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## Concluding remarks\*

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The Kurdish linguistic landscape has changed greatly in this past two decades and it may change further by the time this issue of *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* appears – but the role of the Kurdish language (and other mother tongues in the areas) and mother-tongue-based multilingual education will remain central in building and developing societal peace. We will discuss some of these changes, and we will also make some recommendations for further research on the sociology of Kurdish.

The year 1991 is a significant turning point in Kurdish language studies. Turkey allowed the Kurds to speak their language in the privacy of homes and in the street. In this year in Iraq, the control of the central government was removed from major parts of Iraqi Kurdistan and a Kurdish Regional Government was established. Another development was the fall of the Soviet Union, where Kurds enjoyed some support for the language and this support came to an end.

We have witnessed further changes in recent years that illustrate how questions of language are intertwined with socio-cultural and political issues. In Turkey, there has been a spread of publishing in Kurdish in spite of the serious loss of language, and the spread of broadcasting. We have witnessed the beginning of Kurdish language courses on the university level for the first time. However, the slow response of the government to the mass movement for language rights in Turkey has not been acceptable to the Kurdish population. The Civil Disobedience Campaign in Turkey that “peace mothers” initiated in March 2011, with Democratic Solution Tents everywhere in Kurdistan-Turkey, has four demands:

1. Stop military and political operations immediately.
2. Education in the mother tongue and providing constitutional guarantees for using the mother tongue in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup>
3. Removing the 10% electoral threshold which hinders the representation of Kurdish people in the Assembly.
4. Releasing all political prisoners.

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1) See also Coşkun et al. (2011), and ([http://khrp.org/khrp-news/human-rights-documents/briefing-papers/cat\\_view/40-briefing-papers-and-speeches.html](http://khrp.org/khrp-news/human-rights-documents/briefing-papers/cat_view/40-briefing-papers-and-speeches.html)), *Culture and language rights – mother-tongue education in the Kurdish regions*.

The campaign is the strongest one ever by Kurds; the Turkish police reactions likewise, with beatings, arrests and intimidations. However, resistance, including various kinds of mass demonstrations for democracy is spreading, not only in Turkey but in the whole Middle East.

As one can see from the demands above (and experience when attending conferences and rallies in Turkey, both in Kurdistan and in western Turkey, and following the many court cases), public use of Kurdish (including the right to defend oneself in Kurdish in courts) and education through the medium of Kurdish (and other mother tongues in Turkey) are as central as other political demands. If Turkey did today what the Ottoman Empire promised in 1920, even excluding the independence Article 64, many of the current constitutional and legal restrictions on the use of non-Turkish languages would disappear. Local autonomy, including financial and cultural autonomy, with minority protection, would also lead to solutions addressing the economic, human rights, educational, linguistic and research underdevelopment of Kurdistan.

We do not want to suggest that once Kurdish human rights, including linguistic rights and mother tongue-based education are, respected all the other socioeconomic issues in the underdeveloped Kurdish regions including those related to language and education will immediately be solved. Nation-building and language planning are centuries-long and continuous processes. Since the Kurds started to manage their affairs in Iraqi Kurdistan in 1992 they have faced many challenges, from security, corruption, and fair parliamentary elections to education and language planning issues. Despite this, Iraqi Kurdistan became one of the rare polities in the region where what were thought to be distinct languages (e.g., Turkoman, Neo-Aramaic) started to enjoy language rights (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes 2008). At the same time, there has been a continuous debate over which Kurdish variety should be the official and standard language in the quasi-independent Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The Kurdish nationalist movement has been the major force in resisting linguisticicide. However, now that it has assumed power in Iraqi Kurdistan, it pursues an undemocratic approach to the conflict over the official, standard dialect and denies the bi-standard and multidialectal nature of the language. The nationstate ideology which, following the French Revolution motto, calls for the one nation = one language formula, has been pressing Kurdistan parliament to declare Sorani Kurdish as the sole standard and official language of Iraqi Kurdistan. Sorani speakers' claim has been rejected by Kurmanji speakers who believe that their variety is also standard, and thus deserves the same status as Sorani Kurdish. In the meantime, since 2006, some Hewrami speakers have expressed their desire to have elementary education in their own variety rather than Sorani Kurdish alone. These issues remain unsolved. Recent remarks by a Kurdistan parliamentarian, Tarigh Jambas, at the Kurdish Academy in Hewlêr indicate that very little progress with respect to both status and corpus planning has been made in Kurdistan-Iraq during the past twenty years (Anonymous 2011). A considerable number of Kurdish lexicographers, educators, linguists, writers, translators and broadcasters have expressed their frustration with the way Kurdish is managed in Iraqi Kurdistan characterized by a salient absence of not only clear general language policies but also systematic and well-managed corpus or acquisition planning. In addition, there is an extremist purist policy which has impoverished the language; this is surely not a state policy although it is practiced on all official levels and predates the KRG; it began in the 1920s. In sum, the language planning efforts are inefficient and inadequate in Iraqi Kurdistan.

