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A STUDY OF ASSYRIANS' LANGUAGE USE IN ISTANBUL

Summary. Being one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East, Assyrians have continued to live in various parts of Turkey for thousands of years. Today, the estimates related to the number of Assyrians living in Turkey vary between 4,000–25,000 while they cannot benefit from the rights put forward by the Lausanne Treaty among which schooling is the most important. Assyrian community can be said to be deteriorating in number. This decline in the number of Assyrians living in Turkey raises the question of whether they could maintain their ethnic identity while maintaining their language (Syriac). No studies so far have been carried out to find out the linguistic practices of Assyrian community living in Turkey, as well as their attitudes toward the languages they use. This study aims at shedding light on the present situation of Syriac used among the Assyrian community living in Turkey. The participants are limited to those living in Istanbul due to practical reasons. In this study, language attitudes and language use practices of Assyrian community living in Istanbul are found out through a language attitudes questionnaire. It is hoped that the results of the study will provide the current situation of the Syriac language in terms of its ethnolinguistic vitality as spoken among the community. It is also hoped that the results of the study will provide useful data for those who would like to help protect the ethnolinguistic identities of Assyrian minority in Turkey, as well as all those dispersed around the world, which seems to have become increasingly important for such a country at the gates of the European Union as Turkey.

Keywords: Assyrians, Syriac, language attitudes, language shift.

Introduction

Social identity derives mostly from one's perceived membership to social groups (Liebkind, 1999, p. 142). Therefore, ethnic identity is seen as an important component of social identity. When minorities contact with majority groups, members of the minority group may consciously or unconsciously go through various sociocultural processes that influence their ethnic identities. Berry (1990, as cited in Liebkind, 1999, p. 142) has identified four strategies of acculturation that might take place when minorities come into contact with majorities.

Depending on the aspirations of the minority group members with regards to keeping their own culture and the degree of interaction they would like to be involved in with the members of mainstream society, the intergroup contact can result in a) integration, b) assimilation, c) separation, or d) marginalization. These processes are explained by Liebkind (1999) as follows:

> In integration, some degree of cultural integrity is maintained while one moves to participate as an integral part of the larger social network. In assimilation, original features (language, religion, etc.) are given up totally in favor of those of the majority. In separation, the opposite is true; that is, no features of the majority culture are accepted, and only the original minority culture is valued. In marginalization, neither the majority nor the minority can offer a satisfactory identity. In terms of language, it could mean loss of original language without simultaneous sufficient acquisition of the dominant language (p. 142).

Language provides the link between the individual's personal identity and his or her collective ethnic identity. Because language is the carrier of cultural differences, it is usually seen as the most important symbol of ethnic identity. However, research results about the link between language and identity is not clear-cut. It is widely acknowledged that language and identity appear to be interrelated in that language use influences the formation of group identity, and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage. On the other hand, a considerable amount of research suggests that language is not an essential component of identity. Liebkind (1999) concludes that the importance of language as a component of ethnic identity depends on the particular situation and social context of the language group.

Giles and Johnson (1987, as cited by Liebkind, 1999, p. 143) proposed the ethnolinguistic identity theory. According to this theory, the more important an ethnic identity becomes, the more its members attempt to make themselves favorably distinct on dimensions such as language. As a result, those members of that ethnic group try to differentiate themselves from the members of other groups through various strategies such as accentuating or switching to their in-group language. However, this is only true when the attitudes of the members of the group are highly positive towards the use of their own in-group language. If they are ashamed of their own language, they construct a negative social identity

and as a result may choose to identify themselves with the values and language of the dominant culture.

Language Shift and Attitudes

Language shift implies the cessation, by a speaker or a group of speakers, of using one language dominantly in almost all spheres of life and replacing it with another language (Pauwels, 2004, p. 720). When language contact reaches an extreme point that individuals give up one language in favor of another, it results in language attrition, and eventually language shift. Heine and Kuteva (2005) refer to the difference between language shift and language attrition, pointing to the fact that language shift is usually defined as a community phenomenon while attrition is a phenomenon of individuals (Myers-Scotton, 2002, as cited in Heine & Kuteva, 2005, p. 252).

