spoke Kurdish: they were able to communicate with them, they felt more at ease with them and they learned Turkish more easily by speaking Kurdish from time to time. They were thus more successful in their studies. Lezgin recounted the following:



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*...the teacher I got after having repeated the year was a very good teacher. He was even elected several times the best teacher of the year. He spoke Kurdish too. He was Kurdish. When he referred to bread as “nan”, he would tell us that it was “nan” in Kurdish and “ekmek” in Turkish. Sometimes he even taught us in Kurdish. He was a very brave man. He contributed greatly to the person I now am. I learned Turkish from him.*

Likewise, Cemil explained the effect that a Kurdish-speaking teacher had on him and said:

*...a teacher from the neighboring village came to our school. He spoke Kurdish. His name was R.K. He started teaching us. From time to time he would speak to us in Kurdish. When we played football he'd join us and ask to be passed the ball in Kurdish. It was good. We liked it. We were able to express ourselves more easily.*

Still, many people said that even Kurdish teachers refrained as much as possible from speaking Kurdish to them in the classroom, that they used Kurdish only when a particular student did not understand something and that they generally only spoke Kurdish outside the classroom.

Another situation brought to light by the interviews was that because they began to read and write in a language with which they were unfamiliar, they felt humiliated and lacked self-confidence. Sidar, who experienced this, said the following:

*You leave your family; there is a new environment, a new language... Everything was difficult of course. You couldn't express yourself, you felt humiliated, and you didn't feel confident... Because we received our education in another language, we began to draw away from our own language... We aren't good at either Turkish or Kurdish. We spoke one language when we went home and another when we went to school. So we became disconnected. I still encounter difficulties.*

Similarly, many people stated that the issues arising from receiving schooling in a language they did not know pursued them in later stages of life. For example, Ahmet said that because it was forbidden to speak Kurdish and he initially had to keep quiet in school, this sense of needing to “keep silent” pursued him in later stages of life, making him a passive person:

*Because I didn't ask any questions in primary school, now that I'm at university, when an issue is discussed I prefer to keep silent unless something really bothers me. When something is being discussed outside, I prefer to keep silent as much as possible. I guess that's because of my primary school years.*

Similarly, the problem of not being able to express themselves properly, experienced intensively in the first years of school, continued in later stages of the students' lives. For example, Lezgin says:

*Even now, at university, sometimes I can't express myself fully in Turkish. Sometimes in the breaks we speak Kurdish with the teachers. Others know this too. This happens because of our inability to express ourselves...*

Everyone interviewed agreed that learning to read and write in an unfamiliar language resulted in being unsuccessful academically at school. Many claimed they could have accomplished more had they not had this hurdle to overcome. For example, Sidar said the following:



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*Maybe I could have done more. I could have developed other abilities...*

Regarding being unsuccessful at school, Lezgin said:

*Because I didn't speak Turkish I had to repeat several years. The year I first failed, my teacher didn't speak any Kurdish. That's why we had a problem. We just couldn't communicate. It wasn't only me; my cousins from the village also had the same problems. That's why my cousins and I had to repeat that year."*

Moreover, many people said that beginning to read and write in a language they didn't know gave them a feeling of falling behind others; some say they still feel this way. For example, Sabahat said:

*...the feeling I had was of being left behind. At school at first you seem to learn a language. But you don't actually get an education until you learn that language. That is why, when you look at the whole of Turkey, instead of looking only at the Turkish-Kurdish situation, I believe that when I compare myself with other people who don't speak Kurdish, it is as if I began to receive an education a year later.*

Osman also said similar things:

*When we started school we didn't speak Turkish. We learned some Turkish by the time we were 12-13 years old, so that means we began our lives quite late, with a delay of 15 years... I once looked at some pictures drawn by children going to nursery school; the fact that 5-6 year old children can express themselves in that way arises from the accumulation of information in their repertory. When I was twenty years old and I saw those pictures, I was astounded. I wonder whether I would be able to draw them even now.*

Again in connection with the feeling of being left behind, all of the people we interviewed said that they felt at a disadvantage when they compared themselves with the people who had been educated in their mother tongue. For example, Ruşen said the following:

*For one thing, Turkish children start ahead of you. When they read a text they understand it completely. We didn't have that opportunity. We generally didn't understand.*

Baran had similar things to say:

*Children whose mother tongue was Turkish started ahead of you. When I first started school next to children whose mother tongue was Kurdish, there were also students who spoke Turkish. They generally were the children of civil servants. I must have envied them. When you are little you are not conscious of these things. What is it like to envy the language of other people? It's really tragic. You say things like I wish I was born like that and I didn't encounter these problems. You feel excluded. It's a completely different psychological state.*

*Children in Istanbul or Konya and children in the Kulp district of Diyarbakır don't begin their language education under the same conditions. These children learn a completely new language. And the teachers ask them to make comments in that language. For example we had writing classes. But we couldn't express ourselves. Our sentences were always inverted. And when you couldn't succeed, it influenced your knowledge in math and science too.*



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This is what Deniz had to say on this subject:

*We really did envy them. They spoke Turkish, so they expressed themselves better and they spoke more in the classroom. And they got along better with the Turkish teachers. Because they spoke more, to us they seemed the best, the most hard-working students. It made us feel inadequate. We have always felt that inadequacy.*

Osman says the following:

*...we started life with a defeat of 1-0, with a delay of 10-15 years. They were able to communicate, among them there were the children of police officers, civil servants and teachers. The lessons they learned at school they already knew from home. They were ready. They didn't need to show extra effort. But we needed to make a great effort.*

Another reason why students felt themselves at a disadvantage was that their parents were not able to help them study. Only the presence of another family member who had previously gone to school made a positive difference. For example, Dilgeş said as follows:

*...there were students who understood things and learned easily; students who received support from their brothers or sisters who had gone to school learned things more easily. (...) But especially if there are illiterate people in the family, for example if you look at children's mothers and fathers, at their brothers and sisters in our villages, most are illiterate. Students from families of this kind who start school encounter difficulties if they don't get any support. And when you can't develop you lose interest in reading, so support wasn't of any use.*

Another problem that Kurdish students encountered during their education was that their parents were not able to attend parent-teacher meetings because of the language barrier. Some students said that they did not tell their parents they were having difficulties because they thought it would be hard on them. Gülbahar had this to say:

*My mother came to school once, because I needed to receive some kind of medical treatment in order to get permission from school. She couldn't speak because she didn't know any Turkish. I asked my mother to come. I told her I would speak and convince the teachers... Apart from that my family never came to school. (...) Even in high school I enrolled by myself.*

In addition, the lack of communication persists even after later stages of education, because parents do not speak Turkish and students can no longer express themselves well in Kurdish. Many students said that because they could no longer speak Kurdish well they were no longer able to speak with their parents and share their thoughts with them. For example, Sabahat said as follows:

*Because I use Kurdish so little I find it difficult to communicate with my mother. Think of how, as a young girl, you want to share things with your mother. You learn Turkish at an academic level, you express yourself, but you feel inadequate in Kurdish. And you can't tell your mother about this inadequacy. You feel this as a shortcoming. For example, I have a diary. I write the things there I can't share in Turkish with my mother. But I can't share them in Kurdish either, because I don't speak that level of Kurdish. These are my problems. I can't explain my inner world to my mother... Let's say that I have a very good knowledge of Turkish. One*



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*day when I have a child I'll be able to share things with my child because we will speak the same language. But I have never been able to feel this way with my mother. My mother and I are very apart now. I can say that we have been divided.*

In parallel, those who were able to continue communicating with their parents said that, especially from high school onwards, Turkish became the language they spoke with friends. For example Ahmet says:

*If we were to compare our current knowledge of Kurdish and Turkish, I suppose Turkish would rate seventy percent and Kurdish thirty percent. I only use Kurdish regularly with my family, with my relatives, with some of my friends and when I go to the village. Apart from that, Turkish dominates our lives at university, at work, in the streets. We prefer to speak Turkish. I think we are used to it by now. In the past we used to speak more Kurdish, now we speak more Turkish. It's not only me; Turkish is in everybody's life now.*

Moreover, after five or six years of education, once Turkish has been acquired, many people said that they developed a negative attitude against Kurdish and Kurdish-speaking people. Ahmet continues as follows:

*Once we reached a certain stage in Turkish I began to feel alienated from my surroundings and my village. It was as if they were all behind the times. It's as if we were second-class because we were Kurdish and when we spoke Turkish we acquired a new self-confidence. We had learned Turkish. The first time I read and understood a book I was so happy. It was as if I had achieved great success. I felt like a new person. That's when the ties to your own language are severed. Our own language is a simple, outdated language. I don't know if this was instilled in us by our teachers... That's what I thought. I thought that my language was a kind of egggy peggy: it doesn't mean much and we are not referred to anywhere. We don't have any sources, the books sent here are in Turkish, story books are in Turkish. The heroes in the stories are Turkish. They are brave, this and that... The stories you read are in Turkish. When everything was in Turkish, Kurdish was of no value anymore. Kurdish or speaking Kurdish is not that important... I could see that whenever possible I was saying these things to my family too.*

In a similar way, some students said that in primary school they were embarrassed when their parents spoke Kurdish. For example Lezgin says the following:

*We lived in the city centre. The building we lived in had been assigned to us by the state because of my mother's position. One day my mother called out to me in Kurdish. My playmates asked me "what did your mother say?" And I told them – I was in secondary school – "My mother speaks French with me." My friends told their mothers, "Mom, do you know that our friend's mother is French? She has come from France; they live here." Then their mothers told my mother what I had said. When my mother asked me why I had lied, I told that I was embarrassed. Most of the people living in our building were Turkish; they spoke Turkish. I had lied because I didn't want to be excluded.*

The sense of shame for speaking Kurdish persists in younger generations too. Lezgin, who spoke about a similar situation, recounted the following about his younger brother:

*I speak Turkish with my brother because he believes that speaking Kurdish is demeaning. When I speak to him in Kurdish, he says, "don't speak to me in Kurdish. My friends make fun of me." This is because he goes to*



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*a private school. My brother experiences this discrimination because people there generally speak Turkish. Although I tell him that our mother tongue is Kurdish and that he should not be ashamed of it, he speaks Turkish because of his state of mind, because of his age. We are even thinking of taking him out of that school, because he is being demeaned. Apparently his friends don't speak to him. So both the child and the family are distressed because of this situation.*

Concurrently, people who have acquired political consciousness after a certain age and feel the need to openly express that they are Kurdish have been ostracized by some teachers and by the other students. They have been taunted and stigmatized. For example, Ruşen says the following:

*It was because of the pressure exercised on us, because of things we experienced when we were six or seven years old... In secondary school and high school things changed a little. For example I began to notice these things. I wondered why I had experienced such things. This time I began to feel more Kurdish. Because I began to express this more frequently in secondary school, they called me "peshmerga." In high school they nicknamed me "terrorist."*

Moreover, almost everyone interviewed said that they were subjected to physical violence for speaking Kurdish, for speaking little Turkish or for not understanding what was being said. Gülbahar said the following:

*In primary school I had... well, you know, I had made a name for myself in math... But when I did less than fifty words in reading class, both the teacher and I were shocked. The teacher beat everybody who [read] less than fifty words per minute, but she beat me more. It was as if she beat me more because she thought "how can she not read..."*

*When we were not successful or we didn't understand something it always ended with a slap or with a beating. The teacher would call you to the blackboard and ask you something and when you didn't answer it almost looked as if it was the result of stubbornness. It was misunderstood and the teachers would react to it. And it generally ended up with the student being beaten up. That was our major problem, everybody's major problem in primary school...*

*We spoke Kurdish with our friends in the neighborhood or with other Kurdish students in our class. And when the teacher heard us it generally ended with a beating. That's how it was.*

Lezgin recounts a similar experience:

*Because my friends and I spoke Kurdish in the corridor we were taken to the interrogation room. That's what they themselves called it. It wasn't officially called that of course; they just referred to it like that. I was beaten so hard in that room that when I left my head hurt for a whole day. I didn't tell my family what had happened.*

Dilgeş tells the following:

*Because we didn't speak Turkish, it was difficult for the teacher to make us assimilate it. The teachers themselves had difficulties in expressing themselves to us. That's when we had problems. Because of the language problem there were times when the teachers would get angry, they would scold and even beat students.*

Nevertheless, many people said that they were happy to have learned Turkish, but that it would have been



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better had they been able to learn it under different circumstances and preserve their own mother tongue at the same time. This is what Sabahat had to say on the subject:

*I am happy to have learned Turkish. Having learned such a language gives you a different feeling. I like being able to express myself in Turkish. But I have left behind a language that belonged to me. You feel the pain of that. You feel as if you are choosing between two children.*

Almost all of the people interviewed said that if they have children in the future they will want them to begin school in Kurdish, their mother tongue. However, they also emphasized the necessity of learning Turkish. For example Ruşen said the following:

*I would teach Kurdish very well and also Turkish very well. But I would definitely teach them Kurdish.*

Baran stated the following:

*From the first grade onwards [children] should be educated in Kurdish. But of course they should also learn Turkish.*

Cemil expresses as follows the need for children to learn in their own mother tongue, especially reading and writing:

*In social life you speak Kurdish but you don't write it. If this issue is going to be resolved, we should begin by writing in Kurdish, and then by reading it. We all know what we speak but we don't know how to write it or read it.*

Ruşen adds that families should decide who receives how much language education and in which language and said the following:

*I believe that everybody should learn as much of it as they want. I believe that there is a Basque model in Spain. When somebody is asked in which language they want their children to be educated, some prefer the Basque language and some Spanish. A model like that could be established. I believe that people should be able to get an education – including university-level – in their own mother tongue.*

However, in response to the question “in what way will children be affected, or what benefit will they draw from starting school in their mother tongue?” almost all of the people interviewed said that children would not feel the aforementioned lack of communication with teachers, the inability to express themselves, the lack of self-confidence, the feeling of humiliation and of being left behind. They would therefore be more successful in their studies. In this context, Osman said the following:

*Children who learn reading and writing in their own language can begin to build their lives in their own language. And their dreams and knowledge, their imaginations can develop much further. But when they jump from one language to another, their life is cut in half.*

Ahmet had similar things to say:



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*When I think of the problems I suffered, I believe that Kurdish should be used as a mother tongue in education or that it should be learned first, that up to a certain stage, at least for primary school education, until children's minds mature a little, they should be taught in their mother tongue. I can cite the example of my own life. I think that I would have been more successful from the point of view of both school and development of my personality. Moving on to another language before one learns a primary language and learns to express oneself is a serious problem. Because when you move on to the second language you forget the first.*

Baran said the following:

*They [children] would be more successful. They would feel more self-confident. They wouldn't experience internal conflict; they would be more at ease psychologically and not feel humiliated.*

Cemil had this to say:

*If I was learning Kurdish in the village, I would continue this in secondary school too. If it was like that, others wouldn't give us these demeaning looks. Everybody would receive an education on equal terms, what they call equality of opportunity. We wouldn't start with a defeat of 1-0.*

Some of those who say that an education in the mother tongue would abolish the aforementioned problems spoke of other advantages of using the mother tongue in education. For example Lezgin said the following:

*Students whose mother tongue is Kurdish will keep their language alive. And later they will learn Turkish as well as their own language. We say that a language is one person and that two languages mean two persons. People who learn their own mother tongue will then learn also Turkish would make a big difference. People who learn Kurdish can learn many other languages within the Indo-European language group. For example Kurdish is very close to Spanish and to English. The advantage of learning Kurdish is that one can then better understand other languages.*

Some of those interviewed felt that children needed to be educated in their mother tongue, but that regional differences in Kurdish could result in discrepancies in terms of educational standards. Lezgin had this to say:

*The Kurdish language varies from region to region... I noticed this in university, especially. When people from Şırnak and from Diyarbakır speak Kurdish, the difference in dialect is very clear. The teaching of Kurdish should begin with the alphabet. A common language should be agreed upon. Just as there is the Turkish of Istanbul, the Kurdish of a particular region should be taught to everyone. The first thing to be done is to abolish the differences within Kurdish.*



## Group 2: Unilingual Turkish teachers teaching unilingual Kurdish children

This group included teachers from throughout Turkey who do not speak Kurdish, who are employed as teachers in primary schools in Diyarbakır and who have been attempting to teach reading and writing in Turkish to unilingual Kurdish children. Of the 10 teachers interviewed, five said they were from Diyarbakır and that they had received teacher-training in various departments of Dicle University. The other teachers stated that they were from different cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Sivas, Bursa and Sakarya. One teacher said he had 2 years of teaching experience, while the others' range was from between 6 and 26 years.

All of the teachers said that during and following their teacher-training they did not receive any specific training on teaching reading and writing to children with a different mother tongue than the language of school, that this subject was never discussed in their university studies and that they never read any significant research on the subject. However, some teachers said that they asked for recommendations from experienced teachers who had taught Kurdish children. This is what Melike had to say on the subject:

*...we never received training concerning language, concerning a different language; I can actually say that this subject was ignored.*

Ayşegül, who received training to be a primary school teacher, says the following:

*...I have never come across a book on how to teach reading to children who speak different languages.*

The majority of teachers interviewed have taught both children whose mother tongue is Turkish and those for whom it is Kurdish. For example Bengi says:

*The mother tongue of children in Sakarya was Turkish. I never had any problems. Here (Lice, Diyarbakır) the mother tongue is Kurdish. There are students who don't speak Turkish and who have never heard it. Children who go to school speak Turkish, but Turkish is not spoken in their homes.*

Some had students who spoke only the Zaza language or Arabic. Ayşegül is one of the teachers whose students in Lice spoke only Zaza. She tells the following:

*At the beginning we taught students from distant villages. They didn't speak any Turkish. They didn't even know things like "come" or "go." They were mainly Zaza people. The children didn't have a TV at home so they had never had anything to do with Turkish. Neither their parents nor anyone else around them spoke the language. So it was whatever they learned at school.*

When asked what they had initially thought about children who did not speak Turkish and whose mother tongue was Kurdish and whether their impressions had changed since then, the teachers recounted the difficulties they had encountered. The most difficult thing for them was that they were not able to communicate with children and vice versa. Melike says the following:

*...Language is a major problem because they don't understand anything. Even the simplest things are difficult for them. For example we have problems when we conduct activities in Turkish. For example their answers*



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*on exam papers consist of single words. Speaking is already difficult, even simple words are really difficult.*

Bengi had similar things to say:

*The child can't learn anything because he doesn't understand. I tell him what to do through signs. Or I ask children who speak Turkish to tell him.*

*There are three students in my class who don't speak any Turkish yet and it is probable that they will fail this year because we just can't communicate. You can see the child's desire to understand, but they aren't able to do it.*

Ayşegül says the following:

*They think in Kurdish. They don't speak Turkish! Everything is in Kurdish, they even dream in Kurdish. That's how removed they are from Turkish. It's only a language they learn in school. (...) When I taught first grade in a mountain village, the children read beautifully. First grade and they read beautifully. I asked them what the text meant and they replied "I don't know," so they didn't understand anything they read. Once I asked them to read a story about a boy called Ali, whose grandfather had a walking stick... I asked this class of thirty students what "stick" meant and no one knew. I slammed the book shut. That is how little they understood!*

Özlem said similar things:

*...in first grade you teach a letter, you teach a syllable and then you form words, but in order to recognize the letter and think of the word, the child must know the meaning of the word. When they don't speak Turkish reading acquisition is very slow...*

*Although my students are in fourth grade, even now it happens that they don't understand what they read; they don't understand even simple sentences. You know in Turkish classes there is the vocabulary exercises; we slowly develop their Turkish by using words in sentences, but with the time dedicated to this we could have given them other information, we could have helped them be more successful. We work more to develop these children's knowledge of the language [Turkish]. And of course they fall behind other [Turkish] students who can already read. So language is a problem by itself.*

Sevda said the following:

*First you teach the language, then to read and write. Everything needs to become concrete. The children don't know the meaning of the words in Turkish. They can't picture it in their minds. And because the words don't become concrete they can't be learned. In the West [region of Turkey], reading and writing begins pretty quickly, but here we can only achieve it towards the end of the year... so we can barely follow the curriculum.*

Some teachers said that even if they managed to communicate, it was very difficult for students with an insufficient knowledge of Turkish to follow the lessons because they could not understand what they read.

Derya had this to say:

*...Speaking was not enough. A parrot may repeat some sentences but it doesn't know what it is saying, and*



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*the children also didn't know what they were reading. It was so difficult for me. Sometimes I would explain each sentence of a text, one by one, what each word meant, what the sentence meant, repeating everything over and over...*

In answer to a question about how students were affected by not being able to communicate or understand their books, many teachers stated that this resulted in students falling behind and not reaching their potential. Derya says:

*...sometimes you think that this child might become a scientist in the future, but if she doesn't have full command of Turkish, she can't use her intelligence properly and display her skills. In a sense she has difficulty even thinking.*

Melike had similar things to say:

*...sometimes we teachers wonder whether these children are unable to understand. It is not possible for all students, 31 students in a class to all be slow-witted, but I really do not enjoy teaching. Inadequate nutrition and indifference on the part of the family may play a role in it, but I believe that the language problem plays a major role.*

Sevda, who states that even students taking university exams still do not understand everything they read, says the following:

*To start with, in university exams they have problems in terms of language. Their mother tongue is Kurdish, but they take exams in Turkish. Because they misunderstand what they read, they make mistakes. This is definitely a disadvantage. For the students of this region the education system is a race and they always end up at the bottom. They can't get ahead because no matter how much Turkish they learn they still have problems in understanding what they read. It is difficult to overcome this.*

Özlem says as follows:

*...first of all they always fall behind. When we compare ourselves with other schools, we fall behind in all areas, in terms of books and of knowledge.*

Again on the subject of "falling behind," and on comparing Kurdish-speaking students to students educated in their own language, Derya says:

*...sometimes we despair about what is going to happen to these children. I am talking to my nephew studying at the same level in the West and there is such a big difference between them. I cannot calculate the size of the deficit with which they begin their lives. These children are behind in terms of language, economy, family, environment, everything. I lived in the slums of Izmir but even I was lucky.*

Erhan said similar things:

*...from the point of view of success, there is a huge difference between students whose mother tongue is Turkish*



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*and students whose mother tongue is not Turkish. You are teaching them a new language and how to read and write in that language at the same time. There is bound to be a problem in connecting the two. When you teach a student whose mother tongue is Turkish or who speaks Turkish well you can easily succeed. But the others cannot understand anything you explain, so it's bad.*

Mustafa said the following:

*They are always one step behind. In comparison to children in the West they start 1-0 behind. Our main problem with our students is their inability to express themselves. We teach them in Turkish, in the introduction to science class we read a paragraph and answer questions and children need to have a rich lexicon. This was true especially for children from villages... they had this problem. They couldn't express themselves and, even if they did, they couldn't come up with the right words.*

Bengi had this to say:

*While communication and understanding the subject matter is fast with students who speak Turkish, I couldn't achieve any progress with the students here. They are at a disadvantage. The rate of failure is around 90 %. Repeating the first grade causes children to be psychologically affected, to feel inadequate. I have students who are repeating the previous year. I think it's because of the language. These children have failed because they didn't know the language.*

One of the teachers interviewed said that this situation was frustrating not only for the students but also for the teachers:

*I really don't know how it is from the point of view of the students. They end up learning something but we have great difficulty. As a teacher I found the situation very difficult. It's still happening and it's still difficult. The level is so low. We struggle with the students. This system really frustrates us.*

Some teachers said that in order to communicate with students who do not speak Turkish they ask other students in the class who do speak the language to help; they then teach reading and writing through them.

*...thanks to the children who speak Turkish. They would sometimes try to describe things [in Kurdish] for us. As you know, children in first grade learn by stages. The biggest problems concern the first grade.*

In a similar way, Tuba said that she was able to help students through a student in her class who spoke some Turkish and with the help of Kurdish words that she learned:

*Only one student in the classroom spoke Turkish, so, with his help... or with the few words of Kurdish that I knew [I was able to teach]...*

Many teachers said that they didn't know what to do about the impossibility of teaching reading and writing to students who did not speak Turkish. For example, Mustafa felt as follows:

*...let alone teaching reading and writing, we don't even know how to teach Turkish.*



Some teachers admitted that they felt guilty. Ayşegül had this to say:

*...it is so difficult; you end up teaching on your own. You ask a question and then you answer it yourself. For example the level in the eighth grade class I'm teaching is very low. I heard that that class is very good at math and science, but they are zero at Turkish. It's as if the children are forced to take these lessons. I feel as if I am torturing the children; they don't understand, so they don't want to listen to what they don't understand.*

Some teachers feel that illiterate or non-Turkish speaking parents render the situation even more difficult; they argue that if mothers are literate they can be of more use to their children:

*...the mother, the parent is the most important element. They are the ones who help out and are useful. If you can't establish a dialogue with the mother, the father is out at work all the time anyway. Because they don't speak Turkish we weren't able to establish a dialogue with mothers. Besides they feel embarrassed. Because of their culture, they don't come to meetings. But we don't have that problem in the city centre. There it's not the mothers but the fathers who attend the meetings. We told them too, but fathers don't have much influence on children.*

Ayşegül says the following on this subject:

*To start with, families need to be educated. Everything originates from within the families. The Turkish they learn here is not sufficient; the families should speak it too. All the responsibility, all of it lies with the teachers. We are both their mothers and their fathers. We form all three elements of education. It's quite difficult. The state should find a solution. There is nothing we can do.*

When asked if they employ any methods to overcome these difficulties and establish a more effective communication with students, many teachers say that there are no systematic methods to use; some say that they try to make children read as much as possible, that they teach them many words; some say that they try to convey their messages through different sentences and by using many different words. Derya said as follows.

*Sometimes when I read a sentence I use the vocabulary in ten different ways. When I do this I develop my own vocabulary. I try as much as possible to go down to the level of children. Sometimes I use ten different words instead of one. These are the problems we encounter. It is difficult in terms of time too, but we try to teach them to read as many books as possible.*

Also, some teachers stated that they tried to teach children Turkish through ample use of pictures, visual materials and drama techniques.

Some teachers said that if they had known the children's language, that is to say Kurdish, they would have explained difficult things in the children's language. For example Ayşegül had this to say:

*...I suffered the consequences of not speaking their language. I explain things to children and I know that they don't understand, but I can't explain things in their own language. If I knew Kurdish I would explain things using Kurdish from time to time, but because I don't speak it I have great problems.*



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Moreover, the teachers said that when children spoke Turkish they frequently used incorrect sentence structures for Turkish. This is due to the sentence structure of Kurdish and to the fact that children sometimes translate their thoughts from Kurdish. For example, Melike said:

*...some things we found so funny. For example, when the children played and we asked what they were doing, they said: "I am playing to myself;" or "he is breaking my name," or "shall I open you some fruit," for example...*

When asked what they thought about the use of Kurdish as the mother tongue in education, based on their experiences, most teachers said that it would be more useful for people to be educated in their mother tongue and that reading and writing is best learned in the language one knows. Melike had this to say:

*...it is not easy for people to be educated in a language they don't know or understand. For example, one of my sister-in-laws is in England right now. She went there willingly and she wanted to learn the language. She went because she wanted her children to learn it. She's a university graduate, but when she went there she realized that it isn't as easy as one thinks...*

Derya said the following:

*...whatever problems Turks living in England experience, children of Kurdish origin living in their own country experience the same. It's the same problem all over the world. No one should ignore it. Or rather, it can't be ignored; if I, as a person who loves her job and her country, see it, everybody needs to see it.*

Özlem expressed similar views:

*Education should be held in the mother tongue. We are so late in doing this. This is the reason why the east and the southeast have fallen so far behind. We can cite many other causes too, but this is the main one.*

When asked in what way children speaking Kurdish would benefit from the use of their mother tongue in education, almost everyone referred to the same issues. For example, Tuba said:

*If children were educated in their mother tongue they would be able to understand some things more easily.*

Sevda had the following to say:

*All people express themselves best in their mother tongue. They can feel, think and share their love best in their mother tongue. The destruction of a language means the destruction of an ethnicity. How can an ethnicity, whose language has been destroyed, convey itself, its culture and thoughts, its songs, its history to the next generations?*

Tuba believes that people who are educated in their mother tongue will be more successful and says:

*Children, young people and adults have difficulty in expressing themselves, in understanding what is said and in interpreting what they read. If these children learned reading and writing in their own language maybe they would read more books and come up with beautiful ideas.*



Ayşegül said that it would be better for teachers too if everyone were educated in their own mother tongue:

*Well, I think that if everybody were educated in their own mother tongue it would be less difficult for us too. We would be able to do our job more easily. I believe I would have fewer difficulties if I, who speak Turkish, worked with Turkish children.*

One of the recurring issues was that as a result of the language problem, most teachers were also unable to communicate with parents. Also, some parents were able to speak with teachers only through interpreters. Mustafa had this to say:

*...we still have mothers who don't speak Turkish. We experience problems with them of course. The children act as intermediaries: I talk to them and they translate. But of course I don't know how correctly they translate what I say.*

Another teacher we interviewed said that he attempted to communicate with the parents through translators, as well as through body language:

*...at least I understand what is being said and as for pronunciation I have others help me out. Since I have had helpers, I haven't had too many problems in speaking with them. And relations improved when we used body language...*

Bengi, one of the teachers who had problems in communicating with parents, said:

*A parent said to me: "One day, when I came to talk to you, you sent me away, but I wanted to talk." I had actually said that I couldn't speak during class, but she thought that I had sent her away. When parents come to talk, I have to set aside three hours. When we did establish communication with parents of children who were doing poorly, the children did better.*

An issue that the majority of teachers touched on was that aside from language issues, the families had serious economic, educational and other problems. Derya says the following:

*...economic problems aside, the level of the parents aside, the fact that children live in streets that don't see daylight aside, problems are knee deep.*

Ayşegül says as follows:

*You ask a parent to come to tell him to make the child study, to attend to him. But the parent doesn't speak Turkish and he doesn't know how to attend to the child. He is completely ignorant. He is illiterate. The mother, the father, the brothers, the elders, they are all illiterate. So it was very difficult. Some people wanted their children to study and be successful but they didn't know what to do. It's because they are not educated, they don't speak Turkish. I ask a parent to help the child study and he says, "Daughter, I can't read. How can I help him?" So we had serious problems.*

On possible solutions, teachers came up with different suggestions. While some said that children could be



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taught Turkish before school, at nursery school or kindergartens, some stated that the situation was no different for children who had been to nursery school. Some suggested that children could learn their mother tongue via elective Kurdish classes while others said that literacy skills could be taught in Kurdish or that Turkish and Kurdish could be used together.

Derya said as follows:

*Rather than in terms of the political, education should be addressed from a human perspective. What is necessary and right for people, everyone knows what it is, even those who object to it... However language is not the only problem... language is only one of the problems in question.*

Mustafa's thoughts on the subject are as follows:

*If children or their families want children to systematically learn Kurdish and this is demanded by the majority, why not? But if we are supposed to live united together and that there must be only one official language, a solution could be developed accordingly.*

Regarding what should be done, another teacher said the following:

*...as I said, everybody should be taught in their mother tongue. Teachers who don't speak Kurdish should not be sent here to teach, for both the teacher and the students because neither the children nor the teachers can reach out to one another. And this results in flaws in education.*

Teachers also noted that thanks to the increase in technological devices like televisions and computers, children have the opportunity to hear more Turkish and develop their Turkish outside of a school setting.

