

Language and Literacy Practices of Kurdish Children

Across Their Home and School Spaces in Turkey:

An Ethnography of Language Policy

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved May 2015 by the  
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2015

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the language and literacy experiences of Kurdish minority children during their first year of mainstream schooling in a southeastern village in Turkey. I employed ethnographic research methods (participant observation, multi-modal data collection, interviewing, and focus groups) to investigate the language practices of the children in relation to language ideologies circulating in the wider context. I focused on the perspectives and practices of one 1<sup>st</sup> grade classroom (14 students) but also talked with seven parents, three teachers, and two administrators.

A careful analysis of the data collected shows that there is a hierarchy among languages used in the community—Turkish, English, and Kurdish. The children, their parents, and their teachers all valued Turkish and English more than Kurdish. While explaining some of their reasons for this view, they discussed the status and functions of each language in society with an emphasis on their functions. My analysis also shows that, although participants devalue the Kurdish language, they still value Kurdish as a tie to their ethnic roots. Another key finding of this study is that policies that appear in teachers' practices and the school environment seemed to be robust mediators of the language beliefs and practices of the Kurds who participated in my study. School is believed to provide opportunities for learning languages in ways that facilitate greater participation in society and increased access to prestigious jobs for Kurdish children who do not want to live in the village long-term. Related to that, one finding demonstrates that current circumstances make language choice like a life choice for Kurdish children. While Kurds who choose Turkish are often successful in school (and therefore have access to better jobs), the ones who maintain their Kurdish usually have only animal

breeding or farming as employment options. I also found that although the Kurdish children that I observed subscribed to ideologies that valued Turkish and English over their native language, they did not entirely abandon their Kurdish language. Instead, they were involved in Turkish- Kurdish bilingual practices such as language broking, language sharing, and language crossing.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this dissertation to My Mother and to Children who try to grow up multilingual, wherever they are.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciate for the people living in Guzelyurdu for participating in this research study. I cannot mention their names here for confidentiality purposes, but without them this project would never have been possible. I would like to thank the Kurdish children who participated in this study for welcoming me to their games, playground, and homes. They shared their feelings, stories, heroes, and drawings with me, and we became friends. I always felt honored to be welcomed into your world in your small village. I also wish to thank the Kurdish families who welcomed me to their homes, invited me to their lunches, and shared their experiences and life stories with me. I have learned more from each of you than you can imagine. Last but not least, I would like to thank the teachers who treated me as one of their friends or colleagues. I admire your knowledge and commitment. You are wonderful teachers!

I have been lucky to learn from and guided by outstanding faculty and mentors. I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Doris Warriner, my advisor. Thank you for helping me to evolve my thinking, guiding me in the academic world, and encouraging me to become a better writer, scholar, and critical thinker. I truly appreciate all! I would also like to thank my other committee members, Teresa McCarty, Beth Swadener, and Aya Matsuda. Dr. McCarty, I do not remember a single time spent with you without learning something. You are my academic role model! Dr. Matsuda, I always enjoyed learning from you in a friendly-professional way. Dr. Swadener, thanks for encouraging

me to actively involve children in my research. This dissertation would be a different study, most probably one without children, without your insights, feedback, and encouragement. I cannot thank you all enough.

In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Gregory Cheatham for mentoring me as research assistant during my first year of doctoral studies. I appreciate your efforts to make me a better academic. I would also like to acknowledge Drs. Rosa Jiménez, Kate Anderson, and Mary Eunice Romero-Little. Thank you all for being available to listen, read, and advise. Finally, I am grateful to the Graduate Professional Student Association and the Graduate College at ASU for their financial support during the research and writing process of this dissertation. I was lucky to live in the same state with Dr. Shirin Nuruddin, a graduate of ASU Language and Literacy program, while writing my dissertation. Thank you for reading drafts of the dissertation and encouraging me to finish and being such a good friend. Special thanks to my “study buddy” Lusia Nurani.

Arizona’daki komşularım Merve, Zahide, Mukadder, Fatos ve Nurcan, Arkadaşlığınız, desteğiniz ve neşe dolu çay saatleriniz bensiz yapmadığınız için çok teşekkür ederim. Sizinle olduğum zamanlarda tüm strelerimi unuttum. Teşekkürler! En çok da tezimin bitmesine belki de en büyük katkıda bulunan biricik, güzel, ve fedakar anneme teşekkür ederim. Anneciğim, duaların ve desteğin her zaman yanımda ve yardımcıım oldu. Tüm bunlara ek olarak, İrfan’ın doğumunda ve sonrasında yanımda olmak için bütün zorluklara rağmen çok uzun bir yola katlandın. Evin bütün yükünü üstlendin, İrfan’a en derin sevginle baktın. Bu tezi senin fedakarlıkların ve yardımların sayesinde bitirebildim. Canım annem, sana teşekkür edebilmem mümkün değil. Ve bu çalışmaya başlamamdan bir yıl önce kaybettiğim babama. Bu dünyadaki yokluğunun

acısını hala hissediyorum. Ancak, tez planlarımı onu son ziyaretimde paylaşma fırsatım olduğu için seviniyorum. “Tam olarak süreci anlamam ama bu çocuklar için faydalı birşeyler yapmaya çalış hep” demişti. Ben de faydalı birşeyler yapmış olmayı umid ediyorum. Şimdi olduğun yer buradan daha iyidir umarım. Ve kardeşlerime: birçok konuda benden desteğini esirgemeyen abim Mehmet, güvenini her zaman hissettiğim ablam Ayyuş’a, ne istesem hemen yapıp beni hep neşelendiren kardeşim Hülya’cığıma, ve en küçük kardeşim hem de yakın arkadaşım, en çok onun yanında güldüğüm Abdullah’a ne kadar teşekkür etsem az. Sizleri çok seviyorum, iyi ki varsınız. Kayınvalidem Saadet ve kayınpederim Ali’ye de destekleriniz ve duanız için yürekten teşekkürler! And, thanks to my sister-in law, Zehra and her husband Şaban for your encouragements!

Love and deepest thanks to my beloved husband, Sedat, for your invaluable support and friendship throughout this long and challenging journey. I must also extend very special thanks to Irfan, whom I consider the twin of this dissertation because I did most of the analysis and writing while expecting him. Indeed, it often seemed as if I was growing and giving birth to two babies at once! From your kicks and moves at the beginning to your smiles, hugs, and touches as a newborn, your presence inspired and motivated me to see this project through to completion. Being a parent improved my thinking and enriched my perspective in ways that enhanced my analysis of data and interpretation of findings. You have been the biggest joy! Bakhtin says: “the word is half ours and half someone else’s.” To everyone who has shared my words, thank you!

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## 1: INTRODUCTION

One hot and dry day of autumn I walked on dusty and narrow ways with Hami, a key informant for my research in Guzelyurdu village. His phone rang and he began his phone conversation in Turkish and continued a little before switching to Kurdish. It was clear the other person was speaking Kurdish to him. After he hung up, he turned to me and said: “See? I speak Turkish to him and he speaks Kurdish to me back. How can I stop speaking Kurdish? Even if I stop, they won’t.” The villager who called preferred speaking Kurdish even though Hami wanted to speak Turkish. Then Hami commented on the situation as a “fact” of their village that does not want him to maintain Turkish practices. He complained a little bit about people who preferred speaking Kurdish and said, “Even if I stop, they won’t.” Hami’s experience is representative of the challenging beliefs and practices of languages present in Guzelyurdu village. This snapshot is an example of the ideological and practical contexts in the language and literacy practices of Kurdish children.

In the next sections I discuss the situational and historical and social contexts of Kurds in Turkey to provide a larger context for the research study described here.

### Situational Context

The Kurds are a group of people who have been historically minoritized and marginalized in Turkey since the Turkish Republic was established in 1923. The Kurdish language was officially banned by the Republic until the bans were stopped in 1991. All Kurdish children and youth were required to learn and practice Turkish in their first years of school even though their native language was Kurdish. During the Ottoman Empire

(1299-1923) people were allowed to practice their own religion and culture and use their own languages in a loose, multilingual and multicultural structure (Hassanpour, 1992; Yegen, 2009).

Kurds were pressured to assimilate into mainstream society and the Turkification ideology (Hassanpour, 1992; Polat, 2007; Skuttnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994) when the Turkish Republic was established in 1923. Official bans led to the social stigmatization of the Kurds, and the bans and devaluation of the Kurdish language continued until 1991 (Yegen, 2009) when the Turkish government decided not to ban using Kurdish in public spaces any more but other limitations such as use in educational settings continued. Although the government stopped the official ban, social stigmatization has continued. During a personal conversation McCarty (2011) said top down policies take a long time to be observed in society. The rules that ended the ban of the Kurdish language did not mean an end to social stigmatization. Even though Kurdish is now allowed in elective classes it is important to consider the long years when Kurdish was banned and its sociopolitical devaluation.

Historical and Social Context: “Kurds in Turkey”

The Kurds are one of the minority groups that lived in the east and southeast regions of Turkey from the time of the Ottoman Empire, and it is the biggest minority group in terms of its demographics. They traditionally lived in tribes called *ashiret* in Turkey, and each *ashiret* was allowed to apply their own rule system to govern themselves led by their *sheikh* (the leader) or *agha* (Cornell, 2001; Emecen, 2010). They were more successful at maintaining their language, culture, and identity than other minority groups (Cornell, 2011; Yegen, 2009) because the Empire did not have a strategy

to change the culture or the language of a group as long as the group recognized its authority. There was no support for the education and growth of minority languages although minority languages were not banned nor were there strategies to oppress them.

The Turkish Republic (1923-present) used a completely different strategy to unify the language for education in Turkey after the Ottoman Empire (Cornell, 2001; Hassanpour, 1992; Polat, 2007; Yegen, 2009). Nationalism determined everyone who lived within the boundaries of the Turkish Republic were Turkish regardless of peoples' ethnicity in order to unify one nation led by the government. The official language was defined as Turkish in the first constitution of the Turkish Republic in 1924. This was not successful for people who did not consider themselves Turkish.

The experiences of Kurdish children living in Turkey is a critical topic given current Turkish politics, mass media, and public talk about the situation of Kurdish either because of the political problems with PKK (an extremist group) or the needs of Kurds as a minority group. In addition to all these debates and discussions on the state of Kurds and Kurdish in Turkey, the current government of Turkey was on the verge of adopting a new constitution to provide more freedom to individuals with a tolerance for diversity. This effort has ended and the government has stopped working on such a constitution because of the disagreements among political parties. This was outlined in an official letter by the new, constitution commission chair in November 2013 (retrieved from <https://yenianayasa.tbmm.gov.tr/>). Even though the government has stopped working on a new constitution, it has continued to take several critical steps about the state of Kurdish language. As context, it is important to note that this change in language policies was in addition to some other political changes that had been made for valuing Kurdish at



macro level such as the state run Kurdish TV channel that was launched in 2009 and positive explanations by the Turkish government.

#### Current State of Kurdish in Turkey

The children's native language, Kurdish and their identities as speakers of that language are important because of the way language practices and policies are applied in Turkey. In the early 2000s Turkey developed strategies to become a member of the European Union and there was a shift in the language policies. Even though it does not appear to be making special efforts currently, Turkey has continued taking steps to revalue the Kurdish language. The government's biggest step to increase the value of Kurdish in educational settings was announced in June 2012. The Prime Minister (at the time, it was Erdogan) announced the Kurdish language was allowed as an elective in schools with the new education system. The new system is called 4+4+4, and it makes 12 years of schooling mandatory for students (in contrast to eight years, the prior requirement) and allows minority languages, including Kurdish, to count as an elective beginning in 4<sup>th</sup> grade (retrieved from [www.meb.gov.tr](http://www.meb.gov.tr)). As a result, the Kurdish language is now allowed to be used and taught in schools.

In the new education system, children who have turned six years old before the school year begins have to start first grade. This was kindergarten age in the previous education system, and children started first grade when they were seven years old. This means the first graders of 2012-2013 in Turkey started schools without kindergarten experiences. The first-grade classroom was the first place this study's participants were officially required to learn and practice in a second language, Turkish. Hence, I

considered children's developmental processes while looking at their second language learning and practices during this study.

### Personal Context

This research evolved from the personal and professional experiences I have had in relation to what I knew about the unique situations of Kurdish students. My personal awareness of diversity has roots in my lived experiences in my hometown. I was born and raised in ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse city in Turkey, Hatay, which is located in the southeastern part. There is a saying in Turkey that if you want to look for a person from any nation, go to Hatay, and you will not fail to find this person. To the best of my knowledge, my ethnic ancestors are Turks and Turkish is my native language; however, in the area where I was born and raised and where my family lives, we had Kurdish, Arabic, and Laz neighbors and we had a close relationship with them. I have always been comfortable with ethnic and linguistic differences.

I focused on teaching English as a foreign language during my university years in Adana, 2002-2007, and I learned very little about children who come to school with a language other than Turkish. The curriculum assumed all students would be native Turkish speakers. I began to work as an English Teacher in Ovakent Primary School in Hatay after I graduated from university in 2007. Ovakent is a resettlement town for Afghani, Uzbekistani, and Pakistani refugees who speak different languages from each other, Afghans who speak Dari, Uzbek students who speak Uzbek, and Pakistanis who speak Urdu. Because of the large number of languages being used in Ovakent, residents often used Turkish as lingua franca. There were a small number of Turks living in the town as well. My experiences as an English teacher in that school were a turning point

for me. I taught multilingual and multicultural students in an education system designed by the nation to serve the majority (i.e., Turkish speakers) as defined by the constitution. I realized I needed to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy in my classroom on my own, and I did not have the professional knowledge needed to do so. My discussions about these kinds of challenges were always at personal levels during chats with friends who were ethno-linguistically diverse.

I started graduate school at Arizona State University with this experience and the needs of these minority students in mind in 2009. I did not know that Arizona would be a wonderful place to observe the effect of official policies on language practices at the micro-level. During my research projects and studies I had the opportunity to learn about English-only policies and the experiences of ethno-linguistically diverse groups such as Spanish, Native American, and immigrant groups from African and Asian countries as well as international students in Arizona schools. I also had the opportunity to learn about Turkish people's experiences in Arizona. I was a volunteer teacher for Sema Foundation's Saturday school founded by Turkish-Arizonans where I observed Turkish children's language and identity development and their families' experiences. It was meaningful to see these families' efforts (or lack thereof) to maintain their children's native Turkish, at least at the communication level because it was hard to teach academic Turkish to their children at home, alongside their experiences as students who also needed to be successful in mainstream schools. My observations and experiences in Saturday school increased my interest in minority children's linguistic practices and parents' influence on these practices.

The Turkish population in the U.S. is mostly highly educated and families willingly move here because of better job and educational opportunities or for family reasons. This meant they had advanced literacy skills both in Turkish and English. Despite that, not all families were successful in passing down their native language literacy skills to their children. I studied five families' experiences for my class projects and these then became my graduation project during my masters program. These studies demonstrated that parents had an important role in shaping their children's linguistic practices. However, it was clear this role was influenced by language policies, the social positions of individuals, and attitudes toward them and their children as ethno-linguistically diverse people in society.

Some parents "blamed" schools for poor native language skills of their children. Several complained about the English dominant environment during our conversations. Even though I was not a parent while I was working on these projects, it was easy to empathize with parents who described the dilemmas of losing their native culture. Families felt they were unable to speak Turkish to raise their child because they feared it would interfere with a successful educational experience. These experiences during my graduate studies and my teaching experiences in a Turkish Saturday school increased my awareness and interest in the language and identity experiences of minoritized groups in Turkey where I was born, raised, studied, and taught a foreign language.

I became particularly interested in Kurdish children's experiences because all discussions, even ones on the educational needs of Kurdish children, were heavily politicized and focused at the macro level. I wanted to understand the experiences and

views of Kurdish children, their families, and teachers with and gather insights into their daily life at the grassroots level.

Although I considered myself an insider to the diverse environment of my research and Kurdish culture in general, I was an outsider to the children's village, community, and their native language. I felt the excitement of doing something for the children's educational and linguistic needs as they grew up bilingual. I considered my research a journey to the world of the Kurdish children and their families, and I accepted the potential challenges of this role.

### The Present Study

In this study I investigate how macro-level policies and ideologies of language influenced the language and literacy experiences of Kurdish students across their home and school spaces. I was guided by five different, but related, theories of language, language learning, literacy, and policies. I drew on new language policy studies as a "situated sociocultural process" (McCarty, Collins, & Hopson, 2011, p.355) to investigate the language policies and their influences on the practices of Kurdish children. My inquiry shed light on what Kurdish children, their families, and teachers experience in a complicated context where top-down policies seem to ignore the real-life experiences and needs of Kurdish children.

I specifically aligned myself with McCarty's (2011) definition of this situated sociocultural process as: "the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people's language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways." I adopted Woolard's (1998) and Gal's (1998) perspectives on language

ideologies to examine the influence of beliefs of parents, teachers, and students' on their language practices.

Bourdieu (1977) discusses the existence of a “social power” associated with languages in linguistically diverse societies, and I used this perspective to examine how Kurdish children, their families and teachers positioned each language in their beliefs and practices. Bourdieu emphasizes that a person should speak “the appropriate language” to become a full member of the society s/he wants to get involved in when he discussed the relationship between social and linguistic capital in society. I have a critical sociolinguistic perspective on literacy and align my research with scholars (e.g., Au, 2005; Hull & Schultz, 2001, 2002; Street, 1984, 1993, 2003) who view literacy as a set of accumulated social practices that are developed in particular contexts.

I used these theoretical perspectives to explore how macro level policies, mainstream ideologies, and daily life practices of my participants were related. In addition to participant observation and artifact collection, I conducted interviews with first grade elementary school students, their teachers and administrators, as well as their parents and siblings. I examined how families and teachers perceive and position languages (i.e. Turkish, English, and Kurdish) that existed in their context and in their talk to understand sociolinguistic dynamics. I also looked at how teachers and administrators, as official representatives of macro level policies and mainstream society, have influenced policies and practices that might affect Kurdish children's language and learning experiences. In addition, I investigated Kurdish children's perspectives and practices across their home and school spaces in order to describe what they really experience within the complicated frames of policies, beliefs and expectations.

## Research Questions

My research questions emerged from my experiences growing up in Turkey, the theoretical lenses I draw upon, and the increasing need I see for a fuller understanding of Kurdish children's language and literacy experiences in the context of mainstream policies and ideologies:

- 1- What are the experiences of Kurdish children during their first year of mainstream schooling in Turkey from a sociolinguistic perspective?
  - a. What are their language and literacy practices in their homes?
  - b. What are their language and literacy practices at school?
  - c. What are the disparities and overlaps between these students' home and school language and literacy experiences?
- 2- What are children's perceptions about their school and home environments and the requirements of these two environments?
  - a. What do they say about using and learning Turkish? What do they say about learning and using Kurdish?
- 3- How does school staff view the language and literacy practices of their Kurdish students? What is their perspective of Kurdish children and their linguistic repertoire?
  - a. What do teachers and principals say about the language and literacy practices of their Kurdish students?
  - b. What do teachers and principals expect them to be able to do in their new environment?

- 4- How do parents of Kurdish students view the language and literacy practices of their children? What is their perspective of each language (Turkish and Kurdish) of their children?
- a. What is the role of the parents on Kurdish students' linguistic and identity practices?
  - b. What do the parents expect their children to be able to do both at home and in their educational places?

#### Significance of the Study

I investigated the linguistic practices of Kurdish children, an understudied group, at grassroots levels in a heavily politicized environment. The major findings from this study challenge ideologies that ignore minority groups' diverse practices in the language and learning experiences of Kurdish children in Turkey. This study contributes to the debates about "education in mother tongue" in Turkey while also shedding light on the learning experiences of Kurdish children. These insights from a politically complicated, multilingual Kurdish community contribute to theoretical discussions of the "social capital" of languages (Bourdieu, 1986) and the discussion of language ideologies (Gal, 1998; Woolard, 1998; Silverstein, 1999). My research findings describe the hierarchy among Turkish, English, and Kurdish languages in people's beliefs (Turkish is the most valued and Kurdish is the least valued) and illustrate the significant effect of mainstream policies on people's language beliefs. These findings are significant because they portray the strong and complex relationship between language ideologies, language policies, and practices of people in Turkey.



