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## Языковые установки вынужденных переселенцев в регионе Курдистана

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**Аннотация:** Рассматриваются языковые установки вынужденных переселенцев, бежавших в Иракский Курдистан из-за угроз террористических групп с 2003 г. Данная социальная группа включает в себя преимущественно представителей арабской национальности, приехавших из разных регионов страны. Выбор данной социальной группы и языка анализа во многом определяют новизну проблемы исследования. В фокусе исследовательского внимания находится изучение уровня сформированных языковых установок и факторов, влияющих на отношение к своим этническим языкам или курдскому языку (как языку большинства в регионе). Показано, что большинство представителей рассматриваемой социальной группы в регионе по-прежнему позитивно относятся к своему этническому языку и гордятся им. При этом у них не формируется отрицательное отношение к курдскому языку, так как этот язык считается необходимым условием общения с другими участниками, устройства на работу и ведения бизнеса, а также распространения социальных и культурных ценностей курдского общества. Исследование показало, что анализируемая социальная группа вынужденных мигрантов не имеет враждебной настроенности к курдскому языку, несмотря на столетнюю историю этнических проблем с курдами Ирака.

**Ключевые слова:** языковые установки, этнический язык, язык большинства, вынужденные переселенцы, мигрирующий регион, социальные ценности, культурные ценности

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## Language Attitude among the Displaced People in the Kurdistan Region

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on the language attitudes of the displaced people who fled to the Kurdistan region of Iraq due to having the daily threats on their life by the terrorist groups since 2003. These people are mostly from Arabic nation and came from the different parts of the country, the language of analysis and the chosen social group contributing to the novelty of the research. The research aims at exploring the level of attitudes and the factors which affected the motivation of these people either towards their ethnic languages or Kurdish (the language of the majority in the region). It is shown that the majority of the displaced people in the region still have a positive attitude towards their ethnic language, are proud of it while having quite normal attitudes towards Kurdish, and believe that it is necessary for communication with other constituents, for getting jobs and conducting business and in order to spread social and cultural values of the Kurdish society. Here can be seen that the migrated people, who had about a hundred year history of ethnic problems with the Kurds of Iraq, nowadays have a normal attitudes towards Kurdish language.

**Keywords:** language attitude, ethnic language, language of the majority, displaced people, migrated region, social values, cultural values

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### Introduction

The object matter of this paper is the type of language contact and the motivation of the displaced people towards the Kurdish language. Its scientific novelty is due to presenting for the first time the language attitude of the displaced people

in the Kurdistan Region which is the Kurdish-populated territory incorporated into Iraq and considered by the Kurds as one of four parts of Greater Kurdistan.

Whereas the region is quite small in its territory, it is hosting the largest number of refugees from the wars in Iraq and Syria

(a total of 1,4 million displaced people according to a count done with UN help). A comprehensive count carried out jointly by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the United Nations indicates that some 850,000 war-displaced Iraqis have fled to the three provinces of the autonomous Kurdistan Region since January 2014. By the end of 2015 Over 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have fled their home towns and countries, and have found refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan<sup>1</sup>.

The displaced people are from Arabic, Turkmen and Assyrian nations, and they are from Mosul governorate on the border of Turkey and Kurdistan region with some from the central and northern part of the country. Their stay for years left no chance for them to have any contact with Kurdish, the spoken language of the majority in the region meanwhile Kurdish has been banned by the regime in Iraq since its demarcation by British mandate.

Kurdish has its certain linguistic status. It is a Western Iranian language, with two major dialects (Sorani and Kurmanji) and about four minor ones. It is thus related to Persian (though not a dialect of Persian, as some popular sources have claimed) and unrelated to Turkish or Arabic. Unsuccessful attempts to prove that it is a debased 'mountain' dialect of Turkish (various examples of which appeared during the twentieth century) were undertaken for the purposes of Turkish propaganda, and should not be taken seriously [1]. Kurdish has been in contact for a decade with Persian in Iran, Turkish in Turkey, and Arabic in Syria and Iraq and its situation has been changed by time. It faces a new challenge today in the Kurdistan Region due to embodying thousands of the displaced people and this may affect its situation again.