Moreover, some teachers said that they encountered the language problem especially in villages and smaller settlements. From their point of view the situation is better in city centers.

Another point expressed by most teachers is that teachers who came from the West did not know anything about the region, did not have any friends here and therefore had a more difficult time. Teachers who had previously lived in the region said that even if they did not speak Kurdish they got used to the students, to their families and to the local culture more easily. On the other hand, many teachers said that those who spoke Kurdish were luckier.

Furthermore, in the course of the interviews most teachers admitted that they do not know anything about the Kurdish language, which language group it belongs to, which languages it resembles or what are its characteristics. Likewise, they said that they did not know much about Kurdish literature. However, some said that they had heard of Mehmed Uzun; some said they knew that Ahmedê Xanî was a well-known Kurdish writer.



### **Group 3: Teachers who speak Kurdish teaching Turkish to unilingual Kurdish children**

Interviews were conducted with teachers who were employed in Diyarbakır at the time of the interviews, whose mother tongue was Kurdish and who taught Turkish language and literacy skills in Turkish to students who, when they began school, spoke only Kurdish. All of the 12 teachers interviewed were natives of Diyarbakır. The majority said that their mother tongue was Kurmanji Kurdish, while some said that their mother tongue was Zaza Kurdish but that they understood Kurmanji as well. The majority also said that they received training to become teachers in the Education Department of the Diyarbakır-Dicle University, while some said that they had been educated in University of Van-Yüzüncü Yıl or Konya-Selçuk. While the interviewee with the shortest teaching experience had been a teacher for five years, the others had been teachers for an average of 17-22 years. While some had always taught in the Kurdish region, others had also occasionally worked in the west of Turkey.

As in the previous group, the vast majority of the teachers said that both during their university education and afterwards they had not read any resources on teaching language arts and literacy skills to children whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction; that they received no information on this subject from their professors; that these subjects were never discussed in class and that although some trainees occasionally attempted to bring up the subject, professors generally did not allow the discussion to proceed. Bedirhan said the following:

*This is a very taboo subject. Especially if you know what universities are like in Turkey, no one talks much about this subject. When we were in university some of us attempted to bring up the subject in class, but the subject was dropped immediately. People say things like let's not broach this subject.*

Some teachers said that when they were students the political environment was not healthy. According to them, today the situation is better and work on these issues should be conducted. Ayhan said:

*...those were the times when violence was at its worst. Besides, such a thing was never talked about in Turkey. When we were studying in the Department of Education, even the issue of the mother tongue was never talked about. This is why these questions were never discussed. Today, it would be discussed. Education should definitely be discussed and there are places where it should be discussed.*

However one of the teachers said that on his own initiative he had read some studies on this subject; he believed he had benefited from this in terms of gaining a better understanding of his students:

*I can say that besides raising my awareness it also helped me understand the children better, from academic and procedural points of view, to respect their rights, (...) to integrate with and to approach children, to understand their feelings and inner world.*

The teachers interviewed stated that the mother tongue of the children they taught in this region was generally Kurdish, that some spoke Zaza and that the rate of those speaking Turkish was much lower in areas of low income, in districts and villages, than it was in the city centre. Cemal said the following:



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*...everybody living in this area knows that especially in village schools and in the slums of big cities the rate of speaking Turkish is very low. If you ask me, rather than learning Turkish, it is memorizing Turkish. Somebody may use the word "table" but he won't know what "table" means. This is where there is a language problem.*

Furthermore, some of the teachers interviewed said that a few of their students spoke only Syriac or Armenian, and that they experienced similar problems with them.

When asked their view on teaching children whose mother tongue is Kurdish and on teaching them reading and writing, similar points were generally raised and the problems experienced by children were mentioned. The problems that stood out the most were that the children could not understand what was said or what they read and wrote because they did not speak Turkish. Most teachers said that was why they attempted to teach children Turkish before teaching them to read and write. Yusuf said as follows:

*Rather than giving them an education, we try to teach them a language. This is one of the major difficulties of being a teacher. I put aside the reading and writing business and I endeavor to teach them the language. So this is bad for the child too.*

Hamdi had similar things to say:

*...when I worked in Cizre I taught 118 classes and in those 118 classes there was only one child who spoke Turkish. He only knew some Turkish because he worked polishing shoes outside. None of the other children had ever previously come into contact with Turkish. Because it was the countryside there weren't many TVs, people generally sang songs. Consequently, no one could speak at that level. And in the classroom you felt like you were from outer space. No one understood you. They looked you straight in the eye, but they didn't know what you were saying and could not express themselves very much.*

Sami said as follows:

*...since no one can understand the other, the students and their psychological state are most affected.*

Teachers said that some students who had difficulties learning Turkish quit school within a few years. Fazıl said the following:

*...let us say that Turkish children grasp the meaning of something and learning takes place when you repeat something three times. The difficulty lay in the fact that we had to repeat things twenty/thirty times. Therefore, while a child should begin to read and write within three/four months, it took children who didn't speak Turkish – that is to say if they had a certain level of intelligence – a full year. That was the real problem. Children who could not reconcile themselves to this language experienced great difficulties. These cases constituted about one quarter of students. These children were unfortunately crushed under the existing educational conditions, that is to say they fell behind and most quit school in the second or third grade.*

*...reasons for quitting school also included poverty and the withdrawal of girls from school, but it wasn't only that. Another reason is that those who had not reconciled themselves to Turkish and who just couldn't learn the language were stigmatized as unsuccessful.*



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Some teachers said that aside from the difficulties regarding reading and writing, there is also the issue of punishment for students who speak Kurdish:

*While learning to read and write, children initially falter. Now they are also being humiliated. Not all teachers, but most punish children who speak in their mother tongue. They even reward other children, encouraging them to inform on whoever speaks it at home. If you were a student, how would you feel under these conditions?*

On the issue of the disadvantages encountered by children who start school with a language they are unfamiliar with, teachers generally expressed similar views. Süleyman said as follows:

*...you cause atrophy in all of these people from primary school onwards. I pity the children. The language in which they think is different. You have to teach children to read and write within the first six or seven months. This means that you have to teach them a new language. How many people in Turkey are able to learn English in six or seven months?*

Yusuf added:

*Children have great difficulties. I believe this means beginning 2-0 behind everybody else. This is an important issue for Kurdish children.*

Ferzan says as follows:

*...I believe that Kurdish children's education is several years behind that of their Turkish peers.*

Yusuf adds:

*It is not easy to learn a new language. You don't teach Turkish to Turkish children, you develop their language, you teach them other things, you educate them; the same is not true of Kurdish children. The plusses are not the same. Kurdish children attempt to learn Turkish from the first grade. Rather than general education, they receive language education.*

Abdullah recounts as follows the problems encountered by the children:

*Children reach a certain age with a certain language. But what you do is changing all the words they have learned. When they are six or seven, they have their own world and they have established a connection with their mother and father and their environment. What you do is taking them and starting from scratch with another language. Their world collapses. This is destructive from a pedagogical point of view too.*

Bedirhan had this to say:

*Personality disorders, alienation, dislike for oneself... When children don't like themselves and what is theirs they can't succeed in life. They could have become great musicians or painters, but they can't. They don't realize what their areas of interest are and their skills are crushed. They experience this feeling of being crushed and trapped.*



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Hamdi states the following:

*There may be things that these children know well. They live at one with nature and when they describe nature they describe it perfectly in their own language, they know nature very well. But then they try to describe something in Turkish everything turns upside down and they seem to know nothing about nature. Their brain is being damaged.*

Many of the teachers stated that some teachers warned students not to speak Kurdish, that they asked other students to inform on those who speak Kurdish. The teachers then made things difficult for them. Abdullah said the following:

*Some of our colleagues acted like enforcers and said “you must never speak Kurdish.” They appointed some students as informers, asked them to find out who spoke Kurdish and report to them. These informers even went to homes to spy on children.*

*These students went to other students’ homes (Kurdish houses are generally single-storey), climbed on the roof and listened from the chimney to see which language was spoken at each home. Teachers wanted students to speak Turkish even at home. That’s the kind of oppression, of mentality, that exists.*

Another teacher, referring to students who had been turned into “informants” to identify children speaking Kurdish, said the following:

*For example we hear from the public that students are frequently employed as informants. For example they say, “Tell me who speaks Kurdish at home.” Teachers can’t go into homes. So this is the system that was developed. Some children were trained to be informants. A child would come and say to the teacher, “The other evening Hasan spoke in Kurdish with his mother.” So what does the teacher do? He employs different methods either to punish or to humiliate the child. We have encountered such things. Although among colleagues we said that this was wrong, it wasn’t limited to here; this was a general practice.*

Likewise, Fazıl says that the restriction and prohibition imposed on children speaking Kurdish at school was transformed into systematic oppression outside school too, through the introduction of a number of mechanisms:

*...there is this perception that in the classroom, in the domain of the official language I need to express myself in Turkish. There were two reasons for this: I believe that the first was because of the family. Although the child speaks his own mother tongue, Kurdish, within the family, in order to learn reading and writing he needs to learn Turkish. Families have been known to say: “When you go to school speak Turkish, not Kurdish.” That is the perspective, so that the child will learn reading and writing as soon as possible and be successful in his schooling. The second reason is the guidebook published by the ministry concerning teaching Turkish to children unfamiliar with Turkish. When I first began to work as a teacher, education inspectors gave us a seminar on this subject. The main thing that teachers who begin to work in our region are told is this: children must not speak any language but Turkish among themselves. Teachers must prompt children as follows: Turkish must always be spoken, not only at school, but also outside school, in the recreation yard, in the street and within the family.*



Fazil also said that the aim of this pressure was not limited to the child but included assimilating the family:

*Cooperation between teachers and parents should not only be about the assimilation of the children and teaching Turkish to them, it should also be about orienting the family towards Turkish. In almost all of the teacher-parent meetings parents would be told the following: "don't speak Kurdish at home, speak Turkish. If you continue to speak Kurdish your children won't be able to learn Turkish. If they don't learn Turkish they won't learn to read and write and their education will be interrupted." Families were incited in this way via the Head of the District. If there was an outpost in the village, and there was one where I worked, families were incited by the outpost too, to speak Turkish. If you ask if there was excessive pressure, no there wasn't, but it was presented in such a way that children and families had to learn Turkish. If children wanted to receive an education and to acquire a profession, they had to learn Turkish as soon as possible.*

When asked what they did to help children overcome problems arising from learning Turkish, teachers said that they generally spoke Kurdish with the children and attempted to help them in this way, trying to alleviate their disadvantages. Some said they attempted to develop the vocabulary of children by providing them with the Kurdish equivalents of words and concepts taught in Turkish class. Süleyman had this to say:

*If it is a Kurdish or Zaza village, I begin by making some jokes. Or I tell them my wishes in their mother tongue, Kurdish or Zaza. I tell them that I am no different from them, that I am one of them. I reassure them in that way and then class begins. Otherwise it wouldn't be education, it would be military training.*

Derya also had similar things to say:

*Children in first grade cannot speak any Turkish in the first two or three weeks so we have to speak Kurdish with those children. If you don't speak with them then there is no dialogue. One of the children has already quit school and run away. No child has had to run away, at least from my class.*

Yusuf too says that he uses both Turkish and Kurdish:

*Especially when explaining things to those who don't speak Turkish, I say it first in Kurdish then I translate it into Turkish. I have to do this; I can't explain things in any other way.*

*When I teach a very simple concept or a word, I begin by asking questions. For example if I want the first grade to write "grass," but the children don't know what it is, I say "giya" and they understand. They understand that "giya" is "grass." That's how they understand, how they learn, and we try to help them. But it is really difficult. For example in the West a student easily understands what "grass" is, but here we lose a lot of time teaching even a concept.*

Abdullah has similar things to say:

*The student doesn't understand you. You have to establish a dialogue but you don't know the language of the other person. How are you going to warm to each other? There is no excitement, no sharing of emotions, no understanding. We have therefore encountered problems. However because we spoke Kurdish we were able to explain the subject to the children. If necessary we told them the main points first in Kurdish and then in Turkish,*



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*through a kind of common teaching system. This was advantageous for both teachers and students. But this was very difficult for colleagues who didn't speak Kurdish. It was difficult both for the teachers and for the students. These difficulties continued for a while, until students learned to express themselves in Turkish...*

Some of the teachers said that especially during music class they let children sing songs in Kurdish and that this was received positively by the children.

The teachers interviewed stated that speaking Kurdish with the children in or outside the classroom influenced the students positively and that they were better able to express themselves. For example, Süleyman says:

*Let us say that during class a student has not been able to grasp a particular word or expression. When I say that word in Kurdish, the child looks at me as if to say "why was I having such problems" and laughs. He sees it as a joke. While you are actually helping him cheat, he sees it as a joke and grasps the subject more rigorously. He thinks "will I be able to understand the next word he says?" So I benefited from this method.*

Cemal also had similar things to say:

*...to start with, it [speaking Kurdish] results in the emergence of a rich and strong state of mind. My system does not cause children to be diffident. This is what I have observed. I can see that they are naughty, that they physically annoy me. Why do I indulge them? Why do I allow them to do so? I have to make a choice: I will raise either reticent and introverted children, children that have been massacred, or children who, even though they annoy me, are able to express themselves easily, play comfortably, dirty their clothes and if necessary damage their teacher's property; that is to say, naughty children...*

Yusuf has the following to say on the subject:

*They take some people as an example. The fact that a person speaking their language is a teacher seems impossible to them at the first hand, but then they start enjoying it. They get used to it. So it's good. I'm happy with this situation too.*

Hamdi said the following:

*They see me as one of them. Prior to this they saw teachers as cold, distant and harsh and they felt excessive respect as well as fear. But when they see that the teacher is one of them or speaks the same language they relax, they are softer, warmer and more amiable with the teacher... And then there is this wish to talk continuously, without worrying about making this and that mistake; so it was possible to establish an easier communication with the children.*

The teachers said that they had no problem speaking with their students' parents because they generally spoke in whichever language the parents chose; however the parents generally spoke Kurdish. Ayhan had the following to say:

*If parents insist on Turkish, we speak Turkish. If they insist on Kurdish we speak Kurdish. Anyway some parents insist on speaking in Kurdish.*



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Some teachers said that they spoke Kurdish with the parents of their students and that they helped other teachers who did not speak Kurdish. Cemal said as follows:

*We speak in Kurdish with parents who don't speak any Turkish. Several of our friends have asked for our help, for our contribution to their meetings. And we have tried to help as much as possible.*

One of the teachers said that teachers who speak Kurdish generally hold parents' meetings while teachers who do not speak Kurdish generally want to stay away from these meetings because they cannot establish any dialogue with the parents:

*...the parents of my students came to meetings because they were able to talk to me, but the parents of children in other classes usually didn't because they and the teachers spoke different languages, so it wasn't possible to establish a dialogue.*

The same teacher said that this was why teachers who did not speak Kurdish did not want to meet with the parents because parents got frustrated when they were unable to speak to or understand the teachers about their children.

From these points of view, many of the teachers said they felt lucky they spoke Kurdish because they communicated better with both students and parents. Cemal said the following:

*Because we speak Kurdish we didn't have problems in establishing a dialogue with children, but when teachers who don't speak Kurdish teach Turkish to Kurdish children, to children who don't speak Turkish, both the teachers and the students experience serious problems.*

All of the teachers interviewed agreed that it would be much better for children to be taught to read and write in their mother tongue, whatever that language is, and that this is a fundamental human right. Cemal had this to say:

*...we have argued that education in the mother tongue is a fundamental human right and a humane requirement, rather than a political one; that's how we see it now too.*

Yusuf said the following:

*I believe that people should be educated in whatever language they speak. We live in the same country. We are not denying that Turkish is the common language for many peoples. This is basic education and basic education should be in Kurdish. We have difficulties with Turkish.*

Ayhan also had similar things to say:

*...this is not necessary only for us, but for all people; it is people's most natural right. All people should definitely be educated in their own language, in order to succeed more easily.*

Abdullah said the following:



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*...I believe we could have a multiple educational system; so that where there is a different language, let us say in the regions inhabited by Kurds, Kurdish should be taught as well as Turkish. I believe it would be more useful. Learning both languages would be of greater benefit.*

*Education in the mother tongue is an undeniable right. It has to be. Rather than a demand, it's a right. Communities all over the world who have faced issues of the mother tongue and democracy have conferred this right to their people. That is why education in the mother tongue is a necessity. It is also necessary for people to succeed at what they do. Research has shown that there is a difference between the success of students who are educated in their mother tongue and those who are not educated in their mother tongue. Students who are educated in their mother tongue are more successful and are of greater benefit to their country, their family and their environment. Education in the mother tongue is therefore necessary and this right must be conferred.*

Nurettin referred to similar points and said:

*...in order to conceptualize something in your mind you need to understand it and to understand it in a language you know well; the language you know best is your mother tongue. This could be Turkish, as it could be Kurdish, Syriac or Armenian. Since it is the child who has to conceptualize the language in his mind and understand it, if education aims at creating a change in the child's brain, the best way to understand things is through education in the mother tongue.*

Bedirhan, who made similar observations, states that teacher trainees in education faculties of universities also need to be provided with information on the subject:

*The mother tongue is definitely a right. Even if the educational medium is Turkish, children should be able to learn their mother tongue and be able to express themselves in that language. Teachers in education faculties also need to be informed. When you become a teacher and you go all over Turkey and encounter different cultures and different people you also encounter serious difficulties. This language must definitely be taught in classroom settings both in university and primary schools.*

Most of the teachers we interviewed stated that they had believed that education should be conducted in the mother tongue even before they became teachers and, after having seen the conditions of Kurdish children who begin school without speaking any Turkish, they believed in its necessity even more passionately. For example, Yusuf says as follows:

*Before I began teaching I was all in favor of education in the mother tongue. Once I became a teacher I believed in it even more. It is definitely a prerequisite; otherwise the education offered here is meaningless.*

Fazıl too says that before he became a teacher he had known of children who did not receive their education in the mother tongue, but that after he had seen the situation he developed even a clearer view on the subject:

*...the success rate of children who are not educated in their mother tongue falls by fifty percent. This is a scientific observation that we learned about in university, in educational sciences. But we have experienced*



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*this in practice too. I have seen that very successful, very clever children are not able to complete their education, that they give up because they are not educated in their mother tongue, that those who are pushed to continue and have trouble graduating from high school have great difficulty in the university exam. Therefore I now believe that all children should be educated in their mother tongue.*

When asked what teachers and students can do to overcome these problems now, it was generally argued that education in the mother tongue should be permitted. For example, Abdullah said the following:

*The current legislation needs to be amended. This requires political will. Nothing negative would derive from it. The country would not be divided and the state would not collapse. Both types of education can take place within a unitary structure. In regions densely inhabited by Kurds, Kurdish can be used as well as Turkish for education in the mother tongue. I believe that the state should enable this and enact the necessary laws. It should confer this right to its citizens. Citizens will thus put more trust in the state. Otherwise a consensus of feeling will never happen.*

Fazıl said the following:

*...this subject is frequently debated in Turkey because it is a politically-charged issue. However it should be evaluated in terms of education. It should be assessed from the point of view of the education sciences; conditions for this are appropriate in Turkey, there is the possibility for everybody to be educated in their mother tongue. New schools can also be established. Depending on demand, people may be educated in Turkish or in their mother tongue.*

During the interviews, many teachers referred also to their own school years and shared their experience. For example Bedirhan had the following to say about teachers who informed on students who spoke Kurdish:

*Let me give you an example from my own life: I went to school in a village. Teachers had developed the informants' business to such a degree... One day our cattle disappeared. I was searching for them from the top of a hill. My mother called out to me to ask whether I had found them. I replied to her in Turkish but she didn't understand. We went on shouting at each other for an hour, because she didn't speak Turkish.*

Nurettin, who also referred to his years as a student, had similar things to say:

*Although I teach them Turkish, I know very well that they will continue thinking in Kurdish all of their lives. I have gone through the same stages. I still think in Zaza, which is a Kurdish dialect. Frankly, I still do not have a full command of Turkish.*

Moreover, when asked about their views on Kurdish language and literature, almost all teachers said that they knew which language group Kurdish belongs to, what its main characteristics are and which other languages it is affiliated with. Most teachers also said that they knew the basics of Kurdish literature and read books on this subject whenever they found the opportunity.



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#### **Group 4: The parents of children whose home language and school language differ**

In this part of the study, interviews were conducted with Kurdish parents who do not speak Turkish and whose children attend school. A total of 8 women with an age average of 50 were interviewed. Aside from one, all had come from different districts of Diyarbakır and were residing in Diyarbakır at the time of the interviews. They all stated that they were housewives. All of the interviewees had three or four children attending school; some of these were in high school and some in universities. One stated that she had two children attending third and fourth grades in primary school.

When asked what language their children spoke at home, almost all said that the children generally spoke Kurdish with them at home and that no one spoke Turkish. For example, Halime said:

*Di nava malê de bi min û bavê xwe re tu kes tirkî naxiû.*

*[At home no child speaks Turkish with me or with their father.]*

Xanim also said that she and her husband spoke Kurdish with their children, but that their younger children spoke Turkish:

*Di malê de heuserê min, kurê min ê mezîn, bûka min, em hemû kurdî diaxavin û tu kes tirkî xeber nade. Tenê kurê min yê bûçûk derdikevin, ew tirkî xeber didin.*

*[At home my husband, my older son, my daughter-in-law and I all speak Kurdish; none of us speak Turkish. Only my younger children speak Turkish when they leave the house.]*

When asked how their children were doing at school, women whose children were studying in high school or university said that they were doing well in school; Fatê, whose children are in primary school, said that they were not very interested in classes.

When asked whether their children spoke any Turkish when they began school, most women said that at the start their children were completely unfamiliar with Turkish and that both their children and they themselves were affected by this reality. Halime said the following:

*... hatin bajar jî tirkî nedizanîn heta dest bi dibistanê kirî jî tirkî nedizanîn. Pişt dest bi dibistên kirin û hatin malê zihmetî kişandin. Him min, him jî wan.*

*[When they came to this city and even when they began school they didn't speak any Turkish. When they started going to school they experienced difficulties, both them and I.]*

When asked whether their children experienced any difficulties when they first began school, the women expressed different views. Most said that their children did not tell them anything and that therefore they did not know what they had experienced at school. Gulê said the following:

*Willa heta niha çî kişandibin ji me ra negotine. Tu tişt ji me ra negotine. Tu alî de tu tişt ji me ra negotine. Ne*



*di aliyê mamosteyên xwe de ne jî aliyê dibistanê de tu çaran gilî nekirine. Nizanim, êdî di nava wan de tiştek çêbibî jî me ra nedigotin. Ne jî min re ne jî ji bavê xwe re negotine.*

*[They didn't share with us any of the difficulties they experienced. They didn't tell us anything on any subject at all. They didn't complain either about their teachers or about their school. I just don't know, even if anything did happen, they didn't tell either me or their father.]*

Some women said that the children got confused because the language spoken at home and the one spoken at school were not the same; this prevented them from being successful at school. Meryem said:

*... di malê de bi kurdî dijîn û li dibistanê jî bi tirkî dijîn. Ji ber vê yekê jî serê wan tevlîhev dibe. Gelek zehmetiyan dikşînin. Heke dersên wan bi kurdî bûna, dê gelek serkeftî bûna.*

*[They live life in Kurdish at home and in Turkish at school so they get confused. They have great problems. If their classes were held in Kurdish, they would be much more successful.]*

When asked who attended parent-teacher meetings and what they experienced in these meetings, most women said that they did not attend meetings because they do not speak Turkish or that only fathers attended these meetings. Xanim had the following to say:

*Hin caran wexta civîna malbatan, bavê wan diçû ez wekî jina malê nediçûm. Bavê wan diçû. Digot "hûn çima di malê de [tirkî] xebat nadin. Zarokên we zihmetiyê dikşînin." Wî jî digotê "zimanê me ev e". Zarokên me tirkî dizanîn, heta 5'an xwandiye. Ji ber vê zimanê me ev e, em ji gund hatine.*

*[Sometimes their father attended the parent-teacher meetings. As a housewife I didn't want to go... They said to [their father], 'Why don't you speak [Turkish] at home, your children have difficulties.' Their father said: 'This is our language.'" Our children speak Turkish, they studied up to fifth grade. This is our language; we come from the village.]*

Nazê had similar things to say:

*Ji ber ku min tirkî nedizanî ez neçûme. Ji ber ku bavê wan tirkî dizanî ew diçû. Piştî zarokên min mezin bûn ew ji bo zarokên min yê bûçûk diçin. Ez qet neçûme ji ber ku min tirkî nedizanî.*

*[I didn't go because I don't speak Turkish. Their father would go because he speaks Turkish. When my children grew up, they went with the younger children. I never went.]*

Xecê says the following:

*Ez an carekê çûme an ne. Digotin dayê were, xelk tê pirsar zarokên xwe dike. Min digot ez tirkî nizam, ez nayê. Wê demê me digot eyb e. Yanî me şerm dikir.*

*[I probably went once or maybe not at all. They said: "Come to the meeting, mom, others come and talk about their children." And I said, "I don't speak Turkish, I won't go." We used to think that it was shameful. We were embarrassed.]*



When asked whether their children asked for help with their classes or their homework, and whether they were able to help, everyone agreed that they were unable to help their children because they did not speak Turkish. However if an older child in the family had gone to school, she or he would try to help. Halime said:

*Ji ber ku xwendin û nivîsandina min tunebû di vî alî de ez ji bo wan nedibûm alîkar ji ber ku tu xwendin û nivîsandina min tunebû... Dema ku tiştêkî ji min dipirsîn min kurdî ew tişt zanîba, min ji wan re digot. Li gorî qaweta xwe ez ji wan re dibûm alîkar. Aniha jî ez ji wan re dibim alîkar.*

*[I couldn't help them, because I can't read or write... When they asked me something, I told them if I knew it in Kurdish. I helped them as much as I could. I help them now too.]*

Nazê said the following:

*Welle ji ber ku min bi tirkî nizanibû, min nikaribû alîkariya wan bikirana. Yanî hin caran digotin ku ew nizanin lê me nikaribû alîkariya wan bikirana. Yê mezin û yê biçûk alîkariya hev dikirin.*

*[I couldn't help them because I don't speak Turkish. Sometimes they told us that they couldn't understand, but we couldn't help them. The older children helped out the younger ones.]*

Some said that they attempted to help out their children when told the Kurdish translation of their homework. For example, Meryem said the following:

*Ji ber ez bi tirkî nizanim, ez nikarim alîkariya wan bikim. Hin caran jî dersên xwe werdigerînin kurdî û ji min dipirsin. Ez jî heta ji destê min tê, alîkariya wan dikim.*

*[I can't help them because I don't speak Turkish. Sometimes they translate their lessons into Kurdish and ask me questions. Then I try to help them as much as possible.]*

When asked “Would you like if your children were educated in Kurdish at school?” similar responses were given. Halime said the following:

*Ji bo me, nan û av çiqas ji bo me ferz be zimanê kurdî jî ji bo me ewqas ferz e.*

*[We need Kurdish as much as we need bread and water.]*

Meryem had similar things to say:

*Daxwaza me perwerdehiya bi zimanê zikmakî ye. Daxwaza me ew e ku zimanê me jî wekî zimanên din li dibistanan bê fêrkirin. Ez jî dixwazim hem ez û hem jî zarokên min bi kurdî bixwînin û biniwîsin. Lê mixabin niha ev derfet tune ne.*

*[What we want is education in the mother tongue. What we want is for our language to be taught at school, like other languages. Both I and my children would like to read and write in Turkish. Unfortunately we don't have this possibility at present.]*



When asked what benefit their children would draw from being educated in Kurdish, the general emphasis was on the richness arising from knowledge of several languages. Halime said:

*Dema ku tu niha dersên zarokna bi zimankî bizanî çawa ye, du zimanan bizanî li ku ye û sê zimanan bizanî li ku ye! Ew yek dewletmendiya însanan e. Em dikarin bibêjin ev dewlemendî maneviye. Ev yek vi bi vî awayî ye. Dema ku tu diçî nav tirka tenê tirkî dizanin lê dema ku tu kurdî, dimilî û zimankî biyanî ji bizanî çiqas tişteki baş e! Her ziman ji bo mirovan ferz e lê herî zêde zimanê dayikê.*

*[Think of the children's classes now that they know only one language, and think of what it would be like if they knew two or three languages. People would see it as richness. We could say that it is a spiritual richness as well. That's how it is. When you are among the Turks, they only speak Turkish, but if you knew Kurdish or Zaza, it would be so good! People need all languages, but they need their mother tongue in particular.]*

Some women added that if their children were educated in Kurdish, they themselves would also greatly benefit. Nazê said:

*Heke bi kurdî ba, ji bo wan hêsantir ba, dê ji bo min ji baştir ba û ez jî dê hîn bibam. Ez jî dê di aliyê xwendin û nivîsandinê ji wan hîn bibam. Ev yek jî ji min re gelek meraq e.*

*[If education had been in Kurdish, it would have been better for them and easier for me too. I would also have learned. I would have learned to read and write from them. This has always been a matter of curiosity for me.]*

Another issue raised during the interviews was the harassment and taunts that the children whose families had migrated from villages received from their peers at school. Xanim said as follows:

*Dema ku em nû ji gund hatin, zarokên me dihat digiriyan. Digotin "Henekên xwe bi me dikin. Dema ku mamoste pirsan dike em nizanin. Wê demê hevalên me henekê xwe bi me dikin." Ji ber wê yekî, hinekî zêde giraniya xwe dan ser tirkî ji bo ku di dibistanê de zihmetiyê nekşînin.*

*[When we had just arrived here, our children used to come home crying. They said "They make fun of us... When teachers ask us questions, we don't know the answers. And our friends make fun of us." Therefore, my children focused all their attention on Turkish, in order not to experience such problems.]*

Another issue arising from the interviews was that some of the mothers encouraged their children to speak Turkish among themselves. These mothers wanted their children to speak Turkish and, in turn, to teach Turkish to them. Nazê said:

*Piştî zarokên min ev hatin dinê hemû çûn dibistanê û xwendin. Piştî çûn dibistanê û hatin min digote wan di nav bera xwe de [Tirkî]biavaxin da ku ez jî hîn bibim.*

*[All of my children have gone to school. When they went to school, I used to tell them: "Speak [Turkish] among yourselves so I can learn it too."]*



Many mothers who encouraged their children in this way said they did so because they were not able to communicate with doctors; if they learned Turkish they would be better able to explain their ailments to medical professionals. Nazê said the following on this subject:

*Digotin “dayê zimanê te, zimanê te ye. Tu pêwîst nîne.” Min jî digotê “em diçûn nexweşxaneyan, diçin doxtoran, em nizanin em wekî belangazan disekinîn.” Rastî jî heke em diçûn nexweşxanan em gelek zihmetî dikşînin. Hej jî heke ez diçim nexweşxaneyê ez yekî li gel xwe dibim.*

*[The children said to me: “Mother, your tongue is your tongue. You don’t need Turkish.” And I said: “When we go to the hospital, to the doctor, we don’t speak [Turkish,] we feel like wretches.” We do encounter great difficulties when we go to the hospital. I still take somebody along when I go to the hospital.]*

On the other hand, some women said that once their children had begun school and had learned Turkish, they had problems communicating with them; they became unable to understand one another properly. Meryem said the following:

*Zarokên min ne serdestê kurdî ne. Ji ber vê jî em nikarin têkiliyek baş saz bikin. Ew hin tiştan bi tirkî dibêjin lê ez bi tirkî nizanîm. Tirkiya min gelek kanbax e. Dema ez bi wan re diaxivim, bi tirkiya min dikenin. Têkiliyên me gelek kanbax in. Ez û zarokên min, bi hev nakin.*

*[My children are not good at Kurdish. We are therefore unable to communicate well. They tell me some things in Turkish, but I don’t speak Turkish. My Turkish is bad. When I speak with them they laugh at my Turkish. Our relationship is terrible. We cannot get on well.]*

Halime had similar things to say:

*... di vî alî de em pir zihmetiyên dikşînin bi taybetî jî keça min ya zanîngehê dixwîne kurdiya wê gelek kême e. Em kurdî pê re diaxivin ew bersiva me bi tirkî dide. Gelek caran di navbera me de nîqaş derdikevin.*

*[... we experience great problems in this sense, especially with my daughter who goes to university. She speaks very little Kurdish. We speak to her in Kurdish and she replies in Turkish. We frequently end up arguing.]*

Some of the women stated that their children experienced the same problems as they did. Meryem said:

*Rojek, ji ber ku keça min li dibistanê bi kurdî axiviye, mamosteyê wê porê wê kişandiye. Wê demê keça min diçû dibistana navîn. Serokwezîr Erdoğan derdikeve televîzyonan û dibêje ku “kurdî serbest e”. Lê em vê yekê nabînin. Ji ber ku em kurd in, gelek caran rastî cudaxwaziyên tîn. Zarokên me jî di dibistanan de rastî cudaxwaziyên mezin tîn.*

*[One day, the teacher pulled my daughter’s hair because she spoke Kurdish. My daughter was in secondary school then. Prime Minister Erdoğan says on TV: “People are free to speak Kurdish.” But we don’t see this freedom. We are frequently subject to discrimination because we are Kurdish. Our children too encounter great discrimination at school.]*



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Interviews held with people in all four groups show how the educational system is experienced by children who speak very little or no Turkish when they start school. Almost everyone interviewed provided extensive data on the problems experienced by children in linguistic, educational, social, psychological and political, areas. Although most of the issues were common to many in each group, some supplied individual examples as well. In the next chapter, issues raised by many will be examined in light of findings obtained during previous studies and debates in the literature.