Another contribution of this study is related to its timing. After many years of language bans, Kurdish is being revalued and allowed in media, publications, and even schools. My research develops a snapshot of Turkey during a time when language policies regarding Kurdish at the macro level are undergoing significant changes. I believe my study will have a broad impact on what is known about Kurdish children's language and learning practices during a critical time period of value shift of languages. Overall, this study illustrates that diversity can be a resource rather than a deterrent within educational systems, especially one with language-only policies that disregard the linguistic diversity of its participants.

#### Overview of Chapters

In chapter 2, I provide a review of studies and theories that have helped me to frame this study. First, I presented a review of literature on language policy and planning with their relations to my research context. I discuss studies on minority language orientations in linguistically stratified contexts. I also present a review of literature on home and family context of minority children along with their second language learning process. Then, I examine language ideologies and linguistic cultural capital as theoretical notions that inform my perspective to the role of the state of language in people's beliefs, policies, social relations and power in the society. I then examine sociocultural theories of language and language learning that includes literacy as a social practice, language and identity along with how they shaped my view to the analysis of this study and its implications.

In Chapter 3, I describe the context of this research and the methods I used to conduct this study and to analyze it. In the section that I called setting the scene, I provide

a detailed description of Guzelyurdu village and primary school along with the social structure. In this section, I also discuss how I negotiated access and my role as a researcher. To conclude, I describe the methods of data collection as well as the data analysis processes I used.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are data analysis chapters. In chapter 4, I analyze views and ideologies about language, language learning and maintenance, and the state of languages (Turkish, Kurdish, and English) in people's talk. I also explore the nuance between people's beliefs and practices. Chapter 5 focuses on language policies as they appeared in the practices of teachers and school administrators. I also analyze how teachers' practices influence Kurdish families' language practices. In addition to being data analysis chapters, chapter 4 and 5 serve as detailed contextual information chapters for chapter 6 that focuses on social and linguistic practices of Kurdish children and their beliefs in their sociopolitically complicated local context. In chapter 6, I discuss how children construct the world around them and their practices such as language sharing, using Kurdish as a code, language brokering based on my observations, interviews with them, and their multimodal practices. In this chapter, I also discuss siblings' practices and their mediating role on family language practices.

In chapter 7, I review the findings of this study. I then present policy, pedagogical and methodological implications of this study. I conclude with a few recommendations based on the findings of this study.

## 2: FRAMING OF THE STUDY

In this chapter, I review literature that informs the focus and design of this study. In addition to relevant scholarship from the fields of language policy and planning, second language learning, and language maintenance and shift, I also review empirical qualitative studies on the social linguistic experiences of minority children and their families.

### Language Policy and Planning

Spolsky (2004) proposes that language policy consists of three components: language practices (ecology), language beliefs (ideology) and language management (planning). He suggests, “the real language policy of a community is more likely to be found in its practices than in management” (p. 222). An understanding of language practices is not possible without a careful understanding of language planning (Wiley, 1996). Language planning is defined as "deliberate efforts to influence the behavior of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocations of their language codes" (Cooper, 1989 cited in Hornberger, 1994, p.78). According to Fishman (1987) language planning is "the authoritative allocation of resources to the attainment of language status and corpus goals, whether in connection with new functions that are aspired to, or in connection with old functions that need to be discharged more adequately" (p. 409). Although similar to the definitions of other scholars, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) assert the reasons for language planning in their definition is an “attempt by someone to modify the linguistic behavior of some community for some reason” (p. 3; see also McCarty, 2013). According to Hinton and Hale (2001), language planning does

not have to be official; it can be the decision of a family, a few people or an individual. They explain further that language planning can be at both societal and individual levels.

There are three types of language planning (status, acquisition, and corpus) that are accepted and frequently cited by scholars (Hinton & Hale, 2001; Hornberger, 1994; King, 2001; Wiley, 1996). Hornberger (1994) presents an integrative framework chart that describes the goals of each type of planning that are informative to this study. Two of these that were specific to my research: status and acquisition planning. Status is about the uses of language and my research and analysis was focused on the Kurdish language practices of Kurds in a nationalized context that gave their minority language a different status than the official language. Acquisition planning is focused on the users of a language, and it provides insights into the goals of language planning in education/school, group, work, and mass media. The focus of this type of planning is on maintenance, shift, foreign, and second language. This focus contributes to my discussions about Kurdish children's language and literacy practices across their home and school spaces and to their families' and teachers' experiences.

Hornberger (1994) points out that this framework may not be stable in every situation and context. Some contexts may need language planning integrated with the form and function of the language. For example, Kurdish needs both status and acquisition planning as the language is devalued in Turkey. Its speakers have limited options for native language use. Turkey has been in the process of revising and changing its national language planning strategies and policies since the late 1990s. The most current changes are in the education system that now allows minority languages (e.g.

Kurdish) to be taught in elective courses in public schools and as the instructional language in private schools.

Language is mostly used as a tool for power issues (Fishman, 1996; Hinton & Hale, 2001; Hornberger, 1994; McCarty, 2011; Wiley, 1996), and this has an immediate relationship to the dynamics of language use. “Language planning and policy must consider the social, economic, political, and educational contexts in which groups with unequal power and resources contend with one another. As an instrument of social control, language often becomes a surrogate for other factors underlying the language conflict” (Wiley, 1996, p. 105). Parallel to Wiley’s (1996) discussion, Fishman (1968, p. 39) suggests “the choice of one or another national language reflects either an underlying nationalism which seeks sociocultural integration based on authenticity or an underlying nationism which seeks politicogeographic integration based on efficiency.”

I considered the effect of official language choice strategies during this study with the basis pointed out by Fishman for its potential influence on language ideologies of Kurdish children, parents and teachers. Language planning is related to power issues and the perceptions of language planners (e.g., governments, leaders, and politics) to its speakers, and I was watchful of this as I analyzed the influence of language policies on the practices of the study participants.

The restricted language opportunities forced upon Kurds in Turkey aimed to serve the goal of “unification” (e.g. one nation, one language). Language planning was the official strategy to serve politics rather than the linguistic practices of diverse groups in Turkey. This was especially true in educational settings as language planning required teachers to teach (and linguistically diverse children to learn) only the Turkish language.

The strategies that prioritized official ideologies viewed “the language as a problem” and as a result linguistically diverse children did not experience the benefits of bilingualism with their “language as a resource” (Ruiz, 1984).

My research examined a complicated context where language policies and ideologies were embedded into real life practices of Kurds across social and educational spaces. Following McCarty, Collins, and Hopson (2011), I viewed language policy as “a situated sociocultural process” and argue for what is now called New Language Policy studies (McCarty et al., 2011, p.335). Like McCarty (2011, p.xii), I conceptualized language policy as “the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people’s language choices in profound, and pervasive everyday ways” (p. 355).

#### Language Maintenance and Shift

The nature of language planning is not only about the language per se, but also about power issues in the society and the identity (both individual and ethnic) of its speakers. The Kurdish language is neither endangered nor threatened in terms of its population of speakers. However a threat is not always associated with the number of speakers; it also reflects a loss of power that could lead to the extinction of the language. The Kurdish language was officially banned for years even in homes of Kurds in Turkey. Limited functional use of the language was led by top down language planning strategies and the resulting negative attitudes toward Kurdish have become big challenges for Kurds who want to maintain their native language.

The status of Kurdish (and its speakers) was influenced by Turkification that required speaking Turkish and defining yourself as Turkish. Now, however, both Kurdish

and Turkish people ask for solutions to the problems caused by Turkification, particularly the unmet mother tongue needs in the education of minority children. The maintenance of the mother tongue is defined by King (2001) “as the attempt to maintain the forms and functions of a language, with the ultimate aim of maintaining its uses and users” (p. 202). Kouritzin (1999), and Wong-Fillmore (1991) highlighted minority language maintenance and its significant role in families for language planning and choice in their research. It is increasingly important to examine language beliefs and experiences of families of first grade Kurdish children in this changing policy contexts with the awareness that families are not solely responsible for their children’s native language maintenance

According to Fishman (2001) the shift of minority languages toward the dominant language most likely starts in schools. Schools are considered the key domain of language policy and planning literature (Fishman, 2001; Hornberger, 2008; McCarty, 2011; Spolsky, 2005; Wiley, 1996). Additionally, Hornberger (2006) points out that educational practices often significantly influence the maintenance of diverse home languages as being dominant and desired practices in the society. Schools have become important places to understand the social linguistic movements of a society as being both “a wonderful agency, and a crucial agency for particular aspects of language use, like literacy, versatility, or formality” (Fishman, 1996, p. 87). Language and literacy practices children gain in school mediate their home language practices not only because school has an official and a dominant role, but also because families desire school success for their children. The school’s role in teaching the broader functions of literacy and language increases the importance of this research on the language experiences of

Kurdish children. Schools are the first, even the main official places where Kurdish children meet with the dominant language in the society.

#### Home and Community Based Practices of Minority Students in Schools

In many communities around the world, linguistically diverse children's home and community-based literacy practices are not well respected in mainstream schools, especially when the language of instruction is different from the language spoken at home. Rather than considering the learning and literacy practices of students as an accumulative process, schools in Turkey typically focused on developing a separate set of literacy skills in the school language. In her ethnographic study, Valdes (2001) investigated home and school language practices of four newcomer Spanish speaking students. She observed that the school was not very successful in serving the educational needs of the students. Valdez concluded the main reason for this failure was that the school did not include the existing literacy skills that Spanish students learned in their homes and from their communities.

In a similar vein, Rubenstein-Avilla (2007) investigated the literacy practices of a young Dominican high school woman student, Yanira, at both her home and school. Yanira had a set of literacy skills for memorizing, signing, retelling, and studying the Bible because of her religious practices, but she did not use these same practices in her classroom. Valdes' discussion (2001) confirmed the failure of the school to build on the literacy practices Yanira brought from her home and community. Rubenstein-Avilla pointed to the school strategy that focused on building a totally new and separate set of literacy skills as the reason for Yanira's disengagement with school practices. According to Rubenstein-Avilla "understanding Yanira's experiences as a competent participant in



the largely performative literacy practices, and knowledge valued by her home community, such as reading out loud from the stage of a church and performing in school plays, watching, predicting, and discussing novels, even copying teachers' notes from the classroom chalkboard (attending to form and penmanship), may provide U.S. educators and literacy researchers valuable insights on what counts as literacy and knowledge for older immigrant and EAL students enrolling in U.S. schools” (p. 585).

Following Valdes (2001), Rubinstein-Avila (2007) and a number of other researchers view linguistic and cultural difference as a set of resources (e.g., Gutiérrez et al., 2011; Jiménez, 2012; Paris, 2012) Diverse practices that children bring to school are part of this accumulative process rather than a separate skill set. Soto (2001) draws attention to the need to consider home literacy practices of linguistically diverse children a resource in schools rather than a deficit. With a similar perspective to Valdes (2001) and Rubenstein-Avilla (2007), Soto (2001) discusses the rich language and literacy practices bilingual children develop in their native language in their homes. She points out the need for including language and cultural practices of linguistically diverse children in the school curriculum.

Romero’s (1994) study on the identification of giftedness among Keresan Pueblo Indians investigates the underrepresentation of language, culture, and identity practices of Native Indian students in their mainstream schools. In her ethnographic study, Romero addressed the importance of understanding the community practices of Keres children as that is how they become who they are. Since Keresan Pueblo Indians have shared practices as a community, discussing Keres’ children community practices as the main

focus provided many insights to their accumulated practices. The diverse home language practices of the children in this study include their community practices as well.

#### Role of Minority Families on their Children's Language Practices

The role of minority families on their children's native language maintenance and second language learning process is important. The language chosen by the family indicates the language parents want their children to speak according to Wong-Fillmore (1991). In another study that investigated minority families' language choice and the status of their native language, King, Fogal & Logan-Terry (2008) found that the language choice of families not only affects the developmental process of children but also the future of the minority language in that society.

In addition to language choice and practices, the roots of minority parents' ideologies and attitudes and how they affected language choice attracted the attention of several scholars including Cummins (1981), Garcia (1989), González (2005), Kouritzin (1999) and Wong-Fillmore (1991). Cummins (1981) discussed the provision of economic wellness and better educational opportunities for their children as two additional reasons for families to focus on second language practices. In a similar vein, Kouritzin (1999) and Wong-Fillmore (1991) highlight better educational opportunities as a common choice parents make that also causes native language loss or shift for minority children.

According to Cummins (1981), minority families may feel ashamed of their cultural background. As a result, they do not want to pass these practices on to their children because of mainstream attitudes toward their language and culture in society. A potential reason for native language loss for minority groups is feelings of oppression and shame. King (2001) addressed the similar influence of minority groups' negative attitude toward

their native language and cultural background where minoritized groups developed a negative attitude toward their own language because of the dominant pressure of mainstream perceptions and attitudes toward their language.

King's discussion (2001) along with that of the aforementioned scholars' informed my study. With this foundation for my research I tried to capture the big picture of the social linguistic structure of Kurds' experiences. In addition to mainstream ideologies and attitudes toward Kurdish, I explored parents' feelings and expectations for their children (i.e. a better future, academic and financial well-being) for a full understanding of families' language practices and beliefs. Kouritzin's (1999) discussion, previously mentioned, was based on personal experiences with her two bilingual children, and it was particularly informative to my study. Her research described the dilemma minority parents feel about their role as parents and the responsibility they also have for maintaining their native language.

### Second Language Learning

The literature on second language learning is relative to the language practices of Kurdish children. Age, attitude and investment affect the second language learning process. Children in their early years easily learn more than one language at a time and they can separate two languages successfully without confusion after a short period (Krashen, 1982). Soto (2001) and Hakuta and Garcia (1983) argue it is difficult to know the challenges children have while learning a second language, especially minority children who learn their second language in mainstream classrooms. They point out the need to investigate experiences of more linguistically diverse children during their second language learning process in mainstream classrooms. Spolsky (1969) discusses the

importance of attitude in second language learning. According to him, the learner's attitude toward their second language mediates the learning process. Polat's (2007) empirical study illustrates this correlation between the attitudes of Kurdish high school youth toward Turkish and their willingness to learn and/or speak Turkish.

Norton (2010), with a similar but broader perspective, discussed the notion of investment that focuses on the learner's commitment to learn the target language. Norton was inspired by Bourdieu's (1977) idea of the construction of a social and historical relationship between a learner and the target language as he investigated situated identities during the process of second language learning experiences.

#### Theoretical Framework

The framework for my research was influenced by my graduate studies and my experiences as an English teacher to refugee students in Turkey, as an international student in the U.S., and as an instructor of Structured English Immersion to pre-service teachers at ASU. It includes five different (but related) theories of language, language learning, and literacy that allow a nuanced understanding of the social dynamics of language and power. It also provided the theoretical lenses I used to analyze educational and sociolinguistic practices embedded in the power contexts of Kurdish minority children in Turkey.

First, the influence of Language Ideologies is a specific focus of my research. Next, the notions of Linguistic Cultural Capital provided a rationale for the examination of the social power of languages in specific contexts. Third, the Sociocultural Theory of Language and Language Learning included Funds of Knowledge and Bilingualism. Literacy as a Social Practice views literacy as an accumulated social practice that is

developed/ learned in particular contexts, and it is the fourth component of my theoretical framework. The last part of my theoretical framework is language and identity as integral to social practices. The multiple aspects of this theoretical framework allowed me to examine the relationship between the language and identity of young children in their homes and at school. Subsequently, I describe how this relationship was influenced by existing social practices at the macro-level to show how it effected language and language learning experiences of Turkish children at the micro level in both their mainstream schools and homes.

### **Language Ideologies**

Scholars from diverse disciplines agree that ideologies of language are important to study because they dramatically influence and/or shape the language and social practices of individuals and communities (Fishman, 2001; King, 2001; McCarty, 2005; Warriner, 2003; Wiley, 1996; Woolard, 1998; Wortham, 2001). I found Gal's (1998) definition a useful starting point:

Ideology is conceptualized—implicitly or explicitly—not only as systematic ideas, cultural constructions, common sense notions, and representations, but also as the everyday practices in which such notions are enacted; the structured and experienced social relations through which humans act upon the world (p.445).

Additionally, Gal describes language ideologies as “sources of social power” (p. 443). This was a significant perspective to include because Kurdish is a language that was devalued, exposed to language bans, and associated with social stigma that I described in the introduction. Gal's explanation of language ideologies that focuses on

the gaps between mainstream ideologies and practices at the grassroots level is crucial to hearing and understanding the multiple voices of the participants in my research.

Similar to Gal, Woolard (1998) observes language ideology as “[r]epresentations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in [a] social world” (p. 3). Although each scholar has a different focus in their definitions of language ideology and its influences on people’s practices, they agree that language ideology is not only about language. It is also about the speaker of that language and includes the culture and social identity of the speaker (Gal, 1998; Woolard, 1998; Wortham, 2001). My understanding of language ideologies includes and adds to these discussions. I believe language ideologies are the representations of not only the interactions between language and human beings (including their identity) but also the complicated picture of policies and people’s practices tightly embedded into each other.

According to Wortham (2001), “people rely on their construals of what particular linguistic patterns mean in order to identify speakers as occupying recognizable social positions. Drawing on ideologies that circulate widely in a society, particular speakers position themselves and others in characteristic ways” (p. 256). Wortham (2001) discusses how language ideologies influence a speaker’s interaction with the society s/he lives in. This perspective will help me to explore the mediating role of language ideologies on Kurdish children’s, their parents’, and teachers’ social and linguistic practices as they relate to their conceptions of self and others in the society.

To expand this discussion further, Gal (1998) talks about the inequality of service to diverse groups if official and social institutions authorize ideologies of languages in a society and they become a source of social power. This discussion of language ideologies

as a possible source of social power suggests the multiple voices and diverse needs of a society may be unmet by the existing ideologies. I relied on these theoretical perspectives to examine language ideology as a belief system (either taken for granted or enhanced as a result of learning or lived experiences) and also as mechanism that mediates language, and identity practices of people socially.

The main focus of my research was the linguistic experiences of children whose native language, Kurdish, was exposed to official bans and social stigma for decades in Turkey. I examined the beliefs of study participants and their relationship to social linguistic practices of Kurdish as a minority group. This approach to language ideologies, with its complex social, political, and practical structure, provided deep insights into language, literacy, and identity practices of Kurdish students across their home and school spaces (Fishman, 1991; Wiley, 1996).

### **Linguistic Cultural Capital**

Linguistic Cultural Capital focuses on the symbolic social power of language. Scholars from various disciplines discuss the existence of a “social power” associated with language in multilingual societies (Bourdieu, 1986; Fishman, 1991; Myers-Scotton, 1995). Bourdieu (1986) identifies “linguistic and social capital,” as the social, contextual, financial and historical meaning of languages in a society. For a different perspective, Bakhtin’s (1981) theory of “authoritative voice” and “internally persuasive voice” investigated language and power issues in in a stratified society. It is my understanding that the authoritative voice, which dominates the inner voice, can be used to represent dominant and non-dominant languages in a stratified society. Fishman (1991) looks at the

power associated with minority language(s) in society from the perspective of the future and describes how one language gains power while the other one loses its power.

According to Fishman, one language gains power while the other one loses its power within the same context. He views school and family environments as important agencies that maintain or limit this power. Related to this view, Fishman (2003) discussed how languages gain low and high status based on being a written language or an oral language. He concluded reading and writing have a higher status than an oral language in stratified societies. Consequently, school becomes a space where language can be developed to gain a higher position in society while the community language that does not exist in schools is devalued.