Due to this challenge the situation in the Kurdistan region is worldwide analyzing from a linguistic point of view. The aspect of sociolinguistic studies can be viewed as the region of multiple language contact. This type of contact gives the displaced people a chance to have some linguistic scenarios (language maintenance, language shift or creation new language) which vividly related to their attitude.

#### **Language attitude as an issue of socio-linguistic studies**

Language attitude is one of the most important factors that lead to maintaining a language [2, p. 114]. Baker C. defines attitudes as "hypothetical constructs that are interfered, conceptual inventions hopefully aiding the description and explanation of behavior" [2, p. 115]. The term "language attitudes" is an umbrella term. It comprises a wide range of research topics and areas:

- attitude to language variation, dialect and speech style;
- attitude to learning a new language;
- attitude to a specific minority language (e.g. Irish);
- attitude to language groups, communities, and minorities;
- attitude to language lessons;
- attitude to the uses of a specific language;

- the attitude of parents [together with other relatives as well as an individual's social environment] to language learning;
- attitude to language preference [3, p. 151].

Attitude can be classified into some levels. Holmes J. expresses three levels of attitudes towards a social or ethnic group [4, p. 211]. The first level is that of attitudes towards a social or ethnic group. The second level is that of attitudes towards the language of that group and the third is the attitude towards individual speakers of that language. Here the individual speakers are important and people generally do not hold opinions about languages in a vacuum. They develop attitudes towards language which reflect their views about those who speak the language, and the contents and functions with which they are associated. Holmes J. points out that the underlying assumption for learning languages is that in a society, social or ethnic groups have certain attitudes towards each other, relating to their differing positions. These attitudes affect "attitudes towards cultural institutions or patterns characterizing these groups such as language, and carry over to and are reflected in attitudes towards individual members of the group" [4, p. 212]. These levels of attitude deserved to be changed any time due to having some factors.

#### **Factors affecting language attitude**

Factors affecting language attitudes are many. Yet, the most decisive ones are: historical factor, sociocultural factors, prestige and power of the language, political factor, economic factor, religion and ethnicity.

*History* is one the factors that influence people's attitude towards a language or a language variety. Juvrianto C. states that "some Middle East people may not want to study English because they learn from their history that Western people were Colonialist" [5].

*Sociocultural factor* is another important factor because when a language associated with great cultural value, norms and beliefs will attract positive attitude towards the language from the people. Yoruba for an example is a honourific language that gives honour to people who are superior to someone because of this rich culture, people seem to love Yoruba. For example, Yoruba uses the second person plural "eyin" for an adult individual. Likewise a language that has a great social influence on people influence positive attitude. Some Nigerians will say they hate English language just because it does not respect status nor position in its language. This kind of attitude is based on the fact that this people consider English as a language that is not culturally rich. Baker C. argues that social factors affect the rate of language attitude. Migrants whose goal is to move upwards in society often experience rapid language shift as the better their knowledge of the dominant language is the better their chances of success are. Access to education also plays a part. Undertaking higher education, while providing migrants with opportunities for social and economic mobility, can also alienate them from

<sup>1</sup> Global trends: forced displacement in 2015 // UNHCR. The UN refugee Agency, 2015. Режим доступа: <https://reliefweb.int> (дата обращения: 02.02.2018).

their communities if other community members do not have the same opportunities [6, p. 127].

*The Prestige and Power of the Language* is important as well, some people assume that learning a foreign language will correlate with declining the national loyalty of the learners. However scholars have learned that the enthusiasm on learning a foreign language is not always correlated with a negative attitude toward the national and cultural feeling of the learners. In the African context, so much is attached to the ability to speak English. The term "illiteracy" has been attached to the inability to speak and write English. Thus, the attitude of Africans towards English is highly positive.

*Politics* it is another factor which may affect the attitude of language learners because the language with great political influence and power attracts people. Based on the truth that people love power and politics and some languages like French, English, Spanish and German have great political dominance in many countries [5].