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## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVALUATION OF FINDINGS AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS

As previously stated, through in-depth interviews with four groups of people, this study examines the educational experiences—particularly during the process of learning to read and write—of children whose mother tongue is Kurdish and who attend schools where education is given in Turkish. The study's aim is to examine the psychological, educational, social and linguistic issues experienced by these children as a result of attempting to learn in a language with which they are unfamiliar. The study also examines the interdiction of using the mother tongue in the educational system and seeks to establish the distinguishing characteristics and educational needs of these children.

Interviewees from all four groups provided illustrative information on the problems encountered by children whose mother tongue is Kurdish after they began schooling in Turkish. While some of the most striking points were frequently expressed by people in all four groups, some points were emphasized only by people in particular groups. The issues that stood out most are presented below. A conceptual framework on the importance of the use of the mother tongue in education will later be presented, in order to better understand these findings.

#### A. ISSUES IDENTIFIED

##### 1. Lack of Communication

The first of the issues commonly referred to by almost all interviewees regarded the significant communication problems between students and teachers in the first years of school. Students and teachers from both groups as well as parents expressed that when children begin school they either do not speak Turkish, the school language, or they speak it very little. They are therefore not able to understand their teachers or express themselves. Since they could not learn what they were meant to learn in class because they could not understand their teachers, the students said they generally had to keep quiet. Because they did not speak Turkish, teachers frequently did not even attempt to understand them, when they spoke Kurdish some thought that they were swearing or being willful and they were therefore scolded. Many students also said that as they did not speak Turkish, they were not able to share their thoughts and feelings with their teachers.

According to many people from the four groups, although students acquire reading and writing skills after a long process lasting several years, they are still unable properly to understand the texts they write. The expression *“to repeat like a parrot,”* used by a teacher, is extremely revealing.



Concerning the effect on the students of the lack of communication and of the inability to understand what is taught, many teachers agreed that students fall behind and are not able to fulfill their potential. Many teachers said that the children are actually keen to learn and try hard to understand, but that they may be missing the opportunity to “*become scientists in the future*” because they do not speak Turkish well enough. Moreover, another frequently observed point was that because the children are not able to express themselves properly in Turkish, they are considered to be “*lacking in intelligence,*” “*stupid*” or “*unable to understand.*”

Particularly teachers who do not speak Kurdish stated that they experienced many difficulties and felt quickly worn out because of their inability to communicate with the children.

According to the scholarship on lack of communication, children who speak minority languages are generally disappointed by their first experiences at school and are unable to share their intelligence, thoughts, feelings and humor with their teachers and friends. What’s more, teachers frequently attribute this state of affairs to students’ intelligence, to their failure or reluctance to study. However, as stated by Cummins,<sup>116</sup> children who speak minority languages and whose intelligence, imagination and linguistic ability receive approval and encouragement show more interest in school and achieve better results.

In the current study, all teachers interviewed said that in order to solve the problem of lack of communication they attempt first to teach children to speak Turkish, However, teachers claimed that at least three or four years are needed for a child to understand Turkish, to begin to express themselves in Turkish and understand what they read. Many teachers also stated that their students were unable to follow the curriculum because they attempted simply to teach Turkish to the children. However, the studies distinguish between the language that children use in simple daily interactions (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, BICS) and the language they use to understand the content taught at school (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, CALP).<sup>117</sup> According to this distinction, while BICS refers to children’s everyday communication skills at grocery stores, while shopping or playing with friends and so on, CALP refers to the language proficiency that children should have in order to understand subjects taught at school, in other words the academic content. According to Cummins, whether children understand a subject taught at school and whether they therefore learn is closely related to this second language proficiency. The findings of the current study show that when children whose mother tongue is Kurdish begin school, during the first few years they try to acquire basic communication skills in Turkish, rather than learn subjects on the curriculum. Therefore, although students acquire some basic communication skills in Turkish, they are not able to gain the information they should have and to switch to the language used at school for a long time. As a consequence, this concrete state of affairs results in significant disadvantages for Kurdish children when they begin school, as well as throughout their schooling.

Conversely, the lack of communication between teachers and students in the first years of school later also arises between students and their parents. The new lifestyle that begins with school and is limited to Turkish

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<sup>116</sup> Jim Cummins, “Fundamental Psycholinguistic and Sociological Principles Underlying Educational Success for Linguistic Minority Students” in: *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, ed. Ajit Mohanty, Minati Panda, Robert Philipson, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 19-35.

<sup>117</sup> For a comprehensive debate on this subject, see Jim Cummins, “Language, Power and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire”, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2000), 57-85.



only, brings about the tendency to associate speaking Kurdish with being backward or primitive. A sense of shame causes people to stop using Kurdish and thus to forget the language. In addition, communication among parents who speak little or no Turkish and their children is severely impeded and results in a schism and in lack of communication. The vast majority of parents and – as can be seen from the findings – women in particular speak either very little or no Turkish at all. However, children are exposed to Turkish more and more through educational institutions. A serious decrease is then observed in the rate of speaking Kurdish with parents. Moreover, the gradual increase in technological devices such as televisions, telephones and computers, and the fact that Turkish is the language generally used on these devices can be said to further aggravate the lack of communication. As a consequence, no common language is left for parents and children to share.

## 2. Beginning life with a 1-o deficit

Another striking observation made by almost all groups was the idea of “*beginning life with a 1-o deficit*,” “*falling behind*” and “*running behind*.” All students interviewed said that they considered themselves at a disadvantage in comparison to students who received their education in their mother tongue (namely Turkish students) because they began school and life “*with a 1-o deficit*,” they “*fell behind*” and “*ran behind*.” Many teachers from both groups used similar expressions to state that when they begin school, Kurdish children who speak little or no Turkish are at a great disadvantage in comparison to children whose mother tongue is Turkish. As is pointed out in many studies concerning children’s acquisition of reading and writing skills, children who are forced to learn to read and write in a language they know very little or not at all, are not equipped with the necessary oral skills to acquire these skills and therefore will not be able to make a successful start in school.<sup>118</sup>

This observation has also been made in studies concerning other countries and linguistic environments. Studies have shown that students read and write in the language they know best and that reading materials that are culturally familiar to students hasten language acquisition.<sup>119</sup> In places where completely different educational policies and practices are implemented, students fall behind in comparison to peers who receive their education under better conditions. Cummins draws attention to the state of “*falling behind*” and cites as a major cause the underdevelopment of the second language skill – out of the aforementioned BICS and CALP distinction – which is necessary for success at school.<sup>120</sup> According to Collier and Thomas, it takes American Caucasian students whose mother tongue is English to make the progress that should be made in 10 months, but it takes 15 months for students from linguistic minority groups who learn English as a second language to realize the progress that should be made in 10 months.<sup>121</sup> Cummins states that students of linguistic minorities are only able to reach the stage where they should normally be with an average delay of 5 years.

Concerning the perception of “*beginning life with a 1-o deficit*” or “*falling behind*,” an important concept used

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<sup>118</sup> Colin Baker, “Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism”, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 2006), 316-345.

<sup>119</sup> Diana August and Timothy Shanahan, “Developing Literacy in Second-Language Learners: Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth”, (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> Cummins, *Fundamental Psycholinguistic*, 19-35.

<sup>121</sup> Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, “Making U.S. Schools Effective For English Language Learners, Part 2,” *TESOL Matters*, 9 (1999), 1-6.



to explain this situation in education sciences is referred to as “scaffolding.”<sup>122</sup> This is used to indicate the process by which educators lead their students’ cognitive development gradually, providing them with support and setting an example for them, thus helping them develop their knowledge.<sup>123</sup> According to this concept, students come to school with a certain repertory of knowledge and language. Under normal circumstances, they acquire new information and add it to their existing knowledge with the help of teachers and of school materials and sometimes with the support of their peers. Cummins states that the mother tongue of students may constitute important “scaffolding” in the learning process of a second language, and that encouraging students to use the language they know best in the learning process of a second language may create greater positive results.<sup>124</sup> However Kurdish children, who start school with little or no Turkish, not only are not able to start from a level from which they can make progress; on the contrary, their repertory of knowledge and language are ignored, which results in situations such as “*beginning life with a 1-0 deficit*” or “*falling behind*” and other disadvantages associated. Support or help for these Kurdish students, if at all, can take two forms, as can be seen also from the interviews: either classmates who speak Turkish can provide some help, or teachers who speak Kurdish can use their own initiative to explain some subjects in Kurdish or supply the Kurdish equivalent of words they teach, thus using a kind of “scaffolding”.<sup>125</sup>

### 3. Failing and Quitting School

Our findings show that Kurdish students who speak little or no Turkish are only able to start reading and writing with a considerable delay since they start recognizing letters only at the end of their first year. They are unable to develop literacy skills and consequently are generally made to repeat the year. Most students who repeat a year cite their inability to understand what is being taught to them as the reason for failing. Many students stated that students who had to repeat a year felt their self-confidence decreased and negatively influenced their relationship with school. Teachers whose mother tongue is Kurdish particularly said that students who found it difficult to learn Turkish and failed their class generally quit school within a few years.

This consequence, frequently referred to in studies on education of students from subordinated language groups, goes a long way toward explaining the low rate of school attendance among children studying in regions where Kurdish is spoken and the low rate of success in secondary and university exams. As Cummins also says, an approach where “*one removes one’s language and culture before entering school and leaves it outside,*” has caused children to leave their identities outside the school and has resulted in an inability to benefit from the right to education.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>122</sup> For a comprehensive debate on this subject, see Lindsay Lipscomb, Janet Swanson and Anne West, “Scaffolding” in: *Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology*, ed. Michael Orey, 2004. Also <http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/>

<sup>123</sup> See also Lev Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development” which deals with the same subject: Lev Vygotsky, “Mind in Society”, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

<sup>124</sup> Cummins, *Fundamental Psycholinguistic*, 32

<sup>125</sup> The following points need to be paid attention to: that teachers who speak Kurdish use their own initiative and speak Kurdish with the students may not be valid for Kurdish students going to school outside the Kurdish region.

<sup>126</sup> Jim Cummins, “Bilingual Children’s Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education?” *Sprogforum*, 19, (2001), 15-20. See also <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/mother.htm>



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#### 4. Stigmatization

Another important issue arising from interviews with students consists of the stigmatization that children who speak Kurdish sometimes encounter both in and outside school. We learn, from the interviews, that especially in high school years, students who speak Kurdish become conscious of their identity and linguistic differences; when they insist on speaking Kurdish they are referred to by names such as “*peshmerga*” or “*terrorist*.” Similar findings have also been reached by Bahar and Atli.<sup>127</sup> Researchers state that the word “Kurdish” can be perceived as an insult. People who speak Kurdish are thought to “swear” and Kurdish students are disturbed by the pressure and bans preventing the use of Kurdish, as well as by the above perception. One of the reasons for the lack of self-confidence referred to by many students may be that knowing and speaking Kurdish is frequently stigmatized by teachers and other students or in the mainstream media. Ceyhan and Koçbaş, who write of the concept referred to as “the ideology of contempt” by Nancy Dorian, state that this consists in asserting that a particular language is in some way incomplete in order to justify the suppression of that language.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, in a debate on the concept of “governmentality,” Foucault states that linguistic practices in schools “regulate” how the language should be used; this results in the emergency of hierarchies among languages and their usage, rendering some languages more or less valuable than others.<sup>129</sup> An examination of this study’s findings could be that teachers continuously tell students “not to speak Kurdish anywhere.” This is perceived by students as meaning that “Kurdish is bad and an obstacle” to learning. It also causes Kurdish, which is an inseparable part of their lives, to become a burden and something that needs to be hidden. The fact that a student said “*my mother speaks French*,” because he was afraid of being ostracized when his mother was heard speaking Kurdish, constitutes the best possible example to this situation.

#### 5. Violence

Salmi, who discusses violence, states that there are four main types of violence: *direct*, *indirect*, *repressive* and *alienating*.<sup>130</sup> Direct violence refers to deliberate physical interventions aiming at causing injury to human life. Wide-ranging physical acts including war, murder, female genital mutilation, torture and battery are examples of this type of violence. *Indirect violence* refers to harmful or deadly situations caused by institutions, population groups or individuals, where a direct relationship with victims is prevented through human intervention. According to Salmi *indirect violence* can be of two types: *violence by omission* refers to the failure to intervene when people are in danger or when the harmful effects of a negative situation are technically avoidable or controllable. The unequal distribution of resources and hunger or disease arising from civilian or military interventions constitutes examples of *violence by omission*. Finally, *mediated violence* refers to deliberate human actions whose harmful effects to the natural or social environment are felt in an indirect and sometimes delayed way. Examples include major damage to the environment and the use of harmful

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<sup>127</sup> Firat and Atli.

<sup>128</sup> Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaş, 15.

<sup>129</sup> Michael Foucault, “Governmentality”, in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures By and An Interview With Michel Foucault*, ed. Graham Burchell, Gordon Colin and Peter Miller, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>130</sup> Jamil Salmi, “Violence, Democracy and Education: An Analytic Framework” in *Suffer the Little Children – Advances in Education in Diverse Communities: Research, Policy and Praxis*, 4, ed. Carol Camp-Yeakey, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2004), 207-230.



pesticides in agriculture. The third type of violence, called *repressive violence*, refers to acts and situations such as the violation of human rights, rights of freedom of speech, thought and religion and inequality before the law. Last of all, *alienating violence* refers to the deprivation of individuals or of groups to higher rights such as psychological, emotional, cultural or intellectual health. According to this definition, people's well-being does not come only from fulfilling material needs; it also requires paying attention to nonmaterial needs such as empowerment in the community, the opportunity to engage in creative activities and the feeling of social and cultural belonging. The best known examples of *alienating violence* include racism, social exclusion, the oppression of a culture and living in fear.

Salmi also examines how education can be a powerful instrument to reduce violence and improve human rights. On the other hand, he claims that schools can also be violent environments and the educational process, or the lack thereof, can be an important determinant of violence.

When we look at many of the interviews in light of the above definitions, it is clear that a majority of Kurdish children who begin school with little or no knowledge of Turkish are subject to many of the above types of violence. That students are frequently beaten by their teachers for not understanding what is said, for finding it difficult to learn to read and write or for speaking Kurdish among themselves, in or out of school, constitutes *direct violence*. Conversely, the educational, social, linguistic, psychological and economic damage arising from the failure to include Kurdish in the education of Kurdish children can be cited as an example of both types of *indirect violence*. Likewise, prohibiting Kurdish children from speaking Kurdish in the classroom, with their friends in the school garden and even at home with their parents are clear examples of *repressive violence*. Lastly, forcing Kurdish children to receive their education in a language with which they are unfamiliar, negating their identity in the educational system, in classroom practices or in textbooks and causing them to be embarrassed of their mother tongue and culture constitute examples of *alienating violence*. Similarly, teachers from both groups and parents can also be said to be subject at times to *alienating violence* and at times to *repressive violence*.

## 6. Keeping Quiet and Waiting for the Bell

An issue referred to by most students interviewed is that in the first years of school many people had to "keep quiet" because they did not speak Turkish. Many people say that because it was forbidden to speak Kurdish and they could not speak Turkish, they were unable to speak to each other; they got bored of keeping quiet in class and waiting for the bell to ring to speak and for the final bell to go home. These interviewees also said that in later years at school they were unable to ask questions because of their inadequate Turkish; they again had to "keep quiet," that this "keeping quiet" over time became a habit and also influenced them in later stages of life, rendering them passive. It is quite meaningful that the first Turkish expression that a student learned was "shut up."



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## 7. Informants

Many of the teachers whose mother tongue is Kurdish said that in the first years of school Kurdish students are warned by some teachers not to speak Kurdish. Students who continue speaking Kurdish are identified by other students appointed as *informants*; they are then subjected to punishment. These findings show great similarity to findings cited in the scholarship on the issue. Skutnab-Kangas refers to Clason and Baksi and says that Kurdish students are not permitted to speak Kurdish among themselves or with their parents. Those who persist in speaking Kurdish are identified by teachers and punished; students acting as informants are rewarded.<sup>131</sup> It has also been observed that with the support of village outposts, some teachers incite parents not to speak Kurdish with their children, telling them that if they continue to do so their children will be unable to learn to read and write in Turkish and will therefore be unsuccessful in school.

It is generally the case that the justification for not permitting the students to speak in their mother tongue is that “it is what students need.” According to this argument, in order for students to be successful in school, they need to receive maximum exposure to the language of instruction. Students are asked to speak Turkish both in and outside school, in the street and at home; parents are encouraged to only speak Turkish with their children. This is supposed to help students learn Turkish better. However, giving priority to teaching students Turkish in all classes causes Kurdish students to believe that they are inadequate; and in order to remedy this inadequacy they need to give priority to Turkish always and everywhere. The above argument therefore not only ignores the benefits that children would draw from being educated in their own mother tongue, but also seeks the solution of the problem not in considering the mother tongue as part of the child’s education but in fruitlessly giving more priority to Turkish.

This assumption, referred to as “time on task” in the field of language education, asserts that there is a direct correlation between the total length of education in the school language and the academic success; that for children to learn a second language they need to be distanced completely or as much as possible from use of the first language. However the literature has shown that among students belonging to minority languages there is no such direct correlation between the length of education in the majority language and academic success; that on the contrary, providing education in two or more languages positively influences learning the academic content and the languages in question.<sup>132</sup> As is the case with children belonging to ethnic language groups, the current educational and linguistic policies in Turkey assume that the mother tongue of Kurdish children is Turkish; they insist that they follow the same curriculum and receive the same quantity and type of Turkish education as children whose mother tongue is Turkish.<sup>133</sup> But Şahin and Gülmez, who studied the reasons for the lack of school success in this region, argue that the Turkish language education policies implemented by the state also play an important role in this lack of success.<sup>134</sup> However, what is suggested as a solution mostly regarding what needs to be done is to provide these children with further Turkish language education. For example, in a televised

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<sup>131</sup> Tove Skutnab-Kangas, *“Bilingualism or Not: The Education of Minorities”*, (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1984), 309-11.

<sup>132</sup> Cummins, *Language*, 174-175.

<sup>133</sup> Although only non-Muslim communities referred to in the Treaty of Lausanne have been permitted to receive education in their own language, it is well known that many issues are experienced in the schools where these languages are used as well.

<sup>134</sup> İsmet Şahin and Yener Gülmez, “The Efficiency of Education in East and Southeast Turkey” *Social Indicators Research*, 49 (2000), 213–236.



speech, the former Minister of Education Hüseyin Çelik said that the curriculum needed to be amended to enable children in the region to better learn Turkish. However, examples in the relevant literature have shown that there is no direct correlation between providing children from minority language groups with more classes in the language of instruction, or majority language, and these children's academic success.<sup>135</sup> On the contrary, research has shown that students who are more successful both in language development and in their classes are not students who know the language of instruction best but those who know both the language of instruction and their own mother tongue well.<sup>136</sup> A research conducted in Van with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who speak Kurdish, in support of this thesis, has shown that Kurdish language development is the major determinant of students' Turkish language development of the Kurdish students; that contrary to what is argued, students who have a more balanced relationship with Kurdish and whose linguistic skills in Kurdish are relatively better than their peers acquire better linguistic skills in Turkish and even in English.<sup>137</sup>

## **8. Distinctions between Villages / Slums, Regions and City Centers**

Another issue raised by many teachers in both groups is that the rate of Turkish among children from villages, districts and city slums is very low. Conversely, teachers state that in city centers children speak more Turkish than in the past before they begin school because of the widespread use of televisions, telephones and computers. Some of the parents stated that after migrating from rural areas to city centers, children experience great difficulties at school and that others make fun of them because they cannot speak Turkish well.

## **9. To Be A Kurdish Speaking Teacher or Not To Be**

Another significant conclusion arising from the interviews is that there are important differences between the two groups of teachers. If the teacher speaks Kurdish and uses Kurdish even if only occasionally, the students feel relieved and certain potential negative consequences are prevented. For example, many students have stated that they find it very difficult to communicate with teachers who do not speak Kurdish; they feel them to be distant. Teachers concurred: those who do not speak Kurdish stated that their inability to speak the language caused difficulties for both themselves and the students. The children's educational experience was thus negatively affected. Likewise, teachers who speak Kurdish said they felt lucky to have familiarity with Kurdish because they had the opportunity to give their lessons in both languages. Parents also said that children whose teachers spoke Kurdish had a far more positive outlook toward their schools and were more successful students. Moreover, as could be inferred from some students and from many Kurdish teachers, failing is generally much less prevalent among students whose teachers speak Kurdish.

Furthermore, in comparison to teachers who do not speak Kurdish, Kurdish-speaking teachers are able to communicate directly with the parents. Therefore parents tend to attend parent-teacher meetings more frequently. Conversely, teachers who do not speak Kurdish said that when they held meetings with parents they encountered great difficulties; they generally asked teachers or students who speak Kurdish to help for translations.

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<sup>135</sup> For examples and a more comprehensive debate on this subject, see: Cummins, *Language*, 173-200.

<sup>136</sup> Cummins, *Fundamental Psycholinguistic*, 20-21

<sup>137</sup> Mehmet Şerif Derince, "The Role of First Language (Kurdish) Development in Acquisition of a Second Language (Turkish) and a Third Language (English)" (Unpublished Graduate Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2010).



On the subject of what methods and materials were employed to solve students' learning difficulties, teachers from the two groups gave different answers. Many teachers who do not speak Kurdish said that they made use of visual materials; they tried to teach subjects with the help of stories, pictures or dramatization. Moreover, some stated that when the subjects they taught were not understood, they asked a Turkish-speaking student to help. Teachers who speak Kurdish said that when they tried to teach a subject where the language barrier was an issue, they generally spoke Kurdish to help curb their disadvantages. Most said that by using Kurdish to explain the words, concepts and sometimes the curriculum, they enabled students to develop their vocabulary more easily and to better understand the lessons. Most also said that when teaching Turkish they made comparisons to Kurdish.

Also, as previously stated, Kurdish teachers not only speak the language, they also have general knowledge of Kurdish, its literature and culture. Even in current monolingual practices, having some knowledge of the structure of Kurdish may be of use when teaching Turkish to students; the two languages can be used to compare and contrast the linguistic structures. Being knowledgeable about a language and its literature and sharing this knowledge with students may also have a positive influence on the latter.

However, similarities also exist. For example, almost all of the teachers in both groups did not have the opportunity to read any sources on teaching children whose language of instruction is different from their mother tongue. Many said that when they were studying at university their own teachers deliberately refrained from referring to this subject; if it was brought up it was immediately dropped by the teachers and students were not permitted to debate it. Almost all of the teachers believe that it would be better both for the students and for themselves if future teachers received training in these subjects in education faculties and made to read relevant sources.

## 10. The Role of Parents

Another important finding of this study indicates that, as acknowledged by people from all four groups, parents are generally unable to help their children in their initial attempts at acquiring literacy skills. Students, parents, as well as teachers from both groups bemoaned this state of affairs. Students said that as they no longer spoke Kurdish well, they were unable to communicate with their parents. Some parents said that by not speaking any Turkish, they gradually start to have less and less contact with their children. On the other hand, Turkish teachers complained that parents did not show any interest in their children's schooling. It is undeniable that parents play a very important role in their children's school experience.<sup>138</sup> Many of the teachers said that the inability of families to provide support aggravates the situation: if parents were literate the students' would be in a much better condition. The literature shows that when parents provide support, children attempting to read and write learn more quickly, are better motivated and achieve better results. In cases where children begin to read and write in their mother tongue, the support and resources received at home reach higher levels. Furthermore, in many linguistic contexts, research shows that when children begin to read and write in their mother tongue, their parents then seek adult education so that they may themselves learn to read and write.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, according to research, parents who speak minority languages say they are keen to contribute to their children's education, but due to a number of factors, educators either

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<sup>138</sup> Baker, 316.

<sup>139</sup> Pamela Mackenzie, "Multilingual Education among Minority Language Communities" *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 12 (2009), 369-385.



undervalue parent's interest, motivation and potential contribution or are unable to make proper use of them. What is more, in cases where the mother tongue is excluded from the acquisition process of literacy skills, parents invariably end up becoming powerless and disinclined to offer their help, thus hindering their children's possibility to receive a more relevant education. The studies have shown that situations of this kind bring about additional psychological problems and the issue becomes even thornier.<sup>140</sup>

## 11. Language Shift

Another consequence of these educational policies is that, among younger generations, Kurdish is gradually being shifted by Turkish. The vast majority of students interviewed said that although they continue to speak Kurdish with their parents, they generally speak Turkish with their friends. Most stated that Turkish has become the most commonly used language, especially in high school years; one student's statement that "*Turkish is the dominant language in everyday life, university, working life and on the streets,*" is self-explanatory. These findings reach the same findings as some previous studies. For example, a study carried out in Diyarbakır, in the centralized district centre of Şemdinli and in three villages has shown that a shift from Kurdish to Turkish has been taking place over generations among people whose mother tongue is Kurdish. The use of Kurdish has been decreasing from the older generation (40 and over) towards the middle generation (30 to 40) and to the younger generation (20 and under).<sup>141</sup> Similar findings have also been observed in the above-mentioned study conducted with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in Van. The study showed that while students generally spoke Kurdish with their parents, they generally spoke Turkish with their friends and siblings; Turkish was more commonly used on buses, in the street and in shops.<sup>142</sup>

As stated by Skutnabb-Kangas, Henrik-Magga and Dunbar, people are born into languages, cultures and traditions; in order to be learned, they need to be lived and taught.<sup>143</sup> Moreover, they cannot be acquired by children unless those around them are engaging in the cultural life. It is highly improbable that people who are not able sufficiently to acquire the language and culture of their parents are able to transmit these to their children or to following generations. There is no doubt that messages such as, "Kurdish has no value," instilled especially in school, and the absence of institutional support behind the speaking of Kurdish play an important role in the gradual decrease of speaking Kurdish among the Kurdish community.

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<sup>140</sup> August & Shanahan, p.?

<sup>141</sup> Ergin Öpengin, "La situation sociolinguistique de la langue kurde en Turquie" (Unpublished Graduate Thesis, Université de Rouen, 2009).

<sup>142</sup> Derince.

<sup>143</sup> Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Ole Henrik-Magga ve Robert Dunbar, "Forms of Education of Indigenous Children as Crimes against Humanity", Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Seventh Session, New York, April 21 – May 2, 2008.



## B. ATTITUDES TO THE USE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN EDUCATION

Interviewees from all four groups suggested that all peoples should be able to learn and use their mother tongue in their schooling process; this would be best for everyone, especially the students. Through making comparisons, teachers who do not speak Kurdish referred to difficulties experienced by their acquaintances learning English outside Turkey, and argued that in a similar fashion it was very difficult for Kurdish children to learn Turkish and that certain changes needed to be made to transform the situation in a better way. As to the suggestions to this end, some proposed that there should be more nursery schools, while others said that the situation is no different for nursery school students. Some believed that the best thing therefore is for people to receive education in the language they know best, be it their mother tongue or second language. Furthermore, most of the teachers who do not speak Kurdish said that following their experiences in regions where Kurdish is spoken, their view of the use of the mother tongue in education had changed. It was only then that they had begun to realize its importance. Likewise, almost all of the Kurdish teachers argued that since students can best understand subjects in their mother tongue, everyone should be educated in their mother tongue. Some teachers said that some kind of bilingual education in Kurdish and Turkish needs to be implemented in the Kurdish region; in order to do so, certain laws would need to be amended. Parents added that the use of the mother tongue in education is as necessary for children as “*bread and water*.” They believe that if Kurdish is used in the education of their children, they themselves will also benefit because they too might have a chance to learn to read and write. People from almost all groups said that use of the mother tongue in education should be seen as a fundamental human right and as a requirement of effective education rather than as a political stance.

These findings coincide with the results of the study conducted by Eđitim-Sen entitled “Survey on Attitudes to Education in the Mother Tongue.”<sup>144</sup> In this study, interviews were held with 781 people of different ages, educational and socio-economic levels and ethnic groups in 26 cities in the seven regions of Turkey; the results show that the 69 % of interviewees said that education in mother tongue should be regarded as a human right; that everyone should be able to receive education in their own mother tongue. Among people whose mother tongue is Kurdish, this rate reached 92 %.