Blommaert's (2003) sociolinguistics of globalization that focuses on the value of shifts in language use across time and space also informed my theoretical framework. Blommaert (2003) discusses globalization as a reason for the increased value of minority languages. In my research I investigated the social power of languages and the process of how this power affects linguistic (including literacy and identity) practices of minority children. This perspective helped me describe the dynamic structure of this power along with the dynamic structure of linguistic practices in stratified societies. Blommaert points out the necessity of looking at the situated linguistic and identity practices as the value of a language changes simultaneously across spaces. His (2003) discussion of simultaneous change in the value of languages across spaces was a significant lens I used to investigate Kurdish children's practices because while Kurdish is valued at home, it is not valued in schools.



## **Sociocultural Theories of Language and Language Learning**

Funds of knowledge and bilingualism are two components of the sociocultural theory of language and language learning that inform this research. *Funds of knowledge* are defined as “the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 2001, p. 133). The influence of the disparity between language (including literacy), culture, and identity practices of minority children at home and school has been studied in various contexts (e.g., Au, 2005; Heath, 1983; Mercado, 2005; Romero-Little, 2010; Valdes, 2001 to name a few). These researchers agree a lack of school success experienced by linguistically and culturally diverse students may be due to a mismatch between language practices at home and school.

González states “[S]tarting from what is available and building on that foundation” is essential in schools for minority students (2005, p. 166), and this supported my beliefs about the skills minority children bring to their schools. Children’s linguistic, cultural, and social repertoires need to be considered as a baseline rather than a disadvantage for new learning experiences in school. It is essential to understand the language repertoire children bring to school: How minority children learn what they know, who their first teacher is, what kind of expectations their families have in their households, and what kinds of practices their families and communities need (Romero-Little, 2012, personal conversation).

*Bilingualism* is considered both a theory of language and of language learning as the two processes are intertwined. The simplest definition of bilingualism is the capacity an individual has to speak two languages (Hakuta & Garcia, 1989; Diaz-Soto, 2001). The

term "minority-language children" refers to children whose first language or home language (L1) is different from the language of the wider community and its schools Cummins (1983). Researchers agree the benefits of bilingualism for children is a balance between the development of two languages simultaneously (Cummins, 1983; Garcia, 1989; Hakuta and Garcia (1989); Soto, 2001. My research aims to describe the bilingual repertoire of Kurdish students and the relationship of home and school practices to this development.

### **Literacy as a Social Practice**

Literacy is a social practice or a set of practices that are socially constructed (e.g., Au, 2005; Hull & Schultz, 2001, 2002; Street, 1984, 1993, 2003). This means literacy as a cultural and social practice varies according to time and space in relation to power. An autonomous model of literacy (Street, 2003) is viewed as a neutral process and a collection of skills, but many literacy scholars have found that this perspective is not very successful in explaining the actual literacy practices of students (Au, 2005; Rubenstein-Avilla, 2007; Street, 2003; Warriner, 2003). Therefore I draw on New Literacy Studies—hereafter “NLS” - (Gee, 2011; Street, 2003) to inform my theoretical framework, and I particularly align myself with Street’s (2003) definition of NLS:

What has come to be termed the "New Literacy Studies" (NLS) (Gee, 1991; Street, 1996) represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1985). This entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power. NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking "whose literacies" are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant (p.77).

Drawing on this definition of NLS, I view literacies as an accumulated repertoire with different literacy practices useful in different contexts for different purposes rather than a set of specific skills such as writing and reading. This stance is consistent with Warriner (2012) who discusses the literacy context as influenced by broader social, cultural, ideological, and political components. My research documents and analyzes the literacy practices of Kurdish children upon their entry into mainstream classrooms in Turkish schools. I examined their literacy practices as an accumulative process to analyze the overlaps and disparities between school and home literacy practices. Multiliteracy as a perspective helped me to explore which literacy practice is good in which context and for what in Kurdish children's experiences. Drawing on this perspective on literacy as socially constructed and multiple, I was also able to analyze how Kurdish children navigate their literacy practices across spaces with broader social, cultural, ideological, and political components.

### **Language and Identity**

Norton (2013) defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p.45). According to Kramsch (2009) identity practices are best understood by looking at how they are influenced by the context, social expectations, attitudes, and the individual's own expectations. Warriner's (2003) perspective of identity as “socially situated, socially constructed, dynamic, and multiple or hybrid” is also important because “identities are not only constructed,

transformed, or improvised according to situation, interlocutor, or purpose; identities are simultaneously influenced by structural or societal factors and created or improvised according to specifics of the local situation” (p. 51). Following Warriner’s perspective, I viewed identity as an individual process to be understood in its situated context with the specifics of that context such as the social position of the individual, his/her ideologies, and the value of the language(s) she/he speaks.

In a similar vein, Bucholtz and Hall (2004) state “it is crucial to attend closely to speakers own understandings of their identities, as revealed through the ethnographic analysis of their pragmatic and metapragmatic actions” (p. 371). There are potentially many other dynamics that affect the self- identification of individuals. According to Bucholtz and Hall, this perspective requires consideration of the social position of individuals’ ethnicities, languages, cultures, and even traditions. This research explored the situated identity practices of Kurdish children in their home and school contexts. That is why a consideration of these potential dynamics, in each of their contexts, and how it affected the identity practices of Kurdish children is significant.

In order to look at specific linguistic and identity experiences of Kurdish children I aligned my thinking with the “embodied self” theory of Kramsch (2009) This theory is based on the idea that the language learner not only experiences learning a language but he or she also explores one’s self during this journey. Kurdish children bring their Kurdish identity, which has been historically stigmatized in Turkey to their schools and to their institutionalized social environments.

### **Language Crossing and Sharing**

Rampton's (1995) investigation of language crossing looked closely at communicative events where "people who are not accepted members of the group associated with the second language" alternate languages. He viewed language crossing as a way of gaining ethnic approval and explained that language crossing may occur in a shared culture and it is associated with belonging, something not easily shown. Paris (2012) called alternation between languages "language sharing" for ethno-linguistic recognition in multilingual and multinational contexts. He suggested language sharing practices be utilized in educational settings because it is a way of learning across differences. It also indicates students' meta-linguistic awareness of their language practices.

Notions of language crossing and language sharing help me examine and theorize the different ways in which Kurdish students engage in language alternating practices among themselves, with their teachers, and while interacting with me. I align myself with work on language alternation that focuses on whether and how it might occur in a shared culture where second language is ratified. I consider such practices to be indicators of students' heightened metalinguistic awareness. At the same time, I also show that language alternation is not based on only ethnical differences. Instead, it shows up when there is diversity in linguistic practices among speakers—e.g., when ethnically Kurdish students speak or use Turkish at home or during a conversation between her other Kurdish speaking friends. Since I align myself with Paris' (2012) discussion of utilizing these practices during the learning process of students and I believe these practices provide insights into shared values among student, I adopt Paris' term language sharing while referring to language alternating practices Kurdish students in this dissertation.

### **3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

I analyzed Kurdish children's language, literacy, and learning experiences to focus on the influence of language policies and ideologies with the understanding that policies are complicated, dynamic, and embedded in real-life practices. My goal was to capture the active roles of policies and ideologies on the mediating practices of people in multiple ways.

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology of this study. First I present the research context along with my experiences and roles as a researcher in that context. Then I detail the methods of data collection and analysis I used and their appropriateness for what this dissertation study investigates. Finally, I discuss the limitations and weaknesses of the methods I used and my role as a researcher as well as my relationships with the participants of the study. In so doing, I hope not only to provide insight into my experiences as a researcher but also to shed light on the complexities of doing sociolinguistic research on a historically and politically minoritized group that included young children.

I aimed to provide a holistic picture of the experiences of Kurdish children in a complicated context where policies and ideologies are heavily intertwined. This study investigated the experiences of children during their first year of mainstream schooling when they first come across official policies that allow their Kurdish language but does not promote it. As literature and theoretical perspectives guiding this research suggested, I have analyzed people's talk and practices to portray a holistic picture. I utilized ethnographic research methods such as participant observation, interviews,

document/artifact collection and analysis, field notes, focus groups and qualitative data analysis to glean insights into the experiences of Kurdish children across their home and school spaces. Although the main focus of my study was the experiences of Kurdish children, I also studied the beliefs, experiences, and practices of parents, siblings and teachers to describe the layers of context that were heavily influenced by policies and mainstream ideologies.

### Setting the Scene

#### **Guzelyurdu<sup>12</sup> Village**

Guzelyurdu is a Syrian border village located in southeastern Turkey. There are 200 houses in the village and based on personal reports the vast majority of the population was Kurdish. There are a few people from different ethnic origins such as Turkish and Arabic who moved to Guzelyurdu from either another village or Syria when they married a villager. People have two jobs in Guzelyurdu; animal breeding and farming. Villagers who own land or animals have their own business. Villagers who did not have either a field or animals worked for other people. People who need to work for others generally migrate to metropolises in Turkey as temporary workers. People in this group travel to those cities during winter when there are not many jobs they can do in the village. Limited job opportunities appeared to be a significant influence on parents' views

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<sup>1</sup> All names of places and people are pseudonyms

<sup>2</sup> There are two other small villages close to Guzelyurdu village. Those two officially have two names. The first name is Guzelyurdu. However, they are known with their second names by people. Research setting of this study has only one name which is Guzelyurdu village and it is different from the other two small villages.

of languages and their practices for their children. For example, they did not want their children to live in the village in the future. As a result, they tended to want their children to practice the Turkish language expected by the bigger society outside of their village.

The village is 17 miles away from the town where I grew up, and lived during this study. There was only one bus that traveled between the city center and Guzelyurdu, and it did not have a regular schedule. Transportation was the first challenge I experienced when I tried to access my research site. When I learned that all teachers who worked in the village lived in the city center and that they rented a bus to travel to the village every morning and after school, I joined them. This shared experience helped me get to know the teachers more quickly.

Since the village was a little far from the city center and transportation was a challenge, villagers did not have many options for access to the bigger society. They preferred not going outside of their village except to a small town close by for shopping at the bazaar. They bought clothes and did their grocery shopping during this weekly trip. The location of the village and challenges of travel has also impacted villagers' lifestyles and language practices. For example, most of the parents, even the younger ones (30-35 years old), did not continue high school because of transportation problems that were even harder when they were school age. It is useful to note that almost all villagers had school experiences; at least, they attended primary school. However, not all of them could read and write in Turkish. Women especially did not read and write in Turkish because of either not attending school or not learning in the school they attended. Hence, the school level of the majority of the village was not high. I did not meet or hear of anyone who could read and write in Kurdish. Most of the villagers had not seen the



Kurdish language written. The Kurdish repertoire of Guzelyurdu villagers was built on the spoken language. Both Turkish and Kurdish language were practiced in the village. Except elderly people, a few of whom were grandparents of children participants of this study, were Kurdish monolingual.

### **Minority within Minority**

Age was not the only difference in language practices among the villagers. There was an invisible wall between people who spoke Kurdish and those who spoke Turkish. Although 99% of the community was Kurdish, villagers described themselves and their practices as separate and different. This wall within the village appeared during my first home visits and permeated the conversations I had with parents. There appeared to be two sides to the village divided by the river. I realized the existence of two groups among several families as they described their language practices. Families shared that they were not like villagers who lived on the other side of the village when they talked about their home and language practices. The small river that flowed in the village was near the back yard walls of the school and this was the other side of the river. The river not only divided the village into two parts geographically, it also created a language border. People who lived on the west side of the river always spoke Turkish, and thought that Kurdish had no benefit for them or their children; families on the east side of the village practiced Kurdish in their homes. People who lived on the western side of the river viewed themselves closer to Turkishness and more modern than people on the eastern side. Also, all families on the west side farmed, and this was considered cleaner and more prestigious. Families who lived on the east side mostly did animal breeding which was

considered dirty, smelly, and anti-social because people needed to spend days in the mountains to breed animals. Families who lived on the west side of the village had more access to mainstream society. One person from the west side said “Whoever comes to our village from the city, for example the mayor or any person with an official position, they come to our houses. We show them around if they want to see places in area.” Most families on the west side were related. The grandfather of these families was once agha (the leader) of Guzelyurdu. Although this system of leadership does not exist anymore, families assumed prestige from this previous status. These families appeared to be representing the mainstream society within the village not only because of their previous leading role but also because their language and identity practices were more Turkish. This representation of mainstream society added another dynamic to my research: minority within minority.

I visited homes and conducted interviews in both sides of the village. Families on the west side compared themselves with villagers living on the east side to explain why they prioritized Turkish and Turkishness; I did not witness any villagers from the east side who compared their practices to those of families living on the west side. I did not ask families living on the eastern side if they agreed with this representation because of ethical considerations. However, I was able to confirm this finding with Oznur, the interpreter for my study, who was from the east side, during my last conversation with her. She confirmed the existence of this invisible wall and the differences between the two sides of the village during our last conversation.

### **Guzelyurdu Primary School**

There is only one school in Guzelyurdu village and it was officially separated into two schools: elementary school (Kindergarten-4<sup>th</sup> grade) and middle school (5-8<sup>th</sup> grades) with the new education system that started in 2012-2013. Although the school was divided into two, students shared the same schoolyard. Twelve teachers and two administrators, (a principal and a vice principal) who previously served as teachers in the same school before it was divided into two, continued working in these two schools. There were two kindergarten classes, two first-grade classes, one second-grade class, one third-grade class, and one fourth-grade class. There was one class of each 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in the middle school. There were 156 elementary school students and 118 middle school students. All students were from Guzelyurdu village during the time I conducted research except for 12 students transported in October from a small village nearby because there was not enough space. The vast majority, approximately 95%, of the students was ethnically Kurdish. There were only a few students with a parent who was either Turkish or Arabic.

Cengiz was the teacher of the first-grade class I observed. There were nine girls and five boys, and eleven students were ethnically Kurds. Three students were children of Kurdish-Turkish or Kurdish-Arabic intermarried couples. The age range of the students was five to seven, but most students were six years old, and eight of the fourteen students had attended kindergarten. Cengiz considered all his students without kindergarten experiences because they had not had a full time teacher, and their kindergarten experience had not been positive.

## Negotiation of Access

I first met Cengiz during a teacher orientation arranged by the City Education Department we both worked for in 2007. The orientation sessions we attended aimed to describe how the education system and bureaucracy worked for new teachers. Cengiz and I were new teachers from different minority groups, and we sometimes discussed the challenges we had in our schools and exchanged ideas and opinions about our experiences. He talked about his Kurdish students while I talked about my Afghanistani, Uzbekistani, and Pakistani students. I knew that he worked hard to fulfill the needs of his students through the correspondence we sometimes exchanged and by what he shared.

After I resigned from my teaching position and moved to the U.S., Cengiz and I did not talk much, but we did not lose our connection. I shared my plans when I started to plan this research, and he said he would be very happy to work with me in his class. Although his willingness was not the official permission I needed to have, it was especially helpful because of the nature of my study.

I needed to gain access to two different types of research sites during data collection because my research included both the classroom and household experiences of Kurdish children. The first official permission was for access to the school and classrooms. For this, I needed to apply for official permission from the Ministry of Education because it controlled the schools in Turkey. The second permission I needed to obtain was from parents of the children I wanted to observe and talk with during home visits. This part was not as difficult as I imagined it might be. As I conducted classroom observations, Cengiz's welcoming message was very important to me because it would not be easy for a teacher to accept a researcher in his/her class if we did not know each

other before. This was the first time I met with several parents. They all told to me that they would be very happy to have me in their homes. I was also lucky that the maintenance person of school was one of the villagers and he was willing to help me whenever I needed his help to access parents.

### Researchers' Role

My role as a researcher varied for teachers, families, and children because of my multiple data collection ways and spaces (i.e. home, school, and playground) of this research. I was a researcher for teachers; a teacher with a different position for parents; and a different type of teacher for children. Qualitative research is a “situated activity and locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.3). I did not hesitate to explain the details of my research and my aim to be in the village in the first conversations I had with people. I hoped to carry the voices of Kurdish children along with their families’, and teachers’ practices and their perspective to academia (Meriam, 2002). The way parents viewed me was important although I sometimes was thought of as a “teacher” and I was sometimes felt limited. This was especially true during my initial conversations with children.

Cengiz introduced me to teachers in the teachers’ lounge on my first day of school, September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2012. He had already told them about me. They considered me a researcher who was going to observe everyone. Teachers were really nervous to have me in their school at the beginning because of their idea that I was going to evaluate them as a “researcher.” Both their questions and practices during my presence made their feelings about me obvious. For example, they stopped their conversation or changed the topic as

soon as I entered the teachers' lounge. This was a little challenging for me because I wanted to observe their authentic practices. There was another first-grade class in addition to Cengiz's class. When I approached the teacher, Esra, to ask if I could observe her class, she rejected me and said she would feel nervous (One month later, she invited me to conduct observations if I wanted.). Even Cengiz was nervous to have me in his classroom as a researcher because of similar reasons. I understood his concerns about being observed and having conversations about his teaching strategies and current curriculum recorded because I had also been a classroom teacher.

In order to build trust and convince teachers, especially Cengiz, I was not there to judge or report them to Ministry of Education or anywhere else, I was always transparent about my research process. I answered all questions about why I was doing this research, about my life and studies in Arizona, and about what I had done before moving to the U.S. I was happy to help teachers either with paper work or their classrooms. In addition, since I took the same bus to the village with the teachers it eased the process of building trust and assured them I was not evaluating them. I was able to gain their trust within a few weeks and they started to feel more comfortable when they shared their experiences with/in front of me. When that happened, I became "a researcher who used to be a teacher like them" and this allowed me to learn more about their beliefs and practices. I tried to show teachers that I understood the challenges they had because I had been a teacher to refugee students in the same education system.

I avoided discussion of professional issues because teachers viewed my doctoral studies as something more "valuable" than their position. I asked questions about their

practices and life as a teacher in the village, and I tried to show I was interested in learning about and from their experiences and what they could tell me.

Cengiz introduced me to parents as “Ayfer Hoca (teacher) (This is how all teachers call each other.)” during the first parents meeting, and explained that I was in their village because I was interested in their children’s education and language practices. Six parents were there for this meeting. I could feel their excitement as they met me, a person who was going to do research for the good of their children. I did not talk much to parents at this first meeting, as I wanted to start with participant observations. After the meeting, parents approached and told to me they would be very happy to talk with me and have me in their homes. A father, who missed the meeting, and said he came to meet with Cengiz and wanted to meet me. He explained how happy he would be to contribute to my research about his children.

The parents’ excitement was a good sign that participant recruitment was not going to be hard. It was also good to learn the parents were excited to share their own experiences. All the parents called me “Ayfer Hoca” after this first meeting. I was a teacher researcher for parents, even for all the villagers. I realized during my home visits that parents who met me discussed my project and me with other villagers. They introduced me to their neighbors as “teacher but different as I was doing research about their children, and I was interested in Kurdish”.

I found that I needed to talk more about what I was actually doing in school during my home visits. I had to explain that I was not evaluating teachers, and that I was doing the research for my studies in the U.S. I am not sure that I was able to clarify that this was not about status between the teachers and me since most parents believed I had a

higher professional position than teachers in school. Parents welcomed, respected, and shared their experiences with me because they were happy to be “listened” to and “researched”. I tried to show my interest in families’ real life experiences and challenges they had raising their children. I did not want to be viewed as someone who asked questions for answers only because I was genuinely interested in their experiences. Parents were comfortable sharing their personal experiences and beliefs with me. They opened their homes to me and welcomed me as if we had known each other for years. Even so, I was an outsider because I was not ethnically a Kurd and I was “a researcher coming from America”. I answered questions about why I was interested in their practices and explained the importance of my study as not many had been done. Although they thanked me for doing this and showed respect for “my successes at this young age” (study in the U.S), I also felt that these two positions left me an outsider to their life.