Fishman (1991) reiterates the importance of intergeneration language maintenance of minority groups in order not to lead to language shift or at worst language death. He defines the major causes of intergenerational language continuity as population transfer and voluntary or involuntary out-migration (p. 57), contending that dislocation might also be social or cultural, in that members of minority ethnolinguistic groups are frequently socially disadvantaged, i.e. less educationally and economically fortunate than the average of the population surrounding them (p. 59). Fishman (1991) states that there is a need for time interval for a healthy language shift study to take place, in that an earlier study can serve as a benchmark for a currently contemplated comparative study (p. 41).

One way to study issues of language and identity is the study of attitudes since language attitudes reflect language not just as a means of communication but also as a symbol of a society/group (Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis, 2007). Therefore, the examination of language attitudes in contact situations is important since they derive from values and beliefs which are directly related to the sense of identity (p. 367). Fishman (1991) also refers to the complexity of measuring attitudes and adds that self-report data is the most practical way to collect data about language attitudes:

> Attitudes are inferred or inferable from things occasionally said and done; competence is often inferred or inferable from observed listening-to-Xish behavior, e.g. observed laughing or smiling at the right time when in earshot of Xish humor, observed correct following of oral or written instructions conveyed in Xish, etc. ... If attitudes and competencies do become of overriding interest or importance, there is usually no practical alternative to either collecting self-report data about them via 'scales' or 'questionnaires', on the one hand, or, on the other hand, to letting trustworthy and informed observers report their impressions as well and as uniformly as they can (p. 49).

Ethnolinguistic Vitality and GIDS Scale

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality is first introduced by Giles et al. (as cited in Liebkind, 1999, p. 145). This concept refers to a group's ability to survive as a distinctive collective entity in an intergroup setting. In other words, vitality refers to the number and importance of functions served by a language in society (Edwards, 2006, p. 327). Giles et al. group the factors that affect ethnolinguistic vitality in three sets: a) status (e.g., economic, political, and linguistic prestige); b) demographic strength (e.g., absolute numbers, concentration, birthrates, migration, etc.); c) institutional support and control factors (i.e., representation of one's own language in media, government, education, etc.).

A group's strengths and weaknesses in each of these domains could be assessed so as to provide a rough classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having low, medium, or high vitality (Yağmur & Kroon, 2003). Low vitality groups are likely to lose their distinctive identities in the end since they are entitled to go through linguistic assimilation. On the other hand, high vitality groups are more successful in maintaining their language and distinctive cultural traits. It is the perceived or subjective vitality is important, not the real or objective (Liebkind, 1999).

Fishman (1991) proposed a sociopsychological language vitality measure that is GIDS (Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale), which he likens to a 'Richter Scale' that measures the intensity of earthquakes. GIDS is likened to a Richter Scale in that the stronger the tremors in an earthquake, the greater the disruption of the established, normal geological strata. Similarly, high numbers in GIDS scale refer to low continuity and maintenance prospects of a language community (p. 87). GIDS scale provides us with parameters through which we

can decide the level of vitality of a certain language. In other words, it helps us to decide to what extent a specific language is threatened. Fishman's model is expanded by Lewis and Simons in 2009 as a more comprehensive and concrete document which may be used to understand a language's "endangerment and revitalization since it is a clearer reconceptualization of the factors indicative of language loss or vitality" (Obiero, 2010, p. 209). The scale is provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale

Level	Label	Description
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the national level.
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within major administrative subdivisions of a nation.
3	Wider Communication	The language is used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.
4	Educational	The language is in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.
5	Developing	The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
6a	Vigorous	The language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.
6b	Threatened	The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children.
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.
8b	Nearly Extinct	The only remaining users of the language are members of the grandparent generation or older who have little opportunity to use the language.
9	Dormant	The language serves as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community, but no one has more than symbolic proficiency.
10	Extinct	The language is no longer used and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.

Language Maintenance

Edwards (2004) acknowledges the difficulty in defining what a minority group because being a minority group is directly related to the issues of power, prestige, and dominance. A distinction is made between indigenous minorities, who continue to live in their homeland, and immigrant minorities, who have stepped away from their homeland. This distinction should not be taken for granted and regarded without its problems in definition as social groups are not static with regards to geography and culture. As Edwards notes "we should try to remember that –historically and linguistically– change rather than stasis is the norm" (p. 458).