When asked at what age children should begin to receive education in Kurdish, most people argued that instruction should be in Kurdish from the beginning of school onwards, while some interviewees felt that children should learn both Kurdish and Turkish simultaneously. On the subject of what benefits Kurdish children could draw from the inclusion of Kurdish in education, almost everyone from all four groups said that the lack of communication between children and teachers would come to an end. Apart from this, the following were the benefits predicted by most:

- students will be able to learn to read and write more quickly;
- students will have a higher probability of success in school;
- students will have a healthier state of mind;
- students will be better able to fulfill their potential;

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<sup>144</sup> Eđitim-Sen, “Anadiilde Eđitime Tutum Anketi” (Survey on Attitudes to Education in the Mother Tongue), (2010). Ankara: Eđitim Sen Publishing.



- students will not be silent and intimidated, but rather more active;
- students will have more self-confidence;
- students will better understand their culture and be able to transmit it to the next generations.

### C. SUBTRACTIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

All of the findings of this study indicate that Kurdish students' school experiences are linguistically "subtractive". Researchers define a subtractive linguistic situation as follows: in cases where monolingual policy and practices are implemented and where a monolingual life and education are the main priority, children who speak a language other than the official language are generally made to renounce their mother tongue and learn the dominant language. Through these practices, generally observed in submersion models,<sup>145</sup> students having a different mother tongue are taught a second language and their first language is thus subtracted from their linguistic repertory. Educational practices of this kind, which comply with monolingual ideologies, destroy children's opportunity of adding another language to their mother tongue, and are subtractive.<sup>146</sup>

Many pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists and linguists argue that subtractive bilingualism and submersion education result in negative consequences for individuals. Most experts have stated that such an educational approach aims at assimilation; as such, it generally causes serious linguistic, mental, psychological, cognitive, educational, social (including the health factor) and economic damage.<sup>147</sup> This situation has resulted in significant problems in terms of students' acquisition of literacy skills and learning processes at large. It has become clear that due to serious problems regarding curriculum and educational policies, children who begin school in a language they do not know are forced to distance themselves from their mother tongue; they are unable to achieve the academic standards needed to meet the educational needs of the language of instruction.<sup>148</sup> Teresa McCarty, who conducted a study on the education of students belonging to minority groups in the United States, has similar things to say:

*Native and minority children display the lowest rates of school success and family income and the highest rates of depression and suicide are seen especially among young natives.*<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> In these models, education is provided either in the majority language only or there is little place for the mother tongue if there is any at all. The main goal is to assimilate students from subordinated linguistic communities into the majority language and culture. For a comprehensive debate on this subject, see: Baker, 187-226.

<sup>146</sup> Ofelia Garcia, "Education, Multilingualism and Translanguaging in the 21st Century", in: *Social Justice through Multilingual Education*, ed. Ajit Mohanty, Minata Panda, Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009), 140-158. See also Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Bilingualism or Not*.

<sup>147</sup> Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Linguistic Genocide in Education – Or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?" (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

<sup>148</sup> For comprehensive debates on this subject, see Virginia Collier and Wayne Thomas, *A National Study of School Effectiveness for Language Minority Students' Long-Term Academic Achievement* (Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence, 2002), June 21, 2010, [http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1\\_final.html](http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html); Ajit Mohanty, Minata Panda, Robert Philipson and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Social Justice through Multilingual Education", ed. (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009).

<sup>149</sup> In: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Dunbar, "Indigenous Children's Education as Linguistic Genocide and a Crime Against Humanity? A Global View", *Journal of Indigenous Peoples Rights*, 1 (2010), 11.



According to the information uncovered in the interviews, it is clear that while many people who begin their education in Turkish, a language they do not speak, gradually become alienated from Kurdish, they are also not able to develop linguistic proficiency in Turkish sufficient for the school environment. Due to the subtractive linguistic policy and practices, almost all of the students stated that they were not able to express themselves well either in Kurdish or in Turkish and that they felt stuck in between. This phenomenon is frequently referred to in the literature as semilingualism. The concept suggests that when children belonging to minority language groups are thrust into the majority language especially through schools, excluding their mother tongue, in the long run they are unable to acquire full command of either the language of instruction, which is generally the majority language, or their mother tongue. Therefore they are not able to develop any language in which to fully express themselves or to follow the curriculum.

Studies have shown that most of the damage arising from subtractive educational policy and practices generally accompanies individuals belonging to minority languages throughout their lives.<sup>150</sup> Likewise, Firat and Atlı have also observed during interviews held with many Kurdish individuals that most people connect their failure in school to their inability to receive an education in their mother tongue. They state that this results in a split personality and harms their whole life, their identity and sense of belonging.<sup>151</sup>

On the basis of findings by Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar,<sup>152</sup> the short and long-term educational, social, physical and psychological consequences of subtractive linguistic practices and submersion models on students can be summarized as follows:

- Negative educational consequences: failure at school, low school attendance rates, low development of first and second language;
- Negative physical consequences: alcoholism, tendency to resort to violence, etc.;
- Negative psychological consequences: lack of self-confidence, considering one's own community as worthless and backward, considering one's mother tongue as worthless, etc.;
- The disappearance of the language and of the established culture;
- Negative socio-economic and other societal consequences: high unemployment rates, low income, economic and social marginalization, alienation and mental illness.

In parallel to findings of previous studies, the findings of this study show that the initial difficulties that Kurdish students who do not speak any Turkish encounter when they begin school continue to affect them in later life. These students occasionally find it difficult to express themselves even when they study at the university level. In fact many people from the first group, namely Kurdish students, stated that if Kurdish had been used for their education, they would have been more successful both at school and in later life. The vast majority said that the use of their mother tongue would have made them feel more self-confident, more at ease, less frustrated and free of inner turmoil.

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<sup>150</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar, 39.

<sup>151</sup> Firat and Atlı.

<sup>152</sup> Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar, 57-67.



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## **D. A THEORETICAL APPROACH – THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC AND SOCIOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES**

The findings of our study indicate that, in order to understand what Kurdish children who speak little or no Turkish experience at school, it is necessary to take a number of variables into consideration. Many studies seeking to identify these variables have examined the socio-economic level of families, the inadequate quality of education and the insufficiency of teachers and materials, to name a few. However, the findings of comprehensive and detailed studies conducted over the last few decades in different countries have indicated that the linguistic variable also plays an important role in the language experience of children who begin school speaking a language other than the language of instruction. When we consider the socio-political context of education in general and of the education of children belonging to minority languages in particular, the findings of the current study need to be explained within a framework that covers the linguistic variable as well as the socio-political context of education. Cummins is among those researchers who present a theoretical framework of this kind.<sup>153</sup> According to Cummins, the academic success or failure of bilingual children who belong to communities speaking the prestigious majority languages, as well as of children who belong to communities speaking the lower-status minority languages, can only be understood by taking into account certain psycholinguistic and sociological principles. Psycholinguistic principles consist of type of linguistic proficiency, linguistic interdependence and additive bilingualism. On the other hand, the sociological principles consist of understanding oppressive societal power relations and identity negotiations.

### **1. Psycholinguistic Principles Underlying Academic Development of Linguistic Minority Students**

According to the theoretical framework proposed by Cummins, studies in the socio-linguistic context point to three psycholinguistic principles. The educational experiences of students belonging to linguistic minorities are determined by the way these principles are implemented.

#### **a. Language Proficiency and Academic Development**

Cummins has frequently emphasized that there are different types of language proficiencies. As mentioned before, the type of proficiency known as the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) is used to carry out daily activities, and it is different from the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) which is associated with understanding and following academic subjects. A third type, mentioned by Cummins in his recent debates, is a linguistic proficiency acquired through the direct teaching of the sounds, grammar and writing rules of a language. According to Cummins, it is important to distinguish among these different linguistic proficiencies in discussions of education and linguistic situations of bilingual students because each develops in a different way, and they play different roles in academic development of bilingual students. Furthermore, both linguistic minority students and majority children can react differently to the strategies used for the acquisition of these different types of linguistic proficiencies. As BICS is used in face to face conversations, the sentences generally contain short, simple and commonly used words. Gestures and mimics are also used to support the conversation. Associated with academic language, CALP, on the other hand, consists of relatively less known and morphologically more complex words, of longer sentence structures mostly requiring conjunctions; generally, it

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<sup>153</sup> Cummins, *Fundamental Psycholinguistic*, 19-35.



frequently contains passive sentence structures. It is generally found in text books and literature. When students from majority language groups begin school, they already have a great degree of the BICS type of linguistic proficiency, and they improve it with new words, phrases and structures learned at school. At the same time, they are ready to add the CALP type of linguistic proficiency to their existing linguistic repertory. However, when linguistic minority students begin school, they generally speak the language of instruction only a little or not at all. They are required to spend a long time trying to develop BICS. Therefore they fall behind in the development of sufficient and effective CALP. As previously noted, at least a few years are needed for linguistic minority students to reach the language proficiency level of students from the majority group when they are instructed in the majority language submersion education. That is why the language or languages to be used by linguistic minority children beginning school directly determine their academic development.

## b. Linguistic Interdependence

The second of the psycholinguistic principles consists of linguistic interdependence. According to this principle, tested among linguistic minority groups of different socio-economic status, in many countries and linguistic environments, there is a “common underlying language proficiency” on which bilingual students’ languages are constructed. Thanks to this common underlying language proficiency, information that is learned in one of the languages can easily be transferred to the other language or languages if appropriate conditions are set. For example, if students are taught to literacy skills in Kurdish, these skills can be transferred to Turkish, too, and they do not need to be re-taught in Turkish from the beginning once again. According to Cummins, this principle explains why in some successful educational models such as immersion bilingual education<sup>154</sup> or two-way bilingual education, although students are exposed to two languages or relatively less to one of two languages, they achieve more successful results in comparison to submersion models used in the education of most linguistic minority students. In other words, what matters in educational models implemented in the education of linguistic minority students is not maximum exposure to the language of instruction, but under which circumstances this exposure takes place, whether previous language repertories are taken into consideration and whether they are regarded as helpful multilingual development. It seems that, in terms of learning and teaching practices, it can be suggested that students should be encouraged to transfer their knowledge and skills across their languages. From this point of view, putting in place support between linguistic minority students’ language repertories, the use of their common underlying language proficiency, the mutual transfer of repertories and skills, or the failure to do any or all of these constitute factors that determine linguistic minority students’ school experiences and their academic and linguistic development.

## c. Additive Bilingualism

Additive bilingualism is the polar opposite of the aforementioned *subtractive bilingualism*. Cummins asserts that according to the common findings of approximately 200 experimental studies conducted in various linguistic situations in different parts of the world over the last 40 years, a positive correlation has emerged between additive bilingualism

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<sup>154</sup> Popular examples of these models are implemented in French/English bilingual regions of Canada. In these models, students are instructed through medium of two languages or a second language under the supervision of bilingual teachers while both of the languages are valued explicitly. The goal is to bring up multilingual students. However, in some countries, there are some education models named as ‘immersion education’ while they might not be aiming at effective bilingualism but rather a smother assimilation to the majority language. See: Baker, 187-226. See also: Fred Genesee, “Learning Through Two Languages”, (Cambridge, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, 1987); Bostwick, M., “What is Immersion?”, <http://www.bi-lingual.com/School/WhatIsImmersion.htm> [July 19, 2010].



and students' linguistic, cognitive and academic development. Additive bilingualism is present when students add a second language to their existing linguistic repertory while continuing to develop their first language conceptually and academically. It is generally seen in immersion models and effective bilingual or multilingual education models. The experimental studies cited by Cummins have shown that in situations where additive bilingualism is encouraged, bilingual students enjoy many advantages over monolingual students. The scholarship underlining the advantages arising from additive bilingualism are as follows: bilingual students show a deeper awareness of the structure and functions of languages that they know (metalinguistic awareness); they learn new languages much more rapidly. Also, many studies associate additive bilingualism with advantages such as cognitive flexibility, more advanced reading skills, varied and creative thinking and greater sensitivity to people speaking various languages.<sup>155</sup>

## **2. Sociological Principles Underlying Academic Development of Linguistic Minority Students**

In order to understand how the psycholinguistic principles described above are implemented in the case of different language groups and their effect on the academic development of students from subordinated linguistic communities, it is necessary to look at how a number of societal relationships that take place within the interactive educational environment. Studies show that the psycholinguistic principles in question are implemented in schools attended by students from majority language groups in a way that the students are empowered, enriched and become more successful in terms of academic development. On the other hand, in the schools where students from minority linguistic communities largely attended, the opposite happens: the students are forced towards weaker and generally less successful positions. Cummins argues that in order to understand the major reasons behind these disjunctures, it is necessary to examine the types of societal power relations between dominant groups and subordinated groups, as well as the micro-interaction of the power relations between educators and students. Cummins proposes two closely related sociological principles for understanding these relations and their interaction, which play an important role in the academic development of linguistic minority students.

### **a. Understanding Coercive Power Relations**

Cummins says that many sociologists and anthropologists working on ethnicity and school success state that societal power relations play a very important role in the school experiences of minority groups.<sup>156</sup> Studies have shown that minority groups experiencing long-term school failure are subject to physical and symbolic violence by dominating groups generation after generation. In one of his previous studies, Cummins states that historically, subordinated group students have been disempowered educationally in their school in much the same way that their communities have been disempowered in the wider society.<sup>157</sup> In order to shed better light on being subject

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<sup>155</sup> For a comprehensive study, see: Baker, 142-165; and Cummins, *Language*, 178-182.

<sup>156</sup> For studies cited by Cummins (2009) see Carl Bankston and Min Zhou, "Effects of Minority-Language Literacy on the Academic Achievement of Vietnamese Youth in New Orleans", *Sociology of Education* 68 (1995), 1-17; Teresa McCarty, "A Place to Be Navajo – Rough Rock and the Struggle for Self-Determination in Indigenous Schooling", (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002); John Ogbu, "Minority Education and Caste", (New York: Academic Press, 1978); John Ogbu, "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning", *Educational Researcher*, 21 (1992), 5-14.; Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut, "Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation", ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001);; Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, "Linguistic Genocide in Education - or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?," (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000).

<sup>157</sup> Cummins, *Language*, 48-49.



to physical and symbolic violence and exclusion, Cummins refers to the terms *voluntary* and *involuntary minorities*<sup>158</sup> and to the concept of *reactionary ethnicity*<sup>159</sup> frequently used in the literature. *Voluntary minorities* are groups who willingly migrate from their own lands to other countries hoping to find better economic conditions or a freer political environment. Members of these groups are able to achieve a certain amount of school success and to become integrated within the countries where they have migrated. However, *involuntary minorities* are groups who have been brought unwillingly under control by dominating powers and find themselves continuously faced with failure at school, both through overt discrimination in terms of access to financial resources such as work opportunities, sufficient schooling and accommodation, and through the devaluation of their identities within the dominating society. Cummins also says that people belonging to *voluntary minority* groups can at times be subject to discrimination in terms of social integration and the use of financial resources. Moreover, the second and subsequent generations from the voluntary minorities usually share many characteristics of the second group, described as *involuntary minority*. Finally, *reactionary ethnicity* is defined as arising when defensive identities develop and unite in the face of an opposite dominant identity. According to this concept, identity constructs and alliances founded on opposition to the dominant power come to oppose institutions – among them schools – administered by the dominant power. Here, failure at school can be seen as related to the consequences of reactionary ethnicity and opposite identities which are discriminated and excluded.

## **b. Identity Negotiation**

Taking the above studies as a starting point, Cummins states that *identity negotiation* plays an important role in linguistic minority students' cultural interaction with schools and academic success. Students from linguistic minority groups inevitably find themselves reflecting on who they are and where they stand in their community. Studies have shown that *selective acculturation* experiences, in other words situations where students preserve the language and culture of their community and add to it a new language, influence students positively and contribute to their academic success. However, in cases of serious assimilation, that is to say when students lose the language and culture of their community to a great degree, significant lack of self-confidence and school failure has been observed among students.<sup>160</sup> In this sense, the interaction that the educational system as a whole and the teachers as its bearers develop with linguistic minority students and the messages they convey to them play a very important role in the identity development of these students. Societal power relations influence the way teachers define their roles (teacher identity) and the educational structure (curriculum, securing of funds, evaluation, etc.). These in turn influence the way teachers interact with students from linguistic and cultural minority groups. These interactions create an interpersonal space where learning takes place and the negotiation of identities is debated. Identity negotiation results either in the reproduction of coercive power relations or in the creation of collaborative power relations.

To summarize the theoretical framework suggested by Cummins, the aforementioned psycholinguistic and sociological principles provide important clues in explaining the academic success or failure of students from both prestigious majority language groups and low status minority language communities. Of these, the

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<sup>158</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Toward A Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" *American Education Research Journal*, 35 (1995), 465-491.

<sup>159</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*.

<sup>160</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Legacies*.



principles of “linguistic proficiency,” “linguistic interdependence” and “additive bilingualism” shed light on the psychological and linguistic aspects of the students’ educational experiences. On the other hand, “understanding coercive societal power relations” and “identity negotiation” are sociological concepts which are quite helpful in explaining the power relations between subordinated groups and the dominant groups. They determine the way how psycholinguistic principles are implemented, as well as the micro-interactions arising from power relations between educators and students. For Cummins, an effective educational system that will enable students from linguistic minority groups to succeed can only be possible through a model that questions coercive power relations and that attempts to achieve identity negotiation for students. From this point of view, the role of education is to empower students. In this case empowerment should be understood as a process where, in the interaction between teachers and students, both groups are to receive more recognition in terms of their cultural, linguistic and intellectual identities and are to believe that they will be successful in school.

## **E. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The abolishment of the serious linguistic, psychological, cognitive, educational, social and economic damage caused by subtractive educational policies and practices depends directly on the use of Kurdish as a language of instruction in the education of Kurdish students, since these types of damages already arise from the exclusion of Kurdish from the education of Kurdish students. That is why a great many steps need to be taken for the use of Kurdish in the education of Kurdish students. In this sense, taking as a starting point the findings of this study and the topics discussed so far, studies from the relevant literature and the theoretical framework, it is possible to put forth a number of linguistic, social and cultural recommendations concerning the educational policy and practices followed in schooling of Kurdish students who speak little or no Turkish when they begin school. The implementation of some of these recommendations might be realized in long terms taking five or more years both from a conjectural perspective and due to the need to prepare the necessary infrastructure. However, while the preparation of the necessary infrastructure can begin immediately, considering the current conditions, some of the recommendations below can be implemented immediately. In both cases, it is essential that these recommendations are taken seriously into consideration by public opinion, by the relevant state institutions, political parties responsive and critical non-governmental organizations and relevant individuals.

### **1. Recommendations Concerning the Educational System**

***Kurdish should be used in education; bilingual educational models should be developed:*** As previously mentioned, the most realistic way to eliminate the inequalities experienced by Kurdish students would be to use Kurdish in their education. However, how Kurdish should be used in education no doubt constitutes a very complex and multi-faceted issue. Scholarship on the question includes many models where minority languages are used in education. Of these, submersion models aim at assimilation, whereas immersion and two-way bilingual education models aim at bilingualism, biliteracy, long-term school success and the effective learning and use of languages in question. When the discussions in the current literature on the issue are critically taken into consideration, the possibilities arising from a additive bilingualism and the needs and demands expressed by the people interviewed in this study, the design and implementation of school models aiming at a balanced bilingualism in Kurdish and Turkish and literacy in the two of the languages in the education of Kurdish children will play an important role in lifting the above cited damages and disadvantages. There



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is no doubt that for the development of bilingual educational models many lessons can be gleaned from bilingual educational models in different countries. However, taking an educational model that has been successful in another country and implementing it with another language will probably produce weak results resembling submersion models. From this point of view, in order to develop strong models to be used in the education of Kurdish children, the current situation and detailed observations made in our study should be taken into consideration; models that respond to different needs should be developed. However in order to develop models that will be implemented in the future, it is necessary to start preparing the necessary infrastructure immediately.

***Bilingual educational models to be used in the education of Kurdish children should cover all school levels:*** Once conditions, needs and attainable objectives have been identified, the models to be developed should not be limited to the initial years when students acquire literacy skills. They should include of long-term programs covering all stages of education, from primary school to university. An opposite model would not play a role or have any effect on the secondary and tertiary level of education. Also, a monolingual educational model in either language that students would not be responsible for in country-wide centralized examinations will prevent students from learning one of the languages and the model from being successful.

***Coercive teacher-student relations should be transformed:*** This study also shows that socio-cultural messages established through language and educational policies and especially conveyed through teachers play a very important role in Kurdish children's school experiences. As stated in the theoretical framework presented in the discussion section of the present volume, the main reasons behind school failure of students belonging to linguistic minorities are socio-political underlyingly. They manifest themselves in the micro-interaction between students and educators in the school environment. That is why, as explored also in the theoretical framework, educational interventions can only be successful to the extent that they can open up for discussion the current coercive power relations and establish different power relations based on collaboration. This should not be understood as the token addition of Kurdish to the education of students whose mother tongue is Kurdish. However, the objective should be the effective empowerment of Kurdish students and therefore of the Kurdish community through bilingual and multicultural education, the elimination of existing inequalities and the resulting societal justice. Otherwise, simply achieving literacy in the first language will not transform Kurdish students' educational experiences and will not contribute to the abolishment of poverty, inequality and discrimination. That is why language should be used as a tool with the aim of establishing a transformative education shaped in line with the principles discussed in the theoretical framework, where both students and teachers experience identity negotiation and where parents are also given a role.

***Bilingual or multilingual teacher training departments should be established:*** The necessary infrastructure should be prepared and relevant departments should be opened in educational faculties for the training of teachers who will provide Kurdish-Turkish bilingual education

***Teacher trainees should be trained on linguistic and cultural diversity:*** Educational faculties should provide teacher trainees with pedagogical courses that provide guidance on teaching children whose mother tongue differs from the language of instruction. Teacher training courses known as "Intercultural Education" in the scholarship generally include subjects such as the history and culture of linguistic and cultural minority groups, class management for linguistic minority students and the methodology for teaching such children. Courses of this



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kind are held in countries such as the Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Austria and Southern Cyprus among many others and they have been proven to be quite useful.

***Teachers should be given in-service training on linguistic and cultural diversity:*** Teachers who are already working in schools attended mostly by Kurdish students should be provided with in-service training on teaching students whose mother tongue differs from the language of instruction.

***Kurdish teachers should receive training on bilingual teaching methods complete with examples:*** Kurdish teachers, who from time to time choose speaking Kurdish with their Kurdish students in an attempt to alleviate their disadvantages, should be provided with seminars on bilingual educational methods, strategies and course materials. Existing good examples and practices should be recorded in written or visual form and shared with other Kurdish teachers.

***Teachers who do not speak Kurdish should be encouraged to learn Kurdish:*** We have observed that teachers who do not speak Kurdish experience difficulties with students, parents and the environment in which they live. It is a safe assumption that the reason for some of these difficulties arises from their lack of knowledge of the Kurdish language and culture. That is why teachers who work or who will work in the Kurdish region should be encouraged to learn Kurdish. Appropriate environments should be provided for such language instruction. For this, the importance of learning Kurdish for teachers who will teach in the region can be made clear; informative booklets on the Kurdish language, culture and literature can be distributed to teachers; free-of-charge Kurdish language courses can be provided specifically for these teachers. Teachers who learn Kurdish may thus be able to establish more productive, sincere, constructive relationships with both students and parents. This will encourage an identity negotiation and may positively contribute to Kurdish students' school success and to alleviate the existing social and economic inequality and discrimination.

***Kurdish literacy courses should be created for Kurdish students in the short term:*** During the process of designing different types of bilingual educational models where Kurdish will be one of the languages of instruction, it is necessary to provide state-supported, free-of-charge Kurdish literacy courses for those students who can speak Kurdish but do not know how to write and read in Kurdish in order to re-establish certain attitudes to language and students' self-confidence until the above can be achieved. Seeing their mother tongue in written texts and being able to make use of these texts may have a corrective and constructive effect on the students' relationship with the school and with their mother tongue. In addition, literacy courses of this kind will provide the ground for the implementation of bilingual educational models.

***Kurdish literacy courses should be created for parents:*** When the role of parents in students' education is taken into consideration, it is essential that parents be considered part of the educational process. Setting up Kurdish literacy courses for parents, no matter whether they are already literate in Turkish or not, would be a positive first step in this direction. Such steps would help parents become empowered and contribute to their children's education. These courses would also be important in that they would provide access to wider resources.

***Centers for the development and assessment of bilingual education curriculums should be established:*** Rather than the simple juxtaposition of two languages, bilingualism is a dynamic process consisting of a new way of thinking which results from the coming together of at least two languages. Any educational curricula to respond



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to this dynamic process cannot consist of the superimposition of separate curricula prepared for different languages. Therefore, autonomous centers for the development and assessment of bilingual education curriculums, which will take into consideration the dynamic structure of bilingualism and all of its educational processes, have to be established.

***When Kurdish students learn a third language, this should be related to their previously acquired languages:*** Bilingual educational models are also models that encourage multilingualism. Studies in the field and on the linguistic interdependence principle, mentioned before, shows that the languages already known by bilinguals play a determining role in the acquisition of a new language. From this point of view, when English or another third language is taught to Kurdish students both in the current educational system and in probable Kurdish-Turkish bilingual educational models, the students' first language – Kurdish – and second language – Turkish – should be seen as important facets in the teaching of a third language. For this reason, appropriate teaching methods and materials should be created.

## **2. Societal and Cultural Recommendations**

***Public awareness should be raised on the use of mother tongue in education and bilingualism:*** As stated in the aforementioned report on bilingualism and education by Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaşı, successful language education cannot be expected in environments where there is a negative attitude towards that language. This is why work should be done to eliminate negative attitudes towards speaking mother tongue and its use in education and bilingualism. Therefore, an environment should be created where multilingualism is considered a positive value and a fundamental human situation rather than a limitation. The study conducted by Eğitim-Sen shows that the majority of people have a positive attitude towards learning, speaking and teaching the mother tongue in education; however, the interviews conducted for the current study suggest that Kurdish is seen by some teachers as being the source of problems, that students and parents are encouraged not to speak Kurdish and are stigmatized when speaking Kurdish. From this view, use of Kurdish in education might have to confront with negative attitudes in some circles and confusion in others. It is therefore very important that a sound language planning be developed in order to transform attitudes towards Kurdish and enable positive views to evolve. The public needs to be informed about the damage, inequalities and discrimination arising from current educational policies and practices and the opportunities that would result from bilingual education. To this end, television and radio programs, seminars, conferences, community meetings, multilingual informative posters, booklets and commercials need to be created and disseminated among the public.

***Parents should be provided with information on linguistic and cultural diversity:*** Work should be conducted with parents from linguistic minorities to inform them of the importance of speaking in their mother tongue with their children, of developing their mother tongue and therefore of bilingualism/multilingualism in their children's school success and social relationships.

***TV programs should be created to develop students' Kurdish language skills:*** Taking into account the importance of mother tongue proficiency in achieving better societal and academic development, television programs aiming to develop children's mother tongue should be created by state-supported or private television channels broadcasting in Kurdish; resources should be provided for the preparation of programs of this kind. This



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will constitute a significant development. Clearly, the ban on children’s programming for radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish needs to be abolished.

***The public should be provided with information on beauties of dialectical differences within language:*** As observed in some interviews in the first group, the belief that the dialectical differences within the Kurdish language will cause difficulties in conducting bilingual educational models should also undergo a transformation. The dominant political discourses usually easily receive the consent from the public regarding what is to be regarded as “unique” and “standard”, and therefore “the best” for the public. The Kurdish language’s not being “unique” and “standard” as in the popular common sense might be interpreted as a lack of self-confidence at least among some Kurdish-speaking circles. This lack of self-confidence mostly arises from the continuous comparison between their mother tongue, Kurdish, and the political power and economic advantages of the dominant language, Turkish. In order to change this perception, it is therefore necessary to raise awareness among the public regarding the dialectical differences existing inevitably in all languages and to persuade the public about the fact that the dialectical differences only add to the beauty, ingenuity, naturalness and historical richness of a language.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### RIGHT TO EDUCATION IN THE MOTHER TONGUE – COUNTRY EXAMPLES

Over the last few years, the right to education in the mother tongue has been occupying a considerable place in the national and international political agenda as one of the fundamental elements of the fight for linguistic rights. The right to education in the mother tongue is a great priority in that it constitutes the basis for the realization of other rights concerning the mother tongue, such as the guarantee of the use of the mother tongue in politics and in mass communication tools, as a prerequisite of equality in political participation, and in the sphere of jurisdiction and administration, which are parts of the public sphere. The fight for the right to education in the mother tongue, which gained momentum in Europe from the late 1960s onwards, has forced international and European-based institutions to deal more comprehensively with the matter in the 1990s. Although concerning linguistic minority rights in general and the right to education in the mother tongue in particular, there is no common text that binds European Union (EU) member states, texts prepared by the United Nations (UN) and especially by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (CE) and opened for signature and ratification by states have become guides for all candidate and member countries containing linguistic minorities and have begun to form the framework for these states' approach to the right to education in the mother tongue.<sup>161</sup>

In Europe, a high number of examples may pave the way for the debate in Turkey on the Kurds' right to education in the mother tongue. However, the fight of linguistic minorities in political regimes other than liberal democracies for the right to education in the mother tongue and their experiences may also be taken into consideration in this debate. [In this respect, the example of Uyghur language in China, besides two well-known examples of Basque language in Spain and Corsican language in France is also examined.] Each example will be shown through its historical background, socio-political circumstances and practices concerning the use of the mother tongue in education and in parallel with comments on the current situation and in the near future. This chapter will end with an evaluation concerning the meaning of these comments from the point of view of the issue of the Kurdish language in Turkey.

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<sup>161</sup> UN Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966 - Article 27); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990 - Article 30); UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1993); CE European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992/1998); CE Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995/1998 - Article 5, 6, 9-12, 14); OSCE The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (1996); OSCE Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (1998); OSCE Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities (1999); OSCE Guidelines to Assist National Minority Participation in the Electoral Process (2001); OSCE Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media (2003).



When we look at how these examples were chosen, we can see that each example presents similarities as well as differences with respect to the situation of the Kurdish language in Turkey. When each case is examined separately, the similarities between the Corsican language in France and the Kurdish language in Turkey can be listed as follows:<sup>162</sup> the dominant quality of the central administration accompanying the unitary state structure; the multilingual structure of society in contrast with the above quality; constitutional regulations ignoring this structure (the tendency to restrict education in minority languages via the provision of education in the official/national language only); reservations to the signing and ratification of texts adopted by international and European-based institutions because of the perception of minorities as a threat to national unity and integrity; the positioning of minority linguistic and cultural values in respect to the majority language and values that constitute the political regime's basis (in opposition to the republic/revolution/modernity); the issue of standardization in Corsican and Kurdish languages; the presence of sections within the Corsican and Kurdish minority that continue their fight through violence; the regional and political tension arising from the geopolitical importance of the Corsican and the Kurdish region. When these similarities are examined closely, dissimilarities begin to appear, and the most striking of these is the fact that the central government in France has recently begun to show flexibility, especially concerning Corsica.

