

Interregional migration and language shift among Turkey's ethnic Kurds[†]

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Introduction

Analysing population patterns and behaviour of ethnic groups in Turkey is a challenge due to paucity of reliable data drawn upon representative samples as well as overall very sensitive political context. However, the ethnic differences in Turkey's demography are significant as in many other multi-ethnic countries. Due to rapid urbanisation and violent ethnic conflict in the second half of the 20th century, Turkey has seen a major geographic shift of population which has also resulted in changes in ethnic mix of populations across regions. In this study, we aimed at mapping out these shifts. Nevertheless, finding the appropriate proxy to measure ethnic patterns is difficult as there has been no census or major survey data detailing language use published since the 1965 Turkish census while ethnic identity, as such, has been never been openly asked for in any census or major survey. Historically, mother tongue in surveys and censuses have been used as a proxy of ethnicity. However, we have first analysed a relatively recent survey data to raise concerns about the use of language as ethnic marker. Hence, we opted to utilise second language use as well as parental language besides birth-region as ethnic markers instead of mother tongue/main language as over the years Turkish has become the most commonly used language among the Kurds in Turkey.

Alba (2005) argued that blurred boundaries –which we often see in migration literature on second generations- can be associated with “the prospects and processes of assimilation and exclusion”. Alba et al (2002) pointed that languages spoken at home by third-generation immigrant children are most affected by factors including intermarriage. These arguments are not exclusive to international migration context and thus well be relevant to internal migration of ethnic groups such as Kurds from east to the west of Turkey. Considering language shift as well as widespread bilingualism among the Kurds (Zeyneloğlu et.al. 2014), we reject the approach equating mother tongue to ethnicity in censuses and surveys in Turkey.

Our analysis of the TDHS data in regards to parents' language and educational attainment shows that more than 3% of children whose both parents speak Kurdish as main language are reported not to be Kurdish speaking. At the same time, Kurdish speakers are almost non-existent among the children of those who do not speak Kurdish at all. Furthermore, Kurdish is only the second language

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among about 5% of children whose both parents speak Kurdish as main language. This figure declines below 2% among the children of persons whose main language is not Kurdish. It appears that some of the children of Kurdish parents have been raised in Turkish or have adopted that language as their main medium of expression at a later time.

Table 1 Cross-tabulation of parents' language versus respondent's language^a

	Parents' language		
	Both parents speak main language	Only one parent speaks Kurdish as main language	Neither parent speaks Kurdish as main language
Respondent's own languages	Column %	Column %	Column %
Main language Kurdish, does not speak Turkish as second language	21.3	3.8	0.0
Main language Kurdish, does speak Turkish as second language	70.0	25.7	0.1
Main language not Kurdish, but does speak Kurdish as second language	5.4	26.3	1.5
Does not speak Kurdish at all	3.3	44.1	98.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	1,203	62	6,805

^a Ever married women aged 15-49

Source: TDHS 2003 data

Education seemingly plays a role in language shift. We found that higher the educational attainment the lower the use of Kurdish language as it declines from over 99% among the uneducated to 87% among secondary school (including middle school) or above graduates. Kurdish is not even a second language for 13% of secondary school graduates. As Smits and Gündüz-Hoşgör (2003) have noted, there appears to be a *strong relationship between going to school and speaking Turkish* among Kurds. It appears that there is no bijective link between mother tongue/main language and ethnicity in the Turkish context.

The main focus of this paper is to explore internal migration of Kurds in Turkey and whether migration affects language shift besides education. We argue that overt questions on ethnic identity are needed to properly identify ethnic groups. Due to missing information on ethnicity as such, we employ 'birth region' as a proxy for ethnic origin, establishing that persons born in the predominantly Kurdish-speaking provinces are 'mostly' of Kurdish origin. Further, we make use of second language as well as parental mother tongue to locate ethnic Kurds within the data besides childhood region. First, we explain our methodology before analysing the internal migration of the Kurds in Turkey. Finally language shift is examined by migration patterns.

Data and methods

We have used tabulations from the 2000 Census full data, which is the latest available²⁸⁸. Considering the significance of intermarriage in language shift, we have focused on those aged 25 to 64 and thus avoided the institutional population and retired persons. The census 2000 data contains 29,801,881 persons aged 25-64. When persons born abroad as well as those whose birth place is unknown are excluded 29,083,058 persons remain. Persons living outside their birth region are classified as interregional movers in this study. Details of the choice for birthregion instead of language are explained in another study (See Zeyneloglu, Sirkeci, Civelek, forthcoming).

Table 2 Distribution of population born in regions according to region of residence and age groups (column % within each region of birth)