It is safe to suggest that Kurds in Turkey may have fewer status planning difficulties in managing their choice of language. Iraqi Kurdistan has had a haphazard language policy and planning since the establishment of the new Republic of Iraq in the early 1920s. In Turkey where

Kurdish was officially banned until recently, the new language policy, including mother-tongue-based education when it comes, will not be built on equally shaky foundations. Moreover, Kurdish in Turkey is not as fragmented as it is in Iraq or even Iran; with the exception of about two million Zaza speakers, all northern Kurds speak Kurmanji. It might be easier to declare Kurmanji as the official or national language of Kurdistan-Turkey while granting linguistic rights to Zaza speakers.

Iranian Kurds may also be in a better position than Iraqi Kurds. If Iraqi Kurds have been heavily influenced by the linguistic properties of a very different language, Arabic, Iranian Kurds have been under the influence of Persian, the official language of Iran, which is linguistically and culturally much closer to Kurdish than are Arabic and Turkish. In Iraq, Syria and Turkey, a large segment of the Kurdish populations in urban centers have been alienated from their own language not only at the phonological and lexico-grammatical levels but also at the levels of register, genre and pragmatics. Furthermore, although East or Iranian Kurdistan is home to all the major Kurdish varieties and dialects except Zaza, it might be easier to decide on a national and official language there (i.e., Sorani) than it has been in Iraqi Kurdistan. The reason is that except for some Hewrami and Kurmanji speakers most Kurds in Iran seem to have accepted Central or Sorani Kurdish as their common language already. Thus it might be easier to declare it as the official local language, should Iranian Kurdistan obtain political autonomy. This prospect, however, seems remote at the present time. In fact, activities connected to the maintenance and development of Kurdish in Iran have experienced a considerable setback in recent years. Whereas over two dozen Kurdish and Kurdish-Persian periodicals were published in the late 1990s in Iran, the only non-state-sponsored Kurdish periodical that has survived the state's censorship axe is the monthly periodical of *Mahabad* (J. H., personal communication, May 3, 2011). Despite this and the non-implementation of Article 15 of the constitution, as an indication of linguisticicide or "let die" policy, publishing "nonpolitical" books in Kurdish, albeit in very limited numbers, have continued. A good example is the three-volume dictionary published by University of Kurdistan, reviewed in this special issue.

In Syria the status of Kurdish has not changed and "[v]arious bans on the use of the Kurdish language" (Malmisanij 2006) continue. However, judging by the events reported from Syria in May and June 2011, the country appears to be in a socio-political transition which may bring about changes to the status of the Kurds in that country as well. Syrian Kurds are different from Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Iran in that all of them are speakers of the Kurmanji variety. Therefore, they may not have to deal with the challenge of internal linguistic diversity at least in any near future. Nonetheless, any linguistic or educational transition (e.g., from Arabic only to bilingual, Kurdish and Arabic) will not be without its own challenges.

Of course, inter- and intralinguistic diversity is not unique to Kurdistan. All nations are more or less diversified linguistically. These diversities are situated historically, territorially and socio-politically, which means that each community needs to find its own way to appreciate linguistic diversity through reasonable and sound language planning and policies. To do this in Kurdistan, much more work and research needs to be done. For example, some of the basic information needed for research into the language and education of the Kurds is missing, such as the number of Kurdish speakers in general and also the population of each dialect group: Kurmanji in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, or Hewrami in Iraq and Iran and so forth. Knowing the number of Hewrami speakers would, for instance, help Kurdistan authorities if they were to decide on Hewrami-based education in Hewraman. Having more reliable statistics and numbers will also assist further research in the field.

Research is also needed in the area of corpus planning something not addressed much in this issue. After Hassanpour's (1992) book not much has been done about corpus planning for any of the dialect groups. It is no secret that for example in Iraqi Kurdistan a "poor" Kurdish is used and written in hundreds of television and radio stations, web features, and periodicals. Still, there has not been any noteworthy analysis of the existing corpus and acquisition planning in Iraqi Kurdistan. Further research into the complexity of language standardization, status, corpus and acquisition planning may raise more awareness among policy makers in Iraqi Kurdistan about the fact that remaining silent about the status of Kurdish varieties and the demands of some Hewrami speakers is not going to make the language debate in that region wither away. The lack of clear language policies is not a solution to linguistic conflicts and challenges of language management (Fishman 2001). In fact, the absence of a clear policy could be even more oppressive in a multilingual society: it ignores the rights of linguistic minorities and subtly continues to naturalize and perpetuate monolingualism. As Fishman puts it, "even the much vaunted 'no language policy' of many democracies is, in reality, an anti-minority-language policy, because it delegitimizes such languages by studiously ignoring them, and thereby, not allowing them to be placed on the agenda of supportable general values" (Fishman 2001: 454). As "beloved languages" need protection and preservation, they also deserve standardization, nationalization, etc., to be able to function in ways that modern life requires (Fishman 1997).

