

## A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Minorities' Language Right in Iraq

### Shabaki Kurds' after ISIS Invasion: A Case Study

Mohammed Sami Al-Assadi\*

Salih Mahdi Adai

University of Babylon / College of Education for Human Sciences

Article Info	Abstract
<p>Date of Article</p> <p>Received : 2023/12/25</p> <p>Received in revised form: 2023/12/27</p> <p>Accepted: 2024/1/04</p> <p>Available online: 2024/7/10</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p>Shabaki Kurds, language right, ideology, ISIS invasion</p>	<p>This paper addresses Shabaki Kurds' ideology towards the status of their own identity after migration to the south of Iraq because of ISIS invasion in 2014. Several drastic changes occurred after this international political and military event. A survey study is conducted depending on a questionnaire to elicit the data and analyze the subjects' responses. The findings of the study reveal that most Shabaki Kurds find themselves obliged to use other than their native language because of the circumstances of displacement after the events of armed violence in Iraq. Besides, although the use of the Shabaki Kurd language is eliminated, the Shabaki Kurds tend to employ the sociolinguistic strategy of language maintenance to keep their identity and culture. Moreover, it seems that religion has an impact on language use in Shabbaki social groups since Islam is their influential religion.</p>

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## 1- Introduction

All Iraqi ethnic groups and lives have been under the spotlight with the danger of genocide by ISIS armed guerrillas. Yazidis, Christians, Shabakis, Kurds, Failis and other minorities have been just a list in the queue. Other Shia and Sunni group were under the risk of murder since they rejected the rule of ISIS. Shabaki Kurds and some other minorities moved with nothing to the south of Iraq to face a new life and social community in cities like Najaf, Babylon, Diwaniya, Kerbala and Nasiriya. They lost their chance to complete education and faced the problem of social interaction in a language other than their own (see Web

source: 1). This study is the first of its kind in which the ideology of an important Iraqi minority (Shabaki Kurds) towards the status of their identity after migration and displacement is scrutinized. Thus, the current paper stands itself as an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are Shabaki Kurds' beliefs about their identity after moving to southern Iraq due to the 2014 ISIS invasion?
  - 2- How do Shabaki Kurds view their language and educational rights after being displaced to the south of Iraq by ISIS in 2014?
2. Language, Culture and Identity

According to Eberhard (2009: p. 1), the interrelation between language and culture stems from the human beings' immediate experience that constrains all facets of language. Most linguistic constructions are reflections of their cultural constructions. Identity, as a construct of culture, is based on the formulations of worldviews, values, conventions, social system and even economy.

Ideologies are constructed systems of ideas, they reflect and perpetuate the specific interests of their authors (Erikson and Murphy, 1998, p. 138). According to Kroskrity (2000) (cited in Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015), identity is viewed as "the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories" (p.111).

Identity can be constructed by different linguistic means such as lexical choices, grammatical structures, conversational styles, communicative practices (silences, greetings, ... etc.) and speech acts (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 72).

As Foucault (1980) correctly mentions, identities and selves are not fixed things; rather, they are constructed, represented and re-represented via discourse and many other linguistic manifestations. They are continually reconstructed and re-defined in different contexts and circumstances.

Identity is not a source but an outcome of linguistic behaviour (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 77). Our ideologies toward identity vary in different contexts and environments. Errington (2000, p. 115) defines language ideologies as 'a rubric for dealing with ideas about language structure and use relative to social contexts'. Some language users believe or 'evaluate' some linguistic ways as 'better'

than others (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 75).

Hegemonic ideologies invoke that some language varieties or languages dominate others given the impression that those other ones are deficient. Thus, such ideologies are indicative of using only one or two privileged varieties or languages in the domains of education, politics, legislation and formal offices (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p. 75).