Pauwels (2004) describes language maintenance as the opposite of language shift. Language maintenance is seen as a situation in which a speaker or a group of speakers continue to use their language in some or all spheres of life although a dominant majority language exists and is entailed to be the main/sole language in these spheres. Both language maintenance and language shift are possible results of language contact, which can even drastically end with language death. This occurs in situations where an entire speech community stops using the language for a variety of reasons (p. 719). In the process of language shift, there exists a transition period that is characterized by transitional bilingualism (p. 720).

Maintenance of minority languages is also problematic in that whether we mean oral or written maintenance. The most important point about language maintenance is the ability of groups to transmit their domestic languages to coming generations without interruption. An interruption in this maintenance poses threats to the language (Edwards, 2006, p. 457). Therefore, for a language to be maintained without interruption it must be used naturally at crucial language domains such as the home, the school, and the workplace. However, these domains are linked to the social, political, and economic forces, both within and without the particular language community. Thus, people may choose to use the language of larger community for reasons like linguistic practicality, communicative efficiency, social mobility, and economic advancement. These reasons might finally result in more dangers to the minority language since for example forces of urbanization, modernization, and mobility might lead to

a decrease in the use of language both with respect to the levels of its use among individuals and in the number of people who use it.

When the case of Turkey is specifically considered, two studies on Turkish-Arabic speakers' language use are noteworthy in showing how bilinguals see their language use. Smith-Kocamahlul (2003) found that Arabic speakers in Antakya, Turkey, experience a language shift in a negative manner as younger generations' use of Arabic becomes less prominent in contrast to their use of Turkish. Sofu (2009) found in her study of three generations of Arab language speakers' use of Arabic and Turkish that a shift towards the use of the dominant language (Turkish) is observed in first and second generations, the third generation seem to be "more language conscious and see the maintenance of their language as a way to preserve their cultural identity" (p. 256).

Assyrian Community in Turkey

Assyrians have lived in various parts of Turkey for thousands of years. Today the Assyrian communities seem to be prominently present in the cities of Mardin and Istanbul. Unfortunately, we were unable to reach an exact official number of Assyrians currently living in Turkey. However, Karimova and Deverell (2001) provide sources related to the number of Assyrians living in Turkey which vary between 4.000 to 25.000. On the other hand, they also contend that 45.000 Assyrians out of a total number of 50,000 migrated from Turkey in the last 20 years, with only 5,000 Assyrians are left in Turkey. Schleifer (2006) reported 30–40,000 Assyrians living in the area around Midyat, a southeastern town in Turkey, 40 years ago. He stated that the present number of remaining families living in the town was only 100. In a 2008 report of Minority Rights Group International, based on a 1995 study, the number of remaining Assyrians in Turkey was stated around 15 000, the majority of whom live in Istanbul and around 2000–3000 of whom live in the south-east Turkey.

A reliable account of Assyrian history and linguistic identity is not available in the current literature. One point of crux in the history of Assyrian community in Turkey is their exclusion from the rights given to other religious minorities through the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 (Toktas, 2006). Although Assyrians are Christians, they cannot benefit from the rights laid out in the

Lausanne Treaty since these rights are given only to Armenians, Greeks, and Jews that reside in Turkey (Karimova and Deverell, 2001). Hence, they are deprived of the rights of founding their own schools (Oran, 2004) which is more likely to contribute to a break in intergenerational language transfer. As a result of hundreds of years of policies, Assyrians in Turkey have come to be described as a group who is "always denied any form of recognition by the republic, it is a community in steep decline and one that is rapidly losing its viability" (Karimova & Deverell, 2001, p. 12).

One major cause of discomfort for Assyrians was due to the military conflict that has been continuing for decades in the southeast of Turkey which forced them to migrate either to foreign countries or to larger cities among which Istanbul is the leading one (Donef, 2000). Although running away from war struck southeast of Turkey, they remain invisible to many as Karimova and Deverell (2001) describe the situation of the community in Istanbul as "some Assyrians have adopted a low profile, seeking to protect themselves through a degree of anonymity (12). These results show that sociolinguistic realities of minorities are not detached from the sociolinguistic existence of larger groups with whom they reside in a specific context. The unpromising situation of Assyrians stemmed largely from the unifying and homogenizing policies entailed by Turkey's commitment to being a pure *nation state* although it is beyond the scope of this paper to hold an extensive discussion regarding the political situation of the Assyrian people in Turkey. Nevertheless, it would be necessary to point out that the Assyrian community has gone through a great deal of social, cultural and political difficulties making it harder to maintain their ethnolinguistic identities in Turkey. On the other hand, there are promising developments because of Turkey's struggle in being a member state of the European Union regarding the betterment of rights of the minorities in general. To exemplify, Toktaş (2006) points out some improvements welcomed by the European Commission so as to reaffirm the rights of Assyrian Turkish citizens as follows:

> The Regular Report of 2001 by the Commission welcomed the adoption of a reform package of 34 constitutional amendments on 3 October 2001 as well as the formation of various human rights bodies (European Commission, 2001). Signs of increased tolerance towards certain non-Muslim religious communities such as the Prime Ministry issuing a circular to local authorities

> reaffirming the rights of Assyrian Turkish citizens, who had emigrated, to return to their villages in South-East Anatolian provinces or the permission for the opening of another Syrian Orthodox church in Istanbul were also noted (p. 494).

Despite such improvements, the situation is still far from being satisfactory since there is not an institutional or governmental support for the Assyrian community to help actualize their identity together with all its aspects such as ethnicity, religion, culture, and language. This decline in the number of Assyrian people living in Turkey raises the question of whether they could maintain their ethnic identity, an important aspect of which is directly related to the maintenance of the language, Syriac in this case. No studies so far have been carried out to find out the language use practices of Assyrian community living in Turkey, as well as their attitudes toward their mother tongue and the Turkish language. This study aims at shedding light on the present situation of Syriac as is used among the Assyrian community living in Turkey. The participants are limited to those living in Istanbul only due to practical reasons. In this study, language attitudes and language use practices of Assyrian community living in Istanbul are found out through an attitudes questionnaire. It is hoped that the results of the study will provide the current situation of the Syriac language in terms of its ethnolinguistic vitality as spoken among the community. It is also hoped that the results of the study will provide useful data for those who would like to help protect the ethnolinguistic identities of Assyrian minority in Turkey, as well as all those dispersed around the world, which seems to have become increasingly important for such a country at the gates of the European Union as Turkey.

Similar to Komondouros and McEntee-Atalianis (2007, pp. 368–369), the aim of this study is to present the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Assyrian community living in Istanbul, Turkey. Specifically, this study tried to fulfill the following aims:

(1) to report the current language use and competence in Assyrian language;

(2) to examine some sociolinguistic parameters and language attitudes at play along the broad lines of an ethnolinguistic vitality framework;

(3) to investigate the link between language and identity to see whether this may be an important factor in the language preservation;

(4) to explore whether these factors together may underpin the survival of Assyrian language.

Methodology

In this descriptive study, data were collected by means of a questionnaire originally developed by Komondouros and McEntee-Atalianis (2007). Permission to use the questionnaire was received from the authors by e-mail and the items were reworded to fit it into the context. The items were written on a five-point Likert scale in English that was translated into Turkish by the researchers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed with the help of an association of Assyrians living in Istanbul, Mesopotamia Cultural Association, during February 2010. Following a snowballing technique, individuals were reached directly and asked for possible individuals who could fill in the questionnaire. In reaching the participants, a gate-keeper who was an experienced and respected elderly man of the community helped the researchers to reach the members of the Assyrian community. Although 100 questionnaires were distributed, only a total number of 50 individuals responded with their questionnaires. Statistical analyses were carried out by using statistical software (SPSS 16.0).

Results

Demographics about the participants are given in Table 2. As can be seen in the table, majority of the participants define Assyrian as their mother tongue (64.3%) while 28.6% of the participants label Turkish as their mother tongue. These results suggest that more than 35% ethnic Assyrians' mother tongue has already become a language other Assyrian itself. Similarly, 39.3% of the participants have no informal education received in Assyrian. In terms of formal education, 71.4% of the participants have received high school or lower education. In terms of the household income, 75% of the participants claim to have less than 2500 liras per month which suggests that per family, their income level is below

average in many senses. Considering that more than 57% of them are from families with 5 to 9 members, this amount can only help to get by economically.

Table 2.