*Economics* can't be out of the process and Language that is attached to great economic benefits and goods attract people. Many people around the world will say, "English is a language and when you learn English, you are assured of a good job". This kind of statement is given birth to because of the economic power of English. Calvet L. J. states that human beings are not always able to choose their languages, their choice is determined first and foremost by the milieu in which they find themselves, by the languages that coexist in this niche and then by their needs, and very little by the typological situation of the coexisting languages [7, p. 16]. Holmes J. states that economic factors such as employment opportunities also impact on the survival of a language within a small community. Learning the language of their host country often becomes critical in order for migrants to obtain employment [4, p. 119].

*Religion* is another factor which may affect the attitude, a language attached to a particular religion will attract positive attitude from people. A Muslim will always have positive attitude towards Arabic is considered as the language of the Holy Quran and it is the language that Allah (God) understands. A catholic person will have a positive attitude towards Latin because that is the language of the Roman Catholic Church. The same religious factor applies to a Sango worshipper. A Sango worshipper will have positive attitude towards Yoruba because that is the language of the Obakoso (Sango).

*Ethnicity* for some is vital as well and attitude towards an ethnic group influences attitude towards a language of the ethnic group. For example, in Kano state, Hausa as an ethnic group is regarded as a prestigious language because people consider the ethnic group a good one. This attitude influences positive attitude towards Hausa as a language.

#### **Attitude as a factor to maintain and shift languages**

Language attitude as one of the main factors to language maintenance or shift may have a positive or negative impact. For those who have a positive attitude towards learning new

languages, the result will be positive too, but for the ones who still believe that the prestige of their language is much more important the result will be negative. C. Baker argues that people who consider their language essential to both their ethnic and self-identities, and who have strong emotional attachments to their heritage language, are more likely to maintain the language than are those who define their identities through factors other than language [6, p. 130].

Weinreich U. argues that some ethnic groups stick to their mother language because of the emotional involvement with it, as one learned it in childhood or because of the role of language as a symbol of group integrity [8, p. 99]. Park S. M. & Sarkar M. who investigated Korean immigrant parents' attitudes towards heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain Korean as their heritage language in Montreal. They concluded that "Korean immigrant parents were very positive towards their children's heritage language maintenance. Korean parents believed that their children's high level of proficiency in the Korean language would help their children keep their cultural identity as Koreans, ensure them better future economic opportunities, and give them more chances to communicate with their grandparents efficiently" [9]. Not so far Kuncha R. M. and Bathula H. sought to investigate language attitudes of mothers and children in the Telugu community and how they relate to the loss of language in an English speaking country. The findings showed that although most of the Telugu people speak their own community language at home, the children are rapidly losing their language [10]. Also Tuwakham M. investigated language vitality and language attitudes of the Yong people in Lamphun province. The findings showed that the Yong people in Lamphun have positive attitudes towards their own language as well as other languages such as Kammuang and Standard Thai [11, p. 117].

The motivation of the community members towards the host language is one of the factors which can have a role in the process of language shift. Both Roberts M. and Starks D. identify a positive attitude on the part of a migrant community towards the language of its homeland as the essential ingredient in language shift. A positive attitude increases the likelihood that the language will be spoken in a number of domains and this assists the community in avoiding a shift to the dominant tongue [12; 13].

While the attitude of the migrant community can reduce the rate of language shift if the community values its language and feels that it is fundamental to its cultural identity, the attitude of wider society also plays a role. A positive societal attitude towards the language encourages a positive attitude in the migrant community which is essential to ensure the use of the language in different domains and resistance to language shift. C. Plimmer's study of the Italian community in Wellington found that its attitude towards the language was enhanced by the prestige of it being associated with fashionable clothes, cars, and food [14].

Romaine S. discusses the way in which stereotypes can be projected onto a language and how this can result



in the community making a conscious decision to stop speaking the language as self-defense in order to avoid stigma, such as in the aforementioned case of Dutch settlers [15]. Another example of this is Quechua which is spoken throughout Andean countries from Chile and Argentina in the south, to Ecuador at the northern tip of the Andes. Quechua speakers were encouraged to abandon their language in preference for Spanish which was considered the language of education, economics, and politics. There was a great stigma attached to being heard speaking Quechua and, in Peru, this was reinforced by the labelling of the shift from Quechua to Spanish as "integration into national society" [16, p. 292].