There is also need for research from a critical language policy perspective (Ricento 2007). This calls for research that focuses on language use (or lack of it) by all groups in a polity, ways of regulating and talking about language use (discourse), and, more importantly, educational practices: media of instruction, the teaching of languages as subjects, and the medium which the students and educators use orally. A more complete examination of the ecology of language must see languages within the contexts where they are banned, regulated, spoken, promoted, or taught. Language policy is not just practices carried out by policy makers from the top. It must include the speakers' bottom-up activities and resistance; non-official actors are the ones who directly or indirectly contribute to what languages are, are perceived to be, and will become.

The papers in this issue have a strong focus on the suppression of Kurdish. Future research should highlight the achievements of Kurdish in relation to vitality. Further research into Kurdish needs to be carried out with the understanding that a new Kurdish language order has started to emerge. The opening of borders has resulted in extensive contact and exchange between Kurdistans of Turkey/Iraq and Iran/Iraq. Diasporas used to be important as sanctuaries for publishing, but with the formation of KRG and the rise of social media they have lost much of their role even though they are still important to satellite broadcasting for all Kurds except for KRG. Satellite TV, mobile phones, and various social media are central to Kurds (and others) knowing about and being inspired by what is happening everywhere (including the millions of Kurds in diaspora in Australia, Canada, Europe, the USA, etc.; Sheyholislami [2011]). It is important and necessary to study what the social media and the Internet have done/are doing to the language in the context of continuing repression.

The papers in this special issue examine the social life of the Kurdish language, its troubled history, and the intricacies of undertaking research on Kurdish. These are viewed within the historical scope of Kurdish language issues before and after the fall of the Ottoman regime, and within the demolingistic scope of Kurdish in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq but excluding issues relevant to Kurdish in Syria, Armenia and diaspora. The volume provides detailed discussion of the topics listed above within the context of comparative/international case studies, which allows for similarities and differences between cases to emerge. The similarities outweigh the differences, and point to broader issues and concerns in the field of Kurdish studies and of general significance

to the field of the sociology of language, hopefully making this special issue of interest to *IJSL* readers from different areas of specialization. For instance, the focus on the harm done to indigenous languages and speech communities as a result of the forced removal of children and their re-education in residential schools as part of a “civilizing mission” closely parallels Aboriginal children’s experiences in Australia and North America, and will resonate with scholars and stakeholders working on language revitalization and reconciliation. Similarly, it will resonate with (other) Indigenous groups internationally (e.g., Indigenous/tribal researchers in Nepal, India, and the Nordic countries) engaged in language revitalization efforts and attempts to introduce mother tongue-based instruction in the state educational system.

Turkey goes to enormous efforts all over the world but especially in North America and Europe to silence the Armenians and rewrite history, trying to convince people that there was no Armenian genocide a century ago (for facts about the genocide, see, e.g., Fernandes [2007]). In a similar way, Turkey tries to convince the world that “there is no Kurdish problem” (in fact, it is, of course, a Turkish problem). The history of oppression and subjugation of Kurds and Kurdish, and of their purposeful under-development, vilainization, categorization as “uncivilized” or non-existent, has been silenced or rewritten in all Kurdish areas (even if this has now changed in Iraqi Kurdistan). In the articles of this volume, there is supportive overlap coming from hugely different sources, in the context of different countries, reporting on the same historical key events and processes involving Kurds and Kurdish. It will be harder now for states to discredit the issues – they cannot erase them from memory or rewrite memories emerging in different countries, from such different historical accounts. With the same “history” coming from such different angles as language historians in Syria, Iran, Turkey, etc., all of them reporting on the same thing, there is a huge “external validity” almost jumping off the pages of the combined papers, as one of the peer reviewers of the volume pointed out.

We hope that this volume can in a small way help in starting to remove some of the roadblocks that face Kurdish studies. The scholarly silence on the sociology of Kurdish has not been due to serendipity or a lack of importance of the language itself; rather, linguicide perpetuated by the states ruling over Kurdistan and accepted by others with grave economic, military and political interests in the region has played a key role in the omission of Kurdish from the scholarly literature. This special issue is also significant for its symbolic value: The Kurdish language is being highlighted in *IJSL*, *therefore it is*.

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