In a similar vein, Grin (2005, p. 448) makes the assumption that our knowledge needs to be expanded of what diversity in society really is. Linguistic variety is the finest example of this diversity. Furthermore, it is challenging to provide a thorough analysis of topics like variety, policy, and diversity. He goes on to say that denying one's language might be interpreted as denying one's identity and culture. Since they will not need to acquire a second language in order to further their education or find employment, major language users will save time and money. Consequently, "the imposition of a dominant or majority language on others gives rise to potentially major inequalities. Their actual magnitude depends on the type and context of language dominance considered" (p. 455). This indicates that a settlement or payment is required in order to preserve minorities' linguistic rights in language planning and policy. Additionally, improving language revitalization and validation initiatives is greatly aided by language planning and "fulfills a language community's needs, objectives, and capacity." The language community should be involved at every stage of the process for language planning to be most effective, "and when the focus is placed on the community, its speakers,

and intergenerational transmission of the language" (Franks & Gessner, 2013, p.11).

It is believed that while language shapes identity, it does not represent it. It is vital to remember that actions shape who people are, not the other way around (May, 2005a). Furthermore, language management and organic assimilation have to take the place of language domination. Two important concepts in linguistic rights are dominance and power. According to Phillipson (1992), the existence of other languages is threatened by the dominance of English, which is a form of linguistic imperialism. One might imagine globalization to be a major factor in the improvement of English's expanding socioeconomic standing. "The growth of commerce and other economic interactions across international borders" is the definition of globalization. The language most frequently linked to globalization is English, from pop music to computers, from McDonald's to Coke, from dollars to movies. (Curzan and Adams, 2009, p. 490).

Communication and language use are closely tied to culture. The process of analyzing meaning, particularly pragmatic meaning, entails "a serial contextualization of our facts, context within context, each one being a function, an organ of the bigger context and all contexts finding a place in what might be called the context of culture" (Firth, 1957, p. 1940). Language actions, however, cannot be completely understood in isolation from or without reference to a certain culture (Lyons, 1977, p. 609). Therefore, it is possible to see speech actions as a mirror of particular cultural ideas and characteristics, such "social identity." From a cognitive perspective, our

mental processes for formulating and creating meanings by compromising our social and discursive worlds to create our own views of what we see and hear in our cognitive worlds constitute our linguistic understandings of language messages. Barrett (2006) draws attention to this theory when he contends that linguistic signs—words, phrases, and speech acts—are indexically deployed when they are changed to provide the intended context, that is, "indexicals to create social contexts... [communication] involves the projection of particular speaker identities and stances and the establishment of social relationships between participants. The contextual functions of an indexical are inseparable from its expressive and phatic functions" (p. 168). Language can therefore be utilized to highlight intergroup identities. In diverse or related ethnic and religious communities, it can replicate social and psychological ties. It is believed that these group identities are salient. Thus, using language or discourse, speakers try to emphasize or "construct" their participation in a socio-cultura group (Eelen, 2001, p. 216; Meyerhoff, 2011, p. 73). Identity is shaped by culture, particularly language, and it may take on many different connotations. For example, a person may identify as "a woman, a Briton, a Black, a Muslim. Herein lies the facility of identity politics: it is dynamic, contested, and complex" (Harrison, 1998, p. 248). Tabouret-Keller (1997, p. 315) asserts that "language acts are acts of identity." Self-identification, collective identity, institutional identity, and global identity are the four main subfields of identity study that he recognized. Furthermore, it is proven that individuals and groups have many identities based on the various roles they

can play or represent in the connections they participate in within society.

In a similar spirit, Fuller (2007, pp. 105, 107) defines social identity as the membership in a social group or category that is socially formed. Therefore, social identity is that which is created via discourse rather than that which is determined by variables [such race, sex, age, etc.]. In a previous study, Gumperz (1982) has argued that the creation and perception of communicative and interactive actions do not follow any universal felicity requirements or appropriateness rules. The application of speech rules to speech occurrences has demonstrated that language use, conventions "for what counts as appropriate speech behavior, as well as the very definitions of such events vary from culture to culture and context to context" (p. 3). He (1982) similarly contends that interactive continuous synchronization necessitates "some degree of predictability and routinization, such as is most commonly acquired by shared culture and similarity of interactive experience)" (p. 141). Although, distinctions among such activities as gossiping, debating and lecturing exist in almost all cultures, "but each culture has its own constraints not only on content but also on the ways in which particular activities are carried out and signaled" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 166). Additionally, each person will interpret each activity according to his or her past knowledge and the circumstances, even within the same culture.