Children also viewed me as “teacher.” I spent a lot of time in their classroom doing participant observation, and I was able to go to the teachers’ lounge whenever I wanted. However, I was not the only one being observed. Children also observed me very carefully. They talked about me as a “teacher who sometime takes notes” who sat at the very back of the class. After some time, when they realized I was interested in their drawings and handcrafts, they added another definition to my role, “picture lover”. They were well aware that I was interested in their experiences even before I started my interviews and group activities. I did not mind tutoring students in Cengiz class as it allowed us to know each other better. After a few weeks, the children started to ask questions about different issues such as their course material, social life, and future. The



questions they asked gave me the opportunity to learn about the world of Kurdish, and it also showed me they were aware my role as “teacher” was different from Cengiz’s. With all these roles (some of which were co-constructed), I was able to build close relationships and have fruitful conversations with the children. The one challenge I had during these “official” conversations was that it took a long time to get them to answer my questions because they were generally reluctant to talk. It is hard to tell if this was because they perceived me as a teacher or if it was simply a challenge involved in doing research with young children.

I worked hard to maintain a focus on participants’ perspective as the main focus of this research during and after data collection. I shared my findings with both families and teachers in the last focus group interview for accuracy purposes and to learn what they thought about my analysis. I also checked my analysis with children during focus groups when I asked if my findings sounded right to them or not.

#### Data Collection Methods

My data included participant observation, formal and informal interviews, field notes, focus groups and document collection. I chose these data collection methods to look at details in the real life experiences of Kurds at the same time I examined Kurdish children’s experiences in a politically and ideologically complex space.

#### **Participant observations**

Participant observation is defined as a way for the researcher to have a role in the research field for observation of participants’ or a specific communities’ experiences, habits, tradition to have a deep understanding of the social and cultural practices of that

specific group of people or individuals (Anderson-Levitt, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Meriam, 2002). I conducted participant observation in the classrooms, on the playground, and in the homes of Kurdish children. I was able to learn about the people in Guzelyurdu village, and these observations helped me select my participants. Ongoing observations also helped me to develop a detailed understanding of Kurdish children's real life experiences and to make more sense of the data I collected and also the research context. Through participant observation, I interacted with Guzelyurdu villagers and teachers—over time, they came to accept my research questions and me. I conducted participant observation both in and outside of the classrooms and these are discussed separately next.

### **Classroom observations**

Cengiz's class was the first place I started participant observations in September 2012. I sat at the back of the classroom on the chair Cengiz brought to class for me while all students were staring at me. Although I was introduced to them, they were very interested in learning more about who I was, what I was doing, and why I was doing this. I continued classroom observations to January 2013 when I finished data collection.

My role in the classroom was not always as passive as it was during my first visits, and my role as an observer never ended. I conducted classroom observations every school day from September through January except for six days when I could not go to the village for personal reasons. I completed 230 classroom observations; each was for forty minutes with ten a minute recess. I took quick notes in a small notebook when possible. González (2001) recommends looking at the interactions of people especially with higher and lower positions to understand the power issues in context. Through

classroom observations I learned about Kurdish students' interactions with their mainstream teachers, and these led me to ask questions about whether and how power issues affected the interactions. I also learned how Kurdish students navigated their diverse practices within the policies they were introduced to for the first time in their classroom context.

### **Household Observations**

I began this part of participant observation one month after I started classroom observations. I visited homes of the children after I contacted parents and had permission to visit. I visited the homes of 12 first-grade Kurdish students. I could not visit one family because the mother did not seem interested in having me in her house; she said her house was really far away and she was very busy with animal breeding. I could not visit a second family because the mother had to work outside the home because her husband was in prison. This mother's daughter did not attend school regularly despite of all of Mr. Cengiz's efforts.

Families welcomed and hosted me generously in their homes. Household observations enabled me to learn about families' daily life experiences and home spaces of the children. I was also able to learn about the relationship villagers had with each other when I observed their language practices within the village. I visited 11 different families three to five times and another family only one time because the father said he was very uncomfortable talking about his family's experiences with me. During my one visit he allowed me to interview him, but he did not want the interview to be recorded. Although I learned a lot from household observations, I do not think I was able to

conduct observations as thoroughly as I hoped because families seemed to feel uncomfortable during my presence. For example, some of them did not want to help with their children's homework while I was there and they delayed it. Most of them were not comfortable having conversations with their spouses in front of me and my interviews were restricted. For all these reasons, I believe my household observations provide a limited understanding of everyday practices and daily routines.

### **Field Notes**

Throughout the study I took field notes as a primary source of data. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), field notes capture the events in the field and enrich the data that is collected. From the very first day of my data collection, I used a small notebook to jot down key words and main ideas. Because teachers were a little nervous about the idea of being reported, I tried to keep my notes as short as possible to not give the impression of recording everything. These short notes required me to transcribe my field notes on my computer every night, and I did this immediately after I returned home in order to have them fresh in my mind. I organized the field notes I gathered in four parts and typed them into a table on a word document. The first column included the description of events and environments. I wrote my notes about the children's linguistic practices in details in the second column. The third column was "analytic notes" for connections between my notes and literature that was related. This third part was helpful for my research perspective during data analysis. After a few days of typing up my notes, I realized I needed to add a fourth column to record what people shared with me during personal conversations that I could not voice record. I also made note of follow-up

questions (e.g. for interviews and focus groups) and critical points as they emerged. I kept these in a list so that I could see them separately. My field notes and analytic notes created a recursive process that prepared me for follow-up and next steps on my research journey. This also meant I analyzed my data on a continuing basis.

### **Interviewing and Interviews**

The research interview is a shared, socially situated, and interactional practice between the participant and researcher. It was important for me to note what was said and also the contexts of conversations. I conducted three in-depth interviews (Seidman, 2006) with 12 parents and five teachers (two first grade teachers and three administrators) to understand their practices and lived experiences. I wanted to investigate how parents and families influenced their children's cumulative language experiences across home and school because this was the social network of the children (González, 2001; Orellana, 2009). The three interviews I conducted with families and teachers were voice recorded. During interviews, I asked questions (Appendix J and K) about their life stories, practices, and lived experiences. In addition to these recorded and structured conversations, I had many personal conversations with them. My first interview focused on life histories of families and teachers. The second interview focused on details of the experiences each shared in the first interview. During the third interview, I sought answers on how they made sense of their own practices and experiences. When I scheduled the interviews, I worked around the obligations and responsibilities of parents and teachers. The length of the interviews varied and were determined by how much time each interviewee had. Although I was able to have interviews with teachers for 90

minutes, parents did not always have 90 minutes for an interview and we often had two or three short interviews. A note in my field notes in the early weeks of data collection reminded me the questions I asked greatly influenced the kinds of data I collected and analyzed:

I am more interested in answers of people for "why" and "how" questions than "what" questions. "What" questions take us to the surface of an iceberg. Yes, it is very important to realize the existence of iceberg. However, people's stories are hidden behind "how" and "why" questions. (November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012)

The interviews I conducted were a learning experience for me as I was able to hear the voices of children, families, and teachers about their beliefs and practices when I analyzed my data. Although I learned a lot from the responses for “what” questions, I was thrilled with what I learned from parents and teachers as they responded to “why” and “how” questions. Both my structured and unstructured conversations permitted me to learn not only the participants’ experiences, but also how this influenced their children’s practices and why.

I conducted interviews and all personal conversations in Turkish, the second language of parents, and I hired an interpreter to conduct interviews also in Kurdish. She asked exactly the same questions I asked parents. I wanted to see if there was anything missing in the responses of parents when I used their second language, and I also wanted to see if they took a different position when each answered the same questions in Kurdish to a Kurd. This was important because I viewed the interviews as an interaction and as a

way a parent might position him or herself in this particular situation. After all interviews were conducted, I compared parents' talk in two languages to catch any differences.

The biggest challenge I had while conducting interviews was voice recording. The prospect of a recorded conversation made some parents and teachers nervous especially during the first interviews. I did not turn a recorder on without their consent. Although they allowed me to record our conversations, they asked many questions about what I was going to do with these records. I explained that I was recording the conversations for my research and for my own notes. One parent, who was willing to have conversations and interviews with me, wanted me to not record the conversations; however, he said he would be patient and wait for me to take notes as long as I wanted. So I took notes during my interviews with this parent. Most parents were more comfortable during my second interviews.

The situation was even more challenging with teachers. I waited to begin my interviews with them until I was sure they were no longer fearful of being reported to any authority. The teachers' hesitations were because government employees were expected to fully accept the governmental rules and regulations. They were even more hesitant because my research was related to the Kurdish language and that was a critical political issue in Turkey. When they grew more comfortable through our conversations and shared experiences, I began conducting structured interviews. I even told them they could listen to the recordings if they wanted to, and I agreed to delete parts they did not want me to use in my dissertation. No one either wanted to listen to the recordings or wanted to delete any parts. Like the parents, teachers also seemed more comfortable during second and third interviews.

## **Focus Groups**

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted focus groups with teachers at the end of my data collection process. Although I planned and tried to have focus groups with parents as well, it was not possible because they did not want to have conversations in a group. Focus group interviews allowed me to learn more about the practices of the teachers and how they viewed their Kurdish students' diverse practices. I conducted three focus groups with four teachers because one administrator/teacher left the school before I started group interviews. During the first two group interviews, I asked follow up questions of all the teachers and then I asked them to say more about specifics that emerged in my notes, interviews, and personal conversations. During the third recorded interview, I presented my preliminary findings and asked for their reactions to or thoughts on those findings. The focus groups with teachers were very interactive. Teachers were more comfortable than I expected them to be. All my questions were answered, and in addition we had rich conversations about their perceptions of issues like teaching Kurdish students, the current curriculum, Kurdish students' needs, and the relationship between families and teachers. As I could not have focus groups with parents, I had a last conversation with six parents who had time to meet with me one more time to discuss my preliminary findings. During this last conversation with parents, I was able to both get their thoughts on the preliminary findings and hear more on what they wanted for their children.



## Collection of Documents

I also collected documents as part of my data. I gathered handouts given to children by Cengiz, parent-teacher letters, and other course material used by teachers in their classrooms. The documents I collected provided me with insights into policies and teacher practices, the language and literacy practices of parents, the shared policy and literacy experiences between parents and teachers, and the learning processes of Kurdish children. These documents also contributed to conversations about language and literacy practices parents' lived experiences.

### Research with Young Children

During my second month in Guzelyurdu village, a parent came to Cengiz's class to ask a question about school materials they had bought for students. Cengiz had a conversation with the parent in front of the classroom with the door open. While I was listening to the conversation, Filiz, who sat behind her classmates and had a hard time understanding the school material (according to her teacher), looked at me and asked:

Filiz: "Aren't you writing this down?"

Me: Why do you think I should write this down?

Filiz: I think it is important. A parent came and she is asking something about her child, I think you find this important. You need to write this down to not forget.

I started this research with the aim of carrying Kurdish children's voices and experiences, which are understudied, to academia and to the debates about "Kurds in Turkey" that are heavily politicized. This conversation with a first grader was one of many that showed me how good young children are at analyzing social dynamics around

them. The children amazed me with how they navigated their practices, not only in their spaces, but also according to their audiences to make them what Bourdieu (1986) would call “legitimate” (p. 5). In addition to their awareness of “legitimate” practices in each context and with each audience, their awareness of my focus in this research emphasized the importance of having young children’s voices in research. This is consistent with the perspective of “young children as social actors who shape their identities, create and communicate valid views about the social world and have a right to participate” (MacNaughton, Hughes, and Smith, 2007, p. 460),

In every path of this research, I felt like Kurdish children presented a treasure to me as I was a researcher interested in their actual life experiences. Even so, it was not always easy. When I encountered challenges such as the preference of silence during conversations or a really short attention span of children, I worked to modify my methods so that I was able to relate to the children in ways important to the questions of this study. Swadener and Polakow (2008) point out that young children may not have enough vocabulary to express their feelings, but they are able to use non-verbal ways of communication to express their perspectives (if we can interpret what they mean when they use other modalities of communication). In addition, I needed to consider their second language learning process and how it may have influenced their talk during conversations. I found myself frequently modifying conventional interview strategies by using a “Mosaic approach” (Clark & Moss, 2001). Clark and Moss (2001, p. 5) define their framework as multi-method (considering different ways of children’s expression), participatory (children as active participants), reflexive (includes parents reflections), adaptable (can be applied in other childhood institutions), focused on children’s lived

experiences, and embedded into practice. This approach suggests employing multiple ways of gathering data with young children that includes inviting children to talk in response to the interview questions, draw pictures to represent their thoughts, use various materials such as play dough or other toys, and conversations with parents.

Orellana (2009) investigates the daily life, language, and identity practices of immigrant children with consideration of the construction of childhood for their families. In her study, she focuses on how children become more visible as social actors with their bilingual abilities such as language and culture broking. Orellana found that many immigrant children serve as language and culture brokers for their families and have more responsibilities than their peers. In addition to these children's practices as language and culture brokers for their families, Orellana looked at household practices for a holistic understanding of their context. I drew on Orellana's research approaches with young children and engaged in conversations with children and parents, and I observed their daily life experiences, school and home literacy practices.

### **Observations**

I conducted observations in the children's different contexts, i.e. their classroom, playground, and other social contexts for the four-and-a-half months I was in the village. In the first two months of this process, I only observed children (e.g., taking field notes during observations, conducting interviews, collecting artifacts), and I engaged in personal conversations that seemed to emerge naturally as a result of our shared experience in the same spaces. During these observations, the children and I got to know each other. These observations also helped me build a relationship for more interactive

conversations with them later. The time I spent with children every day allowed children to ask all the questions they had about me and they learned what I was interested in. I also helped with their studies in class during these observations. Observations served well to prepare children for the next stages of data collection in addition to being rich data sources for field notes. Observations were also crucial because I was able to witness situated interactions both among children in their different spaces and between their teachers.

### **Personal Conversations**

Since I spent all my time with children except for parent interviews, personal conversations became an organic part of this study and they were also one of my richest data sources. I heard the most from Kurdish children during these conversations because they were more comfortable while interacting because it was part of our daily life. Indeed, they often initiated the conversations we had. The conversations were also important because other children joined us when I had conversations with their friends. During these conversations, we talked about a wide range of topics including what children did during weekends; what they liked and disliked; what they thought about school, classes, languages, and their village; my life in the U.S.; what American children look like; and which language people in America speak (among many other topics). I was also able to learn about culture of the village and family experiences in addition to children's language views and practices via these personal conversations.

## **Play Times**

During the times when Cengiz allowed me to observe his class, I conducted three group play activities and each lasted 40 minutes.. There were 13 students during the first activity because one student was absent that day. There were 14 students in the other two activities. I voice recorded these group plays to not miss any conversations students were having while playing. We played with play dough once and each student made a “thing” they wanted. Then, they explained what their shapes were and why they chose to make that shape. Other students asked questions of each other about these objects. I continued my conversations with the children while we were playing with play dough. During the second playtime, children wanted to sing songs. We first sang a song altogether, then students volunteered to sing a song. All students volunteered for singing. The third one included two activities. Children drew pictures for fifteen minutes based on their wish. During the rest of the time, they were divided into three groups to play an “imagine and describe” game. One student imagined an object, or a situation, then described this to other group members. Then they took turns to do the same. My aim with this structured game was to observe students’ language and literacy skills as well as their interactions in a specific context. Playing with them also allowed me to have more conversations with them during a time they were enjoying their favorite activities.

## **Individual and Group Interviews**

After two months of observations and personal conversations, I conducted individual and group interviews with the children. These recorded interviews were more structured as compared to the format of the personal conversations. Although I am aware

that young children are more comfortable in ordinary conversations compared to structured and official ones, I conducted these interviews as another piece of the Mosaic and this allowed me to ground the children's practices and interactions in these structured contexts. I had individual interviews with a total of 11 students out of the 14 in Cengiz's class, each with parental consent. Three students did not want to have interviews for reasons I could not learn. I had three<sup>3</sup> individual interviews with nine students and four interviews with two students who wanted to have the fourth one because they had more they wanted to share with me. The length of interviews ranged between ten and thirty-five minutes based on the desire of the children. During these interviews, I had several options (e.g. drawing, playing with dough, or making a handcraft) for students to choose while we were having our conversation. Drawing pictures and playing with dough were the most popular. I tried to get answers to questions (Appendix I) from students about their language and literacy practices, views and feelings about the languages they spoke, and their school experiences. I was able to get answers for most of my questions in addition to what they wanted to share with me about other topics like what they ate last night. Rather than focusing only on my own questions, I allowed children to speak about whatever they wanted. In so doing, I did not want to bore students and I wanted to learn as much as I could because everything they shared taught me something about their world, their lived experiences either in school or home, and their views of their environment.

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<sup>3</sup> I had to give breaks to interviews because of physical needs of children such as visiting restroom. I still count them as one interview.

I had two big challenges as I conducted these interviews. First was potentially because of my role as “a teacher”. Some children, whose home language was Kurdish, hesitated to say they spoke Kurdish at home during my very first conversations with them. They were obviously nervous because they knew they had to speak Turkish at school and Kurdish was a language that was not to be used in school. However, they felt more comfortable as we spent more time together and made sure that I was not their “real teacher.” The second challenge I had during individual interviews was voice recording. Children were distracted by the recorder especially during the first interview even though I introduced them to the device and its function and why I was using it before we started. For example, when we were having conversations some students liked to watch the voice recorder to see how it worked. Some stopped talking suddenly to check if the recorder also stopped. I told students they could hold the recorder if they wanted. Some students held the recorder during all our interviews but others did not. This seemed to help them feel less distracted.

In addition to individual interviews, I conducted group interviews with children. Three students who did not want to have individual interviews with me wanted to join group interviews. I had group interviews with 14 students. I divided them into groups of four and five based on two criteria. I tried to mix groups of silent and talkative students so there was a balance when students talked. I also thought that would help quiet students be encouraged by their friends who were more comfortable talking. Next, I worked carefully to not put students who did not like each other into the same group with the concern they might start fighting or stop talking and that would influence the group interactions. During group interviews, I asked follow up questions I noted down

throughout the study. I also shared some of my preliminary findings to see if they agreed with. In addition to these, group interviews contributed to this study by allowing me to learn more about students' language practices, social networks, and experiences outside of school. I also heard more about family practices and relationships during these group interviews. Students were more comfortable talking in groups than they were during individual interviews. Some students, who were mostly silent in other situations, became more interactive while participating in the focus group conversations.

### **Multimodal Data Collection**

I employed multimodal data collection and aligned myself with Pahl and Rowsell (2010) who discuss artifacts with their embodied experiences. Pahl and Rowsell point out that artifacts are sensory; they have smell, taste, color, and shape and they give meaning by all of these. I considered multimodal data collection not only as one of the ways of understanding literacy experiences of Kurdish children, but also as a way of learning how they understand the world around them through the colors they chose, shapes they drew, and texts/stories they shared about those artifacts. My multimodal data collection included two stages. I started by asking questions about their drawings that they wanted to show to me from their picture book. They loved talking about pictures they had drawn. I did not ask children to give those pictures to me because I did not want them to consider these "picture conversations" as something similar to their teachers' handouts. After these conversations, I took notes about what we discussed and what they told me.

Eventually, the children started to bring me pictures they drew at home, during recess, or during their drawing time. They also began giving me some of the pictures we



had discussed during earlier conversations. Most of the time, when they brought pictures and handcrafts, we had short or long conversations about what they were about, who the people figures were, and where the place was. Sometimes, they began to quickly run away without saying anything right after they handed me the pictures they drew. Those pictures generally included me looking like a “Walt Disney princess.” I now have 74 pictures and several handcrafts including a spin top, a man made out of wires, and a hairclip by Kurdish children in addition to our conversations about the multimodal data. This form of data collection—where I was open to receiving and collecting artifacts in multiple modalities—allowed me to investigate Kurdish children’s views of the world around them and how they positioned themselves within this world. Additionally, I had the chance of viewing the embodied practices of each student while learning more about their accumulated language and literacy repertoire. Kurdish children seemed to feel excited and actively involved. They really enjoyed drawing pictures and preparing artifacts and talking about them because it was a way for them to talk about their own thoughts, their own perspectives, and their own “masterpieces.” Even the quietest students, who were usually unwilling to speak with anybody, were very active at drawing pictures to give me. They saw their multimodal materials as a unique way of communicating what they were thinking. Overall, multimodal data collection became a great way to hear children’s voices and learn more about their experiences, views, and perspectives.