Although the similarities between the Basque language in Spain and the Kurdish language in Turkey are few in number, they are important in terms of observing the process of a similar fight: similarities consist in the extensions of the Basque country and the Kurdish region in the territories of neighboring countries, similar experiences of military regimes and the persistence of an armed struggle. In addition to the differences in detail of these similarities, the difference in the level of prosperity between the Basque country and the Kurdish region and the direction of internal migration due to this difference, the over one hundred year long history of work carried out on the Basque language and the absence from the point of view of Kurdish of such a history and of the experience of protecting and developing the language combined with the fact that the positive process arising from the guaranteeing of education in the Basque language by the Basque Autonomous Community is not valid for Kurdish are significant differences in that they contribute to expansion of the debate.

Contrary to initial impressions, the close similarities and dissimilarities between the Uyghur language in China and the Kurdish language in Turkey contribute even more greatly to the aim of the present study. Similarities include the fact that the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, where the Uyghurs live, is situated on a border like the Kurdish region. This creates a geostrategic agenda for the relevant countries, the fact that Xinjiang and the Kurdish region are economically weaker than other regions in their respective countries and the persistence of the armed struggle for independence. In addition to the differences in the detail of the similarities, there are also differences such as the communist one party rule in the Chinese state in contrast to Turkey's semi-liberal/democratic system and authoritarian rule; the fact that Xinjiang is ruled autonomously – although its characteristics are a subject of debate – and that the Chinese state has been guaranteeing the use of the mother tongue in education for about sixty years – though intermittently and with some problems.

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<sup>162</sup> When said similarities are examined, we should keep in mind that industrialization, the process to create a common market and the building of a nation in France began much earlier than in Turkey. It has therefore spread over a much longer period of time. This difference points also to the emphasis on equality, which is inherent in the French nation-building policy, which is relatively more successful. The emphasis on nation-building and equality creates a qualitative difference between the negative attitude to minority rights, considered as positive discrimination by the French state – which is based on the concept that the French public, consisting of equal citizens, should benefit equally from public services and equality of opportunity should be achieved – and the similar negative attitude by the Turkish state.



It is debatable whether these similarities and dissimilarities pave the way for a direct and detailed comparative political analysis. However, since the aim of the present part of this study is to expand the scope of the debate, both similarities and dissimilarities are examined in a way that will provide guidance for their general evaluation. [Otherwise the theory that every example is unique would prevent transcending work aiming to serve national policies established through official theses that assert the correctness of the above theory, and the development of social science theories and political practices of universal nature.]

## A. CORSICAN LANGUAGE – FRANCE

The French language, declared the legal and administrative official language of the Kingdom of France through an edict issued in 1539, was taken under the auspices of the *Académie française*, established in 1635. In 1793 it was declared the language of compulsory education.<sup>163</sup> This national educational system, aimed at increasing the rate of literacy particularly among the rural population thus enabling them to adopt the cultural values and concept of citizenship envisaged by the revolution; said revolution not only prohibited the provision of education in languages other than French, it also equated these languages with opposition to the revolution, traditionalism and a separatist attitude against national unity. Under the influence of regional movements of the 1970s, private schools were established, named *Diwan* in *Bittany*, *Ikastola* in the Basque country, *Calandreta* in Occitania and *Bressola* in North Catalonia. These private schools, which provide education mainly in the minority language, have been active since 1969 in the Basque language, since 1977 in the Breton language and since 1991 in the Alsatian language. However, in line with Article 2 of the constitution, amended in 1992, French was declared the official language of the French Republic. Through the Toubon Law, dated 1994, French was established as the only language for all official correspondence, the advertising sector, offices, all commercial agreements and communications and all state schools. Although these two legal measures were taken to protect the French language from the increasing dominance of English, they were also employed to consolidate the state's negative attitude toward regional and minority languages.

In fact, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), signed in 1999 by the socialist government of the time is still awaiting ratification in the French Parliament. This seems to result from the endorsement of certain sections' (of both the society and the government) concerns that if this charter is ratified, the unity and indivisibility of France will be subject to ethnic separation; that the French language's loss of dominance will result in political power being divided between the center and regions on the periphery; that at a time when the English language's increasing dominance threatens the existence of French, the official support of regional languages will mean the squandering of national resources. From the point of view of these concerns, this charter violates the principle of equality before the law, threatens the indivisibility of the Republic and the unity of the French nation and even goes as far as to accord special rights to organized linguistic minorities.<sup>164</sup>

The initiative taken in the early 2000s by then Minister of National Education Jack Lang for inclusion of the schools called *Diwan*, where the educational medium is the Breton language, as an official element of the national educational system, could not be completed because of the Constitutional Court's negative view on

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<sup>163</sup> Alexandre Jaffe, *Ideologies in Action Language Politics on Corsica* (Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 79.

<sup>164</sup> *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the French Dilemma: Diversity v. Unicity – Which Language(s) for the Republic?* (2004) Council of Europe Publishing, Regional or Minority Languages, 4.



this subject. According to the EBLUL Report dated 2007, France continues to be a member state of the Council of Europe that has still not ratified the European Charter for Languages it signed in 1999. It also insists on not removing its reservations from Article 27 of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, thereby not improving its report card concerning the language rights of minorities.<sup>165</sup> Although no progress has been made on these issues, the constitutional amendment made in 2008 is an important step towards the official recognition of “regional languages.”

Seventy-five languages spoken in France other than the French language are classified as “regional languages” (the Breton, Basque, Catalan, Occitan, Corsican and Oil languages, etc.), “foreign languages” (English, German, Spanish, etc.) and “languages of origin” (Arabic, Turkish, Polish, Portuguese). Corsican, a regional language spoken in Corsica and the North of Sardinia, belongs to the family of Romance languages. Defined by UNESCO as a language under potential threat because of its lack of official or prestigious status, Corsican is currently the first language of only 10 % of the population of Corsica and is spoken to varying degrees by about 50 % of the population. It is not surprising that the island’s entire population speaks French.

Corsica, which throughout the Genoese rule of four centuries benefitted from the privileges of a sort of autonomous region, was the Republic of Corsica under the leadership of Pasquale Paoli for a very short period, from 1755-1768. Italian, the language of political and cultural life until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was declared the official language of the republic and the constitution was written in Italian.<sup>166</sup> The island came under French sovereignty in 1770, and after the revolution it was annexed to the French Republic through the strong central administration policy implemented by the Jacobean elite. Although the prohibition of official documents of the republic in languages other than French constitutes a political maneuver against the Italian of Tuscany, which dominated the island for centuries, rather than against the Corsican language, the meaning of this prohibition in parallel with the nation-state concept of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is more prominent for Corsican.<sup>167</sup> Corsican had never been an official education language, but education had never been used by the state as free-of-charge but compulsory political mechanism, as it had in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While the domination of the Italian language was more indirect and restricted to the higher classes, the domination of the French language was more concrete and direct.<sup>168</sup> This domination equated the French language with “national” identity, modernity and respectable citizenship, the Corsican language was lowered to the status of separatism, backwardness and second class citizenship.<sup>169</sup> Like other regions in the periphery of the country, Corsica too was always treated by Paris with the suspicion that it had counter-revolutionary aims and that it threatened the security of the regime.<sup>170</sup> [That the

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<sup>165</sup> EBLUL Report on ‘Regional and minority languages and cultures in France are outlaws’, The French Committee of the European Bureau for Lesser – used Languages. EBLUL is a non-governmental organization founded in 1982, which works for the protection of languages and linguistic diversity. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/info-ngos/EBLUL.pdf> [February 2, 2010]. For the attitude of member states of the Council of Europe regarding the Chart of European Languages, see: <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=148&CM=1&DF=&CL=ENG>.

<sup>166</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 72.

<sup>167</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 76-77.

<sup>168</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 77.

<sup>169</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 117.

<sup>170</sup> Robert J. Blackwood, “The Gallicisation of Corsica: The Imposition of the French Language from 1768 to 1945,” *Language Policy* 3 (2004): 133–152.



state appointed only French-speaking officers to execute the administration and jurisdiction of the island seems to explain why the restriction of the Corsican language in the private sphere has been ascribed with a directly political meaning. In addition to openly political and direct maneuvers of this kind, economic and social factors have also contributed to the establishment of a hierarchy among languages. The worry of not finding employment in either the public or the private sector has pushed Corsicans to accept the domination of the French language.<sup>171</sup> The bilingualism (Corsican and Italian) that existed among a small, urban and educated section of the island's population before it entered French domination came to an end during this time and during the revolution, when this elite class adopted French at the expense of the Corsican language and became a part of the national military, economic and political system<sup>172</sup> so much so that a considerable number of Corsicans were employed in French colonies. However, due to the weak economic and social position of the island, those who returned after the colonies gained independence, especially the second generation, adopted the thesis that the island was an internal colony. They became the leaders of the Corsican national movement.<sup>173</sup> The Corsican (Defferre) Statute dated 1982 defined Corsica as a "common country" and tacitly recognized Corsica as distinct from the other 22 administrative regions. In 1975 the establishment of a local parliament with proportional representation was prescribed for the island, which was divided into North Corsica (*Haute Corse*) and South Corsica (*Corse-du-Sud*). Although the Corsican Parliament, based in Ajaccio, the capital of the Corsican Region, is not equipped with financial autonomy or judicial powers, as the legislative power of the island it has been conferred the role of consultant to the national parliament in matters related to Corsica. There is also a regional council that carries out cultural, educational and media activities. The Corsican Statute represents the administrative and cultural recognition of Corsica within the French state's traditional unitary structure.<sup>174</sup>

And yet, the fact that the French Government did not permit the Corsican Parliament to take any initiatives concerning the island has caused the National Liberation Front of Corsica (FLNC), which had seats the parliament after having received 9 % of votes in the 1984 elections, to take up arms again and thus render the parliament completely dysfunctional. Although this state of affairs did not in any way disturb the French state, which wished to renounce on paper the non-central attitude that it had had to adopt in order to follow EU regional policies, the ever-increasing unrest on the island required initiatives for the adoption of new regulations in 1988.<sup>175</sup> The term "Corsican people," referred to in the Statute of Corsica accepted by the French Parliament in 1991 was annulled by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that it contradicted the constitutional article according to which in France there is a single people (the French) and a single language (the French language). Nevertheless, a new regulation known as the Joxe Statute has accorded the Corsican Parliament new powers in the fields of economic development, culture, education and local administration. Corsicans were thus conferred by parliament the right to learn Corsican if they wished. However, the Joxe Statute is nothing more than the result of a productive administrative regulation and of a rationalist non-

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<sup>171</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 81.

<sup>172</sup> Donald Reid, "Colonizer and Colonized in the Corsican Political Imagination," *Radical History Review* 90 (2004): 116–22.

<sup>173</sup> Reid, "Colonizer and Colonized," 119.

<sup>174</sup> Ivan S. Balaguer, "The End of the Corsican Question?" (paper presented at the Conference on Nations without States in the Global Age, the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism and the London School of Economics, at Queen Mary College, University of London, June 2007), [http://works.bepress.com/ivan\\_serrano/2](http://works.bepress.com/ivan_serrano/2) [2 February, 2010].

<sup>175</sup> Balaguer, "The End of the Corsican Question?"



centralist approach. It has not enabled the assertion of the political recognition of the Corsican identity by Paris.<sup>176</sup> On the other hand, the assassination in 1998 of Corsica's governor by the FLNC and the accusation brought to the new governor regarding non-legal measures taken against Corsican nationalists has resulted once again in social distrust and in political instability in the region.

As a result of the preparation process of a new Corsican Statue in 2000, known as the Matignon process, a draft law enabling the wider implementation of the teaching of Corsican and according the Corsican Parliament limited but periodical power of legislation (for trial purposes) was presented to the French Parliament by Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. It was ratified in 2001, but its enactment was prevented by the Constitutional Court.<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to previous processes, which were top to bottom, unilateral, closed to negotiation and confined to the administrative perspective, the Matignon process is significant in that it constituted the first official meeting between Corsican and French representatives.<sup>178</sup>

The failure of the Matignon process has resulted in the Corsican issue once again being considered an administrative issue. The draft law prepared in 2003 by Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister of the Interior in Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin's government, and aiming for the expansion of autonomy through the union of the two parts of the island and the conferral of more political power to the local administration, was voted for in a local referendum where attendance was very low. It was rejected with a minimal difference in vote (50.8 % "No", 49.02 % "Yes").<sup>179</sup> This referendum result, which confirmed that the entire island population was not for full independence, suggests also that the same is not valid in terms of the expansion of autonomy.<sup>180</sup> It has been noted that one of the reasons why people voted "No" was that approximately half of the population of Corsica is employed by the state and was therefore afraid of becoming unemployed if the island became independent.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, in line with the referendum result, the demand of autonomy-supporters that the Corsican language is developed in the region, that the local government is conferred further authority and that the island is exempted from national taxes have been postponed for the moment. The referendum result also seems to explain why the FLNC, which has expressed similar demands since the 1970s through armed operations, has not obtained the public support it expected. However, rather than militant nationalists, the FLNC consists of former convicts who adopt methods very similar to those used in the Sicilian mafia.<sup>182</sup> To counter the theory that methods of this kind are related to the blood feuds, clashes and bandit culture dominant in the rugged internal

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<sup>176</sup> Balaguer, "The End of the Corsican Question?"

<sup>177</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Matignon process: Farimah Daftary, "The Matignon Process and Insular Autonomy as a Response to Self-Determination Claims in Corsica," in *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Volume 1*, ed. Arie Bloed, Rainer Hofmann, Joseph Marko *et al*, European Centre for Minority Issues and European Academy of Bolzano/Bozen (Leiden, Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2002), 299-326.

<sup>178</sup> Balaguer, "The End of the Corsican Question?"

<sup>179</sup> Alejandro W. Sánchez, "Corsica: France's Petite Security Problem," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31 (2008): 655-664.

<sup>180</sup> Daftary, "The Matignon Process".

<sup>181</sup> Sánchez, "Corsica," 661.

<sup>182</sup> Sánchez, "Corsica" 657.



areas, the essentialist and dominant nature of these theories is emphasized.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, it is pointed out that the said “bandit” elements were equipped with special privileges in the eyes of the state for many years. These elements are able to coexist with modernity and the discourse based on the antagonism between primitive Corsica and modern Paris is thereby problematized.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, it has also been stated that the violence that has dominated the island for many years has created economic degeneration and social division, thus negatively influencing the political culture.<sup>185</sup>

Although the Corsican language first began to be taught in schools legally — though to a limited degree — in 1975, it became part of the curriculum for pre-school, primary and secondary school (an average of three hours a week) from 1994 onwards.<sup>186</sup> A similar situation is true for the University of Corsica, founded in 1982. Additional initiatives have also been taken from 1991 onwards concerning employment incentives for lecturers who speak Corsican and the continuation of the education given at the Study of Corsican Studies at an undergraduate and graduate level.<sup>187</sup> In 1984 a radio station broadcasting in Corsican was founded and the move of the regional television station to Ajaccio resulted in an increase of programs in Corsican.<sup>188</sup> In courts and during administrative procedures it is possible to speak Corsican if the officers in question speak it too. Furthermore, the Corsican Parliament’s Cultural Council has recommended that the Corsican language be used on signs and signboards.

The fact that the Corsican language consists of northern, southern, Ajaccio and Genoa dialects and has not yet become a standard language is cited as a justification by those who object to its wider use in the island and to its official use. The claim that Corsican is derived from Italian and is not a natural dialect is also adopted by similar political approaches. These theses have pushed Corsican language activists to work hard especially from the 1980s onwards, to prove that Corsican is a separate language.<sup>189</sup> *Scola Corsa*, a movement aiming for the wider use of Corsican at school, has published children’s books and organized courses for adults. The teachers association called *A Caspa* has conducted a campaign for the inclusion of Corsican in compulsory education from pre-school level to university and for it to acquire equal status with French.<sup>190</sup> Founded in 1972, *Scola Corsa* has integrated all local Corsican language movements and has worked for the creation of courses in Corsican and for Corsican officially to acquire the characteristic of regional language.<sup>191</sup> The publication of books in Corsican

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<sup>183</sup> Marta Petrusiewicz, “Corsica: Old Vendetta and the Modern State,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21: 2 (1990): 295–301; Stephen Wilson, *Feuding, Conflict and Banditry in Nineteenth Century Corsica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>184</sup> Petrusiewicz, “Old Vendetta,” 296.

<sup>185</sup> Daftary, “The Matignon Process,” 309.

<sup>186</sup> Françoise Convey, “Teaching the Mother Tongue in France,” in *Teaching The Mother Tongue in a Multilingual Europe*, ed. Anthony Adams and Witold Tulasiewicz (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), 121; see also Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 126, 131.

<sup>187</sup> Euromosaic, “Corsican in France”, <http://www.uoc.edu/euromosaic/web/document/cors/an/i1/i1.html> [February 2 2010].

<sup>188</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 130.

<sup>189</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 130.

<sup>190</sup> Euromosaic, “Corsican in France”.

<sup>191</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 126.



lies at the root of these movements which aim to reverse the process of preventing the transformation of Corsican – which remained a spoken language throughout the Genoese rule – into a written language.<sup>192</sup> The Corsican Days organized by the Scola Corsa movement in the 1970s brought together many language activists and became a national campaign demanding that the Deixonne Law dated 1951, which initially allowed only for the Basque, Breton, Catalan and Occitan language to be taught as elective classes in state schools, include also Corsican – excluded on the grounds that it was an Italian dialect – and obtained a positive result in 1982.<sup>193</sup> According to the expanded version of the Deixonne Law, education in the Basque, Breton, Catalan, Occitan, Corsican, Alsatian, Gallic, Moselle, Tahiti, Creole and Melanesian languages is held partially in parallel with French.<sup>194</sup> This partial system is implemented in some state schools in regions like the Alsace, the Basque region, Brittany and Corsica, subject to parents' request and the presence of at least 15 students.

When the Corsican people did not show much interest in the harsh policies developed by Corsican language and culture activists, language planners from the University of Corsica and from the Corsican Parliament's Culture, Education and Environment Council began to develop a discourse based on multilingualism, aiming at equal official status with Corsican and French, and that remove the language from narrow ethnic relations and place it among cultural codes. This new approach replaced the discourse focusing on Corsican monolingualism to the exclusion of French.<sup>195</sup> The 1989 policy naming Corsican as a motherland language (*lingua matria*) rather than a mother tongue (*lingua materna*) was announced in Corsican, French and English. This decision is very significant in that it weakens the relationship between language and origin, it adds the concept of civic citizenship to the status of regional language and it displays the region's acceptance of an international language other than French.<sup>196</sup>

## B. BASQUE LANGUAGE – SPAIN

Modern Spain was founded after the French occupation of 1808 and the Napoleonic Wars. The Cádiz Constitution prepared in 1812 constituted the first step of the transition from absolute monarchy to liberal nation-state.<sup>197</sup> Interrupted from time to time due to power struggles between liberal nationalists and Catholic royalists, this liberalization began to take root in popular political consciousness and in the concept of Spanish citizenship in the period 1875–1923/31, known as the Restoration Period.<sup>198</sup> The First Republic founded in 1873 following the collapse of the Empire and dominated by an anti-democratic and elitist liberalism came to an

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<sup>192</sup> Convey, "Teaching the Mother Tongue," 120.

<sup>193</sup> Robert J. Blackwood, *The State, the Activists and the Islanders: Language Policy on Corsica* (Amsterdam: Springer, 2008), 60; see also Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 126.

<sup>194</sup> Christine Hélot, "Language Policy and the Ideology of Bilingual Education in France," *Language Policy* 2 (2003): 255–277.

<sup>195</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 189.

<sup>196</sup> Jaffe, *Language Politics on Corsica*, 178.

<sup>197</sup> Jesús Millán and María C. Romeo, "Was the liberal revolution important to modern Spain? Political Cultures and Citizenship in Spanish History," *Social History* 29: 3 (2004): 284–300; see also: Eduardo M. Moreno and Juan S. P. Garzón, "A Difficult Nation?," *History and Memory* 14: 1–2 (2002): 259–284.

<sup>198</sup> Millán and Romeo, "Political Cultures and Citizenship," 292.



end with the military *coup* of 1923, which followed internal disorders and insurrections. The Second Republic, founded in 1931, was interrupted by a three-year civil war resulting from objections to the election results of 1936. Between the years 1939-1975, Spain was under the military dictatorship of General Franco. In 1977 there was a return to the Republican regime and elections were held. The Franco regime, which shared the anti-liberal, nationalist, Catholic and developmentalist ideology of the 1923 coup and did not allow for the development of a democratic political culture or of a state-defined public nationalism independent from the army, the church and feudal lords, is seen as an extension of the process which followed the ending of the absolute monarchy.<sup>199</sup> On the other hand, Spain's defeat by the United States in 1898, which resulted in the loss of all of its colonies, triggered the nationalist movements in the Catalonia and Basque regions and interrupted the nation-state building process.<sup>200</sup> The "Spanish honor" was injured by the above defeat and there were attempts to repair it through the glorification of the Castilian language and Castilian culture.<sup>201</sup> Studies were carried out periodically on the origins of the Castilian language with the aim of proving that claims that this language was superior to other "Spanish languages" in the peninsula – because unlike them, it was original and not derived – that it constituted the basis of Spanish culture and that it was "voluntarily" adopted even by people speaking other languages.<sup>202</sup> It is apparent that these claims are also adopted nowadays, with the objective to delegitimize demands to determine one's own fate, which aim to make people in autonomous regions forget about the colonial history and "forcefully" reverse the partial assimilation claimed to have taken place "voluntarily."<sup>203</sup>

Efforts were made for the creation of the homogeneous society required by the Spanish nation-state through the establishment of a Castilian-based cultural hegemony on cultures speaking other languages.<sup>204</sup> Castilian was first declared the official language in 1716, as an extension of the efforts to centralize the absolute monarchy which ruled the country in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>205</sup> The term "Castilian" refers to a Spanish dialect and is used to distinguish it from all other "Spanish languages" such as the Basque, Catalan or Gallic language, to distinguish the Spanish used in northern and central Spain from the Spanish used in Andalusia and to distinguish the Spanish of Spain (*Castellano*) from the Spanish of Latin America (*Español*). However, in order to elevate the status of Castilian in comparison to other European languages deriving from Latin and especially French, it has been emphasized especially in the first years of the Second Republic that Castilian is a language spoken not only in Spain but also in South and North America.<sup>206</sup> The relatively "lower" status of Castilian before

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<sup>199</sup> Millán and Romeo, "Political Cultures and Citizenship," 293.

<sup>200</sup> Millán and Romeo, "Political Cultures and Citizenship," 292.

<sup>201</sup> Luis López, "The Origins of Spanish Revisited: Linguistic Science, Language Ideology and Nationalism in Contemporary Spain," *Bulletin of Spanish Studies* LXXXIV: 3 (2007): 287-313.

<sup>202</sup> López, "The Origins of Spanish Revisited," 302.

<sup>203</sup> López, "The Origins of Spanish Revisited," 309.

<sup>204</sup> Goldie Shabad and Richard Gunther, "Language, Nationalism, and Political Conflict in Spain," *Comparative Politics* 14: 4 (1982): 443-477.

<sup>205</sup> David Lasagabaster, "Bilingualism, Immersion Programmes and Language Learning in the Basque Country," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 22: 5 (2001): 401-425.

<sup>206</sup> Camille Pitollot, "Spain, the Spanish Language and Its Future," *Hispania* 13: 5 (1930): 404-412.



other European languages such as English, French and German is a sort of reflection of Spain's underdevelopment in comparison to other European countries in terms of industrialization, nation-building and democratization.<sup>207</sup> The impulsive quality of this underdeveloped nationalism was soon to become an aggressive policy against Spanish citizens who are not Castilian. The equation of Spanish and Castilian in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was to become a major building stone in the construction of Spanish nationalism in the long term and would enable the Spanish state to overlook non-Castilian cultural values even today.<sup>208</sup> However, unlike other European countries, nation-state-building in Spain was never to display an integral aspect; it was to present cultural pluralism and political federalism tendencies. The "national" Castilian identity imposed by the state was always to exist along with local identities arising from alternative and popular struggles.<sup>209</sup>

The Basque country, which was an autonomous administration throughout the periods of the Kingdom of Castile and the Bourbon dynasty, consists of the Labourd, Lower Navarre and Soule regions, situated in the southwestern region of France, and of the Basque Autonomous Community and the Navarre Autonomous Community, situated in the northern area of Spain. The Basque Autonomous Community, which forms the basis of this study, includes the provinces of Araba (Álava), Bizkaia (Biscay) and Gipuzkoa (Guipúzcoa) and as one of 17 autonomous communities identified by the Spanish Constitution of 1978 (Article 2), is administered as an autonomous region, in accordance with the Statute of Autonomy (Guernica) dated 1979.<sup>210</sup> According to Article 3 of the Constitution and Article 6 of the Statute of Autonomy, in this region the Basque language shares with Castilian the status of official language:

3.1. Castilian is the official Spanish language of the State. All Spaniards have the duty to know it and the right to use it.

3.2. The other languages of Spain will also be official in the respective autonomous communities, in accordance with their statutes.

3.3. The richness of the linguistic modalities of Spain is a cultural patrimony which will be the object of special respect and protection.<sup>211</sup>

A critical caveat of this article is that the reality of Spanish being the only language that the Constitution requires citizens to know and the use of which it guarantees creates a serious legal imbalance to the detriment of minority languages. This imbalance results in a significant socio-linguistic influence on the regions where

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<sup>207</sup> Javier F. Sebastián and Gonzalo C. De Miguel, "The Notion of Modernity in 19th Century Spain: An Example of Conceptual History," *European Journal of Political Theory* 3 (2004): 393-410.

<sup>208</sup> Moreno and Garzón, "A Difficult Nation?," 272.

<sup>209</sup> Moreno and Garzón, "A Difficult Nation?," 278.

<sup>210</sup> Although the part of the Basque country situated within French territory presents a history similar to that of Corsica in the sense that it is subject to the French language policy mentioned in the above analysis of the Corsican language, it is not an autonomous administration. However, the Basque language, spoken by 36 % of the region's population, is taught at school like other regional language. See Felix Etxebarria, "New Challenges for Bilingual Education in the Basque Country," *Intercultural Education* 14: 1 (2003): 93-107.

<sup>211</sup> Ferran Ferrer, "Languages, Minorities and Education in Spain: The Case of Catalonia," *Comparative Education* 36: 2 (2000): 187-197.



minority languages are spoken.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, it is claimed that the restriction of the official status of minority languages only to their own regions harms the constitutional principle of the equality of citizens by consolidating the secondary position of these languages before Castilian – the “national language” – and by recognizing minorities’ cultural identities only in terms of their territorial identities.<sup>213</sup> More importantly, according to the current constitution it is not possible for a Basque living in Seville, for example, to demand a Basque education. This creates the impression that the policy developed to preserve linguistic diversity aims to create separate linguistic areas in practice and to subject minorities on the periphery of the country to the Castilian center.<sup>214</sup>

Articles 148 and 149 of the constitution, which is the product of a political culture where centralism is equated with authoritarianism and autonomy with democracy, determines the division of powers between the central administration and autonomous administrations. It establishes three main levels: areas completely under the authority of the central government, areas completely under the authority of local governments and areas under the authority of both the central and the local government.<sup>215</sup> Education is one of the areas where authority is shared. The authority granted to the local government is defined as producing concrete policies in light of general principles and standards identified by the central government.<sup>216</sup> For example, according to this article and to the Education Law dated 1990, only 45 % of the curriculum is prepared by the Basque government. This restriction constitutes a problem with the central government especially in the establishment of the content of history classes.<sup>217</sup> On the other hand, Article 16 of the Statute of Autonomy states that the authority to determine educational policies lies completely with the local government, as long as it does not contradict the principle of sharing authority.<sup>218</sup> Article 6 of the statute guarantees the right of everyone living in the Basque country to speak (learn) and use both the Basque language and Spanish. It states that the common institutions of the Autonomous Community are responsible for taking into consideration the Basque country’s socio-linguistic diversity and for protecting both languages.

The head of the Basque government, elected by the Basque Autonomous Parliament, is responsible for implementing the parliament’s policies in areas such as agriculture, industry, taxes, culture, arts, education, media, transportation and security. The party with the highest number of seats in the parliament is the Basque Nationalist Party (EAJ/PNV), the oldest party of the Basque country; it is followed by the Socialist Party of the Basque Country (PSE-EE/PSOE), the People’s Party (PP) which is active throughout Spain and the socialist Aralar Party, which emerged from a critical tendency within the Party of the Unity of the People

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<sup>212</sup> Ferrer, “The Case of Catalonia,” 189.

<sup>213</sup> Clare Mar-Molinero, “The Politics of Language: Spain’s Minority Languages,” CLE Working Papers 3 (1994): 106-113.

<sup>214</sup> Mar-Molinero, “Spain’s Minority Languages,” 108.

<sup>215</sup> Ferrer, “The Case of Catalonia,” 188.

<sup>216</sup> Ferrer, “The Case of Catalonia,” 188.

<sup>217</sup> Moreno and Garzón, “A Difficult Nation?,” 275.

<sup>218</sup> For the autonomous status of the Basque country, see: [http://www.basques.euskadi.net/t32-448/en/contenidos/informacion/estatuto\\_guernica/en\\_455/adjuntos/estatu\\_i.pdf](http://www.basques.euskadi.net/t32-448/en/contenidos/informacion/estatuto_guernica/en_455/adjuntos/estatu_i.pdf) [14 Mart 2010].



(Herri Batasuna). The latter was closed down in 2003 on the grounds that it had organic ties with ETA which conducts an armed struggle for the independence of the Basque country. Furthermore, small parties such as the Basque Solidarity Party, the United Left-Green Party and the Union, Progress and Democracy Party are also represented in parliament.

One of the main policies of the Basque Nationalist Party, founded in 1895, was to revive the Basque language (Euskara). These efforts resulted in the establishment of the Basque Studies Society and of the Basque Language Academy in 1918. Language activities carried out by the academy aim at increasing the social status of the Basque language, rather than any planning regarding the standardization of the Basque language or its linguistic structure.<sup>219</sup> However, the Basque language did not become one of the main elements constituting the nucleus of Basque nationalism until the late 1960s.<sup>220</sup> Although the first book in the Basque language is known to have been published in 1545, the declaration of Castilian as the official language in 1716 is considered a significant factor behind the decline of the Basque language.<sup>221</sup> Its decline was also due to industrialization, which created a two-way effect. The intensive migration of workers who did not speak the Basque language to new industrial cities in the Basque region and the rapid urbanization around industrial regions of people who spoke the Basque language caused Basque to disappear completely from the economic and public domain until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>222</sup>

In addition to this economic factor, the fact that the oppressive political environment arising from internal strife, international wars and the military dictatorship that dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> century lasted until the late 1970s has not allowed for the protection and development of the Basque language to become an important issue. While at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the rate of spoken Basque within the territory of the Basque Autonomous Community was around 83 %, by the end of the century this rate had dropped to 24 %.<sup>223</sup> However, the Basque Language Academy, which became active once again in the late 1960s, attempted to standardize the Basque language to a version called Batua. It also worked for preparation of the infrastructure necessary for official Basque education to be established in later years. In addition, Basque education was brought into being non-officially, via a night school network organized secretly in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>224</sup> The education held in these secret schools, known as *Ikastola*, would acquire first legal and then special status in later years and would then become an element of a partly public service.<sup>225</sup>

As in the case of Castilian, the use of the Basque language as a language of education can be divided into three stages: the “survival stage” began with the Franco regime and continued until the “Law for the Normalization of the Use of Basque” (henceforth the Normalization Law) came into force in 1982. It was con-

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<sup>219</sup> Jacqueline Urla, “Ethnic Protest and Social Planning: A Look at Basque Language Revival,” *Cultural Anthropology* 3: 4 (1988): 379-394.