## 2-Language Rights: A Theoretical Background

One of the key areas of research for several academic fields, including sociology of language, sociolinguistics, language planning, and policy, is the study of language rights. The

Language Ecology (LE) and Linguistic Human Rights (LHR) movements are well-known in this respect. The former views language and ecology in terms of the declining number of world languages within an ecological framework, while the latter "argues, often on the basis of LE premises, for the greater institutional protection and support of minority languages, and their speakers, both within national and supranational contexts" (May, 2003, p. 95). Therefore, language rights are concerned with upholding human equality through the eradication of linguistic difference and the improvement of language equality (Smith 1999, pp. 1-2).

### 2.1 Language Rights and Rights of Language

Making a distinction between rights of language and language rights is crucial. In Ogechi's 2003 statement,

The right of language(s) refers to the right of each and every language in a multilingual society to exist and the equality of opportunity for it to 'develop' legal and other technological limbs and to flourish. Language right refers to the right to use the language one is most proficient in, as well as the right of access to the language(s) of empowerment and socio-economic advancement. (p. 277)

The Language rights and human rights are therefore both essentially human and institutional. Nonetheless, both ideas are frequently employed interchangeably in research. These two concepts are combined in even international legislation, as those of the European Union, as in "Treaty languages," "official and working languages" and "languages recognized by the Constitution." (Urrutia and Lasagabaster, 2007, p. 480).

### 2.2. Rights and Regulation

International rules pertaining to language rights, according to Patrick (2005, p.p 371-2), seek to regulate rather than to eradicate specific conflicts. Thus, maintaining social justice, equality, and human freedom is their goal. All countries ought to recognize them as moral and social precepts that structure the international community and human rights. The promotion of "small" or minority languages is the purpose of language rights. As for Coupleland (2003), it is seen as a component of the "sociolinguistic theory of globalization."

Furthermore, a variety of issues has to be assessed in the context of preserving and advancing indigenous languages. These elements might be political, social, or economic. Others could be psychological, spiritual, or cultural. The statement "language plays a constitutive role in all of these practices" is confirmed by Patrick (2005, pp. 385–36). Therefore, in order to further our understanding of the rights to and preservation of indigenous languages, we require further ethnographic research and studies that provide a comprehensive picture of everyday social practices in a wider range of contexts.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) provides evidence that the United Nations Human Development Report from 2007 makes a connection between human development, linguistic rights, and cultural liberty. He believes that learning languages other than one's mother tongue destroys one's original tongue. Most immigrant minority students, many national minority students, and many students in post-colonial contexts throughout the world are being taught through the medium of dominant languages in submersion

programs, according to him (2009, p.2). In this setting, being a minority is perceived as a sign of low power rather than simply a demographic quantity. Similarly, Ricento (2005, p. 349) suggests that more linguistic rights emancipation is necessary for minorities and other marginalized groups, especially in liberal nation-states like the USA. But he contends that language as a right has minimal bearing on the advancement of language communication theories and politics.

### 2.3. Language Rights and Equality

Language rights are concerned with preserving human equality. Scholars have offered several cases and anecdotes to highlight the struggles minorities and other nations face in obtaining the freedom to speak in their native tongues. As Hornberger (1998) demonstrates,

"It is not only Welsh speakers who have become activists for the right to use their own language. Language rights, or linguistic human rights, have taken on increasing urgency worldwide in the light of the twin threat posed by the loss of a vast proportion of the world's linguistic resources – the endangered languages –and by the growth of world languages like English." (p.450)

The English language may pose a growing threat to other global languages in terms of dominance. A cursory look at any department at any university in the globe would make the point clear. Other languages' standing is threatened and even eliminated by the widespread use of English as the language of technology, the internet, communication, science, and even the majority of publications in the humanities.

### 3. Methodology



This study focuses primarily on the linguistic and cultural context of Iraq's Shabaki Kurds who provide a distinctive opportunity for the study of language and cultural maintenance or transition since they make up a marginalized speech community in the nation, particularly in light of migration and displacement. This study raises general questions about the role of various sociodemographic factors in the process, including the size of the group, demographic concentration, intermarriage with other Iraqis, attitudes and values, among other elements, while paying particular attention to measuring the degree of maintenance or shift in their speech.. Therefore, the current study relies on a modified version of Al-Khatib and Al-Ali's (2005) method. It mainly depends on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a questionnaire.