#### Interpreting and Translation

I used language Turkish language during my communications in Guzelyurdu village because I cannot speak Kurdish. A Turkish-Kurdish bilingual interpreter named

Oznur helped me conduct interviews with parents in Kurdish and then translate the transcribed data into Turkish. Oznur was born and raised in Guzelyurdu village. Kurdish was her mother tongue. I made sure that I did not lose any meaning during my interviews with parents by hiring her. She asked the same questions I asked to parents but in Kurdish. This process required that I work with her a couple of hours to clarify how to conduct an interview. We studied each question together. We also worked on how to start an interview and how to make transitions between questions and how to respond to people when needed. Another topic we studied was how to ask questions if she wanted to hear more or needed clarification. We also focused on ways to elicit more detailed answers from parents in case they gave short answers. After conducting interviews in Kurdish, she transcribed them into Turkish for me to analyze. Because Oznur did not have any formal training as an educational researcher or interviewer, I created the interview protocols that she used to elicit information from parents about raising Kurdish children in a Turkish dominant world. Through these interviews, I was able to compare the interview transcriptions conducted in Turkish to the ones in Kurdish. This design allowed the parents multiple opportunities to express themselves, and they did so in both their native and second languages. Another contribution of Kurdish interviews to this study was seeing whether parents positioned themselves differently when they spoke to me than when they spoke Kurdish to one of their villagers.

### Data Analysis

The vast majority of the data collected was qualitative in nature. The data analysis process was iterative and began when I started my research project and continued through the writing process. I had an ongoing data analysis process that began while I was writing

field notes and continued through interviews, transcription, and in multiple stages of coding. Taking field notes the way I did enabled me to reflect my thinking on the data I collected in addition to allowing me to discover emerging themes within and across the data. Through the analytic notes column I used, I was able to connect the data collected with the related literature and theories that further enlightened the data analysis process. I spent hundreds of hours transcribing all my audio-recorded interviews and indexed the rest of the data I collected (e.g. play time conversations, multimodal data). As Elinor Ochs (1979) observed, transcription is a kind of “theory” since the transcription process enabled me to hear the interviews a few times and note down important themes during transcription. I learned my data from inside to out. Field notes and transcription allowed me to have a thorough understanding of my data and prepared me for the level of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis helped me to build both inductive and deductive thinking. I started with preliminary coding and took analytic memos while doing it. My analytic memos included my reflections, ideas, and questions about that specific part of transcribed and indexed data. After organizing and getting familiar with the data, I coded all data on Excel sheets to identify recurring themes for a first set of codes. Bringing these codes together, I came up with categories for the second set of coding. Next, I came up with emerging themes based on those categories. I also used a research questions column to keep codes and themes organized according to the research question(s) they addressed. I continued reading and rereading the data on these coded sheets throughout the whole analysis process. I did not stop going back and working on my transcribed data even after I finishing coding. I highlighted the important excerpts, took notes, and noted

down the questions I had. Through thematic analysis, I was able to re-examine the data to understand what people said about what they did in addition to their responses to why and how questions. Since I am interested in the language beliefs of people in relation to language policies and their lived experiences, this bottom-up way of looking for recurring patterns and themes was very useful.

### **Participants**

In this section, I briefly introduce each child, her/his parents and siblings, and the teachers who participated this study. I introduce the children who participated this study along with family members so that it is easy to understand family relations before I start presenting the data analysis.

*Gulnaz and Her Father Rasit:* Gulnaz was one of the most successful students in her class. She worked hard to finish all the tasks given by her teacher. Gulnaz was always nice to her friends and she was the most loved one among her friends based on what I learned from her classmates. Kurdish is her native language. Her mother cannot read or write in Turkish but she speaks Turkish. Gulnaz's grandmother lives with them in the same house. Their home language is Kurdish. Gulnaz's father Rasit is a seasonal worker. He works as a gardener in Ankara, the capital city, during spring and summer seasons. Rasit is a primary school graduate and considers the education of his daughter to be very important. He helps Gulnaz with her homework and states that he could do anything for her daughter's education.

*Tarik, His Father Aras, and His Mother Zehra:* Tarik is a silent student in his class. He never missed any assignment and always got endorsements from his teacher.

Tarik speaks both Kurdish and Turkish at home. His father Aras works as a field worker for other people in the village. Aras is a primary school graduate. He stated that he educated himself to improve his Turkish by watching television. He prefers speaking Turkish at home and among his friends. Tarik's mother Zehra is one of few women to graduate from primary school in the village. She speaks Turkish fluently but prefers speaking Kurdish at home. Both parents consider their son's education to be very important and both help Tarik with his homework.

*Sibel and Her Father Enver:* Sibel is the most social and verbal student in her class. I have not observed her hesitating to ask any question she has for her teacher or friends. Although her parents are native speakers of Kurdish, they say that they prefer speaking Turkish at home because it is the language of power. However, they do not entirely abandon Kurdish because they need to communicate with the community. Sibel's father Enver is a farmer working on his own land. He is one of the few high school graduates in the village and he devalues Kurdish because of its stigmatized status in mainstream society. Although Sibel actively participated in this study and her parents gave the consent for this, her father Enver agreed to participate in only one interview. He did not allow me to voice record our conversation because he had concerns related to the politicized status of Kurdish language in Turkey.

*Filiz and Her Father Faruk:* Filiz was one of the students who were defined as "slow learners". She was a talkative student among her friends during recess but stayed silent during classes. Her native language is Kurdish. Her grandmother lives with them in the same household. Filiz practices both Kurdish and Turkish at home. Faruk, her father,

was a farmer and animal breeder. He speaks Kurdish at home. Both of Filiz's parents help her with her assignments.

*Ugur and His Mother Susan:* Ugur is one of the most successful students in the class. He was a social and talkative student both during recess and classes. Although both of his parents are Kurds, they prefer speaking Turkish at home. Ugur does not speak Kurdish. His mother Susan is a housewife. She is a primary school graduate. Susan helps with the assignments of Ugur's homework.

*Berfin and Her Father Vedat:* Berfin was the most silent student in her classroom. She was also one of the more successful students. She never missed any tasks and received compliments from her teacher on her hard work. Berfin's home language is Kurdish. Her father Vedat is a primary school graduate and an animal breeder. He helps Berfin with her homework.

*Zerrin, Her Mother Ayse, and Her Sister Meryem:* Zerrin was a very talkative student. During my observations, her teacher stopped her many times while she was speaking during the class. Zerrin's home language is Kurdish-Turkish-Arabic mixed. Her father is Arabic from Syria and he is a Kurdish-Arabic bilingual. Her mother Ayse is multilingual in Kurdish, Turkish, and Arabic. Ayse and her husband speak Kurdish at home. They also occasionally speak Arabic to each other. Although the father does not speak Turkish, Zerrin's elder sisters including Meryem, speak Turkish among each other. Meryem, a seventh grader, told to me that they speak Turkish on purpose because they do not want to have problems in school. Ayse supports her daughters' language choice because she thinks this is necessary to further their education.

*First Grade Teacher, Cengiz:* Cengiz taught the class where I conducted my observations. He was also the one who helped me obtain access to Guzelyurdu primary school. He speaks Kurdish but he does not share this with his student or their parents.

*First Grade Teacher Esra:* Esra taught the other first grade class at Guzelyurdu Primary School. She was in her 7<sup>th</sup> year of teaching in the same school during this research. Esra is monolingual Turkish speaker and she is ethnically a Turk. Although Esra was not comfortable talking with me or allowing me to observe her class at the beginning, she invited me to attend her class if I wanted to after I spent two months in the village. She participated in interviews and focus groups.

*Principal Tahsin:* It was Tahsin's first year as Principal of Guzelyurdu Primary School. However, he was familiar with the school and teachers because he had previously worked in a village close to Guzelyurdu and participated in shared projects with Guzelyurdu. Tahsin had very good relations with teachers and was very nice to students. Tahsin is ethnically Arabic and speaks Arabic. Tahsin believed that Kurdish students needed to study twice as much as their Turkish speaking peers outside of the village in order to be successful in school.

*Vice Principal Mesut:* Mesut was one of two vice principals and he was one of the first people I met during my time in Guzelyurdu village. Mesut was very welcoming and warm to me. Mesut was Kurdish and was raised in the village; his parents and siblings still live in Guzelyurdu village. Mesut used his background and relationships with parents to try to convince them to shift their language toward Turkish. As I learned from my conversations with him, he truly believed that Kurdish was a disadvantage for students' school success. Although Mesut had been the vice principal for several years, he left his

position and went to another school in the middle of the semester, but we kept in touch after he left. I was able to have three conversations with him about the relationship between the school and the rest of the village.

*Former Teacher and Vice Principal Kemal:* Kemal was a teacher when I started this research but soon became the vice principal of the school. As a former teacher, he seemed to understand students' needs and experiences. He also knew parents well. Kemal was monolingual Turkish speaker but believed that Kurdish was important unless it negatively influenced students' educational experiences

### Ethical Considerations

This study evolved from events and situations that I have experienced personally, my emerging research interests, and the goals I have to bring the real life experiences and voices of Kurdish children into academic conversations about language learning, language maintenance, cultural identity, and bi/multilingualism. I am primarily interested in focusing my analytic lens on the experiences and views of those who have been historically and politically marginalized—with a particular interest in those who are under eighteen. However, recruiting members of groups who are vulnerable in all these ways requires planning, anticipation and sensitivity. At the beginning of this study, I provided the participants with consent forms and explained the goals and purpose of the study. I answered all questions they asked about the research process. I informed my participants they could withdraw from the study anytime they wanted without negative consequences and also that they had the right to not answer any questions I asked. In addition, I reminded the participants repeatedly that using pseudonyms would protect their identities and confidentiality, including the name of their village, the name of the



school, and the name of the city. Although some participants told me I could use their real names, I used pseudonyms for all names of people and places. It is important to note that, in spite of my efforts to protect study participants and minimize harm, it is impossible to know whether any of the questions I asked made them feel uncomfortable. It is my hope the benefits of this research outweighs any discomfort those who participated may have experienced while sharing their experiences.

#### Limitations of the Study

There were potential limitations in this study because of the nature of the data collection methods and the research sites selected. The first limitation was that I did not speak the native language of the participants in my study, Kurdish. To manage this limitation, my interpreter conducted interviews in Kurdish so that participants were comfortable to talk about what they wanted to explain to me. I presented my preliminary findings to participants during the last focus group interview I conducted in order to confirm that I did not miss anything, and they also learned what I would write about their experiences in my research reports.

Another potential limitation of the study was that I am a Turk, from the mainstream group. Although I am familiar with Kurdish culture and the nature of the village because of my personal background, I was still an outsider to the experiences of the Kurdish community in Guzelyurdu village. My experiences as a mainstream language speaker could influence my perspective of the data. Although I live and study in a country where a language (i.e. English) other than my native language (i.e. Turkish) is the official language, I cannot say I was able to put myself into Kurdish parents' and children shoes while analyzing the data. I can never know if I would have a different perspective

to this exact same data if I were a Kurd. Although it was not possible to eliminate this problem, it was useful to be reminded of my potential biases and I examined them during the analysis and interpretation of my data.

### Summary

In this chapter I presented the context in which this research study was conducted, biographical information about the participants, and details of data collection and analysis procedures. I also discussed my role as a researcher; how this role enhanced and influenced this research; and the complexities of involving participants who speak a different language. I have reflected on the limitations to the study. Since I am interested in people's language experiences as a cumulative process, which includes language ideologies, language policies, and daily life practices, I view all parts of my methods, including the analysis, as important to understand the experiences of Kurdish people. In the next chapters, I present key findings of my research and a detailed analysis along with the related data.

**4: “SHE CAN MAINTAIN KURDISH  
BUT SHE SHOULD SPEAK TURKISH VERY WELL”:  
LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES OF KURDISH PARENTS**

This study focused on the language ideologies that affected the language and literacy practices of Kurdish children living in Turkey across their home and school spaces during their first year of school. Parents’ and teachers’ talk about their perceptions and beliefs about languages appeared both directly and indirectly during our conversations. In this chapter, I analyze what parents and teachers said about the role and function of three languages - Kurdish, Turkish, and English – in order to understand their views on the relative status and vitality of each language. This investigation provided a context for understanding local language and literacy practices (which I will discuss more in Chapters 5 and 6).

I examined parents and teachers’ talk about language to understand how they view the status of Turkish, English, and Kurdish and to develop a greater understanding of ideological influences on their language policies and practices. One important finding is that people’s language ideologies are complicated, complex, and embedded in ways that are difficult to describe because it is not always clear which one lays where and where the roots originate. While organizing this chapter, it was hard to decide which part of talk and analysis should go under which section since each of them gave implications about the other as being outcomes of long, cumulative, and complex processes for each individual who was speaking. I also had difficulty with what I think of as the researcher’s

dilemma. I had to decide how much my voice should be included in this written text as I endeavored to foreground the really strong voices of my participants.

I learned a lot from the participants of this study. Although most of the parents' educational background was not even middle school, their lived experiences and their views of languages (and the social positions of languages) were very insightful. These views have a lot to tell us about social linguistics, language policies, language learning, language maintenance, and language practices in grassroots communities. In this chapter, I provide a detailed but holistic picture of language ideologies as they appeared in the talk of my participants during our conversations.

My research findings show that families living in Guzelyurdu village believe there is a hierarchy among three languages: Turkish, English, and Kurdish. The value attached to each language depends upon its range of functions as well as the potential benefits of each language for its users in the society. Community members appeared to value and prioritize Turkish the most because it is the official language, "the language of education and country" as defined by villagers, but they also valued English because of its functions as a world language. Kurdish was valued less by the parents and children that I talked to because they viewed it as "just a community language."

My findings also show one reason that villagers devalued Kurdish was because it does not have the same wide functions as Turkish and English in society, and because it is not associated with any potential advantages that Turkish and English have such as providing access to educational success. However, they still value the Kurdish language by defining it as an important "tie to ethnic roots." Kurds value Kurdish in contexts where they do not compare it to the positions of either Turkish or English languages in

mainstream society and policies. In other words, Kurdish still has its value for Kurds as their native language when it is not situated with other languages (i.e. Turkish and English) in the same context. The villagers' perspectives on each language seem to be based on the functions and status of that language in relation to the functions and status of other languages in society. Rather than perceiving a language with only its existing functions in their practices, parents seemed quite aware of what status languages had outside of the village as well. Parents also referred to their lived experiences, their current life standards and the future they wanted for their children when they explained what Kurdish means to them despite their diverse language practices and active use of Kurdish in daily life. The de/valuation of Kurdish for them is based on what the language is associated with as well as the comparisons they make between the functions and value of Turkish and English. That is also true for their perceptions of Turkish and English. Kurdish parents explained that they prioritize Turkish because it is the official language and it has dominant functions in all contexts in Turkey, and they pointed out the Kurdish language does not have the functions and status that Turkish has. They placed English in their perceptions based on the comparisons they made between Turkish and Kurdish languages. In all of these ways, their beliefs about each language as they appeared in their talk had strong connections to their views of other languages in that context.

During one of my conversations with Rasit, Gulnaz's father, he responded to a question I asked about Gulnaz's language learning process in school by saying that "language is language but every language has a different value". As it turns out, this statement captured what I heard from many parents and teachers and children say—albeit in different words. Rasit went on to describe language policies, the perspective of bigger

society, and mainstream ideology when he explained his perspective about the possibility of his daughter's Kurdish language learning in school as an elective course. He said:

**Rasit:** Well, now teacher, do you think all languages are equal? I want my child to be successful. So then, she needs to value and focus [more] on Turkish. Kurdish has nothing to do with that. If she has to learn another language, she should learn English. [It] is necessary [functional] everywhere (Autumn, 2012)

Here we see that Rasit prioritizes the Turkish language because he believes it is necessary everywhere as the official language and also because it is the way his child will be successful in school (a clear priority). Fishman (1996) discussed the hidden agendas of educational policies such as prioritizing an official language. This seemed to be an important factor in the language perceptions of participants in my study. The hidden language policies in Turkey, like the access Turkish provides to the bigger society with its wider functions, seem to be leading Kurds to value Turkish over Kurdish. This appears to be present in the contexts where parents devalue Kurdish (e.g. while comparing functions of Turkish/English to Turkish), and contexts where they value it (e.g. while talking about it separately not related to other languages). The conflicts in their view of Kurdish actually appear to reflect the dominant roles of the Turkish and English languages in mainstream society and the language policies in place. When he said, "Kurdish has nothing to do with that", he emphasized that the Kurdish language did not provide the educational advantage Turkish provided to his child because it is not the language of education. Rasit often associated educational success with learning and using Turkish or English, but not with learning or using Kurdish. Just as Turkish is valued

because it is necessary in every context including educational places, Kurdish is devalued because it does not have as many functions as Turkish and it does not help with success in school. English is thought to have more prestige than Kurdish because it has more functions than Kurdish even though it is not the official language in Turkey. For Rasit, the time spent on learning a language was determined by its functions and its usefulness. He was sure that English had more advantages for his child than Kurdish because it is “valuable everywhere” while Kurdish is not. After hearing about this hierarchy among languages from Rasit, I decided to re-examine what language really means to a minority parent in a society.

Rasit was not the only parent I talked with who valued Turkish and English nor is he the only one who devalued Kurdish. All parents I had conversations with had similar perspectives on the relationship between education and the value of languages. The educational success of their children was one of their priorities, and they often talked about this in relation to their hopes for their children to have a better life in the future. The role of each language (according to many parents) was related to what they believed would be needed in educational settings (and implicitly for a better future).

The educational functions of languages were not the only factors that contributed to the complicated hierarchy among languages in talk by parents and teachers. Parents wanted their children to have better standards of living than they currently had. They valued Turkish most as the official language and even English because it was the world language because they believed these two languages would provide opportunities for better life conditions that include educational success, social well being, and financial wellness.

## “His future is Turkish”: Language, Opportunity, and Instrumentality

Kurdish parents’ expectations for their children’s future appeared in their talk as another mediator of their language practices just like their lived experiences for their language beliefs. Suzan, for instance, shared with me how she perceived the future of her children during our second interview when she said:

The places he [her son] will go, the people whom he will be friends with, the positions we [her and his father] want him to have, all speak Turkish. His future is Turkish. (Autumn, 2012)

Suzan was thinking about the positions and environments that she and her husband desired for their children to have access to in the future when she prioritized the Turkish language. They wanted their children to have a better life outside of the village. In one of our conversations, she shared with me that they wanted their son to be a medical doctor. For the future they imagine for their children, Turkish is what they will need since those contexts will require fluency in Turkish. The wider functions of the Turkish language and its position in the greater society are the reasons Suzan deems the Turkish language critical to her son’s future. She is not the only person whose beliefs about languages are influenced by her hopes/desires for her children’s future.

Participants prioritized Turkish and defined it as “the language of education and bigger society” when it was compared to the Kurdish language that was viewed as “just a community language.” Parents used the analogy of “flag and language” often to express the importance of the Turkish language over Kurdish when they talked about the official status of Turkish. According parents, the flag they live “under” defines the language they were to speak. For instance one parent said:



**Suzan:** We actually don't even think about Kurdish when [in a context where] Turkish and Kurdish are present together because Turkish is better, umm, because we live under the flag of Turkish government. (Autumn, 2012)

According to Suzan, living under the flag of Turkish government means Turkish is the only language and this leaves no space for Kurdish even within the family. The Turkish language as it is associated with the country's flag has a robust effect on individually held ideologies of language. Vedat shares a view that is similar to Suzan's about the flag and the Turkish language:

**Vedat:** We live under the Turkish flag; Turkish is the language of the government. It is of course more important. (Autumn, 2012)

Vedat pointed out how the Turkish language needs to be learned and spoken with its functions in all official and social contexts when he said "It is of course more important." No discussion of the importance of the Turkish language was required because the flag of the country according to Vedat represents the official language.