Demographics

Age	f	%
15–25	12	42.9
26–35	4	14.3
36–45	9	32.1
46–55	3	10.7
Sex	**f**	**%**
Male	21	75
Female	7	25
Mother tongue	**f**	**%**
Turkish	8	28.6
Assyrian	18	64.3
Arabic	1	3.6
Kurdish	1	3.6
Birth place	**f**	**%**
Istanbul	17	60.7
Mardin	1	3.6
Şırnak	4	14.3
Others	6	21.4
Educational degree	**f**	**%**
0-5 years primary school	6	21.4
0-8 years primary school	5	17.9
High school	9	32.1
Two-year university	2	7.1
Four-year university	5	17.9
MA/ MS	1	3.6
Education (formal and informal) received in Assyrian (in years)	**f**	**%**
None	11	39.3
0–1	4	14.3
2–3	7	25
4–5	4	14.3
6+	2	7.1
Household Income	**f**	**%**
0–1499	12	42.9
1500–2499	9	32.1
2500–2499	5	17.9
3500+	2	7.1
Number of family members in household	**f**	**%**
2–4	12	42.9
5–9	16	57.1
How important is it for you to speak Assyrian?	**f**	**%**
Not important	2	7.6
Very important	26	92.32

Forty-two percent of the participants are between the ages of 15–25 while 16% of all were between 26–35 and 22% are between the ages of 36–45. Those who are between the ages of 46–55 make up 16% of the participants while only 4% of them are between the ages of 56–65. In terms of sex, 48% of them are males and 52% are females. When asked about their native language, 64% of the participants state that it is Assyrian while 28.6% of them state that it is Turkish. In terms of their birth place, 60.7% were born in Istanbul. Participants' educational background reveals that 14.3% of them have received less than one year of instruction in Assyrian while 39.3% of them have not received any formal instruction in Assyrian. In terms of household income, most of the participants (75%) live in households with less than 2499 Turkish Liras per month. This result suggests that the Assyrians who participated in this study are lower middle class or lower class individuals. It can be said that the participants are from large families (57.1% having 5–9 family members within their household). Finally, 92.3% of the participants claim that it is very important for them to be able to speak Assyrian.

Table 3.

The percentages of the use of Assyrian by family members from different generations

	None	**Few words**	**Very well**	**Home language**	**NA**
Participants	21.4	14.3	25	39	-
Parents	33.3	-	14.3	51.9	-
Grandparents	33.3	-	18.5	48.1	-
Children	14.3	17.9	10.7	10.7	46.4
Grandchildren	10.7	-	3.6	-	85.7

The use of Assyrian language by family members from different generations is shown in Table 3. Participants who answered the questionnaire acknowledge that only 39% of them consider Assyrian as their home language and only 25% of them can use it very well. Participants' parents, on the other hand, have higher percentage of using it as their home language (51.9% as their home language

and 14.3% very well). One step further, we see that participants' grandparents use the language more successfully than the participants (48.1% as home language and 18.5% very well). Hence, we understand that there is a sharp decrease in the use of their language as a mother tongue when different generations are considered. This decrease becomes more obvious when participants' own children are taken into account since only 10.7% of their children speak Assyrian as home language. Further, none of the participants state that their grandchildren use Assyrian as their home language. These results show the decrease in intergenerational use of the language. These results suggest that Assyrian language is now rarely known by these members as a mother tongue which may signal that the language is now endangered.

Table 4.

Frequency of the use of Assyrian language in different contexts (in %)

	Never	**Very little**	**Sometimes**	**Frequently**	**Always**
In family	28.6	14.3	14.3	17.9	25
Among relatives	32	3	21.4	25	17.9
With friends	48.1	11.1	22.2	14.8	3.7
At school/ work	64.3	14.3	17.9	3.6	-
Social- daily life (shopping, etc.)	35.7	32.1	28.6	3.6	-
At church	25	17.9	17.9	7.1	32.1
In other group meetings	46.4	10.7	28.6	10.7	36

Results related with the contextual use of Assyrian language are given in Table 4. As can be seen in the table, Assyrian is mainly used in participants' religious affairs (32.1% using it always at Church meetings) and personal group meetings such as celebrations (36% using it always). In family (25% always) and among relatives (17.9% always) are also the contexts in which participants use Assyrian. While 64.3% of the participants state that they never use it at school or work, 48.1% state that they never use it with their friends. These results suggest that social use of Assyrian language is almost non-existent in society apart from

religious services since none of the participants claim to use the language at school or work "always".