<sup>220</sup> Mar-Molinero, “Spain’s Minority Languages,” 110; Shabad and Gunter, “Political Conflict in Spain,” 448.

<sup>221</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 403.

<sup>222</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 403.

<sup>223</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 403.

<sup>224</sup> Bill Haddican, “Suburbanization and Language Change in Basque,” *Language in Society* 36 (2007): 677-706.

<sup>225</sup> Mar-Molinero, “Spain’s Minority Languages,” 110.



ducted secretly, via the resistance of teacher associations and corresponded to the first years of education in the Basque language, which acquired an official status along with the Autonomy; in the “implementation stage” the principles of the Normalization Law and school models implementing Basque education more intensively began to be established; in the “consolidation stage,” in the 1990s, the shortcomings of the models developed in the implementation stage were remedied and education in Basque was improved and applied more widely.<sup>226</sup>

Education in the Basque language, which began officially in 1976, consisted of three different school systems: the public sector, the private sector (pioneered by the Catholic Church) and *Ikastola*. In the period following the coming into force of the Normalization Law, which stipulates that the Basque language is the language of administration, education and media in the Basque Autonomous Community and guarantees all students’ right to receive their education in Basque and Castilian, these sectors were transformed into three different educational models.<sup>227</sup> While the system adopted by the private sector and called Model B was dominated by a partial immersion program where Basque and Castilian were used equally,<sup>228</sup> the system known as Model A, implemented by the private sector, consists of an educational program where the main curriculum is in Castilian; the Basque language is taught in a separate class. Model D, developed by the *Ikastola* sector, consists of a total immersion program where the main curriculum is taught in the Basque language and Castilian is taught as a separate class.<sup>229</sup> The *Ulibarri* program, based on all three models stipulated by the Normalization Law for education in Basque is seen as an important cornerstone in the Basque language’s achievement of its current level of activity and prevalence.<sup>230</sup>

Nowadays these types of education have distanced themselves from the initial sectoral divisions. The public sector model has approached models developed in the private sector or by the *Ikastola* model.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, the Basque country is divided into three areas – areas where Basque is predominantly spoken, areas where Basque is not spoken to a great degree and areas inhabited by migrants – and different educational models are implemented in each area.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, while Model A, generally implemented in private sector primary schools, is sought less and less, the demand for Models B and D is rapidly rising and indicates that interest in the Basque language is on the rise.<sup>233</sup> Moreover, it has also been established that students who receive the Model D type of education not only develop a very good knowledge of the Basque language, as

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<sup>226</sup> Ferrer, “The Case of Catalonia,” 192-194.

<sup>227</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 410.

<sup>228</sup> See the fourth chapter of this book for the term “immersion”.

<sup>229</sup> Apart from these models, one can also talk about a Model X used in schools providing education in Castilian only, for people who settle for the short-term in the Basque Autonomous Community. See Etxeberria, “Bilingual Education”.

<sup>230</sup> Jasone Aldekoa and Nicholas Gardner, “Turning Knowledge of Basque into Use: Normalisation Plans for Schools,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 5: 6 (2002): 339-354.

<sup>231</sup> Etxeberria, “Bilingual Education,” 96.

<sup>232</sup> Shabad and Gunther, “Political Conflict in Spain,” 465.

<sup>233</sup> Etxeberria, “Bilingual Education,” 96; Aldekoa and Gardner.



required by higher education in Basque, but their proficiency skills in both languages, called balanced bilingualism, are much higher than that of students who receive other models of education.<sup>234</sup> This skill provides an additional advantage in that it facilitates the learning of a third language.

Although the above positive findings have been observed in primary education, the fact that students and parents gravitate towards Model A, which places more emphasis on Castilian, shows that economic and social attitudes can be given more priority than linguistic concerns.<sup>235</sup> The technical reason why Model D is not preferred in secondary education is that there is a lack of teachers with a good command of Basque.<sup>236</sup> To solve this issue, the Basque government is offering a three-year “teacher training program” called IRALE for teachers wishing to improve their level of Basque.<sup>237</sup> Moreover, economic support is also provided within a program called EIMA, founded in 1982 and seeking to prepare written and visual educational materials in the Basque language.<sup>238</sup> With the aim of using Basque more frequently in daily life, the Basque government is also preparing Basque educational programs for adults and encourages artistic and cultural activities such as theatre, music projects, summer camps and film screenings in Basque.<sup>239</sup>

That the Basque language is still in second place in areas such as mass media, public administration and even education — all dominated for many years by Castilian in spite of a variety of initiatives taken by the Basque government — constitutes an ongoing problem. Also, only 46 % of the population of the Basque Autonomous Community speaks the Basque language.<sup>240</sup> Although the hierarchy between Castilian, the language of prestige and economic security, and Basque, the language of social solidarity and identity, is being demolished in favor of Basque, the process is not advancing as rapidly as some might wish.<sup>241</sup> However, a similar hierarchy is also emerging between Batua, the standardized form of Basque, and other dialects, especially Herrikoa.<sup>242</sup> This hierarchy is also arising because Batua, adopted by the Basque education system, is nothing more than a language of instruction and has not made the transition into daily life. Some activists also claim that Batua is no longer the language of radical politics and opposition or even of social solidarity and common identity as it once was. They feel that it has now become the language of the government and of the strong economic class.<sup>243</sup> The new generation Basque movement is attempting to develop an anti-hegemonic and

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<sup>234</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 415; see also Josu Sierra, “Assessment of Bilingual Education in the Basque Country,” *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 21: 1 (2008): 39-47.

<sup>235</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 420

<sup>236</sup> Etxeberria, “Bilingual Education,” 100.

<sup>237</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 408.

<sup>238</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 410.

<sup>239</sup> Lasagabaster, “Bilingualism,” 409.

<sup>240</sup> Shabad and Gunther, “Political Conflict in Spain,” 446.

<sup>241</sup> Begoña Echeverría, “Language Ideologies and Practices in (En)gendering the Basque Nation,” *Language in Society* 32 (2003): 383-413.

<sup>242</sup> Echeverría, “Language Ideologies,” 396.

<sup>243</sup> Haddican, “Language Change in Basque,” 679.



anti-hierarchic approach against the institutional and traditional politics and language policies currently in existence in the public sphere.<sup>244</sup> Moreover, claims that the priority given to Basque education constitutes an obstacle for other minority groups who live in the Basque country and who receive an education in their own languages, necessitate the revision of models for Basque education.<sup>245</sup> That members of said groups do not have the necessary level of knowledge in the Basque and Castilian languages is cited as the reason for the disadvantages of these groups.<sup>246</sup> The tension that has arisen between the Basque government, which emphasizes the consolidation of Basque education and regional integration for the elimination of this disadvantage, and the central government, which attempts to guarantee Castilian education and national integration, points to the existence of a long-term issue that needs to be solved.

### C. UYGHUR LANGUAGE – CHINA

The Manchu (Qing) Dynasty succeeded the Ming Dynasty in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, maintained its rule until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, and began to lose its sovereignty as a result of wars and rebellions taking place both within and outside its borders.<sup>247</sup> The military and administrative modernization that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century also reflected the demands for reforms of the constitutional monarchy. The failure to meet these demands led to mass public rebellions. The first years of the Republic of China, founded in 1912 by Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang), were so unstable that regions on the periphery were allowed to declare their independence. The “national unity” achieved in the 1920s under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek in the form of single party rule was not sufficient to eliminate this instability. Although the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945 ended with China’s victory, the civil war that followed between nationalists and communists aggravated the country’s political and economic reality. The harsh socialist policy implemented by the People’s Republic of China, founded in 1949 by Mao Zedong, leader of the Communist Party of China, was completed with the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 70s. Although the economic development of the 1990s onwards pushed China to implement a somewhat more flexible political or economic environment, the “Patriotic Education Campaign” initiated in 1991, which focused on rewriting history, was based on a nationalist tendency that aimed at creating a stronger and integrated “national identity.”<sup>248</sup>

Although the majority of the population in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region consists of Uyghurs, it is also inhabited by Han, Kazakh, Hui (Muslim Chinese), Kyrgyz and Mongol people. This area corresponds to the region once called Chinese Turkestan or East Turkestan.<sup>249</sup> The Manchu Dynasty, which began its decline in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, attempted to win back the control it was losing over the population of the border region of Huijiang (Muslim land) and against Russia by establishing a province called Xinjiang (New Frontier)

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<sup>244</sup> Jacqueline Urla, “Outlaw Language – Creating Alternative Public Spheres in Basque Free Radio,” *Pragmatics* 5: 2 (1995): 245-61.

<sup>245</sup> Etxeberria, “Bilingual Education,” 105.

<sup>246</sup> Shabad and Gunther, “Political Conflict in Spain,” 466.

<sup>247</sup> Victor Lieberman, “The Qing Dynasty and Its Neighbors,” *Social Science History* 32: 2 (2008): 281-304.

<sup>248</sup> Zheng Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52: 4 (2008): 783-806.

<sup>249</sup> For the history of Xinjiang see: James A. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007).



in 1884.<sup>250</sup> The early years of the Republic of China provided the stage for a continuous struggle for domination and independence. The Eastern Turkestan Republic declared in 1933 did not bring any stability to the region, over which China gained control the following year, but China was only able to maintain its presence in the region for about ten years through a local warlord supported by the Soviet Union.<sup>251</sup> The second Eastern Turkestan Republic, founded in 1944, lasted until the foundation of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was founded in 1955 and replaced the previous province. Although according to the official interpretation Xinjiang consolidated its status as an autonomous region through the independence it acquired along with the communist movement in China, according to another interpretation Xinjiang, which resisted the communist revolution and wished to found an independent country, was invaded by revolutionary forces.<sup>252</sup>

The tension that existed for years between the opposition forces in Xinjiang and Chinese authorities reached a peak in 1997, when demonstrations and bombings against arbitrary arrests by the police took place.<sup>253</sup> Violent events staged in support of the pro-Tibetan movement organized during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and to protest the death of the Uyghur businessman Mutallip Hajim while under police arrest drew the world's attention once again to Xinjiang. While the death in the summer of 2009 of 150 people who gathered in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, to protest the incidents in Shaoguan that ended with the death of two Uyghurs, resulted in heightened reactions against the People's Republic of China, Chinese authorities claimed that the groups had been incited by separatists led by Rabiya Kader, who lives in exile, thus attempting to legitimize the deaths by defining those who died as terrorists.

The Uyghur identity, which began its development as a unifying element during the last years of the Manchu Dynasty and the first years of the Republic of China, is nowadays preparing the ground for a political and linguistic movement. When countries in Western Turkestan (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) gained independence in 1991, similar demands for independence gained momentum in Eastern Turkestan.<sup>254</sup> However, the People's Republic of China claims that these demands are an extension of a plan to weaken China, that they are directed and financially supported by external powers and that these plans, presented within the framework of human rights, minority rights and religious freedom, attempt to prevent China's fight against terrorism.<sup>255</sup> Groups fighting for the independence of Eastern Turkestan are distinguished from each other on the basis of their ties to Eastern Asia, the Islamic world or Russia. While the Eastern Turkestan Independence Movement, which shows a secular tendency, gives priority to the Uyghur identity, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement, which aims for an Islamic theocracy and draws inspiration

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<sup>250</sup> Michael Clarke, "The Problematic Progress of 'Integration' in the Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang, 1759 – 2005," *Asian Ethnicity* 8: 3 (2007): 261-289.

<sup>251</sup> Clarke, "Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang," 270.

<sup>252</sup> Clarke, "Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang," 278.

<sup>253</sup> Eric Hyer, "China's Policy towards Uighur Nationalism," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26: 1 (2006): 75-86; see also: Clarke, "Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang," 284.

<sup>254</sup> Hyer, "Uighur Nationalism," 76.

<sup>255</sup> Clarke, "Chinese State's Approach to Xinjiang," 284.



from the examples of Saudi Arabia or the Taliban, is based on the Muslim identity.<sup>256</sup> However, both groups are troubled by the presence of non-Turkish and non-Muslim minorities, such as the Han Chinese.<sup>257</sup> The Han Chinese, on the other hand, claim that the People's Republic of China enacts positive discrimination toward Uyghurs in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region; this results in negative discrimination against themselves. However, when said positive discrimination is analyzed, particularly in terms of the Uyghur language, it is clear that it is far from free of problems.

Although the education held in the Han language (Chinese / Putonghua / Mandarin), which was the dominating language from the last years of the Manchu Dynasty to the first years of the Republic of China; to which only children from the higher classes had access and which was based on Confucianism came to an end as a result of the ethnic and linguistic equality policy of the Communist Party, the principles adopted during the Cultural Revolution overshadowed the progressive quality of this policy.<sup>258</sup> Following the ratification by the State Council of the "First National Conference Report on Ethnic Education," dated 1951, which left its mark on the initial period 1949-1958, it was decided that ethnic groups possessing written languages, such as the Mongols, the Koreans, the Uyghurs, the Kazaks and the Tibetans, would receive their primary and secondary education in their own languages; ethnic groups which did not yet have a written language would create and develop a written language, while using the Han language or another local language as a language of instruction.<sup>259</sup> This report also noted that Han language courses would be offered in schools, in accordance with local ethnic minorities' needs and wishes. Ten of the 55 different ethnic groups forming the People's Republic of China have acquired a written language and have learned Chinese through this policy. Close to 40 have reached a stage where they are able to use Chinese in addition to their own language and some of the remaining groups have decided to adopt Chinese.<sup>260</sup> That same year, the Central Institute of Nationalities — now called the Central University of Nationalities — was founded, aiming to train those who would work on the development of ethnic minority languages and literature.<sup>261</sup> This positive approach to minority languages acquired an official status when the Constitution of 1952 guaranteed the "freedom of all nationalities to use their own oral and written language;" state support was provided for people with an oral language to transform it into a written language and for people with a written language to develop their lan-

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<sup>256</sup> Hyer, "Uighur Nationalism," 80.

<sup>257</sup> For a comparative analysis using the example of India, of the lack of violence in clashes based on linguistic identities in Xinjiang in comparison to clashes based on religious identities, and the fact that they result in less instability, see: Marie-Eve Reny, "The Political Salience of Language and Religion: patterns of Ethnic Mobilization among Uyghurs in Xinjiang and Sikhs in Punjab," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 32: 3 (2009): 490-521.

<sup>258</sup> In this section the terms Han language, Chinese, Putonghua and Mandarin have been used interchangeably to refer to the dominant language in China, in order to remain faithful to the sources used as references.

<sup>259</sup> Dai Qingxia and Dong Yan, "The Historical Evolution of Bilingual Education for China's Ethnic Minorities," *Chinese Education and Society* 34: 2 (2001): 7-54.

<sup>260</sup> Ma Rong, "Bilingual Education for China's Ethnic Minorities," *Chinese Education and Society* 40: 2 (2007): 9-25.

<sup>261</sup> Qingxia and Yan, "China's Ethnic Minorities," 25.



guage.<sup>262</sup> It was in this “pluralist” period that the first legal steps were also taken towards the implementation of regional autonomies.<sup>263</sup> The constitution conferred autonomous administrative organs the responsibility to provide services in the region’s written language and to produce policies aiming to develop the language and culture of the nationality in the region.<sup>264</sup> In light of this policy, the Xinjiang Education Publishing House was founded in 1956 for compiling, translating and publishing the necessary written materials for education in the Uyghur language. In 1954-55, short-term courses were created in Mongolia and Xinjiang to train linguists and language teachers for institutions of higher education.<sup>265</sup>

However, policies adopted in the second period 1958-1977 and referred to as the “Chinese – Monopolist” period resulted in the decline of minority languages’ use and development.<sup>266</sup> This period, when distinctive characteristics and autonomous regions of ethnic minorities began to be perceived as a negative entity, included harsh practices seeking to form a national unity and to emphasize generalities in light of socialist policies.<sup>267</sup> Particularly from 1966 on, when the Cultural Revolution began, assimilationist policies — referred to by some as dominant-nation chauvinism — built on the principle of national unity, the languages of ethnic minorities were declared unnecessary and backward, institutes working on these languages were closed down and the use of some languages was prohibited.<sup>268</sup>

In the third, “pluralist” period, which extended from 1977, when the Cultural Revolution came to an end, to the early 2000s, particularly from the 1980s onwards, bilingual educational policies allowing ethnic minority languages to be revived, began being implemented.<sup>269</sup> The constitution, re-written in 1982, contains two articles concerning languages: while Article 4 guarantees the freedom of all nationalities in China to use and develop their own languages and writing systems, Article 19 charges the national government with the responsibility to ensure that the common language is used throughout the country.<sup>270</sup> Article 6 of the Law on Compulsory Education, on the other hand, states that schools are responsible for the wider use of Mandarin, the common language.<sup>271</sup> According to the principle adopted in 1980 by the Ministry of Education and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, all ethnic groups that have a language and a writing system may use this

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<sup>262</sup> Qingxia and Yan, “China’s Ethnic Minorities,” 21.

<sup>263</sup> Linda T. H. Tsung and Ken Cruickshank, “Mother Tongue and Bilingual Minority Education in China,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 12: 5 (2009): 549-563.

<sup>264</sup> Qingxia and Yan, “China’s Ethnic Minorities,” 21.

<sup>265</sup> Qingxia and Yan, “China’s Ethnic Minorities,” 25.

<sup>266</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual minority Education in China,” 550.

<sup>267</sup> Qingxia and Yan, “China’s Ethnic Minorities,” 26.

<sup>268</sup> Rong, “Bilingual Education,” 14.

<sup>269</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual Minority Education in China,” 551.

<sup>270</sup> Rong, “Bilingual Education,” 15.

<sup>271</sup> Rong, “Bilingual Education,” 15.



language as their language of instruction, but they also have to learn oral and written Chinese.<sup>272</sup> This principle, included in the Law on the Regional Autonomy of Minorities, dated 1984, is also reinforced through the Guiding Framework for the Reform and Development of Minority Education, published in 1992, according to which “all schools providing education in the minority language are responsible for conducting education in two languages and for the wider use of Putonghua, the national common language.”<sup>273</sup> Moreover, the first graduate program on bilingual education was established in 1986, the first doctorate program in 1994 and the first post-doctorate program in 1996.<sup>274</sup> Yet, although all these bilingual education programs were founded in line with the structured immersion program which aims for the equal use of the mother tongue and the official school language in terms of time and value, their implementation seems to have more of an assimilationist nature, in that Chinese is given priority.<sup>275</sup>

In the 2000s, when the People’s Republic of China adopted a kind of competitive economy called “socialist market economy,” new policies were developed for the Han language, the common communication language and the dominant language in the political, economic and cultural spheres, to be learned well by all ethnic minorities in order to achieve economic mobility and national progress throughout the country.<sup>276</sup> The main subject of the 5th National Conference on minority education, held in 2002, was the preparation of a curriculum to gradually develop the teaching of minority languages and the Han language with the objective of achieving a stronger and more dynamic bilingual education in primary and secondary school belonging to minorities, and of the policies necessary for the learning of a foreign language where possible.<sup>277</sup> However, the critical approach developed over the last few years has focused on the necessity to confer local administrations at different levels – autonomous regions, provinces and municipalities – the right to prepare language educational policies in line with regional needs and capacities and appropriate curricula, rather than for the Chinese central government to develop a general minority language education valid for the whole country.<sup>278</sup> This necessity indicates the need for further autonomy and for the recognition of ethno-linguistic identities in Xinjiang and envisages the diversification of language education alternatives in minority schools.<sup>279</sup>

In the Xinjiang Autonomous Region, which is inhabited by 13 ethnic groups, the Han, Hui and Manchu communities speak Chinese (Putonghua), the Turkic communities speak the Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tatar language and the others speak Russian and the Tajik language. While Uyghur qualifies as a common

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<sup>272</sup> Rong, “Bilingual Education,” 15.

<sup>273</sup> Shuang Zhang, “China’s Bilingual Education Policy and Current Use of Miao in Schools,” *Chinese Education and Society* 41: 6 (2008): 28–36.

<sup>274</sup> Qingxia and Yan, “China’s Ethnic Minorities,” 37.

<sup>275</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual Minority Education in China,” 550, 561. For an evaluation of “immersion” education programmes, see: Jim Cummins, “Immersion Education for the Millennium: What We Have Learned from 30 Years of Research on Second Language Immersion,” <http://www.iteachilearn.com/cummins/immersion2000.html> [July 19, 2010].

<sup>276</sup> Eric T. Schlusell, “‘Bilingual’ Education and Discontent in Xinjiang,” *Central Asian Survey* 26: 2 (2007): 251–277.

<sup>277</sup> Zhang, “Miao in Schools,” 29.

<sup>278</sup> Zhang, “Miao in Schools,” 34.

<sup>279</sup> Schlusell, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 273.



language for all ethnic groups in the region, Putonghua and Kazakh are of secondary importance but are still quite widespread. Nevertheless, it has been determined that less than 1 % of the Uyghur community is proficient in the Putonghua language.<sup>280</sup> The cultural diversity in question has allowed the formation of a separate schooling system based on the principle of education in the mother tongue. Primary and secondary education therefore takes place in the six mother tongues of Putonghua, Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian, Xibo and Kyrgyz.<sup>281</sup> While more than half of the students prefer to attend minority (Minzu) schools, the rest attend the Chinese (Hanzu) schools where education is conducted in the Putonghua language.<sup>282</sup> In the Minzu schools education is held in the relevant minority language and Mandarin is taught four hours a week, while in Hanzu schools education is held in Mandarin and the relevant minority language is taught four hours a week.<sup>283</sup> However, the number of Hanzu schools, which were first founded in the 1950s, increased dramatically from the 1960s onwards because of the migration of the Han people. As they have been in greater demand among minority groups over the last ten years, it has become the dominant type of school.

The economic and political development of the last ten years has played an important role in the determination of recent language policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. While the proportion of Han Chinese living in Xinjiang within the whole population was 6 % in 1949, it has now reached 40 % as a result of internal migration encouraged by the Chinese government.<sup>284</sup> This increase has resulted in a change of the region's language of power from Uyghur towards Putonghua and, especially as seen in 2000, in the change of demand for education from schools providing education in Uyghur to schools providing education in Putonghua.<sup>285</sup> Mandarin has therefore acquired in Xinjiang the status of elite language found in many post-colonial states.<sup>286</sup> Because of recent political tensions, this status has coincided with the Chinese government's policy to control separatist movements and with its new model called "integrated education." This model stipulates the unification of minority schools and Han schools in a system where education will be given in the Putonghua language.<sup>287</sup> The "integrated education" model (min han haxiao) is based on the principle of implementing different programs in different regions, such as the complementation of the curriculum prepared in the Han language with courses offering the minority language, or the complementing of the curriculum prepared in the minority language with courses offering the Han language, or the co-existence of both the minority and the Han language within the curriculum.<sup>288</sup> However, the

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<sup>280</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 552.

<sup>281</sup> For a different classification regarding bilingual education in China see Schluskel, "Discontent in Xinjiang," 260-261.

<sup>282</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 552.

<sup>283</sup> Schluskel, "Discontent in Xinjiang," 261.

<sup>284</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 550.

<sup>285</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 550. For a study of how the hierarchic relationship between the Uyghur and the Han languages – due to how these languages are positioned with respect to modernity – is perceived by the relevant communities, see Xiaowei Zang, "Minority Ethnicity, Social Status and Uyghur Community Involvement in Urban Xinjiang," *Asian Ethnicity* 8: 1(2007): 25-42.

<sup>286</sup> Schluskel, "Discontent in Xinjiang," 267.

<sup>287</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 551.

<sup>288</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, "Bilingual Minority Education in China," 552.



fact that in practice this principle concentrates only on the first alternative precludes the other two alternatives.<sup>289</sup> In 2005 all the Minzu and Hanzu schools in the main cities of Xinjiang were unified; in 2006 incentive payments were made to the families of children who live in rural areas and attend schools where education is held in Mandarin only.<sup>290</sup> The Chinese national government policy prescribes that all Hanzu and Minzu schools are unified under the “integrated education” system by 2008.<sup>291</sup>

The official reason for the legitimization of this model is that the education in the mother tongue provided in minority schools is much lower in quality than the education given in the Han language. However, there are objections to this reason on the basis that sufficient analysis has not been conducted on the source of the said quality issue and on how the integrated system of education will benefit from this matter.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, experts in the region claim that the cost of high school education, following nine years of free-of-charge education, is far too high for the Uyghur people. Therefore, the above quality issue has arisen from termination of the positive discrimination implemented in university entrance exams for students who do not speak the Han language.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, as a result of conducting education in the minority language for many years, students’ and teachers’ proficiency in the Han language is not sufficient for education in this language; that has not been taken into consideration when planning the “integrated” monolingual educational model.<sup>294</sup> In addition, the fact that in September 2002 universities in Xinjiang began providing education in Mandarin only, in spite of intense protests, constitutes another indication of the negative change in language policies.<sup>295</sup>

Following this change, the use of Mandarin in schools attended by children speaking minority languages has increased compulsorily and to the disadvantage of the relevant minority languages; the use of the term “bilingual education” in China in general and in Xinjiang in particular is therefore referred to as a ‘euphemism’ by some researchers.<sup>296</sup> Unlike its use in the 1950s, the expression “bilingual education” in China nowadays refers to a system where students are able to receive education in their mother tongue for a short while before beginning their education in Mandarin.<sup>297</sup> Contrary to its objective, this policy, which is now being implemented more aggressively and is turning into “education in Mandarin only,” is believed to constitute an obstacle to the integration of minorities with the Chinese state, society and economy, to result in a reaction against Mandarin and to therefore result in a decrease in interest in learning the language, as well as in motivation in learning in general.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 261.

<sup>290</sup> Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 258.

<sup>291</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual Minority Education in China,” 552.

<sup>292</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual Minority Education in China,” 552.

<sup>293</sup> Tsung and Cruickshank, “Bilingual Minority Education in China,” 552; see also Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 265-269.

<sup>294</sup> Guljennet Anaytulla, “Present State and Prospects of Bilingual Education in Xinjiang,” *Chinese Education and Society* 41: 6 (2008): 37-49.

<sup>295</sup> Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 257.

<sup>296</sup> Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 251.

<sup>297</sup> Anaytulla, “Bilingual Education in Xinjiang,” 38.

<sup>298</sup> Schlusssel, “Discontent in Xinjiang,” 269.



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## D. EVALUATION

The nationalist ideology that the French and Turkish states are resorting to with the aim of building a modern, centrist and secular nation-state envisages that a direct equation be established between state and nation and that all non-French/Turkish elements are melted within Frenchness/Turkishness. This ideology has failed to penetrate areas such as Corsica and the Kurdish region, which lie on the periphery and which have weak economic, cultural and political ties with the centre. This has resulted in both states having to revise their policies concerning these regions. While France has chosen to resort partially and in a limited way to local administration/autonomy models that have been implemented for a long time, for Turkey this method is currently not considered even a possibility. However, besides impeding the development of a democratic political culture, this situation is also preventing a thorough discussion of the use of the mother tongue in education. And yet, the autonomy that in Corsica exists only within the framework of very limited authority is not sufficient for education in Corsican to be implemented widely and at all levels. It would actually be more appropriate to refer to the current system as the “teaching of Corsican,” rather than “education in Corsican.” The main reasons for this are not only that the Corsican parliament is not fully authorized in the field of education, but also that the discourse that in comparison to French, the Corsican language represents a backwards, anti-republican and anti-modern culture has actually been internalized by Corsicans themselves. That is why there is a dual obstacle to the establishment of Corsican language policies: one is the French state and the other is the Corsican. Therefore, changes that the French state will make to its current policy and steps that it should take towards guaranteeing the use of Corsican as a mother tongue in education seem to be directly related to the meaning that people who speak Corsican ascribe to education in the mother tongue. The expression “bilingual/multilingual education,” adopted recently to replace the expression “education in the mother tongue,” seems to be more suited to quell the concerns of both the Corsican people and the French state.

When we consider that similar concerns exist in Turkey and that the positive effect created by the choice of terms of the discourse would produce a result in favor of education in the mother tongue, we must take into consideration the probable contribution that the concepts of multilingualism and multilingual education will make towards a deeper and richer debate in Turkey. This probable contribution will only be possible when the following truth is recognized: claiming that France has a similar political, legal and administrative structure to that of Turkey and citing the French state’s negative approach to education in the mother tongue as an example to legitimize Turkey’s similar approach is not truthful. First, although the use of the mother tongue in education in France has occurred at different times and in different ways for each language, it has been continuing for over 40 years. Moreover, as seen in the Corsican instance, a partial transfer of power is valid in some situations. Lastly, it must not be forgotten that the republican regime created by the French state on the basis of principles such as public impartiality and equal citizenship has recently become a subject of critical debate. The main theme of this debate consists of minority rights, a subject which has been brought up again in parallel with the issue of migrants but which includes local minority rights as well.

The national unity projects based on a dominant language and culture, undertaken by the Spanish and Turkish states to compensate for the collapse of the empire’s heritage, the loss of territory and the delayed modernity and to initiate a movement to catch up with developed European countries, have always co-existed with the struggles of minorities which produce alternative histories, languages, cultures and identities.



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It should be noted that the Basque education currently implemented in the Basque Autonomous Community developed thanks to a secret and civil Basque educational network carried out a long time before the autonomy status was acquired and even under the harsh conditions of the Franco regime. This is significant in terms of showing that what invalidates the state's official policies is not only political struggles but also linguistic and cultural resistance. Moreover, when the Basque Autonomous Community used its power in the field of education to open schools providing education in the Basque language, the necessary demand and supply for this education developed as a result of these struggles. The problems that education in the mother tongue – or rather bilingual or multilingual education – implemented in different parts of the Basque country via different school systems since the 1980s currently presents arise not from the educational models themselves or from multilingual education, but from the need to revise educational policies in line with changing political, economic and social conditions. In fact, the Basque Autonomous Community has not envisaged a single educational model and has created different school systems in accordance with the needs of different schools. This should be taken into consideration when establishing policies for education in the mother tongue. The aim of these policies is for the Basque language not to be restricted to schools but to be part of children's and young people's daily activities; this can be seen as another way of guaranteeing the use of the mother tongue in education. The criticism that education in the Basque language excludes the community that does not speak Basque should be seen as a warning that the difficulties caused for the Basque language by Castilian should not be caused by the Basque language for other languages and dialects.