### Empirical studies related to language attitude

In the last ten years, some researchers investigated the language attitudes of the different ethnic groups in the world.

Khadidja A. is another researcher who investigated the different attitudes of the Kabyle minority group living in Oran towards the four languages that include their speech repertoire. The findings pointed that the Kabyle speakers of Oran manifest positive attitudes towards their native language. These positive attitudes may play a significant role in the maintenance of the Kabyle variety in the speech community of Oran where the predominant language is Algerian Arabic [17, p. 145].

Dweik B. S. investigated the language attitudes of the Chaldo-Assyrians of Baghdad, and found that the attitudes of the Chaldo-Assyrians towards Syriac and Arabic were highly positive [18]. He also investigated language choice and language attitudes in a multilingual Arab-Canadian community and found that Arabs of Quebec – Canada have positive attitudes towards Arabic, English and French [19].

Bichani S. investigated Language Attitudes in two Arabic Speaking Communities in the UK and her findings show that subjects' attitudes to the heritage language, in both its varieties, namely standard (Fusha) and colloquial Arabic, were generally positive [20].

Deji-Afuye O. O. investigated in Language Use and Language Attitudes in a Bi / Multilingual Community and found that there are several factors may affect the prestige and status of a language and thus, the attitude of people towards it [21].

Adesoji-Farayibi Ch. investigated the Attitude towards Igbo Language in High Schools in Nigeria and found out that the general attitude towards indigenous Nigerian languages has often been that of disdain and negligence, especially in the domain of education. Igbo, one of the major Nigerian languages seems to be the most affected among its counterpart-Hausa and Yoruba [22].

Belmihoub K. investigated language attitude in Algeria and his results show a strong preference of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), English, and French by native speakers of Algerian Arabic (Derja). Native speakers of Tamazight (a Berber language) preferred MSA, English, French, and Tamazight [23].

### Methodology

**I. Selection of participants.** Since the study was on the displaced people, any data from non- displaced people was not used. The displaced people are from different parts of Iraq and their staying in the region obliges them to have a contact with the other languages in the region. The subjects were also selected based on convenience sampling since their stay was still on, and I could get as many displaced people as were willing to participate. The only requirement was that they be displaced people and came from Iraq, not from other countries.

**II. Description of the participants.** The subjects in this study were 80 displaced people: 56 % male and the other 44 % female. The participants were from different nations; 70 Arab, 6 Turkmen and 4 Assyrian. Participants were categorized into groups as follow: age 15–24, age 25–34, age 35–44, age 45–54 and those above 55. The largest percentage was of those aged 15–24, who made up 40 % of the participants. The respondents were also categorized according to their level of education, 33 % have secondary school education and in the second position were those who have a high school education with 19 %.

**III. The survey items.** To address the research question, participants were surveyed by use of a questionnaire that investigated language attitude of the displaced people. The questionnaire had two main sections. The first section was an in depth exploration of the participants' biographical information to assess how various family backgrounds. This section sought information such as participants' age, gender, ethnic group, place of birth and parents' educational levels. The second part explored language use patterns seeking information on languages preferred in various contexts. The questionnaires were distributed to all willing participants along with necessary instructions. Since all the respondents were not in a high linguistic level therefore it's translated into Arabic, the ethnic language of the majority.

**IV. Data analysis.** The data collected from the questionnaire items was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Results are presented below with a table given for illustration. Open ended questions were categorized so that they would be interpreted for possible generalizations.

### Finding

For understanding the attitude of the displaced people in the Kurdistan Region a list of questions is designed. These question deal with the participants' attitudes and feelings towards both the ethnic language and Kurdish. The participants were asked to respond to twenty-four statements about their attitudes towards their ethnic language and Kurdish. Each statement is given five options to answer: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly agree.