During our conversation about his daughter's language practices, I asked Rasit what would happen if his daughter forgot the Kurdish language, and he said:

Why would I worry for that? We already live under Turkish flag.  
(Autumn, 2012)

According to Rasit, losing Kurdish would not be a big problem because Turkish is the official language and it is valid everywhere in the country.

The parents' comments about Turkish as the language of the government and its association with the Turkish flag reflect a number of assumptions about the functional value of Turkish as the official language. One needs to understand and speak Turkish in order to communicate, to have a good job, and to occupy socially acceptable positions in society. Turkish was seen as "the key" to access to larger social groups in both official and non-official contexts while Kurdish was limited to being the local language.

Parents in Guzelyurdu village viewed Turkish as the language of "present ones" (children and new generations). Although parents were able to speak Turkish, and some of them practiced it daily, they considered Turkish as the language that belonged to their children. Parents did not mind "having" a different language (i.e. Kurdish) than their children because they thought Turkish was the language of the future and their children represented the future to them. Their perception of Turkish as the language of the future is not the only reason for a possible language shift. The current language practices of Kurdish children seem to be the other reason for the potential language shift. According to parents, their young children's Turkish repertoire is larger than their own use of Turkish and the children practiced more Turkish than the parents did. Ayse explained this difference in our conversation below:

**Ayse:** The present ones [children] speak Turkish all the time. Wherever they go, children prefer speaking Turkish among themselves. For example children of my uncle, my children's cousins, they speak Turkish when they come together although their parents can't speak Turkish.

**Me:** Do these cousins go to school?

**Ayşe:** Yes. They all go to school. Not only them (cousins), the elder sister of her (Ayşe's first grader daughter) speaks Turkish to her. They speak Turkish to each other. (Autumn, 2012)

Later in our conversation, Ayşe mentioned the problems her older daughter had during her first years of schooling because she could not speak Turkish. Subsequently, her older daughter did not want her siblings to have the same problem. For these reasons, Ayşe thinks Turkish is the language of children and this is what they need to do for their future well being. Another parent, Suzan views Turkish as the new orientation of families because “the generation is changing. Children speak Turkish because of school and people focus more on Turkish.”

Parents were not the only ones who prioritized the Turkish language. Teachers also prioritized and valued Turkish because it is the official language in Turkey. Teachers have the responsibility of following a curriculum designed with no regard for particular needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students in their classrooms. Their teacher education program was designed for “standard” students - ones who speak and practice Turkish and who come to school with a good level of readiness to learn the course material and classroom language. Their perspective of Turkish was mediated by the functionality of it in the country and in the education system.

All three teachers I interviewed (Kemal, Cengiz, and Esra) came from homes where Turkish was the only language spoken, although only two of the three were monolingual Turkish speakers themselves. Cengiz, the teacher of the first grade class where I conducted my observations, had learned Kurdish and viewed himself as a

Turkish-Kurdish bilingual. His parents spoke Kurdish but their home language was not Kurdish. Cengiz learned Kurdish during his teaching service in a monolingual Kurdish speaking village. According to the teachers, they learned how to teach linguistically diverse students by experience once they began to teach in Kurdish speaking villages and communities like Guzelyurdu village. It is noteworthy here that all the teachers I interviewed and observed in their classrooms seemed very interested in the success and social well-being of their students. They perceived and defined Turkish as a “must” for their students “if they want to have a good position in the society” because it is the language of education and the official language.

During our conversations, the teachers said that students who spoke only Kurdish at home with their families often had a hard time understanding instruction in the classroom. Reminiscent of English-Only arguments in the U.S., these teachers thought Kurdish-speaking parents should encourage their children to learn and use Turkish to show they cared about their children’s success and future. Kemal, for instance, focused on his students’ potential experiences with the official status of Turkish when they leave the village:

**Kemal:** Turkish is the official language. It is the language of the country. When students go out of this village, they will understand the significance of Turkish better. Actually, parents have started to understand that their children need Turkish to do better in the society. Children know that they need to improve their Turkish to go to higher schools. They see that. Not only for their education, for other social reasons they know that they need to speak Turkish. (Autumn, 2012)

In this excerpt, Kemal describes the functions of Turkish and the need for children to speak Turkish in their society. Kemal knows well that students are encouraged to practice Turkish to be able to be successful. His description provided me with insights about the indirect influence of schooling on the value shift for languages in Kurdish children's perceptions and practices. For example, later in our conversation, Kemal mentioned that he suggests to parents who are literate, to read and make their children read books (in Turkish) to improve their Turkish language skills. He says this is important for students to understand the school material better, and in addition, it helps them to express themselves better in Turkish. This increased my understanding of why parents might value the Turkish language more as their children proceed to higher grades.

Esra and Cengiz were two of the teachers who prioritized Turkish for similar reasons. Each of them told me they felt lucky to have more students who came to school understanding some Turkish during the last two to three years because. They described how, even before they started school, some Kurdish children had started to use Turkish with their elder siblings and cousins who attended higher grades at home. In the past, teachers had to spend time teaching students basic Turkish before starting the curriculum. According to Esra, surviving in school and society was difficult for students who did not prioritize Turkish at some point early in their lives:

They [students] need to speak Turkish to be a part of the society as the most important. They can't do well in exams and in school [if they don't speak Turkish]. Even if they handle the situation in early grades, they will fail in higher grades. (Autumn, 2012)

Esra also talked the value of the Turkish language for her students when she described her role as a teacher in relation to the social well being of her students:

**Esra:** I know some students don't understand the material not because they are not intelligent. It is because of their language. I know their parents. They can't speak Turkish well. So, the child doesn't understand me. (Autumn, 2012)

When Esra pointed out the communication gap she had with some students in her classroom, she highlighted what she considered to be “the problems” that Kurdish-speaking students have in their classrooms (especially those with little proficiency in Turkish). Esra was not alone in viewing Kurdish as a problem. Although Cengiz can speak Kurdish fluently, he preferred to not share this with the parents of the children in his classroom. He prioritizes Turkish like the other teachers and he likes what the curriculum requires him to do. He identified not being able to speak Turkish as an obstacle for students who have different home language practices than school:

**Cengiz:** Not only for their success, but also for the access to the bigger society. They [students] can of course survive without speaking Turkish in this village. But, as a teacher I set my goals high for my students. (Autumn, 2012)

During several conversations, Cengiz emphasized that being “a good member” of society requires the ability to speak and understand Turkish: “I teach my students to be a good member of the society. They need Turkish to be a mechanic or a farmer. They need Turkish everywhere.” The conversation I had with Cengiz later explains more about why the Turkish language is more valued than Kurdish:

**Me:** What do you mean while saying “a good member of the society”? I mean how would you define it?

**Cengiz:** How would I define it, ummmm, I think a person who does not steal, respect others' rights, does his job well, and takes what he earns to his family is a good person of the society.

**Me:** What does Turkish have to do with being a good member?

**Cengiz:** I mean, it is related to being successful at their profession whatever it will be. Let's say a mechanic again. To be a mechanic in future, my students need to speak Turkish well because they will have to open their mechanic shop in city not in village or they will need to go to other cities to work for companies as mechanic. So, they will need to be speaking Turkish well.  
(Winter, 2012)

It was important for Cengiz to encourage his students to prioritize Turkish not only in school but also to recognize the functions Turkish has in bigger societies.

The word choices of the parents and teachers throughout my research process alerted me because they provided insights into the speakers' language ideologies and attitudes. The words they used provided insights into how they positioned themselves and the Turkish language within specific conversations as well as insights into how each saw the bigger society. I analyzed excerpts from conversations with three parent participants in the examples that follow.

Vedat was the parent of a first grade student, Berfin. He had to leave school after sixth grade to help his father with animal breeding. During our conversation about his language practices he shared the following:

**Vedat:** Speaking honestly, we, ummm, we, always spoke Kurdish till seven. All Kurdish. I mean we did not know [Turkish], we learned in school.  
(Autumn, 2012)

Vedat's comments reflect what mainstream society often expects from minority people like his Kurdish community. People are expected to come to school speaking Turkish, and they are expected to speak Turkish well to be able to be a part of well-respected society.

Faruk is another parent who learned Turkish at school. During our conversations, he mentioned several times that he felt happy to be able to speak Turkish well:

I learned Turkish at school. I started [to learn] then and [have] learned thankfully. (Autumn, 2012)

Faruk was grateful for learning Turkish because this knowledge helped him communicate with more people outside of the village. Later during our interview, he said to me that he travels everywhere in Turkey “without hesitating” thanks to his Turkish language. He added that he could communicate with men and “even” women with whom men needed to be more kind while talking. He said people listen to and respect him during these conversations and this is mostly because he speaks Turkish.

Another parent, Aras, talked about the potential for self-improvement when he referred to learning Turkish:

All is about a person’s improving himself. I [have] improved myself and spoke Turkish even at my young age. I watched television very often to improve myself, to speak better Turkish. (Autumn, 2012)

As with the other parents I interviewed, Aras told me that he did not think highly of people who “always speak Kurdish rather than improving themselves.” Such excerpts demonstrate the hierarchy that exists between Turkish and Kurdish in teachers’ and parents’ comments on language and language use.

The complicated status of Kurdish emerged, not only for this village but also in society at large, as I listened to their stories and expectations of the future for their children. As I explained in chapter one, Kurdish was the subject of official bans and political debates for many years and its use is considered a sign of being “political and an



enemy of the government” by many people in Turkey. Parents explained several times that they are Kurds, they speak Kurdish, but they are not into politics; as one of the parents I interviewed told me “we [all villagers] have no relations with political issues.” “You go to school. You can’t speak Kurdish there”: Language and Education

Because there are not many job options in Guzelyurdu village, villagers do either animal breeding or farming depending on their circumstances. Men who do not own animals to breed or have a field to farm look for jobs outside the village. They generally migrate to the metropolitan areas of Turkey such as Istanbul, Izmir, and Bursa to be temporary workers. I learned from villagers that they generally work as a gardener or construction worker once they leave the village. The findings of my study show that the lack of job options in the village and the villagers’ experiences as temporary workers in metropolitan areas have played an important role in mediating people’s language ideologies. Their perspective on Turkish is influenced by their interactions in these metropolitan contexts where they have more experiences with monolingual Turkish speakers in social environments and work places. Aras is one of these parents. In one of my conversations he said:

We go out [of the village, mostly to metropolitan areas]. Turkish is very important there. You can’t find jobs if you don’t speak Turkish. They look at your Turkish [accent] while hiring at first. (Autumn, 2012)

The parents and teachers I talked with seemed to believe that knowing and using the Turkish language would help them find jobs and earn money outside of the village. What Aras shared with me about finding a job in bigger cities is an example of the linguistic expectations of the mainstream society for people with linguistically diverse

practices. In this linguistic marketplace (Bourdieu, 1986), Turkish was more valued than Kurdish because of all the opportunities, resources, and access that it made possible. When Aras' said, "they look at your Turkish accent while hiring," he indirectly commented on the hierarchy of languages that exists in this linguistic ecology. In this linguistically hierarchical context where Turkish is valued, it is preferred as unaccented. Parents who prioritize the Turkish language are very aware it is best to speak it without a Kurdish accent because they will not be hired for better earning jobs with an accent.

Rasit works as a gardener in a big apartment complex in Ankara during spring and summer. When we were talking about the language practices of his daughter, he pointed out his work experiences to explain why he values his daughter's Turkish speaking without an accent:

I speak Turkish and I think I am good at speaking it. I have no problem communicating with Turks. I have many [monolingual] Turkish friends. I communicate with them in Turkish. So, I mean, ummm, I am good at speaking Turkish. Umm, but working is a different story. Gardening does not need me to communicate with people much. I mean I can spend a day without speaking with anybody. For other jobs, for example being a nurse, you need to speak Turkish very well. I mean so good that they [people] should not understand you are Kurdish from your speaking. I don't say it is a bad thing but I would want my daughter to speak Turkish very well without Kurdish accent. Now, my daughter wants to be a nurse. She should communicate with patients perfectly as a nurse. I mean, my daughter should not have any problem because of the way she speaks [accent]. She can maintain Kurdish but she should speak Turkish very well. This is what is good for her. (Autumn, 2012)

Rasit wants his daughter to speak Turkish without an accent because an accent in Turkish would be an obstacle for her "perfect communication" as so phrased by Rasit. Here we see that Rasit views a Kurdish accent as a potential deterrent for his daughter's future profession (which he hopes will be better than gardening). Parents like Rasit and

Aras (who migrate to metropolitan areas as temporary workers) have jobs that do not require extensive conversation (i.e. gardening, cleaning, and constructing). They believe they would be hired for a job as a waitress that would require them to communicate with customers if they did not have an accent and such jobs are desirable because they pay better than gardening or cleaning. Kurdish parents believe that access to better educational places and success in those places that is required for good and “guaranteed” professions (e.g. teaching, engineering, and being a doctor) will be possible with the Turkish language. During my conversations with parents on how they view languages (i.e. Turkish, Kurdish, and English), they shared what they expect their children to be in the future. I had one of these conversations with Faruk:

**Faruk:** I mean we always want this [progress]. We want our children to be educated. It is very beneficial for our children.

**Me:** Can you tell me a little bit more about those benefits? What kinds of benefits?

**Faruk:** These [being educated and progressive] are very important. If the person is educated, as I said last time again, s/he is always for peace and fellowship. They [educated people] can think logically and can foresee. They invite people to peace rather than fight. Illiterate people fight each other because they can't think critically. Studying is always beneficial and important. Educated people are respectful, modern, and civic. They guide other people; their speaking skills are good and advanced. They speak kind and beautiful. They are more intelligent. For example: me. I always think about my animals and their food and grass. So, my intelligence does not improve that much. My child shouldn't think about grass. I want her to be educated and progressive. This is what we want. (Autumn, 2012)

Faruk's comments were a good summary of parents' view of educated people in their society and what kind of people they want their children to be. This was actually not surprising to hear from a parent. What makes Faruk's talk complicated is that the Kurdish community associates the Turkish language with education and being educated. In other

words, Turkish is viewed and valued as an entrance ticket for the social, and professional benefits Faruk talked about.

One of the parents I talked with (Suzan) described the ways that Turkish was spoken “everywhere” and the value of such a language in the local linguistic economy:

Turkish is better everywhere. You go to places. You go to school, you need to speak Turkish there but you cannot speak Kurdish there. (Autumn, 2012)

This excerpt shows how much value even Kurdish speakers place on Turkish across contexts and communities.

One of the parents, Ayse, compared her native language, Kurdish, to Turkish during our first recorded conversation and pointed out that Turkish was a necessity for educated children:

**Ayse:** Now, yes, Kurdish is our mother tongue and I speak Kurdish but my children should learn Turkish at a very young age. They should speak Turkish because it is more important for them because of their school, their school environment. If they want to have good jobs in the future, they have to be successful in school. This is what I want for my children. I want them to be teachers for example. So that they can have better life conditions and do not have to live the hard conditions we have. Who would not want this? (Autumn, 2012)

Ayse’s talk is an example of how Turkish gains a higher position in part because of its status in spaces inside and outside of school. Like other parents, Ayse views education in Turkish as the best way to access a better future along with social, and financial well-being in their village where there is a lack of jobs and financial opportunities.

Ayşe and the other parents are not alone in believing that Turkish is more important. Esra, one of the teacher participants, cares about her students' school and social success like other teachers in the school. When she talked about the experiences of students in Guzelyurdu primary school, she said:

**Esra:** Some students save themselves (by learning Turkish) during the first or second year. For some, it takes more time.” (Autumn, 2012)

This teacher's comment reflects a widely held belief (rooted in ideologies of language that place greater value on Turkish than Kurdish) that students who do not learn or use Turkish will have limited opportunities and possibilities in the future.

The crucial role of schools in language policy and planning has taken its place in several scholarly discussions (e.g. Fishman, 1996; Hornberger, 2008; McCarty, 2011; Wiley, 1996). When a language is used in schools, the value of that language is usually increased in the local society (Fishman, 1996). In this case, using Turkish as the language of education reinforced the value of the language while it also contributed to the lower status of Kurdish. Even parents who were not highly educated considered the Turkish language as a critical component in their children's education. Several parents told me that their children would be more successful if they started school by speaking Turkish rather than Kurdish, and many of these parents talked about their own schooling experiences as a reason for this opinion.

For instance, during my first recorded conversation with Vedat (who is Kurdish), he shared the challenges he had in school because of his language practices:

**Vedat:** Well, we speak Turkish to our children. Our families didn't speak Turkish but we do. Why? Because we don't want them to fail in school. We

failed in school. We couldn't continue school. I didn't even know how to tell to teacher that "I don't understand you." So, Turkish is more important for her to learn classes better. (Autumn, 2012)

Vedat told me they shift their language practices to Turkish at home when speaking to his children because he thinks Turkish is necessary for success and because speaking too much Kurdish will limit one's success. He told me he worries that his children will fail like he did if they don't learn and use Turkish. He sees the lack of communication he had with his teacher, and his inability to express himself, as the main reason he had trouble in school. Because he said he wanted to prevent such difficulties for his children, he decided to use Turkish when speaking to his children.

Parents shared common school experiences during our conversations in addition to their experiences as temporary workers in bigger cities. They considered their Kurdish language related experiences as obstacles to their success in school:

**Vedat:** I wanted to say something to my teacher but I couldn't. My Kurdish didn't allow me to say something. I didn't know how to say; I didn't know what do they [Turkish speaking people] call it. If my family didn't speak Kurdish to me, I would be more successful. (Autumn, 2012)

Vedat believed the Kurdish language was the reason for his educational failure. Practically, the Kurdish language is not considered an obstacle as long as its speakers are fluent bilingual speakers. In other words, as long as they speak Turkish fluently without accent, Kurdish language practices would not be an obstacle. What Vedat points out is his monolingual Kurdish practices did not have any functions in school. So, in a context where there are not any efforts to raise children bilingual either in school or home spaces,

Kurdish is viewed as an obstacle for their education which is considered as the best way to escape the limitations of being either a farmer or an animal breeder.

Esra, the other first-grade teacher I interviewed and observed, also shared the view that Kurdish-speaking children are disadvantaged in school because according to her students cannot speak Turkish fluently because of their Kurdish practices at home. Similar to Esra, other teacher participants of this study position Kurdish as the language of illiterate and uneducated people in their talk. Although they have not said this directly, their talk and the state of Kurdish in their talk reflects their perspective of Kurdish and its speakers. Cengiz shared an example from one of his students when talking about his home language practices:

There are parents who speak Turkish at home. I know that. For example, I don't think Sibel's father speaks Kurdish at home because he is a high school graduate. (Autumn, 2012)

Sibel's father is one of the few villagers and the only parent who graduated from high school. Cengiz told me he believes this father chooses not to speak Kurdish because of his high education background compared to other parents who are either illiterate or attended only elementary school.

Parents who valued Turkish more than Kurdish for their children's school success also tended to value the English language for similar reasons. Rasit described the unequal status of these three languages one day when we were talking about the state of languages in society:

Well, now... Teacher, do you think all languages are equal? I want my child to be successful. So then, she needs to value/focus on Turkish. Kurdish has nothing to do with that. If she has to learn another language, she

should learn English. [It] is necessary [functional] everywhere. (Autumn, 2012)

While Rasit values Turkish more than Kurdish, he seems confident that English has even more advantages for his child than Kurdish because it is “valuable everywhere” (unlike Kurdish and Turkish). Parents and teachers in Guzelyurdu village value the Turkish and English languages (and devalue Kurdish) because of the educational access and future job opportunities these languages provide for their children. Dynamically related, the value of each language seems to be influenced by the value of the language it is being compared to. With fewer and fewer functions in local society, even those who grew up speaking only Kurdish view Kurdish in deficit ways.