This issue should definitely be studied when establishing policies for education in the mother tongue in Turkey. The conclusion that a single type of education in the mother tongue to be implemented equally all over the country or all over the relevant area may cause new results can be drawn easily from the Basque education example in the Basque mother tongue. Kurds in Turkey do not live only in regions most heavily inhabited by the Kurdish population but also in the western provinces of the country. Similarly, the Kurdish region is also inhabited by groups who speak languages other than Kurdish and even different Kurdish dialects. It should therefore not be forgotten that education in Kurdish should not be developed in the form of a single model and that educational models to be developed for education in the mother tongue should be continuously revised.

The Uyghur language in China example, which is quite different and dates back much further than the Corsican language in France and Basque language in Spain examples, also presents similar educational aspects. Although the socialist approach, which especially in the initial years presented extremely democratic qualities in comparison to the minority policies of liberal states, was interrupted because of "national unity" based on authoritarian policies, it still constitutes a concrete example to the possibility of the state to interpret minority languages as a true wealth. Yet, although education in the Uyghur mother tongue that excluded Chinese completely produced a positive result from the point of view of the survival of the Uyghur language, the wish to take advantage of China's recent economic boom has come to constitute a disadvantage for the Uyghur people. The Chinese state, however, which chose to remedy this advantage by giving priority not to the benefit of the Uyghur people but to its aim of creating a national market, seems to have decided to impose education in Chinese, rather than implementing a balanced bilingual or multilingual education policy. This anachronistic policy, which is contrary to current worldwide academic tendencies, can be interpreted as a method required by a capitalist economy. However it is clear that it has the potential to cause damage. This policy, which has opened to debate the degree



of autonomy of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, paves the way for the debate on education in the mother tongue in other countries.

A possible reflection of the Uyghur language in China example on the debate in Turkey on the use of Kurdish in education, consists of the fact that education in the mother tongue is a subject that has been debated all over the world for a very long time and that different states endeavor to solve this issue in different ways. The right to education in the mother tongue, which Uyghur Turks have had for over 60 years under an autonomous government, has been to the detriment of Chinese; although this has resulted in the Chinese state's decision to restrict this right in order to create national unity, it is clear that regressive steps of this kind will not be long-lasting. On the contrary, the Uyghur demand to expand their local administrative powers within the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and to use it to implement education in the Uyghur mother tongue will most probably result in the Chinese state revising its recent policies. In fact, the most important way in which the example of the Uyghur language-China can contribute to the debate on the satisfaction of similar demands by the Kurds in Turkey, lies in the fact that the issue of education in the mother tongue is of such vital importance that it cannot be ignored. Also that this vital issue needs to be seen as a process that should include the relevant parties. It should be continuously revised and considered an important element of the political sphere.

In order to draw general conclusions regarding the Kurdish language in Turkey from specific comments on the above examples, we should take into consideration the positive effect that will arise from the preference of the expression “bilingual” or “multilingual education” over the expression “education in the mother tongue.” The terms “bilingual” or “multilingual education” indicate that education in the mother tongue is not an education issue specific to minorities only. In addition, especially at a time when global communication and mobility is so intensive, a new educational approach should be adopted in general. The terms “bilingual” or “multilingual education” also have the potential to alleviate the political and historical burden carried by the expression “education in the mother tongue.”<sup>299</sup>

Nevertheless, the term “bilingual education” should be more than a technical term which covers only the school curriculum and linguistic skills. While bilingualism does not guarantee biculturalism, policies that aim for biculturalism inevitably need to aim for bilingualism as well. In other words, while it is possible to be bilingual without being bicultural, it is not possible to be bicultural without being bilingual; what matters is to transform bilingualism into biculturalism.<sup>300</sup> A transformation of this kind can be realized through individuals open to experiencing different cultures as being complementary to, rather than opposite of their own, to cultural interaction and different cultural identities.<sup>301</sup> In order for individuals to transform bilingualism into biculturalism it is important that relationship between the two languages is not hierarchical, that common points, as well as differences between the two languages and cultures are emphasized and that a bicultural environment is created starting with the early socialization period.<sup>302</sup> In other words, it is necessary to abolish the perception that children who learn a language

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<sup>299</sup> The term “mother tongue in education,” proposed by this study, can be said to present a similar potential.

<sup>300</sup> Christina B. Paulston, *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Bilingual Education* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1992).

<sup>301</sup> Anwei Feng, “Identity, ‘Acting Interculturally’ and Aims for Bilingual Education: An Example from China,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 30: 4 (2009): 283-296.

<sup>302</sup> Michael Byram, “On Being Bicultural and Intercultural,” in *Intercultural Experience and Education*, ed. Geoff Alred, Michael Byram and Michael P. Fleming (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2003).



other than the dominant language have a “language deficiency” and to therefore create “an educational environment where children can use the linguistic repertory they bring from their own socio-cultural environments as a source for learning to read and write in more than one language.”<sup>303</sup> A transformative approach of this kind is seen as an element of political and cultural pluralism.

It is clear that political and cultural pluralism cannot coexist with a centralist understanding. On the basis of the above examples, it may be said that autonomous administrations are a prerequisite for pluralism of this kind. However, autonomous administrations should adopt an approach that does not re-create the power structure that they fought against. The embodiment of this approach in the field of education can be realized on the basis of Haugen’s “language ecology” metaphor.<sup>304</sup> This metaphor, according to Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaşı, “emphasizes the importance of a particular geographical area rather than of a particular language and draws attention to the necessity of focusing on all the languages in a region rather than selecting only some languages. Similarly, it also states that language planning should not be restricted to a single language and that all languages spoken in that environment should be taken into consideration.”<sup>305</sup>

In short, although bilingual or multilingual education, in other words the use of the mother tongue in education is necessary for keeping alive and invigorating a minority language and is conducive to political acquisitions, especially its cultural and political meanings should be kept in mind in the preparation of bilingual or multilingual education models. This question points to an approach that gives priority to transform, rather than to ignore the economic, political and cultural power struggle that education is related to, and to brings out into the open minority languages’ ability to be powerful, rather than to dominate.

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<sup>303</sup> Müge A. Ceyhan and Dilara Koçbaşı, *Çiftillilik ve Eğitim* (Bilingualism and Education) (İstanbul: Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, Sabancı Üniversitesi, 2009), 12.

<sup>304</sup> Einar Haugen, *The Ecology of Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

<sup>305</sup> Ayan-Ceyhan and Koçbaşı, *Çiftillilik ve Eğitim*, 19; Robert B. Kaplan, and Richard B. Baldauf Jr., *Language Planning from Practice to Theory* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007).



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## CONCLUSION

Diverse societies the world over must be able to co-exist harmoniously. Worldwide, demands by groups feeling excluded from the system occupy an increasingly important place in political and legal agendas. In Turkey, a number of different social groups, particularly the Kurds, have for a long time been publicly expressing their demands for the central government's oppressive and standardizing character to evolve in a liberal and pluralist direction. The building of societal peace in Turkey is closely related to the attitude and response to these demands. If the political system chooses to satisfy said demands through open negotiation with those who make the demands, the achievement of social reconciliation and peace will become feasible. But if these demands continue to be suppressed and ignored, as has been the case up to now, the cracks in the social fault line will deepen; it will become impossible to find a resolution to the conflict.

The failure to meet demands concerning the issue of the mother tongue and of Kurdish in education, as discussed in this study, constitutes one of the causes of social conflict in Turkey. The inability to use the mother tongue in education results in Kurdish children, whose mother tongue is not Turkish, being unable to benefit equally from education. This inequality creates social conflict. The lack of communication between teachers and students, teachers and parents and between students whose mother tongues differ, and therefore between different cultures within society, is another factor contributing to this atmosphere of conflict. Notwithstanding that societal peace is damaged by this inequality and lack of communication, the inability to use the mother tongue in education causes multi-faceted negative results from the point of view of Kurdish-speaking students. When all of these issues are taken into consideration measures to be taken to meet the demands for education in the mother tongue are clearly at once educational, legal, administrative and cultural.

Current educational policies and practices have a debilitating and exclusive nature from political, linguistic, educational and cultural points of view. As previously stated, these policies and practices have resulted in serious linguistic, educational, psychological, cognitive and social damage, especially for Kurdish students, in the following way: an antagonistic relationship develops between teachers and students, students fall behind in their education and have to repeat the year, they fail to succeed in school and end up quitting, they are stigmatized for speaking Kurdish, they are frequently subject to violence of one kind or another, they experience problems in expressing themselves later in life, their relationship with their parents is damaged and in the end they forget their mother tongue. Although this grim scenario is obviously not true of all students, it is true far too often to be ignored. Moreover, current educational policies are negatively influencing teachers' working conditions and preventing the development of a productive and efficient educational process. The radical educational measures to be taken to abolish these negative effects are listed below:

- Kurdish-Turkish education models should be developed for the education of Kurdish students,
- Training should be provided for the transformation of coercive teacher-student relations,
- Bilingual teacher-training departments should be set up,
- Centers for the development and evaluation of bilingual educational curriculum should be opened,
- Public awareness should be raised concerning the use of education in the mother tongue and bilingualism,



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- Prospective teachers should be trained regarding linguistic and cultural diversity; similar training should be provided to teachers via in-service seminars,
  - Teachers who speak Kurdish should be provided resources on bilingual educational methods,
  - Teachers who do not speak Kurdish and who work in Kurdish region should be encouraged to learn Kurdish,
  - Kurdish literacy courses should be offered for students who speak Kurdish but have literacy skills only in Turkish,
  - Kurdish literacy courses should be offered for Kurdish parents,
  - TV programs aiming to develop students' Kurdish language skills should be created.

In the event that these measures are taken, students in particular will develop a sound and balanced bilingualism. Within such an environment, students will feel that their identity is recognized and will display a more positive attitude towards school. This will contribute to students' self-confidence and therefore will affect to a great degree their school success. Furthermore, students who receive such an effective and enhancing education will be able to develop stronger communication with other languages and cultures and will feed on the intercultural dialogue necessary for societal peace. Students' economic and social development will also be guaranteed in this way. The benefits brought by these measures can be clearly seen in the Basque language example. The common ground between the three examples cited above lies in the need to revise educational measures continuously. This point should definitely be taken into consideration during the development of policies in Turkey regarding the use of the mother tongue in education.

However, in order to take on these educational measures, it is necessary to recognize that the use of the mother tongue in education is a fundamental human right; that this right needs to be benefitted from in all stages of education and that the use of the mother tongue in education needs to be guaranteed constitutionally and legally. This legal guarantee can be achieved in two ways: the first is the elimination of all prohibitions concerning languages and education rights from all legislation, starting with laws regulating education. Article 42 of the Constitution of 1982 must also be addressed, ensuring that these rights are recognized by legislation. The second is the inclusion in legislation of all language and education rights expressed in international treaties. This requires the abolition of all reservations on the part of the state. As previously seen in the country instances, constitutional and legal measures of this kind constitute one of the first steps towards guaranteeing the right of education in the mother tongue.

The change of the legal paradigm will bring about the transformation of the political culture, the system and the administrative structure. An excessively centralist educational policy that ignores different languages and cultures damages societal peace and constitutes an impediment to an effective and enhancing education. An effective and enhancing education will require flexible school systems that can respond rapidly and efficiently to different regions' different needs. The implementation of a bilingual educational policy that accepts the use of the mother tongue in education necessitates decentralization of the administrative structure. In fact, this can clearly be seen in the Corsican language, Basque language and Uyghur language examples cited



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above. Although different education policies have been implemented, devolution of authority of varying degrees, from the central government to local administrations, is valid for all three examples.

In order for legal and political measures to fulfill their function, they need also to be internalized by society. It is essential that a wider culture develops wherein all different cultures within society are valuable, all of them need to be protected, oppressive and ostracizing hierarchies do not exist among languages, and all languages provide strength and enhancement to individuals and to society. That is why political organs, non-governmental organizations, universities and educational institutions should constantly endeavor for the realization of such a cultural transformation. Especially as seen in the Basque language in Spain instance, cultural transformation based on societal reconciliation constitutes the only guarantee for the permanence of measures aiming at the use of the mother tongue in education.

As a result, the above legal, administrative, cultural and educational measures can be summarized under the following recommendations:

1. Kurdish-Turkish bilingual educational models should be developed for the education of Kurdish students. In parallel to this development, necessary work should be carried out for the implementation of other educational measures mentioned above; it must not be forgotten that it is necessary continuously to revise bilingual education models in line with changing needs and conditions.
2. All prohibitions concerning language and education rights should be eliminated from legislation, beginning with the constitution and the laws and that these rights should be recognized by legislation. Moreover, all language and education rights expressed in international treaties should be included in the legislation; all reservations on the part of the state should be abolished.
3. On the basis that an efficient education requires a flexible school system that can respond rapidly and efficiently to different regions' different needs, the administrative structure needs to be decentralized.
4. In order for a culture to develop where there are no oppressive and ostracizing hierarchies among languages, and where all languages are considered as providing strength and enrichment to individuals and to society, political organs, non-governmental organizations, universities and educational institutions should make an effort to develop policies and practices with this aim.

There is no doubt that in Turkey the use of the mother tongue in education, bilingualism and cultural pluralism presents a problematic political and historical background. This problematic legacy shows both how crucial and how difficult it is to carry out what needs to be done. In order to overcome these issues, Turkey needs to develop its own model. During the development of these models, the students', teachers' and parents' needs as seen in this study can be taken into consideration; experiences of countries that have dealt with and are continuing to deal with such issues and academic and pedagogical studies conducted on these experiences can be benefitted from.

We hope that this study will contribute to the development in Turkey of an educational model that uses Kurdish as a mother tongue, by drawing attention once again to this political and historical legacy of exclusion, by establishing along with the relevant parties the issues that continue to arise from this legacy and by drawing attention to the experiences of countries with similar problems.



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## EXAMPLES FROM THE INTERVIEWS





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## **Lezgin - Student**

### **Can you tell us about yourself and about your education? Where did you go to the school?**

I have three brothers. I am the middle child. Up to high school I studied in Ağrı.

### **At which schools?**

At the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han Primary School. It was a nice school.

### **Did you receive all of your education in the center of Ağrı?**

Yes, I received all of my education in the center of Ağrı. I actually began school after we moved from our village. As soon as we came from there, I enrolled at school. We could say that I received a good education, especially at the primary school. Because I learned many things at the primary school. My primary school teacher was a very good teacher. For example, one year I failed class. The education provided was of good quality, children did not pass their class without working very hard, some were made to repeat the year. The school provided the best possible education for the students. You could tell from the fact that children failed their class that the education was good. For example, if a student wasn't getting a good education that student had to repeat that year.

### **Where did you receive your high school education?**

I studied at an Anadolu High school. I passed the Anadolu school exam. At that time there were entrance exams for high schools. I studied a lot, I studied really hard at the secondary school for that exam. Towards the end of the secondary school I discovered that there was an entrance exam for high school, so I began to work hard. Our financial means had improved a little, so my family was able to send me to a private exam preparation institution. With the help of private tutors I was able to enter an Anadolu high school.

### **When you began school, were you able to speak or to understand Turkish? Did your teacher speak any Kurdish?**

When I began school I didn't know any Turkish, I mean I couldn't speak it well, I could understand some things but only up to a point. As for speaking, I couldn't really speak it. As I said at the beginning, I enrolled at school when we moved from the village. I had to repeat a year because I didn't speak Turkish. For example when I repeated grade one my teacher did not speak Kurdish. That's where the problem lay. We couldn't communicate. Not only I but also my cousins who came from the village had the same problem. That is why my cousins and I had to repeat the year.

### **So you believe that your having repeated a year was due to the language?**

Of course, we didn't speak the language. We didn't speak Turkish at all. We could understand some things but we couldn't speak. But I don't consider having repeated a year as a negative thing. Because it was not possible



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to move onto the following class unless you learned everything properly. Did I draw any benefits from repeating a year? Yes, I did. For example, the teacher I had after having repeated the year was a very good teacher. He was even elected best teacher of the year several times. He spoke Kurdish too. He was Kurdish.

### **Did he speak in Kurdish with you?**

Yes, but that happened like this: When we referred to bread as “*nan*” in Kurdish – in Kurdish bread is “*nan*” – he would immediately say that in Turkish it is “*ekmek*.” Sometimes he actually used Kurdish to teach us class. He was a very courageous man. He contributed greatly to my being who I am today. I learned Turkish from him.

### **What were the mother tongues of other children in your school and in your class in general?**

Ağrı was a small place. It was inhabited mainly by Kurds and naturally many children in my class spoke Kurdish. But high school was incredibly different. At primary school we were able to speak Kurdish with our friends. But after primary school, at high school the situation changed incredibly. I studied at an Anadolu high school. In the Anadolu high school there were very few Kurdish students. They were incredibly few. The students here were generally children of people who came from other regions, children of our Turkish brothers. They were generally children of civil servants and of army people. We experienced adaptation problems in the first and second grade of high school. Sorry, I meant in the prep school and first grade of high school. In prep school we practically never spoke to each other. I witnessed many times reactions such as “he doesn’t speak Turkish, he can’t speak well, let’s not speak with him”. I have to say that we too had some prejudices. These prejudices were broken a little at first grade of high school. In second grade they disappeared completely. We were able to speak and chat very easily. You wouldn’t believe it, but it was in second grade and in the last year that we warmed to each other. In prep school and grade one we didn’t have many friends.

### **What did you think about receiving your education in Turkish, although your mother tongue was Kurdish? What kind of experiences did you go through?**

My mother tongue is Kurdish of course. I am proud of this. People exist through their languages, through their identities. As I said before, the difficulties I encountered consisted of not being able to communicate with other students in high school and of having to repeat a year at primary school. Especially in primary school, when I started school I experienced problems because my first teacher did not speak any Kurdish. I remember that at high school I was beaten very badly. At high school, for whatever reason I don’t know, some deputy principals had formed an *interrogation* room. I remember that one of them was actually a Kurdish teacher. We had three deputy principals, one was Kurdish and two were Turkish. Because my friends and I spoke Kurdish in the corridor we were taken to the *interrogation* room. That’s what they themselves called it. It wasn’t officially called that of course, they referred to it like that. I was beaten so hard in that room that when I left my head hurt for a whole day. I didn’t tell my family what happened. At prep school and grade one, the other students kept their distance from us, they ostracized us. At primary school on the other hand I suffered because my teacher did not speak Kurdish. He used to say to my family “take your child from school.” But with my next teacher everything changed. The teacher I got after I failed the year was very good.



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## **How did your teachers treat you? Can you tell us about that?**

Once I failed class, the rest of the primary school went very well. That's actually when I got to learn Turkish. In secondary school the situation changed again, because most of our teachers were Turkish. I would be lying if I said that we didn't have any problems with them. For example, we had a teacher from Izmir, who used to say, "You are a people who don't want to learn Turkish." She was also our class teacher. And she was also our Science teacher. I always got 2 (grade) in the Science class. But I was a very successful and determined student. I experienced many problems. I also had problems in the English class at high school. Our English teacher was a woman from Kazakhstan, who was a Turkish nationalist. She too made things difficult for us. In secondary school my grade average was brought down by the Science class and in high school it was brought down by the English class. That teacher always said: "There actually is no such thing as Kurdish; this is Turkish that has been Kurdified." So what she meant was that the people in the east have evolved Turkish into Kurdish. That's when I reacted to her and from then onwards I got very low grades in English. Normally my grade average was above 4.50 (out of 5). A student with a grade average this high can generally easily succeed in English too. Especially in Anadolu high schools, English plays an important role in the average grade. My average was affected and this even influenced my university entrance exam. The average grade of my friends who had good grades in English and in other classes was three to five points higher than mine and they were able to be accepted in the universities they wanted.

## **When you spoke Turkish in class and were not able to express yourselves, did you ever resort to Kurdish? Can you remember any examples of this?**

Even now, at university, sometimes I can't express myself fully in Turkish. Sometimes in the breaks we speak Kurdish with the teachers, others know this too. This happens because of our inability to express ourselves. For example with my family we generally speak Kurdish. I still remember what happened in a class called basic health. The teacher had asked us: "How do you measure the temperature of babies?" Parts of the body such as the underarm and the anus... I didn't know these in Turkish. I didn't know what to write, so I thought to get help from a friend of mine. He said "makat" [anus], but I understood it as "*makas*" [scissors]. Because I didn't know what it meant. The teacher called me to the blackboard and said: "What do you mean by 'makas'? Are you making fun of me?" And when I said that I really didn't know, he humiliated me. "How can you not know, who do you think you are?" I wasn't been able to express myself in Turkish in that exam, so I experienced problems

## **What language do you generally speak outside school?**

Outside school we generally speak Kurdish. Especially within the family we speak Kurdish. I speak in Turkish with my brother, because he believes that speaking Kurdish is demeaning. When I speak to him in Kurdish, he says, "don't speak to me in Kurdish, my friends make fun of me." This is because he goes to a private school. My brother experiences this difficulty because people there general speak Turkish. Although I tell him that our mother tongue is Kurdish and that he should not be ashamed of it, he speaks Turkish because of his state of mind, because of his age. We are even thinking of taking him from that school, because he is being demeaned. Apparently his friends don't speak to him. So both the child and the family are distressed because of this situation.



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**A little while ago you recounted something that happened to you. Other than that, were you ever punished by your teacher and by the school management for having spoken Kurdish?**

Apart from that incident I don't remember having received any other punishments. Our principal was a good man. He had leftist views and he spoke Kurdish. I frequently heard him speaking in Kurdish in the school corridors and he used to communicate in Kurdish with teachers he was friendly with. I even spoke in Kurdish when he was around but he didn't react in any way. He even smiled, he treated me very well. We didn't experience any problems because our principal was Kurdish. He loved the Kurdish language; he tried hard to prevent punishments given for this reason.

**Did you think that children whose mother tongue is Kurdish were unlucky when compared with children whose mother tongue is Turkish?**

I used to think it was humiliating. I thought that speaking Kurdish and not Turkish was humiliating. I believed the same things as my brother does now. And what's more my brother speaks Turkish. Which is an advantage for him. My not knowing any Turkish was a great disadvantage for me. We were ostracized, but this happened in high school rather than in primary school. At primary school most children were from the same circles and spoke Kurdish. But this issue emerged in a significant way in prep school and high school. I can tell you that I developed most of my opinions when I was at high school. I used to think that I would continue speaking Kurdish, learn Kurdish and keep it alive even if I was ostracized. That was the effect of the exclusion.

**If you had control over the situation which language would you want your children to use to learn reading and writing in the future?**

I would want them to learn their mother tongue first of course. And I will do my best for this to happen. We have a certain mother tongue, a certain identity and a certain culture. We have been living on this land for thousands of years, Kurdish has existed on this land for thousands of years. If a language and an identity that have existed for a long time cannot be transferred to one's children, it is a grave situation. I would want my children and my wife to be always able to speak and read and write in Kurdish. I am now working to learn Kurdish at an academic degree. I attend courses and spend a number of hours studying. I will study Kurdish and transmit this knowledge onto my children in future.

**If students are taught in Kurdish from now on, at which stage would you think it would be best to do so?**

Here is what I think. The Kurdish language varies from area to area and the difference is quite noticeable. I realized this especially at university. When people from Şırnak and from Diyarbakır speak Kurdish, the difference in dialect is very clear. The teaching of Kurdish should begin with the alphabet. A common language should be formed. Just as there is the Turkish of Istanbul, the Kurdish of a particular region should be taught to everyone. The first thing to be done is to abolish the differences within Kurdish. Most of the words we use are different, when I speak to a friend from Şırnak I see that there is an unbelievable rift between us, because the words they use and the words we use are different. Especially in the southeast, while people from Diyarbakır refer to clothes as "*cil*," we use the word "*hinc*." Starting from the level of the alphabet, Kurdish should



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gradually be raised to an academic degree. For example, lessons can begin with the alphabet and then it would be proper to talk about grammar. Imposing academic Kurdish onto students would be too much. The right thing to do would be to teach first the alphabet, then grammar and then the rules of Kurdish.

**Alright, but what this question means is if students are to be taught Kurdish, at what stage should this happen?**

I believe that the best thing would be to begin with the alphabet. At school we only learned the Turkish alphabet. For example, there are letters that don't exist in the Kurdish alphabet. It would be better if those were taught first, if such fundamental concepts were taught first.

**What is meant by what stage is for example at what grade level in the school?**

I see. I believe that it would be right to begin at primary school rather than at high school. Because as you know we have now reached an academic level. We can speak Kurdish more easily and understand it more easily. But our proficiency will never be as high as those who will receive such an education. It would be better if they could begin at primary school. If they start at primary school children will become more familiar with their language, they will develop a more intimate relation with it. They will know their language better. But if we receive our education in Kurdish only later on, we can get confused between Kurdish and Turkish. Because we already have a certain knowledge. But if they begin learning it earlier...

**And how long do you think it should last?**

The mother tongue is a separate thing and the official language is a separate thing. The mother tongue should always be taught. You can learn Kurdish at primary school, develop it at secondary school, study it at high school and study it professionally at university. Kurdish should exist in all areas of life. It can't be limited only to primary school. It should be taught at primary school, secondary school, high school and university. It should be used in business life too. Because of your business you may encounter people who do not speak Turkish. However, it is also important to be able to use Turkish up to an academic level. Therefore Kurdish should exist in all stages of life. It should always be present throughout the period of education.

**What benefit would children whose mother tongue is Kurdish draw from learning to read and write in Kurdish?**

Students whose mother tongue is Kurdish will keep their language alive. And later they will learn Turkish as well as their language. This is a main difference. We say that a language means one person and two languages mean two persons. People who learn their own mother tongue will then learn also Turkish. This would be a big difference. People who learn Kurdish can learn many other languages within the Indo-European language group. For example Kurdish is very close to Spanish and to English. With the advantage of having learned Kurdish, one can understand other languages better. Languages within the same language group can be learned more easily. For example German or French words that are guttural can be pronounced more easily. Knowing Kurdish will therefore contribute to learning other languages.



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### **What is the role and importance of Kurdish in your present life?**

Of course Kurdish is now present in all areas of our life. Our mother tongue is Kurdish and we learned Turkish later on. Because we learned Turkish later on in some areas of life we are not familiar with Turkish. Kurdish compensates for the inadequacies of those areas. I am very happy that Kurdish is present in all areas of my life. And especially in my family. Kurdish is spoken within the family. I spend the majority of my life with my family, so this naturally affects the role of Kurdish in my life. I have just remembered something else, which I had forgotten. We lived in the city center. The building we lived in had been assigned to us by the state because of my mother's job. One day my mother called out to me in Kurdish. My playmates asked me "what did your mother say?" And I told them – I was at secondary school – "My mother speaks in French with me." My friends told their mothers, "Mom, do you know that our friend's mother is French, she's come from France, they live here." Then their mothers told my mother what I had said. When my mother asked me why I had said so, I said that I was embarrassed. Most of the people living in our building were Turkish, they spoke Turkish. I had lied because I didn't want to be excluded. It's a nice memory in fact.

**Thank you.**



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## **Ayşegül – Teacher**

### **Can you tell us about yourself and the education you received? Where were you educated and how was it?**

Well, I completed my primary and high school education in Sivas. I am a graduate of History at the Sivas Cumhuriyet University. In 2003, I was appointed to Lice, Diyarbakır. I stayed there 6 years.

### **How long have you been working here?**

I have been working for 2 years in [the province center of] Diyarbakır, so for a total of 8 years in Diyarbakır.

### **What subjects and what classes do you teach?**

The first year I was appointed, there were no available classes so I taught Turkish (language and art) to second graders.

### **But you are a classroom teacher?**

I was appointed as a classroom teacher. After that, including this year, I have worked as a classroom teacher for four times. In my last job I taught grades 3 and 4.

### **What is the mother tongue of your students generally?**

At Lice, we generally had mobile education.<sup>1</sup> In the beginning, we taught students who came from distant villages. They didn't speak any Turkish at all. They didn't even know things like "come" or "go." That's how little their knowledge of Turkish was. The children didn't have a TV at home. So they never had anything to do with Turkish. Neither their parents nor anyone else around them spoke it. So it was whatever they learned at school.

### **Is this the case in the city center, too?**

The students in the city center know Turkish better, but we still encounter difficulties when we teach classes in Turkish.

### **What kind of a language background do you think children have when the education language is different from their mother tongue?**

They don't have any language accumulation in Turkish. They begin school with zero Turkish. They only know Kurdish.

### **And in terms of the thinking process?**

The children think in Kurdish. They don't know any Turkish! Everything is in Kurdish, they even dream in

<sup>1</sup>This is a kind of education where students from villages are taken to schools in more central areas by shuttles every day.



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Kurdish. That is how little they have to do with Turkish. Turkish is only the language they learn at school.

**Did you have any chance to read any academic resources, such as books or magazines, on teaching students who speak a language other than the major medium of education or on education of language minority students?**

Well no, I haven't. I don't even know if such a resource exists. I just don't know. I have never encountered any such resources. I haven't encountered any books which talk about how to teach students to read in a different language, how to educate them.

**Do you think a source like that would be useful?**

It may be. If I had known some Kurdish at least, I mean I suffered the consequences of not speaking their language. I explain things to children and I know that they don't understand, but I can't explain things in their own language. If I knew Kurdish I would explain things using Kurdish from time to time, but because I don't speak it I have great problems.

**Did any of your professors at university refer to this subject?**

No! Anyway, I am a graduate of History. If I had studied to become a classroom teacher, maybe they would have referred to it. But I studied history. When I first came to Lice I was actually surprised to hear that they spoke Kurdish here. I thought, wow, so they speak another language! When I first came here, it felt as if I had come to a foreign country.

**What do you think about teaching students whose mother tongue is Kurdish? What kind of problems and difficulties are you encountering?**

It was at Lice that I encountered difficulties the most. I was teaching my class their very first Turkish lesson, we were reading a text. I asked them to explain what they read, but no one answered. I chose words from the text, "rolling" for example, which is so simple. The children didn't know what "rolling" means. I took a piece of paper and rolled it and I said to the children this is what rolling something is. It is so difficult, you end up teaching class on your own. You ask a question and then you answer it yourself. For example the level of the eighth grade I'm teaching is very low. Apparently that class is very good at math and science, but they are zero at Turkish. There is absolutely nothing. It's as if the children are forced to take these lessons. I feel as if I was torturing the children; they don't understand, so they don't want to listen to what they don't understand.

**Do you think this difference among lessons is language related?**

Of course! The children don't understand, and when they don't understand, they don't find the subject interesting. For example, when I taught first grade in a mountainous village, the children read beautifully. They were first graders and they read beautifully. I asked them what it meant and they said "I don't know," so they didn't understand anything they were reading. Once I asked them to read a story about a boy called Ali, whose grandfather had a walking stick... I asked this class of thirty students what "stick" means and no one



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knew. I banged the book shut. That is how little they understood!