Tab. 1 below shows the attitudes of the participants towards their ethnic language. The results indicate that the majority of the participants (72,5 %) like their ethnic language and are proud of it. Furthermore, the results indicate that the same ratio is given when the participants are asked whether they can

**Tab. 1. Attitudes towards the ethnic language****Табл. 1. Отношение к этническому языку**

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
I like this language and I am proud of it	6	2	14	23	35	80
I can express myself best in this language	6	4	12	26	32	80
I feel at home when I talk in this language	6	1	16	24	33	80
Knowledge of this language is necessary to maintain the unity of the ethnic group	3	2	11	26	38	80
This language is a symbol of my individual identity	1	6	18	24	31	80
Knowledge of this language is a symbol of prestige and social status	3	5	7	33	32	80
The ethnic language does not help me in the work	10	11	6	24	29	80
The ethnic language does not help me in higher education	14	4	10	31	21	80
It is the language of my ancestors, childhood and I am emotionally attached to it	–	3	–	29	48	80
This language is associated with my heritage and history	5	4	9	30	32	80
This language is dying in my home	5	2	16	30	26	80
It is important that my children speak ethnic language fluently	6	3	8	31	32	80

express themselves best in this language while 12,5 % disagree. Also, 71,25 % agree that they feel at home when they talk in their ethnic language; 20 % are undecided and only 8,75 % disagree.

When the participants were asked whether the knowledge of this language is necessary to maintain the unity of the ethnic group, the majority of them (80 %) agree; 13,75 % are undecided and 6,25 % disagree. Moreover, the majority of the participants (68,75 %) consider the ethnic language a symbol of their identity and only 22,5 % are undecided while 8,75 % disagree. Also the results show that the majority of the participants (81,25 %) regard their ethnic language a symbol of prestige and social status, only 8,75 % of them are undecided and just 10 % disagree.

Whether the ethnic language is useful and help them at work, 66,25 % of the participants believe that the ethnic language does not help them while 7,5 % are undecided and (26,25 %) disagree. Furthermore, 65 % of the participants believe that their ethnic language does not help them in higher education because Kurdish is the official language in the region and it is the language used in all domains; 12,5 % are undecided and 22,5 % disagree.

Moreover, the results in tab. 1 indicate that the overwhelming majority of the participants (96,25 %) regard their ethnic language as the language of their ancestors and childhood and only 3,75 % disagree. Also 77,5 % believe that their ethnic language is associated with their heritage and history, only 11,25 % disagree and the same ratios are undecided (11,25 %). 70 % of the participants believe that their ethnic language is not

dying in their home, while only 8,75 % agree and 20 % are undecided. Finally, 78,75 %, as pointed out in tab. 11, encourage their children to speak the ethnic language fluently, 10 % are undecided and only 11,25 % disagree.

Concerning the participants' attitudes and feelings towards Kurdish, tab. 2 below shows their opinion towards this language which is the official language of the region and used in different domains.

When the participants were asked whether they prefer to learn Kurdish in the whole country, the result shows that 65 % of the participants agree, just 18,75 % disagree and 16,25 % are undecided. About Kurdish speaking 68,75 % agree and show their positive attitude towards Kurdish and see it as an important language to speak, 10 % are undecided and 21,25 % disagree. With regard to the importance of Kurdish in the region compared to their ethnic languages, 67,5 % of the participants agree while 7,5 % are undecided and 25 % disagree. When they were asked whether they prefer to use Kurdish for social mobility, the results indicate that 58,75 % agree with this statement, only 11,25 % are undecided while 30 % disagree. When the participants were asked about the importance of Kurdish for communication with other constituents of Kurdish society, the majority (71,25 %) agree, 8,75 % are undecided and 20 % disagree.

Moreover, while the results indicate that 90 % of the participants believe that Kurdish is necessary for getting jobs, 7,5 % are undecided and 2,5 % disagree. Similarly, 90 % of the participants

report that Kurdish is necessary for conducting business, 6,25 % are undecided and 3,75 % disagree with this statement.

When the participants were asked if it is better to learn the Kurdish language in order to spread social and cultural values of the Kurdish society, 67,5 % of them agree, 20 % are undecided and just 12,5 % disagree. About the participants' consideration to see Kurdish as their future carrier language, only 18,75 % of them disagree, the majority (70 %) agree and 11,25 % are undecided. 53,75 % of the participants agree to speak Kurdish because it's the language of their children's school, 31,25 % are undecided and 15 % disagree.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants (78,75 %) agree that Kurdish has many dialects, which makes the communication more difficult, only 8,75 % disagree and 12,5 % are undecided. Finally, the results show that 61,25 % of the participants agree and see Kurdish as an interesting language, 33,75 % disagree and just 5 % are undecided.