Region of birth	Region of residence in 2000 ^a	Age group							
		55-64		45-54		35-44		25-34	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
MAR	<i>Mar</i>	90.3	89.9	91.4	90.1	91.8	90.7	90.7	90.1
AEG	<i>Aeg</i>	4.7	4.9	5.5	5.9	5.3	5.7	5.7	5.8
	Mar	92.6	92.3	91.1	90.4	90.5	90.0	87.2	87.8
MED	<i>Med</i>	3.8	3.4	4.6	4.0	4.7	4.1	5.6	4.5
	Mar	89.6	90.4	87.9	88.9	87.1	88.7	82.6	86.2
CEN	<i>Aeg</i>	10.5	9.7	13.4	12.4	14.6	13.7	15.8	14.7
	Cen	5.3	4.4	6.0	5.2	5.9	5.4	5.4	5.2
		80.2	82.6	75.8	78.0	74.1	76.0	71.4	74.1
WBS	<i>WBS</i>	20.0	19.9	26.6	26.2	30.6	29.9	33.4	32.1
	Mar	4.4	4.7	5.1	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.8	5.4
	Cen	72.6	72.6	64.6	64.9	59.7	60.8	55.0	57.7
EBS	<i>EBS</i>	24.0	22.5	31.3	29.7	34.9	34.7	36.0	35.5
	Mar	7.1	7.3	6.7	6.9	5.7	6.6	4.3	5.2
	WBS	61.6	63.9	53.3	55.8	50.3	50.4	49.7	50.8
ESA	<i>ESA</i>	18.9	18.3	21.7	20.2	23.3	21.9	23.1	21.2
	Aeg	5.6	4.9	6.1	5.5	5.8	5.7	5.3	5.1
	Med	5.8	5.2	6.8	6.2	6.5	6.4	5.8	5.9
	Cen	5.6	5.6	6.0	5.9	5.9	5.7	5.3	5.0
	Mar	62.4	64.3	57.3	60.3	56.3	58.3	57.6	60.7
KSR	<i>KSR</i>	12.3	11.9	15.0	13.6	16.4	14.4	18.1	14.6
	Aeg	7.6	7.0	8.8	7.9	9.1	8.3	8.7	8.0
	Med	7.3	6.8	8.1	7.5	8.0	7.8	7.5	7.3
	Mar	66.1	67.9	60.1	64.1	58.3	62.3	57.4	63.6

^a Only those regions of residence with a share of over 5% in any age or gender group are indicated.

Source: Census 2000 data

Turkish censuses publicly reported the language questions until 1965. Kurds have been largely concentrated in 10 eastern provinces (Ağrı, Tunceli, Bingöl, Muş, Bitlis, Van, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Siirt and Hakkâri). Based on the 1945 Census results, we classified these as the KSR (Kurdish speaking region). Majority of people born in the KSR is expected to be of Kurdish origin. There are socio-

²⁸⁸ Until the year 2000 Turkey conducted de facto censuses and moved onto an address based population record system in 2007. The '2011 Housing and Population Census' is an 11% sample survey of the population.

economic development level differences between regions (Dinçer et al., 2003) and therefore out-migration propensities differ too (Sirkeci et al., 2012). The eastern and south eastern provinces we divide into two regions: the predominantly Kurdish speaking region (KSR) and the rest of Eastern and South Eastern Anatolia (ESA). Persons born outside ESA and KSR at ages 25-64 according to census 2000 are assumed to be of non-Kurdish origin.

Almost 80% of persons living in West and South who spent their childhood in KSR have a connection with the Kurdish language either as main, second or parents' language. Most of the remaining 20% we assume being Kurdish. In the less-than-primary education category only 4% have no connection to the Kurdish language which roughly equal to the Arabic speaking KSR population. Among primary school graduates this proportion rises to 30% while more than 59% of KSR-origin dwellers at secondary or above level in western regions have not expressed personal or parental usage of Kurdish.

Inter-regional Kurdish movers in Turkey

Interregional human mobility in Turkey has risen dramatically in the second half of the 20th century: While among the 55-64 year olds less than a quarter of couples had either wife and/or husband living outside their birth region, this figure rises to 39% among the 25-34 year olds.

Some regions have retained their native born populations. For example, 90% of population in all analysed cohorts and each gender born in Marmara region continues to live there. Similarly, around 90% of population born in Aegean region remained in that region with a small decline among younger age groups. In Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions, the percentage of those remaining in their birth region is very low. The percentage of KSR-born population still living in their birth region ranges from 57% to 68%. The out-migrating population from Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia is destined to several regions. While 18% of men and 15% of women at ages 25-34 born in KSR live in Marmara region, 9% of males and 8% of females do so in the Aegean (AEG). A further 8% of KSR-born males and 7% of females in that age group live in the Mediterranean (MED).

An interesting difference between age groups has to be noted for KSR. While in the groups above age 35 regardless of gender more than 95% of the population has been born in that region, among 25-34 males this percentage drops to 87% for males whilst measured as 92% among females in the same age group.

Migration and language shift

We found that monoglot Turkish speakers share in the KSR resident female population increases as educational attainment level rises. Unsurprisingly bilingualism increases sharply with education. We see similar pattern among Kurdish women resident in the Western parts of the country but with higher monoglot Turkish speakers and much higher levels of bilingualism irrespective of educational attainment levels.

Conclusion and suggestions for further analysis

In this paper, we have analysed interregional migration among the Kurds and language shift. Sizeable Kurdish populations have emerged in three regions, namely Marmara, Aegean and the Mediterranean. Language shift has blurred the

relationship between Kurdish language and the Kurdish ethnic so that mother tongue alone is declining in value as an appropriate ethnic marker in contemporary Turkey. Our analysis, using census 2000 data as well as TDHS 2003 data, provides an example of how and under which assumptions birth region together with second language as well as parental language use can be employed as an ethnic marker, though this method will probably be inappropriate with more recent data considering children of Kurdish migrants born in the western regions in the last few decades. Some of these offspring will adhere to the Turkish identity but some might retain their Kurdishness even with high levels of educational attainment. The time has come for ethnicity, as such, to be openly asked and recorded in Turkish surveys and censuses. Until then, most researchers including the authors of this article will have to utilize proxies as substitute.

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