One hundred individuals, aged between ten and seventy, were chosen to participate in the study. The distribution of the sample by age, sex, employment, and education is displayed in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table (1): Distribution of the sample by sex

Sex	No. of respondents
Masculine	45
Feminine	55
Total number of subjects	70

Table (2): Distribution of the sample by age

Age	No. of respondents
10	7
11	12
21	34

31	40	19
41	50	10
51	60	12
61		5
Total number of respondents		100

Table (3). Distribution of the sample by educational background

Level of Education	Number. of respondents
Illiterate	49
Stage 1- 6	29
Stage 7- 9	9
Stage 10 - 12	10
Sophomores	1
Senior students or above	2
Total number of respondents	100

### 3.1 Instrument: The questionnaire

The questionnaire is used as the main instrument of data collection. It is composed of the following questions:

#### A- Language skills

- 1.Can you understand a conversation in Shabaki Kurd language?
- 2.Can you engage in a conversation in Shabaki Kurd language?
- 3.Can you read Shabaki Kurd language?
- 3.Can you write Shabaki Kurd language?
- 5."Can you grasp Arabic?"
- 6."Can you read Arabic?"
- 7."Can you write Arabic?"

#### B- : Language use in different sociocultural contexts and domains:

- 1
  - "What language do you use when you write a personal letter?"
- 2
  - "What language do you use when you speak with your neighbours?"
- 3
  - "What language do you use at home with your parents?"

- 4  
"What language do you use at home with your brothers and sisters?"
- 5  
"What language do you use when you meet friends?"
- 6  
"What language do you use when you meet friends in the neighbourhood?"
- 7  
"What language do you use when invoking or praying?"
- 8  
"What language do you use at religious meetings at the mosque?"
- 9  
"What language do you use most commonly when you are angry?"
10. "What language do you use when you are excited?"
11. "In what language do you have dreams?"

#### 4. Data Analysis and Results

At the first level of the questions, which is concerned with the language skills, the results can be represented in Table (5) below:

Table 5 Response percentages: Language proficiency in Arabic and Shabaki Kurd language

Language skills		Yes %	No %	A little %
1.	Can you understand a conversation in Shabaki Kurd?	100	00	00
2.	Can you engage in a conversation in Shabaki Kurd?	100	00	00
3.	Can you read Shabaki Kurd?	60	20	20
4.	Can you write Shabaki	50	25	25

	Kurd?			
5.	Can you understand Arabic?	70	15	15
6.	Can you read Arabic?	38	50	12
7.	Can you write Arabic?	35	52	13

The majority of Shabaki Kurd respondents, as shown in the above table, are able to speak and comprehend their native tongue. However, due to poor educational experiences and language loss during their time in school or at university, half of them are unable to write or read in their home tongue. the majority of employment in routine and creative occupations. Moreover, the results showed that they can understand Arabic mostly because of the pressures of daily communication and the need to go to school and live with job where Arabic is the official language and the most commonly used means of communication. On the other hand, most of the Shabaki Kurd respondents were no able to write or read Arabic only to some extent. Only educated subjects have been able to score high rate in reading and writing Arabic.

The Iraqi Shabaki Kurds tend to utilize their language in all ethnic, social, and cultural sectors, but to differing degrees, as Table (6) below illustrates. However, Arabic is only used for sending letters, attending religious gatherings, and praying. This happens because Arabic is the official language of the majority of formal settings and academic institutions, in addition to being a written language and the language of religious areas. However, whether they are upset, ecstatic, or dreaming, they frequently speak in Shabaki Kurd. These findings demonstrated that language may still be used to express people's social and

emotional aspects as well as to operate in some intimate and deep psychological contexts. These results appear to be consistent with those previously affirmed results that Shabaki Kurds are found to be competent in both languages due to the contextual and political factors and demands.