Table 5.

Language skills in Assyrian (in %)

	Never	Very little	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
How often do you write in Assyrian?	75	10.7	7.1	-	7.1
How often do you read in Assyrian?	60.7	17.9	17.9	3.6	-
How often do you listen to the radio or watch TV in Assyrian?	25	14	43	10	7
How often do you use Turkish words while speaking Assyrian?	3.6	10.7	21.4	28.6	35.7
How often do you find remembering Assyrians words difficult when you use it?	14.3	25	7.1	25	25

Table 5 shows participants' use of Assyrian in specific language skills. It can be seen that 75% of the participants never use it while writing and 60.7% of them never use it while reading it. Using Assyrian to listen to the radio or while watching TV is also low, only 17% of them doing it frequently or always. It is also noteworthy that 50% of the participants claim that they frequently or always have problems in remembering words in Assyrian during their communication. On top of that, 64.3% of the participants state that they use Turkish words while speaking Assyrian. These results show that Turkish words are replacing Assyrian words even when communication is handled in Assyrian.

Table 6.

Attitudes towards and estimations about Assyrian language (in %)

	Def. Agr.	Agr.	ND/ DK	Dis.	Def. Dis.
I wish I had more chances in using Assyrian in my cultural and social activities.	71	25	4	-	-
A real Assyrian must be able to speak Assyrian language.	75	14.3	-	7.1	-
Assyrian does not get the value it deserves in Turkey.	85.2	14.8	-	-	-

	Def. Agr.	Agr.	ND/ DK	Dis.	Def. Dis.
I am proud of being an Assyrian.	89.3	7.1	-	-	-
Using Turkish affects the development of Assyrian as a language.	43	35.7	7	10	-
Assyrian will always be alive in Turkey.	46.4	14.3	28.6	7.1	-
The Turkish state must increase its support to Assyrian language.	78.6	18.5	-	-	-
It is necessary to pass Assyrian to future generations.	85.7	10.7	-	-	-
One can be successful in business life without being fluent in Assyrian.	21.4	46.4	14.3	10.7	3.7
Younger generations marry non- Assyrian people more than past generations did.	14.3	48.1	14.8	14.8	7.4
It is necessary to learn Turkish for a better education and career.	43	25	7	7	10
There is sufficient support within the Assyrian community towards Assyrian language.	-	7	10	50	28
I think that the number of Assyrian speakers will decrease year by year.	42.9	28.6	14.3	3.6	7.1
I wish I had more chances of developing my own knowledge of Assyrian.	78.6	17.9	-	-	-
Assyrian does not have the status it once had in Turkey.	46.4	28.6	7.1	10	3
Speaking Assyrian affects one's business career negatively.	7	3	3	28	54
Assyrian language is an important part of Assyrian culture.	78.6	17.9	-	-	-
To be successful, I either have to learn Turkish or migrate to a foreign country.	3.6	17.9	7.1	37	32.1
Assyrian teenagers pay special attention to Assyrian language.	14	3	10	53.6	14.3
I feel myself fine and safe when I speak Assyrian on the streets.	35.7	21.4	25	14	-

Almost all participants agree that they are proud of being Assyrian (89.3% agreeing definitely) and 85.7% of them state that it is necessary to pass Assyrian to future generations although Assyrian does not get the value it deserves in Turkey (85.2% agreeing definitely). Those who believe that Assyrian language is an important part of Assyrian culture make up 78.6% agreeing definitely and 17.9% agreeing and the same amount of participants claim that they wish they had more chances of developing their knowledge of Assyrian because 89.3% of the participants argue that a real Assyrian person must be able to speak Assyrian language.

Conclusions

As we have mentioned above, a reliable account of Assyrian history and linguistic identity is not available in the current literature and this study attempted to fill the gap in the related literature. Knowing that language use fortifies the link between an individual's personal and collective ethnic and ethno-linguistic identity, we attempted, by reviewing the similar studies in the field and through collecting and analyzing empirical data, to show the language use specific to the Assyrians living in Turkey. Results of this study show that although 64.3% of the participants state that Assyrian is their home language, intergenerational use of Assyrian language points to the fact that none of the youngest members of the family use Assyrian as their home language in contrast to 51.9% of their parents and 48.1% of their grandparents used it as their home language. Results also suggest that social use of Assyrian language is almost non-existent in society apart from religious services since none of the participants claim to use the language at school or work "always". Furthermore, 60.7% of the participants state that they never read in Assyrian and 64.3% of the participants claim that they either frequently or always use Turkish words and expressions while speaking in Assyrian.