### Discussion

The results shown in tab. 1 prove that about three-fourth of the participants still have attitude towards their ethnic languages and see it as the symbol of prestige and social status, their heritage and history, the language of their ancestors and childhood. This group of people are the ones who use their ethnic language in most of the domains, this result matches U. Weinreich who argued that some ethnic groups stick to their mother language because of the emotional involvement

with it, as one learned it in childhood or because of the role of language as a symbol of group integrity [8, p. 99].

It agrees with Park S. M. & Sarkar M. who investigated Korean immigrant parents' attitudes towards heritage language maintenance for their children and their efforts to help their children maintain Korean as their heritage language in Montreal. They concluded that "Korean immigrant parents were very positive towards their children's heritage language maintenance. Korean parents believed that their children's high level of proficiency in the Korean language would help their children keep their cultural identity as Koreans, ensure them better future economic opportunities, and give them more chances to communicate with their grandparents efficiently" [9].

It also matches C. Baker's words who stated that people who consider their language essential to both their ethnic and self-identities, and who have strong emotional attachments to their heritage language, are more likely to maintain the language than are those who define their identities through factors other than language [6, p. 130].

The results shown in tab. 2 confirm that about three-fifth of the participants see Kurdish as the important language for conducting business, getting jobs, spreading social and cultural values of the Kurdish society, and having a better future career. This group of people are the ones who integrated into the Kurdish community and use their ethnic language in some domains which have been discussed above. This agrees with C. Baker who argued that social factors affect the rate of language shift. Migrants whose goal is to move upwards

**Tab. 2. Attitudes towards the Kurdish language**

**Табл. 2. Отношение к курдскому языку**

Items	Strongly disagreed	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Kurdish is the official language of the region and Iraq, so it must be learned	5	10	13	28	24	80
It is important that I speak Kurdish in all domains	9	8	8	34	21	80
Kurdish is more important than my ethnic language in the region	19	1	6	28	26	80
I prefer to use Kurdish for social mobility	14	10	9	34	13	80
It is necessary for communication with other constituents of the region's society	6	10	7	37	20	80
It is necessary for getting jobs	1	1	6	48	24	80
It is necessary for conducting business	3	–	5	38	34	80
It is better to learn Kurdish in order to spread social and cultural values of the Kurdish society	5	5	16	28	26	80
It is the language of my future career	9	6	9	38	18	80
It is the language of my children's school, so I need to speak Kurdish	7	5	25	22	21	80
Kurdish has many dialects that make the communication more difficult	1	6	10	36	27	80
Speaking Kurdish is not interesting	25	24	4	13	14	80

in society often experience rapid language shift as the better their knowledge of the dominant language is the better their chances of success are. Access to education also plays a part. Undertaking higher education, while providing migrants with opportunities for social and economic mobility, can also alienate them from their communities if other community members do not have the same opportunities [6, p. 127].

It also matches J. Holmes' words who argued that economic factors such as employment opportunities also impact on the survival of a language within a small community. Learning the language of their host country often becomes critical in order for migrants to obtain employment [4, p. 119].

### Conclusion

The findings of this study cover the issue of the language attitude which is still the urgent field of researches related to the displaced people. The present analysis proved that the displaced people in the region still have a great attitude towards their ethnic language. The replies of the interviewed people vividly show that the displaced people of the Kurdistan

region are still proud of it and see it as a symbol of their individual identities (see tab. 1). It can be related to the fact that they can express themselves better in this language.

In spite of their proudness, the results indicate that the attitude of the participants towards Kurdish language is in a normal degree and more than half of the participants believe that it is important to speak Kurdish because it is the official language of the region and Iraq, It is necessary for communication with other constituents, for getting jobs and conducting business and in order to spread social and cultural values of the Kurdish society. Further research will focus on the language shift and maintenance among the displaced people and factors which facilitate each of them to see whether Kurdish language has left any impact on them during their stay in the region or not.

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