**Through what kinds of methods and strategies could you overcome these difficulties? In other words, what methods have you employed in order to eliminate this lack of communication?**

Some children don't know any Turkish at all, and I came here without knowing a word of Kurdish. The neighbor question I mentioned before, I tell the children I went to a neighbor to change a tenner. I know the children are clever, they are successful, but I can see they don't understand. So I asked friends of mine what "neighbor" is in Kurdish, they said it's "*ciran*." So when I said I went to the "*ciran*" to change a tenner, the children began to understand. So I began learning some Kurdish too.

**Is there any difference between your thoughts at that time and your thoughts now, regarding teaching Kurdish children?**

We had more problems at the beginning. I encountered more difficulties at Lice. It is not that difficult in the city center. In the city, children know more Turkish. For example, I had problems with families in Lice. For example I asked a parent to come in, but neither did I understand the parent, nor the parent me. There was no common ground. But we encounter less problems in the city. The population here knows Turkish better. Students speak Turkish better. So I overcame my difficulties by leaving Lice.

**Did you have any difficulties in establishing communication with your Kurdish students' parents?**

Of course I did. You ask a parent to come, to tell him to make the child study, to attend to him. But the parent doesn't speak Turkish and he doesn't know how to attend to the child. He is completely ignorant. He is illiterate. The mother, the father, the brothers, the elders, they are all illiterate. So it was very difficult. Some people wanted their children to study and be successful but they didn't know what to do. It's because they are not educated, they don't speak Turkish. I ask a parent to help the child study and he says, "Son, I can't read, how can I help him?" So we had serious problems.

**What do you think are the disadvantages of Turkish being the only language of education for these students?**

I don't know from the students' point of view, they manage to learn things one way or another, but we encounter serious difficulties. Personally, as a teacher I have had many problems. Even today we continue to have problems. Oh I don't know, the level is so low, we have to deal with students whose level is very low. The system wears us out.

**Do you have any suggestions? What do you think should be done to overcome these difficulties?**

To start with, families need to be educated. It all originates from the families. The Turkish the students learn here is not enough, their families should speak it too. All the responsibility is on our shoulders. We are both their mothers and their fathers. We form all the elements of the education. It's quite difficult. I don't know, the state should find a solution. There is nothing we can do.



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**Do you think that teaching them Turkish before school would be a solution? Or to have them start nursery school at an earlier age?**

I don't know about nursery school. I have students who have come from nursery school and are even less successful. On the whole I don't know. I mean we don't understand what lies behind this problem. If we think about nursery school, we have students from nursery school too, but they are not doing well either. For example we have a girl who can't count from 1 to 5. She has gone to nursery school and she hasn't learned a single song. Nothing at all...

**Do you know anything about the Kurdish language? Have you had the chance to read anything about Kurdish literature?**

I don't know much, but I know that the Kurdish language is part of the European family of languages. I know sentences are inverted, as in English. I know for example that the verb comes before the object. I only know that it's different from Turkish, because it has a different structure.

**Last of all, what is your personal view on education in the mother tongue?**

Well, I think that if everybody was educated in their own mother tongue it would be less difficult for us too. We would be able to do our job more easily. I believe I would have fewer difficulties if I, who speak Turkish, worked with Turkish children.

**Thank you.**



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## Fazıl - Teacher

### **Can you tell us about yourself and about your education?**

I went to primary school in Siverek and I completed my secondary education in Urfa. Then I graduated in 1993 from the Siirt Education Department of the Dicle University. The same year I was appointed as a classroom teacher to the Bozkuş village, in the Selim district of Kars. I have been working as a teacher since then.

### **How many years did you work there?**

I worked there 3 years. Then I came to the Bismil district of Diyarbakır. I worked there 4 years and then I came to the province center of Diyarbakır, where I have been working since then at the 100. Yıl Primary School.

### **Did you speak Turkish when you started school?**

I can't say that we spoke Turkish when we started school. Although we had some familiarity with Turkish because we grew up on the streets, watching television and in the province center, we did encounter some problems of course. Although I personally didn't have too many difficulties, we had many problems when it came to pronouncing words in Turkish. For example I remember that I had problems with the word "helicopter," I just couldn't say the word "helicopter," I kept saying "elicopter." That's something I can't forget.

### **What is the mother tongue of students in general in your classes?**

In almost all the schools where I worked the mother tongue was Kurdish. In Kars, in Bismil, in the city center of Diyarbakır, in the Şehitlik district... For example, the first place I was appointed to was a Kurdish village; although there had been a school there since 1925, the villagers spoke its mother tongue, that is to say Kurdish. The majority of the children spoke Turkish when they came to school. But they spoke in their mother tongue, too. We didn't have too many problems there, since we were able to speak both of the languages. This was also because of the multilingual nature of the Kars city. There was a fusion of cultures because of the different languages and cultures that existed there, such as Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian and Arabic. So they generally knew Turkish. The Azeris knew Turkish, the Kurds knew Turkish; but knowing Turkish does not mean having full command of the language, the number of words they use daily is between 50-100, it's very low, and of course you have to carry out the education process with these 50-100 words. So it's not a good education. In fact it was Bismil where I encountered students who didn't speak any Turkish at all. Bismil received a large number of migrants especially in the 1990s, people migrated from villages towards the district centers.<sup>2</sup> The school where I worked was a primary school in a district that received a large number of migrants. I had 58 students, 3 were Arabs, they had come from Sason, the others were Kurdish and none spoke Turkish.

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<sup>2</sup> The migration mentioned is the result of war going on in the region for about 30 years. Many villagers were forced to evacuate their villages and move to other places because mainly their villages were burned by the Turkish Army.



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## **The Arab students didn't know Turkish either?**

The Arab students didn't know Turkish either. I didn't even understand that they were Arab at the beginning. They seemed like Kurdish children, but after I taught them Turkish I realized that their accent was different, their Turkish was different. Then I checked their birthplace: Sason. "Do you speak Kurdish?" "No, we don't." They said that they were Arabs. We had serious problems with these 3 Arab children and 55 Kurdish children. There is this too; it doesn't mean much for children, but let me put it this way: it's not as if the children have encountered a foreign language and are trying to learn it. It's rather that the children have this feeling of estrangement, a feeling of trauma arising from not knowing Turkish.

## **How did this reflect outwardly?**

To start with it reflected in the form of extremely shy behavior. Aggressiveness and ill-temper could also be seen in some children, because of the frustration resulting from the inability to express themselves. We therefore had some interesting dialogues with them. The fact that I spoke Kurdish did not create a major advantage. It could seem an advantage from the outside, but what we have here is an education process and the language of that education process is Turkish. And you have received training for the entire curriculum, for Maths, Science, Social Sciences, Introduction to Science, etc, in Turkish. And you are trying to express all these things to them in Turkish. And anyway, when the children come to school and I speak to them, they would never say, "Wait, I don't speak Turkish" or "Wait, I want to speak in Kurdish with my teacher at school." That's not the state of mind they are in; the environment created in the school is that "this is an official school, a state school and Turkish is the state language". So if I spoke Kurdish and expressed myself in Kurdish, the children would thought that it would be considered shameful. When they first began learning Turkish and they spoke in Turkish among themselves their dialogues were very funny. But when we observe these children in the school corridors, during the breaks and in the school garden, we see that it's the opposite, they are self-confident and relaxed, and they speak in their mother tongue when they play. Their eyes shine more brightly. But when you do an activity in the classroom and the language changes, those plucky, self-confident children disappear and they are replaced by meek and intimidated children.

## **Were they embarrassed to speak Kurdish?**

It's not so much that. There is this perception that in the classroom, in the official language domain I need to express myself in Turkish. There were two reasons for this: I believe that the first was because of the family. Although the child speaks his mother tongue, Kurdish, with family members, in order to learn reading and writing he needs to learn Turkish. It is known that families told their kids: "When you go to school speak Turkish, not Kurdish." That is the perspective, so that the child will learn reading and writing as soon as possible and be successful in his education. The second reason is the guidebook published by the ministry concerning teaching Turkish to children who don't speak Turkish. When I first began to work as a teacher, education inspectors gave us a seminar on this subject. The main thing that teachers who begin to work in our region are told is this: children must not speak any language but Turkish among themselves. Teachers must prompt children as follows: Turkish must always be spoken, not only at school, but also outside school, in the school garden, in the street and within the family. Many teachers implement in their class what the guidebook says. After all the teachers also do their best for the children to learn Turkish and to learn to read and write as soon as possible. And they may or may not be aware that they



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are implementing this policy of assimilation. What they are doing is to fulfill their duty. What is their duty? It is to teach reading and writing to the children. And for the children to learn reading and writing they first need to learn Turkish. The method to be used is up to the teacher. And which method does the teacher generally resort to? For example there is the “informants’ business” that has recently become a subject of much debate. For example, they (some of the teachers) tell some of the students to go and find who speaks Kurdish at home and to come and tell them. Since teachers cannot enter homes, this is the method that is generally implemented. So some children are accustomed to act as informants. A child would come and say to the teacher, “The other evening Hasan spoke in Kurdish with his mother.” So what does the teacher do? He employs different methods either to punish or to humiliate that child. We have encountered such things. Although among colleagues we said that this was wrong, it wasn’t limited to our situation, it was a common practice. This is how children in villages rapidly became part of the process to learn Turkish. What does the concept of education in schools actually mean? Cooperation between teachers and parents should not only be about the assimilation of the children and teaching Turkish to them, it is also about orienting the family towards Turkish. In almost all of the teacher-parent meetings parents would be told the following: “don’t speak Kurdish at home, speak Turkish. If you continue to speak Kurdish your children won’t be able to learn Turkish and if they don’t learn Turkish they won’t learn to read and write and their education process will be interrupted.” Families were incited in this way and via the mukhtars (the elected head of the village). If there was an army outpost in the village, and there was one where I worked, families were incited by the army outpost too, to speak Turkish. If you ask if there was excessive pressure, no there wasn’t, but it was presented in such a way that children and families had to learn Turkish. If children wanted to receive an education and to acquire a profession, they had to learn Turkish as soon as possible.

**So this is how children start school and discover that they need to study Turkish. Their parents and especially their mothers don’t speak any other languages. The only language they speak is Kurdish. How can mothers learn another language by themselves?**

This is how it happens without any coercion. When children start school and learn even one word a day, they share that word with their mothers. These are 7 year old children, when they encounter a foreign language their state of mind is ready to learn that language. They begin to think that their mother tongue does not mean much. They think that the language that means something is Turkish. This is how it is, otherwise it would be difficult for children who don’t know any Turkish at all to learn the language... As I said, I had students who didn’t speak a word of Turkish in the beginning, but after 4 months these children reached a level where they spoke Turkish among themselves. Children enter this rapid process of learning; they develop this desire to learn rapidly. They spread this desire to learn rapidly to their families too and most mothers of children who attend school and have learned Turkish begin to understand Turkish. Mothers can’t always express themselves properly in Turkish, but they understand people who speak Turkish. This is because of their children. There are many such examples in the community: they know the language, they understand it, but they can’t express themselves and we witness children who know Kurdish but can’t speak it. Once they begin school that is how their dialogues are: the mother speaks in Kurdish, the child replies in Turkish, then the child speaks in Turkish and the mother replies in Kurdish. That is how their dialogues are. As said before, the reason for this is the state-of-mind, the environment created by the school. The children carry into their home the language they learn at school.



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## **How do you feel about teaching reading and writing to Kurdish children? What kind of difficulties have you experienced or are you still experiencing?**

The method we implement is as follows: as stated in the ministry's guidebook on the education of children, you need to teach class as if the mother tongue of all the children is Turkish and they speak Turkish. Therefore, you teach them, you have to use whatever methods used while teaching to Turkish children. What is that method? The children were given cards: they would read as: "Come here, Ali." Now it's changed of course. In other words, Turkish children began with the sentences like "Come here, Ali" and Kurdish children too began with "Come here, Ali". Most of these sentences had pictures next to them; the current curriculum in the reading and writing process consists of teaching and developing the language. Thanks to the pictures the children understand what "ball" is in the sentence "Ali, throw the ball." And since Ali is a name and the act of "throwing" is expressed in the picture, that's how children begin to learn. Let us say that Turkish children grasp the meaning of something and learning takes place when you repeat it three times. The difficulty lay in the fact that we had to repeat things twenty-thirty times. Therefore, while a normal [Turkish] child should begin to read and write within three-four months, it took children who didn't speak Turkish – that is to say if they had a certain level of intelligence – a full year. That was the real problem. Children who are not reconciled to this language experienced great difficulties. These [children not reconciled to Turkish] constituted about one quarter of the school. These children were unfortunately crushed under the existing education conditions, that is to say they fell behind and most quit school in the second or third grade. So that's what the real problem is; anyway, when we look at the statistics, we see that for example if 80 children have begun grade 1, at the end of grade 8 only 40 children graduate out of those 80. That rate has risen a little now, but especially when I was working as a teacher, between 1993 and 2000, that is to say in 7 years of education, half of the students quit without being able to complete the 8 year process. When you look at the statistics for the whole region [Kurdish region] we reach the same conclusion. The main reason for quitting school included also poverty and the withdrawal of girls from school, but it wasn't only that. Another reason is that those who weren't reconciled to Turkish and who just couldn't learn the language [Turkish] were stigmatized as unsuccessful.

## **Can you think of an example of something that you yourself experienced?**

Well, for example there was this girl in Bismil. She did not learn either to read or write or speak Turkish. She was very introverted; although I paid special attention to her, I mean, students were studying in groups; there were 7 students in each group. I taught her all through grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. In the second term of grade 2, I was desperate. That girl just wouldn't, couldn't start to read. There were tests that the counseling service conducted with her, like all the other students, and all her tests resulted normal. Sometimes there are those who have mental disabilities, who are handicapped and they have learning difficulties. But our children didn't have any problems regarding their mental capabilities, nothing that would affect their ability to learn reading and writing or to learn Turkish. Although all their tests resulted normally, this girl in particular just couldn't learn reading and writing and I lost all hope. But somehow, at the beginning of the second term – her name was Zelal – I can't remember exactly how, but she suddenly began to read. That was one of the most interesting events of my professional life. I couldn't understand how it happened, but what I thought was that she just couldn't accept that process. I don't think that she had reconciled herself to Turkish.



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### **How did you communicate with them, in Turkish or Kurdish?**

I spoke both in Turkish and in Kurdish. She had an introverted personality, so she wouldn't speak much and of course she was from a migrant family. So she had been negatively affected by the migration. There was that too, but as I said, she began to read and write and after that became a very good student.

### **Well, did you generally speak in Kurdish with your students in class or outside class?**

That was forbidden at school. It still is. But of course when we had problems we did speak Kurdish. Interesting things happened with these children, everything was half Turkish, half Kurdish. For example once, when the roof leaked, a student said "the roof is *dilop*;" we had many other such examples... So our dialogues were half in Kurdish, half in Turkish. Visually it's not possible; we didn't have many technical facilities. You can't express it visually, but it's of use of course.

### **How did you communicate with your students' parents?**

The parents didn't speak any Turkish at all. It was especially the mothers who came to see us. In the parent-teacher meetings we spoke in Kurdish with the mothers. At those times, the language issue was not a problem, but our colleagues from other fields experienced problems in their meetings so they didn't want to organize any meetings. Parents too didn't want to go to see those teachers because they didn't speak the language [Turkish], or when they did attend meetings they were like mere spectators when the teachers told them about their children. So it wasn't possible to have serious dialogues. Sometimes we acted as translators, it worked out that way. In teacher-parent meetings it wasn't possible to say things like "come to school" or "attend to your child." So there you had parents hoping to find teachers who spoke Kurdish, nothing more. For example the parents of my students came to meetings because we could communicate, but the parents of other teachers' students didn't because they weren't able to communicate.

### **You have been working as a teacher for many years. Are there any differences between your thoughts back in your first years and now about teaching to Kurdish children?**

Of course there is difference! The success rate of children who are not educated in their mother tongue falls by fifty percent. This is a scientific observation that we learned about at university, in education sciences. But we have observed this in practice too. I have seen that very successful, very clever children are not able to complete their education process, that they give up because they are not educated in their mother tongue, that those who are pushed to continue and have trouble in graduating from high school have great difficulty in the university exams. Therefore I now believe that all children should be educated in their mother tongue.

### **When you were at university, did you ever discuss the situation of children whose mother tongue is a language other than Turkish? Or did any of your professors ever refer to this subject?**

We started university in '89. In those years it wasn't much of an issue in Turkey, but from time to time we debated this subject especially with the teacher of the Turkish class. As I said, it was a period repression, so debates on these subjects were generally brought quickly to an end. It didn't mean much at those times; we



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weren't able to develop any activities concerning the mother tongue.

**Did you have any chance to read any books, journals or other academic resources on teaching children who speak a language other than the medium of education?**

Sure, I have explored this subject. I examined especially the concept of the mother tongue and how other countries have solved this issue, when apart from an official language there are also local and regional languages. For example, let me tell you something from a research: for example I found it very interesting that in Norway there is a community that speaks the Sami language... The Norwegian government carries out a study and finds out that the crime rate is significantly high among its citizens who speak the Sami language; that the Sami-speaking citizens generally quit their education halfway; that the university enrollment rates are very low among them in respect to the Norwegian-speaking population; and that the community speaking the Sami language underwent this process because of not receiving their education in their mother tongue. So now they receive their education in the Sami language, the children receive their education in the Sami language. Teachers are even selected from among people who speak the Sami language and they provide the children with education in the Sami language. The problem is solved in that way. According to the research, most of the Sami children who are educated in their mother tongue are more successful, they continue with their education and there has been a significant decrease in the rate of crime, etc. When I compare this situation with the region where I live, when we look at Kurdish children, we see that the crime rate is very high. They also quit the education process very early on and they encounter serious difficulties when they attempt to acquire a profession and so on. As said before, the reason for all of this is the fact that they are not educated in their mother tongue.

**Do you have any suggestions for a solution, regarding education in the mother tongue? What do you think could be done?**

In a country like Turkey, I believe that the mother tongue is a politicized concept. It is not taken into consideration as a human right or as a basic education right but as a political concept. Education in the mother tongue should not be politicized. Whatever mother tongue children speak in, they should be educated in that mother tongue. There are current public debates regarding whether [mother language] education should be provided as elective course, or it should be in all stages of education or it should be in the form of courses only. But education in the mother tongue cannot possibly be provided through either courses or elective classes. I believe that it is necessary for everybody to be educated in their mother tongue, from nursery school until the end of secondary school or of high school. As I said, this issue is frequently debated in Turkey because it is politicized, but it should be evaluated in terms of education. It should be assessed from the point of view of pedagogy; conditions for this are appropriate in Turkey, there is the possibility for everybody to be educated in their mother tongue. New schools can also be established. Depending on demand, people may be educated in Turkish or in their mother tongue.

**Last of all, do you any knowledge of the Kurdish language? Have you ever had the chance to read anything about Kurdish literature?**



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I do know some things. I have carried out some research on this subject. In the sense that once we began to be aware of our identity, I began to think of who I am, what I am, I am not Turkish, my mother and father, my grandparents, my environment, my uncle, everybody speaks a language other than Turkish. You become aware of this. During our childhood and youth, assimilation policies and martial law were very harsh, but in spite of this you know that you are not Turkish, that you are Kurdish and you begin to speak this language with your friends. And you feel the need to look into what this language is, where it has come from, the scientific aspects of it. I too looked into it and found that it is a language different from the language family of Turkish. We have always been told that Kurdish is a corrupt version of Turkish and so on, that's how we have been educated. However, as a result of our research we have discovered that let alone the fact that the Turkish language and the Kurdish language may have been a corrupted version of one another, the two language families are actually different, they belong to two different language families. Discovering that Kurdish is a separate language gives you a pleasant feeling of course. The late Mehmed Uzun instilled in us a love for the literature, one of the first Kurdish novels I read was his, it was written in a beautiful language. I read novels like that and now that I have discovered Kurdish literature I read these books whenever possible.

### **That's the end of my questions, is there anything you would like to add?**

In terms of current affairs, I would like to say that now there are [Kurdish] courses, there is the TRT 6 channel and the Kurdish Institute opened in Mardin [Artuklu University] and they are getting prepared to accept graduate students. We were so excited when these courses first opened. The reason for this excitement was that a language that had been banned for 78 years, that did not exist, whose existence was not recognized, was suddenly officially recognized. So we were excited, but this sense of excitement did not last long. Why was that? Because it meant paying a fee to learn your own language; when those courses opened people did not show much interest because a course fee needed to be paid. But education is a human right. The state should provide it to its citizens free of charge. The state should provide it in its schools. But the establishment of the TRT 6 channel meant an important acquisition for the Kurdish language. Although it uses the state discourse, I still find it useful. The institute in Mardin has not been named the Kurdish Institute but the Institute of Living Languages, this is meaningless, but that's the way it is. There are names and institutes in these languages but the concept has been politicized; I believe that such things need to be overcome. If Turkey had some trust in itself, if it had the courage to name things, it would be possible for Kurdish Institutes, for departments of Kurdish literature to be opened in Dicle University [of Diyarbakır], Van Yüzüncü Yıl University and other universities in the region and for qualified lecturers to be trained. Sometimes we teachers get together and discuss this issue and we talk about the fact that even when the state decide to bring about a change and announce that education in Kurdish is free or even that it is elective, would we as teachers be ready for this? Some work has recently been carried out with this aim but it is not sufficient. We are not ready, I believe that we are not ready because there needs to be a scientific education process. The training we have received is totally based on the Turkish language; can that be transferred, of course it can in a period of transition, but I don't believe that it is sufficient. From that point of view I believe that the establishment of Kurdish institutes in universities would constitute a serious preparatory phase.

**Thank you.**



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## SUBJECT INDEX

- acculturation* 95
- additive bilingualism* 92-94, 96
- autonomy* 105, 106, 111, 113, 119, 122, 123
- Basque Autonomous Community* 102, 110, 112, 113, 114, 123
- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS)* 80, 81, 92, 93
- Batua* 112, 114
- biculturalism* 124
- bilingual education* 19, 44, 45, 89, 93, 94, 96-100, 118-128
- bilingualism* 44, 93, 96, 98, 99, 105, 114, 124, 126-128
- coercive power relations* 94-97
- Coercive relations* 97
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)* 80, 81, 92, 93
- Corsican Parliament* 105, 106, 107, 108, 122
- Corsican Statute* 105
- Deixonne Law* 108
- education policy* 123
- Hanzu (majority) schools* 120, 121
- Ikastola* 103, 112, 113
- identity negotiation* 92, 95-98
- immersion* 93, 94, 96, 113, 119
- involuntary minority* 95
- language policy* 19, 29, 35
- language proficiency* 80, 92, 93
- Law for the Normalization of the Use of Basque* 112
- linguistic interdependence* 92, 93, 96, 99
- linguistic minority* 44, 81, 92-97, 101
- literacy skills* 63, 64, 82, 87, 88, 90, 93, 97
- Min Han Haxiao (Integrated Education System)* 120
- Minzu (minority) schools* 120, 121
- mother tongue in education* 9, 10, 36, 38, 39, 41-45, 55, 61, 79, 89, 99, 101, 102, 122-128
- multilingual education* 94, 97, 122-125
- multilingualism* 99
- nation-state* 9-18, 20, 22, 29, 104, 108-110, 122
- national identity* 9, 10, 12, 13, 16-18, 22, 26, 29, 31, 33, 41, 115
- political and cultural pluralism* 35, 45, 110, 125, 128
- psycholinguistic* 92-96
- scaffolding* 82
- Scola Corsa* 107, 108
- Statute of Autonomy (Guernica)* 110, 111
- submersion* 90, 91, 93, 96, 97
- subtractive bilingualism* 90, 93
- subtractive education* 90, 91, 96
- voluntary minority* 95
- Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region* 115, 116, 117, 120, 124



## AUTHOR INDEX

- Akçura, Belma* 27
- Aldekoa, Jasone* 113
- Alpay, Necmiye* 29
- Anaytulla, Guljennet* 121
- Anderson, Benedict* 11, 14
- Atlı, Altay* 44, 83, 91
- August, Diana* 81, 88
- Ayan-Ceyhan, Müge* 44, 83, 99, 125
- Baker, Colin* 81, 87, 90, 93, 94
- Balaguer, Iuan S.* 105, 106
- Baldauf, Jr Richard B.* 125
- Balçık, M. Berk* 25, 26, 29, 31, 35
- Bankston, Carl* 94
- Behar, Büşra Ersanlı* 17, 25, 31
- Beşikçi, İsmail* 32
- Blackwood, Robert J.* 104, 108
- Borne, Dominique* 16
- Bostwick, Mike* 93
- Byram, Michael* 124
- Calhoun, Craig* 11, 16
- Caymaz, Birol* 22, 23, 25
- Clarke, Michael* 116
- Collier, Virginia* 81, 90
- Convey, Françoise* 107, 108
- Copeaux, Etienne* 16, 17
- Cruickshank, Ken* 118
- Coşkun, Vahap* 11, 17
- Cruickshank, Ken* 118-121
- Cummins, Jim* 80-82, 85, 86, 92-96, 119
- Çağaptay, Soner* 20, 27, 31-34
- Daftary, Farimah* 106, 107
- Derince, Mehmet Şerif* 86, 88
- Dunbar, Robert* 88, 90, 91
- Düzgören, Koray* 41
- Echeverria, Begoña* 114
- Etxeberria, Felix* 110, 113-115
- Erdoğan, Mustafa* 13
- Feng, Anwei* 124
- Ferrer, Ferran* 110, 111, 113
- Firat, Bahar* 44, 83, 91
- Foucault, Michael* 83
- Garcia, Ofelia* 90
- Gardner, Nicholas* 113
- Garzón, Juan S. P.* 108, 110, 111
- Gellner, Ernest* 17
- Genesee, Fred* 93



- 
- Gunther, Richard* 109, 112-115
- Gül, İdil Işıl* 39
- Gülmez, Yener* 85
- Habermas, Jürgen* 12
- Haddican, Bill* 112, 114
- Haugen, Einar* 125
- Heater, Derek* 12, 14, 15
- Hélot, Christine* 108
- Henrik-Magga, Ole* 88
- Hobsbawm, Eric J.* 15
- Huntington, Samuel P.* 11
- Hyer, Eric* 116, 117
- Hür, Ayşe* 34
- Işın, Engin* 20
- İşyar, Bora* 20
- Jaffe, Alexandre* 103-105, 107, 108
- Kaplan, İsmail* 23, 24, 26, 28
- Kaplan, Robert B.* 125
- Kirişçi, Kemal* 29, 32, 33
- Koçak, Mustafa* 19
- Koçbaş, Dilara* 44, 83, 99, 125
- Ladson-Billings, Gloria* 95
- Lasagabaster, David* 109, 112, 113, 114
- Lieberman, Victor* 115
- Lipscomb, Lindsay* 82
- López, Luis* 109
- Mackenzie, Pamela* 87
- Mahçupyan, Etyen* 20
- Maksudyan, Nazan* 26, 27
- Mar-Molinero, Clare* 111, 112
- McCarty, Teresa* 90, 94
- McDowall, David* 21, 36
- Meriç, Cemil* 30
- Merkel, Peter H.* 11
- Miguel, Gonzalo C. De* 110
- Millán, Jesús* 108, 109
- Millward, James A.* 115
- Moreno, Eduardo M.* 108, 110, 111
- Ogbu, John* 94
- Oran, Baskın* 36
- Öpengin, Ergin* 88
- Paulston, Christina B.* 124
- Petrusewicz, Marta* 107
- Pitollet, Camille* 109
- Portes, Alejandro* 94, 95
- Qingxia, Dai* 117-119
- Reid, Donald* 105
- Reny, Marie-Eve* 117



- 
- Romeo, María C. 108, 109
- Rong, Ma 117-119
- Rumbaut, Rubén 94, 95
- Sadođlu, Hüseyin 26, 30-34
- Salmi, Jamil 83, 84
- Sánchez, Alejandro W. 106
- Sebastián, Javier F. 110
- Schlüssel , Eric T. 119-121
- Shabad, Goldie 109, 112-115
- Shanahan, Timothy 81, 88
- Sierra, Josu 114
- Skutnabb-Kangas, Tove 80, 85, 88, 90, 91, 94
- Smith, Anthony D. 12
- Şahin, Bahar 29, 31, 37
- Şahin, İsmet 85
- Şen, Y. Furkan 13
- Terziođlu, Süleyman S. 19, 39
- Thomas , Wayne 81, 90
- Tilly, Charles 13, 15
- Tsung, Linda T. H. 118-121
- Tunçay, Mete 24, 25, 30
- Tunçel, Harun 34, 35
- Urla, Jacqueline 112, 115
- Virtanen, Özlem Eraydın 14, 18, 26
- Vygotsky, Lev 82
- Wallerstein, Immanuel 22, 27
- Wang, Zheng 115
- Wardhaugh, Ronald 15
- Wilson, Stephen Feuding 107
- Winrow, Gareth M. 29, 32, 33
- Wright, Sue 14
- Yaman , Seval 25
- Yan, Dong 117-119
- Yıldız, Ahmet 21, 22, 24, 28, 31, 33
- Yıldız, Kerim 41
- Yeğen, Mesut 27, 28, 32
- Zhang , Shuang 119
- Zhou, Min 94
- Zürcher, Eric Jan 20, 22, 29, 30, 31







*When I first started school next to children whose mother tongue was Kurdish, there were also students who spoke Turkish. They generally were the children of civil servants. I must have envied them. When you are little you are not conscious of these things. What is it like to envy the language of other people? It's really tragic. You say things like I wish I was born like that and I didn't encounter these problems. You feel excluded. It's a completely different psychological state.*

*Children in Istanbul or Konya and children in Kulp district of Diyarbakır don't begin their language education under the same conditions. These children learn a completely new language. And the teachers ask them to make comments in that language. For example we had writing classes. But we couldn't express ourselves. Our sentences were always inverted. And when you couldn't succeed, it influenced your knowledge in math and science too.*

This is how a Kurdish student expresses his experience of early school days and its enduring influence. The book, *Scar of Tongue*, is the outcome of a qualitative research conducted through the assessment of a wide range of sampling. Rather than simply seeing the use of mother tongue in education as a human right, the study seeks to explore how Kurds and Kurdish children in particular, have been affected by the state policies regarding language and education in Turkey in the absence of this basic human right and necessity. In other words, it is an attempt to better understand the linguistic, educational, psychological, social and political destructions of banning Kurdish language as a mother tongue in education in Turkey and to contribute to precautions aimed at eliminating those destructions.

In this respect, “*Scar of Tongue*” consists of three major parts: firstly, it focuses on Turkey's problematic political inheritance since the establishment of the nation-state, and the problems still posed by this inheritance; secondly it contextualizes this inheritance through findings of the fieldwork together with the theoretical analyses; lastly it compares and contrasts the historical-political context of Turkey with the language policy implementations in three different countries, Corsican in France, Basque in Spain and Uyghur in China with possible policy suggestions and precautions for Turkey.

“*Scar of Tongue*” aims to contribute to deepening of the current debates on mother tongue-based education and to development of an understanding of multilingual education - involving the use of Kurdish in education- in Turkey.