Assyrians do not live in a vacuum. As a part of the vivid social landscape of Istanbul, they constantly interact with their neighbors, friends, colleagues, customers or bosses who are not Assyrians themselves. Hence, 68% of them accept that it is necessary to learn Turkish for a better education and career in society. However, 67.9% of the participants confess that Assyrian teenagers do not pay enough attention to the Assyrian language. These results support the participants' view on the status of Assyrian in Turkish history since 75% of them believe that at present, Assyrian does not have the status it once had in Turkey.

Toktas (2006) mentioned the European Commission report released in 2002 by pointing out the problems faced by non-Muslim minorities, especially the Assyrians as an unrecognized minority group in the Treaty of Lausanne. Their difficulties in constructing new churches and not having a permission to open their own schools to teach their liturgical language for the training of the clergy and their ownership problems regarding their historical properties due to lack of legal personality all pose a threat for the sustainability of the Assyrian

community's heritage language. Hence, the future of Assyrian language is closely related to the possible legal actions that will affect their use of language in the years to come. In that sense, governments should consider both communities' as well as individuals' rights while forming their policies so as to engage its citizens with the rest of the society rather than separating them from it (Arikan, 2015, p. 84).

The importance of the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale in terms of understanding the specific level of endangerment of the language under study was mentioned in the beginning of this paper. As our data suggest, Assyrian community's language use is most likely to be placed either in the level 6b or in 7 based on Fishman's (1991) GIDS because our data shows that these levels' definitions fit well into our participants' use of their ethnolinguistic language since both our data and the levels suggest that in level 6b, "The language is used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users" and in level 7, "the child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves, but it is not being transmitted to children." Because of the primary limitation of this study, that is, the number of the participants, we cannot generalize these results, but we believe that our attempts may help us present an ethnolinguistic picture of the Assyrian community residing in Istanbul, Turkey.

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ASIRŲ KALBOS VARTOJIMO STAMBULE TYRIMAS

Santrauka. Viena iš seniausių krikščioniškų bendruomenių pasaulyje, asirai, jau tūkstančius metų gyvena įvairiose Turkijos vietose. Skaičiuojama, kad šiuo metu Turkijoje gyvena apie 4000–25000 asirų, nors jie ir negali pasinaudoti Lozanos sutarties teikiamomis teisėmis, tarp kurių svarbiausia yra teisė į mokslą. Galima teigti, kad asirų bendruomenė vis menksta, o gyvenančių Turkijoje skaičiaus nuosmukis kelia klausimą, ar Turkijos asirai gali išsaugoti savo etninę tapatybę, išsaugodami savo (sirų) kalbą. Iki šiol nėra jokių tyrimų, siekiančių išsiaiskinti asirų bendruomenės Turkijoje lingvistines praktikas ir jų požiūrį į vartojamas kalbas. Šio tyrimo tikslas – išsiaiškinti dabartinę sirų kalbos situaciją asirų bendruomenėje Turkijoje. Dėl praktinių priežasčių, tyrimas apsiriboja tik Stambule gyvenančiais tyrimo dalyviais. Šiame tyrime taikytas požiūrio į kalbą klausimynas siekiant nustatyti asirų bendruomenės Stambule požiūrį į kalbą ir praktinį kalbos vartojimą. Tikimasi, kad šio darbo rezultatai atskleis dabartinę sirų kalbos padėtį, kalbant apie etnolingvistinį kalbos gyvybingumą šioje bendruomenėje. Taip pat tikimasi, kad šio tyrimo rezultatai suteiks naudingos informacijos tiems, kurie nori išsaugoti etnolingvistinę asirų mažumos tapatybę Turkijoje, ir tiems, kurie yra pasklidę po visą pasaulį, tačiau domisi šia problema. Tai yra ypač svarbu tokiai valstybei kaip Turkija, esančiai prie Europos sąjungos vartų.

Pagrindinės sąvokos: asirai, sirų kalba, požiūris į kalbą, perėjimas prie kitos kalbos.