“They will be stuck in this village if they don’t improve Turkish”: Language as an Access to Bigger Society

Another finding of this study is that participants position the language with wider functions (i.e. Turkish) over the other (i.e. Kurdish) in the language hierarchy. For instance Ayse views Turkish vital for her children to survive in their daily life:

**Ayse:** Let’s say, she will go somewhere and ask for something. Ummm, for example will buy a toy in the city. Shopkeeper can’t understand her [if she doesn’t speak Turkish]. I mean, these are small things, I mean but important for my child. [Another] example; I will take her to the doctor. The doctor will ask “where do you have your pain?” she doesn’t know, she can’t answer because she can’t speak. Why? Because she can’t speak Turkish. I mean, these are all very important. I mean, not only for school but also in other places. I mean, everywhere. I don’t want my children to have problems with communicating with other people. (Autumn, 2012)

Villagers need to travel to either the city center or bazaar in the closest town to shop for clothing, school supplies, household goods, etc. and they need to be able to communicate in Turkish because mostly monolingual Turkish speakers live in the town.



Since this is an important need and social practice in their lives, the examples from Ayse point to the importance of being proficient in Turkish “even during shopping.” Ayse emphasized that these daily life experiences are important for her child even if they sound small and simple.

Communication with doctors often appeared in talk as another example when Turkish provides access to bigger society. Parents shared their own and other people’s lived experiences with me and emphasized how important it was to express feelings in Turkish. In my conversation with Faruk, he pointed out that not speaking Turkish is a disadvantage especially when the health of a person is the issue:

**Faruk:** People from this village, go to doctor and come back without telling their problem because they don’t know any Turkish. Whatever the doctor says, they only say [respond] “yes, yes” [confirming what the doctor says]. They come back home at night with the same pain. She didn’t get any medicine. How can she get? She couldn’t tell to the doctor that she has back pain. If she knew a little Turkish, she [would] tell. She [would] tell her problem. You need Turkish everywhere. (Autumn, 2012)

In Ayse and Faruk’s comments, both the shopkeeper and doctor represent the monolingual Turkish speaker who is a member of mainstream society outside the village with whom they need to interact. The need to communicate with monolingual speakers such as doctors mediates their perceptions of the Turkish language. The Turkish language is described like a shield that can protect them from potential problems (i.e. coming back home with pain) and provide access to mainstream society.

Turkish appeared as a language of prestige in people’s talk and this was related to its function as the official language in official places based on their lived experiences as speakers with a Kurdish accent. The parents I interviewed considered every official

institution (e.g. hospital) as a “governmental office.” One parent shared with me that doctors and nurses in hospitals used to advise them to improve their Turkish. Another parent said they needed to speak Turkish to be able to get official work done such as birth registration. Otherwise, “officers cannot understand you well. Let’s say they understand, they would not respect you ” said Faruk when we were talking about the perception of Kurdish in the bigger society.

In addition, Turkish was associated with greater social prestige in general. Faruk talked about the respect he thinks Turkish speakers gain in mainstream society:

If you speak Turkish well [without an accent], you are respected in the society, especially in government institutions. People listen to you more [carefully] and they respect you more. (Autumn, 2012)

In his talk, Faruk points out the negative attitude that exists in mainstream society toward a Kurdish accent. This attitude appears to be the reason he defines standard Turkish as kind and gentle.

Native Kurdish language speakers’ perception of Turkish as a more prestigious language seems to echo in the communication among villagers in Guzelyurdu. Aras, another parent, shared the social reactions of those who hear him when he speaks Turkish with other villagers:

**Aras:** I sometimes speak Turkish within the village. Friends say: “you speak Turkish while we all speak Kurdish.” As I said before, I teach myself to speak Turkish, I improve myself. Some [friends] call me “the governor” because I speak Turkish. I don’t do it [speaking Turkish] to seem more prestigious than them. This is how I train myself. Even at home, Zehra [his wife] speaks Kurdish to me, I respond in Turkish to her. I don’t try to seem superior to my friends [while speaking Turkish to them]. They think I am trying to be superior when I speak Turkish. (Autumn, 2012)

Aras seems to believe that the ability to speak Turkish indicates one's social status. His comments show that his friends consider Kurdish as the community language and Turkish as the language of "the governor" and other socially and officially prestigious people. Aras' talk also shows us how ideologies of language often influence individual beliefs about the role of language in processes of self-improvement.

It is also important to examine parents' views towards English as they appeared in their talk in order to have a better understanding of this hierarchy. One finding of my study shows that parents place a lot of value on English even though it does not have any functions in the village, and it is of no use in the villagers' daily life. Access to financial wellness associated with languages gives English a priority in parents' ideologies of language—for themselves and their children. Such views are based on their experiences in workplaces. For example, Faruk has discovered that English facilitates earning money:

Well, now, as I told you last time, you go to a restaurant. Antalya, for example, there are tourists coming [there], if I go there to work as a poor person [without any money to invest in anything], I work as a translator. I am sure I earn 3,000 Turkish liras [about \$1500 which is a good amount of money to earn within Turkey's standards] as monthly salary. It is good money, clean [does not need you to work hands on anything such as animal breeding], and easy [to make]. I wish even I knew it [English]. (Autumn, 2012)

Faruk's current hard working conditions and low income makes English a good source to earn money because of the wider functions of the English language. When we compare the hard physical conditions of animal breeding and farming compared to earning money by just producing words, it gets easier to understand Faruk's perspective. This is an expected wish a parent has for a child. However, he seems to miss the point

that English may not be enough by itself to have a space in those touristic places as interpreters to make good money.

Later in our conversation he told me that his daughter could find well-paid jobs easily in these cities because restaurants and big hotels need people who can speak English to communicate with customers from all around the world. Faruk values English as the key to well-paid jobs with easy and comfortable working conditions because of the market value of English and its wider functions. Faruk's talk exemplifies the theoretical discussion by Bourdieu (1986). Both the economic value of English as a source for higher income and its functions position English with a highly valued status. Another parent, Rasit, joined Faruk in this value of English associated with financial wellness in the society. My conversation with Rasit not only shows the value of English, it also shows how Kurdish is devalued because it does not offer the same associated value to its speakers:

**Me:** There are Kurdish classes in schools. Your child can learn Kurdish as an elective class in school. Would you want your child to take Kurdish classes in school?

**Rasit:** No, what is she going to with that. Won't they teach English anymore?

**Me:** They do. These two classes are separate from each other. Students can take Kurdish classes in addition to English classes.

**Rasit:** She should take English classes rather than Kurdish. She should take more English rather than Kurdish classes.

**Me:** Why do you want [her to learn] English that much?

**Rasit:** It is important.

**Me:** Why do you think it is important? What would its benefit be for your child?

**Rasit:** Everything. For example, she can find jobs wherever she goes with her English. For example, she can speak it [to fulfill her needs]. According to the situation, she can get involved in [she has the social acceptance to access to] every respected [social] context but I mean, Kurd[ish] is not the same.

(Autumn, 2012)

Market value and the wider functions of English make it more important than Kurdish despite its local value for Kurdish parents. Rasit's comparison of Kurdish to English when he said, "Kurdish is not the same" showed his perception of the social value of the two languages. The language that has more functions and advantages is positioned with a higher status than the language with fewer functions. In Rasit's talk, Kurdish is positioned at a lower status than English because English comes with advantages Kurdish cannot provide: well-paid jobs and communication with more people from "all around the world." During our conversations, other parents shared with me they are sure their children will find "well-paid jobs wherever they go." In addition to their views of English as an opportunity for finding jobs with high salaries, Kurdish parents believe that English by itself can be a source for those highly paid jobs without higher education because of the value it has in workplaces:

**Aras:** As you remember, I talked to you about working in Antalya. It can be Antalya or other touristic cities. If my child can speak English, he can work as a translator in hotels or restaurants in those [touristic] cities. He can make this as his profession. So, even if he does not finish university, he can find good jobs if he speaks English. (Autumn, 2012)

In Aras' talk we see that he does not really care about education as long as his child finds a well-paid job with his English. He strongly believes that English will be enough for his child to do well financially in the future. As long as English provides a better life for his child, Aras does not think that education is a must.

Parents' beliefs for their children's future were based on what they expect from English with its wide use around the world. They told me that English provided the advantage of finding well-paid prestigious jobs for their children with its functionality

even if their children did not continue to higher education. Parents believed that speaking English would provide access to work as translators, to respect in society, and to opportunities to get involved in prestigious social contexts. Parents thought their children would have this access even if they did not continue to higher education. They viewed English as an alternative to being highly educated. Parents view English as a potential key to access for what their children would gain through education such as social wellbeing and better paid jobs.

Another finding of this study is that villagers placed English at a very high position because of its functions as world language. Ayse, who lived in Syria for more than ten years before moving back to her own village, talked about the role of English as it is being taught not only in European but also in Middle Eastern countries such as Syria:

Well, it is, ummm, good if she learns Kurdish in school. Ummm, I don't say anything [negative]. But, the most important is English. Learning English for her is the most important. I mean, why? Because look at all governments, they teach English in schools. Even Arabs, I mean Arabic countries. Arabs come to Turkey and stay in hotels. I mean I heard that. People [in Turkey] don't speak Arabic, so they understand each other in English. Because it is, ummm, it is very important and popular, English is being taught everywhere [every country] and every school. (Autumn, 2012)

Parents prioritized English, although none of them speak it, as they had the idea that English would be enough to be able to communicate with people in all countries and enough to find jobs easily. All their beliefs were based on what they expect from English for their children's future and as a language with wide use around the world.

As I mentioned before, Kurdish is positioned at a lower level as compared to English in parents' perception. During several occasions, parents placed English at a unique high position because of its wider functions in the world even when compared to

other western languages. Faruk compared English to French when he explained how important English is in the world:

**Me:** Why do you think your children better learn English than Kurdish?

**Faruk:** If I go to France, I can speak English with them even if I don't speak French we can communicate in English. (Autumn, 2012)

Similar to Faruk, Aras explained the value of English by sharing what he observed in Antalya, a tourist city, where he went to work as a temporary worker. He explained further:

As I told you before I went to Antalya. People from all countries speak English there. Why? Because it is the language of everyone. Russian speaks English, the German speaks English, ummm, the French speaks English. I mean everyone. We are Kurdish, but that's not a problem. My child better learn English than Kurdish. (Autumn, 2012)

English in Aras' view is the language to be spoken by his children for its potential advantages as the *lingua franca* of the world.

Ayse also thinks English is the most valuable language in the world as it is the *lingua franca*. Based on her experiences in Syria, she pointed out that English is taught by all education systems in the world. She said:

French [language] is fine. German [language] is fine. But, the important thing is English because English is used everywhere. It is used in French governments; it is used in Germany even as priority. Not only them [Germany and France], for example my daughter was learning English in Syria. (Autumn, 2012)

Based on their experiences, what they heard from mass media and other people and in their talk, English seemed to be valued highly by parents because of its status as the world language.

Parents' wishes and regrets about learning English captured my attention in both our interviews and in my analysis of the data. This gave me insight into where parents position English in their beliefs and where English actually is in real life. Although English did not have any function in their village, parents told me they wished they knew English. During my conversation with Suzan, she mentioned how she wanted to learn English:

**Suzan:** English is very important. It is the most important. I wish I had the opportunity to learn it even now.

**Me:** What would you do with your English if you knew it?

**Suzan:** I don't know. You go somewhere; you come across with a tourist and speak [with the tourist]. I mean you use it for something for sure. If I had the opportunity, I would learn it

Although Suzan does not "need to speak English" now, she positions it with a high status because of "possible functions" she thinks it could have.

The dilemmas and complications people experience in their beliefs creates different perceptions and even responsibilities in a politically and historically complicated context like Guzelyurdu village. Mainstream policies seem to fail to cover Kurds' diverse practices in their village. Yet people need to maintain ties in their own community at the same time they build access to social capital in the bigger society. Although Kurds highly value Turkish and English languages, they still value Kurdish as the mother tongue and a tie to their origins.

During our first personal conversation, Suzan and I were talking about her view of languages when I asked about her view of Kurdish language practices of her children. Suzan told me that she thinks "it is better if they [her children] can keep it [Kurdish] because it is mother tongue." (Autumn, 2012)



Ayşe is the parent who values Kurdish the most, and I wondered if it was because her husband does not speak Turkish well:

My priority is Turkish for my children for their future. My husband agrees with me because we live in Turkey. However, my children should be able to, at least, understand Kurdish well to communicate with their father and relatives from Syria. (Autumn, 2012)

Ayşe, like other parents, values Kurdish because it connects her children with their relatives who live in Syria and who are either monolingual Kurdish or Arabic-Kurdish bilingual. Ayşe and her husband think their children should maintain Kurdish even if the priority in school and society is Turkish, as they want the children to keep their family relationships intact.

Enver, another parent living on the east side whose home language is Turkish, often talked about Kurdish as a language with almost no use for his children. However, on one occasion, he spoke explicitly about the value that Kurdish has:

I think Kurdish is important only as a tie to our ethnic roots. I would be happy if Sibel can maintain Kurdish as long as it won't be a problem in her school and social life because it is her mother tongue. (Winter, 2012)

Although Enver usually devalued Kurdish when he talked about its position alongside the Turkish and English languages in education and mainstream society, he still valued Kurdish as the native language and its tie between generations and its relationship to their ethnic roots.

In addition to the parents who valued Kurdish, all the teachers I interviewed valued Kurdish in their students' talk because it is their mother tongue. Several times Cengiz pointed out the importance of the mother tongue for Kurdish children because

that is how they would communicate with their community and family. He explained that he valued Kurdish as the mother tongue for his students and said that his students should find a way to maintain Kurdish for their future even while learning Turkish. Kemal also thought that his students should not lose their mother tongue if possible. He said:

I don't think students should lose their language [Kurdish] while encouraging them to improve their Turkish reading, writing, and explaining themselves in Turkish. Kurdish is their family language; it is their mother tongue. They better maintain it as it is the tie to their ethnic roots, family, and this village. (Winter, 2012)

Although both parents and teachers explained their negative attitudes toward Kurdish (as compared to Turkish and English), they all seemed to value Kurdish as the mother tongue and the tie to family and ethnic roots. Ethnolinguistic vitality appears in Kurdish parents' beliefs and suggests hopes for the future of Kurdish in this local context.

With the hierarchy of languages and the local value of Kurdish in mind, parents' valuation of bilingualism seems to add some value to Kurdish in this ethnolinguistic local context. For example, Faruk gave the following example to explain what kind of advantages his daughter will have if she is bilingual:

Let's say my daughter will stay in the village [if she does not continue school]. People will want to marry with her [when she grows up]. If she speaks Turkish well, she can get married with Turks in the city, as well. She does not have to limit her choices to Kurds. She can also get married with Kurds without any communication problems if she speaks Kurdish, too. I mean if she can handle two [Turkish and Kurdish] together, it would be very good. (Winter, 2012)

The ability to maintain Kurdish practices can be a social advantage that provides access to more people for his children according to Faruk.

Parents believe Kurdish-Turkish bilingualism could be an advantage for their children if they become doctors, teachers, or nurses in the places where Kurdish people live like Guzelyurdu village. Faruk and Aras highlighted the importance of accessing more people and helping other Kurds when they pointed out the challenges of monolingual Kurds. Faruk said:

If my daughter becomes a doctor in a Kurdish village, her patients will not have to worry about speaking Kurdish to her if she can maintain her Kurdish. I mean Kurdish speaking patients won't face problems while explaining their problem to their doctor unlike many other people who come from hospital with empty hands. (Winter, 2012)

Faruk's comments on the advantages that are available to those who can speak both Kurdish and Turkish reveal the value of bilingualism in this local linguistic ecology and also the value such bilingualism has to the larger community. Like Faruk, Aras also placed value on the brokering practices that bilinguals can engage in and that improve the experiences of Kurdish monolinguals: "If my son can speak Kurdish in the future, he can help them [monolingual Kurds] to fulfill their needs." he said in response to my question about the potential benefits of bilingualism for his child in the future. Language brokering becomes a naturally emerging responsibility for bilinguals in multilingual contexts where there are also monolingual speakers. Orellana (2009) discusses language brokering practices of minority children in linguistically diverse contexts, and I will also discuss this in chapter 6 in detail. However, what appeared in parents talk provides insights into language brokering from a different perspective. In this local context, language-brokering practices contribute to the ethnolinguistic vitality of Kurdish as an expectation of Kurdish parents from their children and as a potential benefit for them in their beliefs. Both Aras

and Faruk gave examples from situations that were experienced often by Kurdish monolingual speakers. Since both Faruk and Aras are aware of the needs of Kurds (i.e. problems expressing themselves to doctors and the need of a language broker in institutions), they view a bilingual repertoire as the potential remedy.

Parents also explained that maintaining the Kurdish language is beneficial for their children because their village is located at the Syrian border in a multilingual context and there are other Arabic and Kurdish speaking villages nearby. If the children are Kurdish-Turkish bilingual they will be able to do business with Syrians (Villagers used to import animals from Syria before the war inside Syria).

For Ayse, being bilingual means having a transnational identity for her children. She shared the following during my second interview with her, when we were talking:

You know my husband is from Syria. We lived there for many years; three of my children were born there and they started school in Syria. Circumstances changed and we had to move back to my village. We have relatives back in Syria, too. I want my children to speak both Kurdish and Turkish so that they can look for opportunities in Syria in future [in case] they can't find anything [jobs] here. (Autumn, 2012)

Although this parent highly values Turkish for her children's educational success and social wellbeing, she sees Kurdish as another advantage for her children because they may end up living in a Kurdish speaking country in the future.

Teachers also valued language use based on the potential outcomes for Kurdish children in the future. Kemal, one of the teachers in Guzelyurdu primary school, became the temporary vice principal of the school two months after I started my data collection. He had been a teacher in the school for four years. During my second interview he said:

Kurdish is their [students'] community language. I don't think that it is something they should lose. However, they need to speak and improve their Turkish to succeed in school. Otherwise, they will be stuck in this village. (Autumn, 2012)

Kemal's talk exemplifies the situation that language choice becomes a life choice for Kurdish children. If they choose to value Kurdish more than Turkish in their practices, they will have to stay in the village and do either animal breeding or farming.

Cengiz had been a teacher in the same village for seven years. We had many conversations about his students and about his role as a teacher. Four of these conversations were recorded interviews in addition to the focus group interviews I conducted with all teacher and administrator participants. Cengiz's beliefs and practices of Kurdish were mostly shaped by his experiences and role as a teacher in this village. In addition to this, his experiences as a teacher in a different Kurdish village located in the Eastern side of Turkey mediated his perceptions toward Kurdish. In our first conversation, he generally compared his previous students to current ones. In that school, students came to school "with literally no knowledge of Turkish." That is why a few times in different conversations he repeated, "Kurdish is not a big problem here. Students understand when I say "table, desk, come, go, sit down, stand up...etc." in Turkish. That is enough for me." Cengiz thinks if his students have a communication repertoire of their daily life in Turkish, it is enough to draw on in school. Even though he values Kurdish, Cengiz said during one of our personal conversations that the priority should be on Turkish if his students want to be successful in school and be able to communicate with bigger society:

Kurdish doesn't take them to the life in the bigger society. Students will understand that. For example, they cannot be mechanic if they speak Kurdish only, they cannot be a restaurant owner, or a contractor. I mean they cannot do much outside of this village with their Kurdish. (Autumn, 2012)

Cengiz, like the other teachers, thinks that students need to have improved Turkish practices to be successful in school. He stated that speaking Kurdish only would limit their career options. He believed that his students would understand this during their school life and "improve themselves accordingly." Cengiz is interested in his students' future and wants them to have better life circumstances. He thinks Kurdish is not enough for them to provide a better future.