These results also suggest that the Shabaki Kurd speaking group in Iraq is now going through a language and cultural maintenance process, especially among speakers who are second and third generation. Speaking with many of the older and middle-aged respondents, it became clear that their Shabaki

Kurd vocabulary is growing rather than decreasing, in contrast to the younger age group of Turks, because they continue to use both languages for most purposes and circumstances. Conversely, some of the younger speakers have mentioned that they frequently find themselves using Arabic terms in place of Shabaki Kurd phrases while speaking with their parents or grandparents because they are unable to recall the Shabaki Kurd word. For instance, a 25-year-old responder stated that, due to the impact of Arabic.

Table (6): Response percentages: Language use in different contexts

Questions		Only	Mostly	Arabic &	Mostly	Only	No	Total
		Arabic %	Arabic %	Shabaki Kurd %	Shabaki Kurd %	Shabaki Kurd %	response %	Total
1.	What language do you use when you write a personal letter?	88	1				11	100
2.	What language do you use when you speak with your neighbours?	18	22	17	22	21	1	100
3.	What language do you use at home with your parents?	20	14	6	15	43	2	100
4.	What language do you use at home with your brothers and sisters?	30	12	7	12	37	2	100
5.	What language do you use when you meet friends?	29	18	19	9	21	4	100
6.	What language do	19	11	23	18	26	2	100



	you use when you							
	meet friends in the							
	neighbourhood?							
7.	What language do	96	1				3	100
	you use when							
	invoking or							
	praying?							
8.	What language do	50		2			5 *43	100
	you use at religious							
	meetings at the							
	mosque?							
9.	What language do	19	6	12	22	37	4	100
	you use most							
	commonly when							
	you are angry?							
10.	What language do you use	19	13	19	18	29	2	100
	when you							
	are excited?							
11.	In what language do you	24	16	24	12	22	2	100
	dream?							

## 5. Conclusion

It is concluded that :

- 1- Most Shabaki Kurds find themselves obliged to use other than their native language because of the circumstances of displacement after the events of armed violence in Iraq.
- 2- Although the use of the Shabaki Kurd language has been eliminated, the Shabaki Kurds tend to employ the sociolinguistic strategy of language maintenance to keep their identity and culture.
- 3- Religion and economics both have significant roles to play in language use. Given that Arabic is the language of Islam and that all Iraqi Shabaki Kurds are Muslims, the Shabaki Kurds have a tendency to favor Arabic exclusively in certain religious and social contexts. This tendency has been exacerbated by their desire to blend in with the majority Muslim community. Furthermore, the vast

majority of Shabaki Kurds discover that the only way they can make a livelihood is in Arabic.

- 4- Only educated Shabaki Kurds have been found to write or read Arabic since it is the language of schooling and academics.

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## التحليل اللغوي الاجتماعي لحق الأقليات اللغوية في العراق

لدى الأكراد الشبكيين بعد غزوداعش: دراسة حالة

محمد سامي الأسدي

صالح مهدي عداي

جامعة بابل / كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية

الملخص:

يتناول هذا البحث أيديولوجيات الأكراد الشبكيين تجاه وضع هويتهم بعد الهجرة إلى جنوب العراق بسبب غزو داعش عام 2014. وقد حدثت العديد من التغييرات الجذرية بعد هذا الحدث السياسي والعسكري الدولي. يتم إجراء الدراسة المسحية بالاعتماد على استبيان للحصول على البيانات وتحليل استجابات أفراد العينة. وتكشف نتائج الدراسة أن معظم الأكراد الشبكيين يجدون أنفسهم مضطرين إلى استخدام لغة أخرى غير لغتهم الأم بسبب ظروف الزواج بعد أحداث العنف المسلح في العراق. علاوة على ذلك، وعلى الرغم من إلغاء استخدام اللغة الكردية الشبكية، فإن الأكراد الشبكيين يميلون إلى استخدام الإستراتيجية اللغوية الاجتماعية للحفاظ على اللغة للحفاظ على هويتهم وثقافتهم. علاوة على ذلك، يبدو أن الدين له تأثير على استخدام اللغة لدى الفئات الاجتماعية الشبكية، حيث أن الإسلام هو دينهم المؤثر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأكراد الشبكيون، الحق اللغوي،

الأيديولوجيا، غزوداعش.س