During my second interview with Vedat, I asked him about his views of Turkish and Kurdish, and I learned he also believed that younger Kurds used Turkish more than Kurdish:

**Vedat:** Current ones [children], the ones who go to school can speak Turkish more or less. People got more interested in speaking Turkish to their children; I am not the only one [focusing more on Turkish]. (Winter, 2012)

According to Vedat, this language shift to Turkish in families is driven by children's preferences. He said that children prefer speaking Turkish rather than Kurdish once they start school. He thinks children feel more comfortable speaking Turkish because they gain academic knowledge in Turkish. He said:

For example: my daughter and nephews. They all prefer speaking Turkish to each other. Once a child starts school, that child speaks Turkish to her cousins, siblings, and friends. I mean children prefer speaking Turkish. I think, they feel more comfortable to say Turkish words. I think they learn Math, Science, even Music in Turkish. So, it is easier for them to speak Turkish. (Winter, 2012)

As an English Turkish bilingual speaker, I still find myself reading numbers in Turkish in an English text because it is my native language. And I heard similar experiences from my other international friends who are bilingual speakers of English and other languages. So I am not sure if Vedat's comment "easy" applies to all bilinguals, especially the ones who become bilingual at a later point by learning the second language in schools. However, Vedat's talk points out that Turkish language practices dominate children's Kurdish practices. They speak and use Turkish in various contexts such as math and science, and during communications with their friends and teachers while Kurdish has limited functions as a home language. In this case, easiness of the Turkish language for Kurdish children appears in Vedat's talk and shows the Turkish language becomes more practical for children to speak than Kurdish. This implies a possible language shift driven by ideologies of language that value Turkish and English while devaluing Kurdish—an ideology increasingly powerful among Kurds. Other parents also told me (proudly) that each generation speaks Turkish better than the previous generation. "Current children speak Turkish better than their parents do," said Zeynep in response to my question about her view of the Turkish language. Other parents compared their Turkish repertoire to their children's during our several conversations. The contrast between their own and their children's language practices is made in the following comments from Ayse, Aras, and Rasit:

**Ayse:** We did not know Turkish at all. We did not know Turkish as much as current children do. Umm, we knew only a few words. These ones [children] can speak sentences. (Winter, 2012)

**Aras:** It did not use to be like that. Current first graders start school speaking Turkish. We used to learn Turkish in school. Children are better at speaking Turkish than us. (Winter, 2012)

**Rasit:** Turkish is spoken by our children more and more. Families try to speak Turkish to their children because they know that it is what children need. I did not know Turkish at all when I started school. My child can understand and speak Turkish better than I was able to speak. (Autumn, 2012)

Parents seemed to accept the language shift they experience between generations as they talked about it. According to them, this is the natural process of schooling, getting more involved in the bigger society, and the improvement that comes with education. Parents shared their experiences during their first year in school when they described Turkish as the current language of their children. During these conversations, they were explicit that Turkish should be their children's language not only for the future they want for their children but also to avoid difficulties parents had in the past.

Suzan, who lives on the east side of the village and who also belongs to one of the most prominent families in the village, described the views of people who live on the west side of the village and view Turkish as the language of new generations and the future:

There also are people who speak Kurdish, in those sides (pointing out the other side of the village with her hand). Their children speak Turkish better than they do. (Autumn, 2012)

In addition to explaining her perception of Turkish as the language of a new generation to me, Suzan pointed out that families from the west side of the village who speak Kurdish to their children create a problem because there will be a point when they cannot communicate well with their children whose preference is Turkish.



Negative attitudes towards Kurdish seemed to be influenced by the language's restricted functions or domains of use (and the value and prestige attached to Turkish and English); and those restricted functions are related to the language's lower prestige and status (as compared to the other two languages). The fact that Kurdish does not currently have enough use in contexts imagined by parents for their children appears to be the main reason for them to develop this negative perspective toward Kurdish. Plus, they believe that Kurdish does not provide any access to wider society and educational opportunities. Suzan, the parent from the west part of the village who speaks Turkish at home, pointed out the limited functions of Kurdish when she talked about what Kurdish meant to her. "Just a community language" said Suzan when she referred to her mother tongue. She also shared with me that she thinks Kurdish does not have any value except in their village or other Kurdish villages nearby which she does not want her children stuck in.

Vedat and his wife, who live in the east side of the village and speak Kurdish at home, said they do not follow any special language plan for their children. They mostly speak Kurdish and speak Turkish "if needed" especially while helping their daughter with her homework. In one of the recorded conversations with Vedat pointed out the limited functions of Kurdish:

Let's say Kurdish is a good language and my daughter maintains it. What is she going to do with it? Kurds live only in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Iraq. And, [all] these [people] speak different Kurdish. It is not the same Kurdish, only the name of the language is Kurdish. Even in Turkey, we don't speak the same [Kurdish] language. I go to Istanbul to work. There are Kurdish people coming from other cities; we don't understand each other's Kurdish. We all claim that our Kurdish is the original one. There is no life for Kurdish outside of this village." (Autumn, 2012)

Vedat had learned from his experiences with other Kurds in different contexts that Kurdish has functions only within their village. Various types of Kurdish spoken by other Kurds he met strengthen this view of Kurdish as a community language because individuals can communicate with only Kurds from the same area.

Vedat and other parents preferred a future in bigger cities because of possibly better opportunities (i.e. higher schools and well-paid jobs) for their children. It did not matter which language was spoken at home or what education level parents had, I did not meet any parent who wanted their children to stay in the village to be farmers or animal breeders. Kurdish which has “no life” out of the village, even among other Kurds, has all its existing functions and value in parents’ talk as “just a community language.” Parent participants considered Kurdish a language of grandparents and older generations.

My second conversation with Faruk was during my visit to their home located on the east side of the village. Faruk is one of the parents who speak only Kurdish at home. He and his wife and child live with his mother who is 83 years old. When I spoke with Faruk, his mother and wife were present. We had our interview with him while having coffee with fresh goat’s milk. His wife and mother joined the conversation when they wanted to say something:

**Faruk:** It is enough to understand it [Kurdish] just to keep the ties with grandparents alive if possible. If not, it is fine to lose it. It is her choice. My mother always speaks Kurdish. She can’t pronounce Turkish. [When she tries to speak Turkish] she confuses.”

**Grandmother:** I am an old person, what can I do? (Autumn, 2012)

Older people in the village generally cannot speak Turkish because most of them have never attended school. People who can communicate in Turkish are the ones who went to school. These are generally younger people who are in their early 30's. Hence, Kurdish is considered as the language of older generations. The younger people are the less Kurdish they speak. This is similar to what Faruk was saying; "it is enough to understand if possible to keep the ties with grandparents alive." Rasit, Aras, and Suzan stated that their children did not have to speak Kurdish, and they use their Kurdish language skills as needed if situations in school, the social environment, or their personal well-being require it.

These excerpts help us understand why actively maintaining the Kurdish language might not be a high priority for these parents. All parents except Ayse thought a plan was not necessary to maintain Kurdish and children will be exposed to the language "even if they don't want" it in the community. The parents seemed to leave the responsibility of maintaining it for their children to the community they lived in. Plus, children were not expected to speak the language. Parents said explicitly that their children should not speak much Kurdish because they wish children to speak Turkish without a Kurdish accent as it could also cause problems in their life.

"It sounds rude when your tongue has Kurdish [accent]" said Aras when he talked about his perception of those who had a Kurdish accent when speaking Turkish. During our conversation, he said to me "kind and nice people don't have any accent." He seemed sure that having a Kurdish accent would be a big disadvantage for them and for their children, and this is based on his experiences as a temporary worker in a tourist city. Aras described the problem of speaking Turkish with an accent:

Even I don't like listening to people who speak Turkish with a Kurdish accent. I don't want to humiliate them but they act so illiterate by speaking Kurdish all the time. Their tongue cannot pronounce Turkish well when they speak Kurdish all the time. They should train themselves and speak Turkish. I watch TV to train myself and learn how to speak kind Turkish. (Winter, 2012)

During the rest of our conversation, Aras told me that people are considered rude with such an accent, and they will not be employed as a waitress in a good restaurant or in any other jobs that require them to talk with customers. He said he needs to train himself by watching TV and that is the only resource he has to listen to "kind speaking people" to avoid this problem. The parents' perspective on languages was shaped mostly by their lived experiences.

Language ideologies widely circulating about the place of each language in school and society and its future opportunities influenced the beliefs and practices of the Kurdish parents and teachers I talked with. Attitudes developed in accord with their expectations for the use and functions of languages for their children in the future. Parents viewed Turkish and English as the future for their children because of the perceived wider functions of the two languages and because of the educational opportunities the languages were associated with. The shift in their children's language practices toward Turkish was perceived as something better and even something that was supposed to be.

### Summary

This chapter described and analyzed the complicated and multilayered nature of the ways language ideologies influence and shape the views of Kurdish parents and teachers in Guzelyurdu village. I discussed how people in Guzelyurdu village position

Turkish, English, and Kurdish language in their talk. I examined how people in the village talk about those three languages based on their experiences and their expectations for their children in the future. The data showed that parents and teachers prioritize the Turkish and English languages over Kurdish based on the symbolic power associated with Turkish and English and the wider functions of the two languages in society. My findings showed that people devalued Kurdish when it was compared to Turkish and English. This devaluation was based on its stigmatized status in the larger society and the parents' experiences in educational, social, and work places. My analysis showed that people in Guzelyurdu village value Kurdish both in their talk and in their practices as their mother tongue and as a tie to ethnic roots even though they devalued it for their children's educational, social, and financial access in the future.

The data analysis yielded insights into Kurds' complicated structure of language ideologies that were an accumulated process of social and political stigmatization. Even though they still valued Kurdish as a tie to their ethnic identity and believe the Kurdish language will be available for their children in the future, my analysis points out this is a critical period for the Kurdish language in the community where I conducted this research. The language is rapidly shifting toward Turkish in Kurds' language beliefs and that influence their and their children's practices. This analyzes emphasizes this shift should not be disregarded especially in this time period when Kurdish still has some value in the views and practices of Kurds.

## **5: POLICIES IMPLEMENTED IN LANGUAGE PRACTICES**

In this chapter I describe and analyze the ways that educational and language policies influence Kurdish children's language and literacy experiences in Guzelyurdu village. I discuss my analysis of the talk and practices of Kurdish families as well as teachers and school administrators. I also explore the relationship between situated practices and the language ideologies that appeared in their talk. With this chapter, I aim not only to contribute another piece to the picture I am painting on how components of the education system (i.e. parents, teachers, and school/ing) in Guzelyurdu village mediate language practices of Kurdish children but also to unwrap the layers of a complexity of practices and beliefs in the Kurdish community. This analysis shows a contradiction between Kurdish people's language practices and what they say about languages. This contradiction is focused and clear in instances of practice, learning, and maintenance along with their beliefs about both the Kurdish and Turkish language. While Kurdish parents state they value and practice Turkish more than Kurdish, their practices seem to value Kurdish rather than Turkish. This contradiction between parents' talk and their practices complicates the beliefs about Kurdish and Turkish languages discussed in the previous chapter.

In such a context complicated with mainstream policies, expectations for the future, and practices that are locally valued but nationally devalued, school administration, teachers, and families mediate Kurdish children's social and language

practices. In this chapter, I analyze and discuss how administrators, teachers and families influence Kurdish children's language practices.

In the first section, I introduce Mesut, the vice principal, who was born and raised in Guzelyurdu village and discuss how he negotiates his roles to mediate language practices of Kurdish children. I also discuss the principal's and second vice principal's practices and views of language practices of their students to have an understanding of policies and practices of school administration.

In the second section, I discuss the analysis of my conversations and observations with teachers on their role as mediators of students' practices. Following this, I discuss the first grade teacher, Cengiz's, views and practices. I conducted classroom observations in his class for more than four months, and we had many personal conversations in addition to our recorded interviews and focus groups. My detailed analysis and snapshots from Cengiz's first grade classroom contribute to my discussion of teachers' views and practices in the school.

In the last section, I examine families' language practices and beliefs. I also discuss the challenges they have within their practices, background, and expectations of teachers. My research is focused on these challenges I believe provide crucial knowledge of Kurdish children's experiences across their home and school spaces.

#### Administrators, Teachers, and Families

I witnessed the use of Kurdish by students among themselves during recess (They stopped as soon as they realized I could hear them speaking Kurdish.) during my observations at Guzelyurdu Primary School. I am not sure why they stopped speaking Kurdish, but it may have been because I was a person whom they called teacher and I

also spoke Turkish. Students obviously knew that Kurdish was not the language to be spoken in school and they were not comfortable using it. Kurdish did not have an official status in school except as one of the elective courses defined by an official policy change in 2012. Even so, nobody in the school elected Kurdish for reasons; I did not have the chance to explore this. As a result, Kurdish use in school was in students' occasional practices or "secret talk" among themselves during recess. However, it was the language of the community outside of the school.

Parents, teachers, and school administrators all made statements that indicated their extensive knowledge of Kurdish children's educational and linguistic practices. Many social factors influenced the language and learning practices of the Kurdish children: for example, the language and cultural background of parents and the expectations of teachers as well as administrators of Kurdish children. I will discuss the practices and expectations of each group separately in the next section and also describe their relationship to each other.

### **"They don't need Kurdish in school anyways": Administrators**

Mesut, one of two vice principals, was one of the first people I met during my time in Guzelyurdu village. He was very welcoming and warm to me. When he introduced himself, I learned that he was Kurdish and was raised in the village; his parents and siblings still live in Guzelyurdu village. As a researcher, I was lucky that he was the vice principal of the school because his insights reflected a deep understanding of the families and their practices as well as the relationship between the school and families. Although Mesut had been the vice principal for several years, he left his



position and went to another school in the middle of the semester, but we kept in touch after he left. I was able to have three conversations with him about the school's role in the village.

Mesut was able to speak Kurdish with families and they were comfortable communicating with him. Because everyone in the village knew him, he was very comfortable visiting students' homes. It seemed to me that villagers respected him very much in part because he served as a role model; he had been successful at school and had become a vice principal in spite of limited opportunities. What I learned from conversations with Mesut and my observations of his interactions with others helped me to understand the active and complicated nature of language policies in this local context. During one of our early conversations, Mesut told me that he wanted the Kurdish children to be successful at school and get into good positions rather than follow their parents' path:

Most probably, I want this [the success of Kurdish students] more than their parents [do]. I don't think their parents consider the education of their children as important. Ummm, they can say that they consider it as important but they don't do anything [special] for that. (Autumn, 2012)

Although Mesut hoped for students' success, he also worried that Kurdish youth living in the village might not be considered successful when compared with their Turkish peers. His concern seemed to be that their Kurdish language practices in school and the educational background of parents would be perceived as limitations even after graduation. During my conversations with him, he also expressed concerns about the negative effect of parents' Kurdish language practices on students' schooling process and

academic success. While raising his concerns about parents, he was drawing from his past experiences in schools:

When you first go to school, you don't know what to say. Teacher asks you a question but you can't answer it. Then, they label you as either lazy or make fun of what you say. I was like that. I had many hard times in school even in high school. I remember one day in high school, I didn't know the word so couldn't tell the answer. I knew the answer but didn't know the word. The word was "corn cob." I had to work more and more to improve my Turkish so that I could answer the questions on tests. I did it but it wasn't easy. Now, I know these children have similar problems. Teachers expect their students to fully understand the instruction and the course material. Everything is in Turkish. Let's say, they will be fine here [in primary school], they won't be fine in higher schools. 99% of families speak Kurdish at home. So, students can't improve their Turkish. They need Turkish in school to not face the problems that I faced. (Autumn 2012)

This excerpt reminded me of the challenges that children who speak stigmatized languages have in schools across many contexts around the world (see Au, 2006; King, 1996; McCarty, Romero, Zepeda et al, 2006; Valdes, 2001). Mesut's comments highlighted his perception that language barriers prevent children from demonstrating their knowledge and learning; such language barriers have also caused teachers to ascribe children limited capabilities and describe them in deficit terms such as "lazy, unintelligent." According to him, this was the experience of all Kurdish students in the village; their home language was viewed as an obstacle for their success and their social wellness. Mesut pointed his finger at Kurdish parents for not caring about their children's education enough since they allowed language practices at home that impacted their children's school success.

Similar to other contexts, Kurdish children are identified as limited and have difficulty in their learning because of their limited school language repertoire. Later in the

conversation, Mesut explained that he had been insisting that students and families speak Turkish at home for students' own good. He believed that the Kurdish language was a barrier for students' learning. He also shared that he had been working on shifting families' home language from Kurdish to Turkish, because the social and linguistic classification in bigger society seemed to lead members of minoritized communities to devalue their own practices, ideologies, and roles:

**Mesut:** I often talk to them [families] about school and tell them that they have to speak Turkish to their children if they want their children's success [in school]. I go visit them often to talk about what they need to do. They don't have educational background or awareness enough to understand what their children do in school and what their children need to be successful. They just send them [children] to school. They weren't even sending children to school before the payment. It [the number of parents sending their children to school] increased now, they all send children [to school]. As I said before, I work really hard on increasing their awareness for the importance of their children's education.

**Me:** What do you specifically do to increase their awareness? Can you give me some examples?

**Mesut:** Well...As I am from this village, I know all of them and they know me from my childhood. So, I go to their houses and explain what kind of challenges I had. Wherever I see them, I try to explain the expectations of teachers and schools so that they consider this [education of children] a little more important. I even called all villagers including children to the square [in the middle of the village] and spoke to all of them. I explained one by one in detail: what their children need in school, why they need to speak Turkish, and why they need to encourage their children to read books in Turkish.

**Me:** Which language do you speak to the parents? Which language do you speak during your home visits? Turkish or Kurdish?

**Mesut:** Kurdish. They know that it is my native language, and they understand it [Kurdish] better. It would not be nice if I spoke Turkish to them as I am from this village. So, I speak Kurdish to them [parents]. (Autumn, 2012)

Mesut made his deficit perspective on Kurdish clear in his talk. His negative attitude toward his native language showed the power of policies on mediating an individual's practices and ideologies. However, his efforts to shift language practices of parents to Turkish provide a better view into the local context that was complicated by

mainstream social and linguistic policies. Not only did he insist on the shift from Kurdish to Turkish in his role as a Kurd from the same community, he spoke Kurdish to parents while telling them to practice Turkish for children's academic and social wellbeing. From this perspective, the practical value of Kurdish became invisible for leaders like Mesut. This was reinforced during his encounters with families when his use of Kurdish appeared only as signal of shared community to increase his influence on the parents. My observations and conversations illustrate that Mesut justified his negative attitudes of Kurdish and insisted on a language shift in his first-hand experiences and because of his great familiarity with the challenges facing Kurdish children. Unfortunately, attitudes like this are one reason Kurdish appears to be in decline (and possibly in danger) in small villages like Guzelyurdu. Mesut seems to have become a representative and mediator for policies and practices that privilege Turkish over Kurdish that were perpetuated at the grassroots level across the region.

The principal, Tahsin and the second vice principle Kemal shared similar views with Mesut about parents' educational background when they talked about their expectations for students. They also shared with me that they do not have to explain which language students are expected to speak in school anymore because students come to school knowing the school language is Turkish. They used to need to explain to parents that that Turkish was the school language for students, and I discuss this later in this chapter. They shared that even if they do not have to explain what the school language is, they have to remind their students often that they need to work very hard to be able to catch up with other students who live outside the village. It was clear that language practices were associated with educational success in the view of

administrators. For example, while they described the education background of parents, administrators and teachers both mentioned parents' Turkish practices.

The principal explained his concerns about Kurdish students' current practices during our conversation. He believed students in city centers were a lot more successful than Kurdish students who would fail in nationwide tests in which all students competed. This imagined community of youth living outside of Guzelyurdu village and potentially competing with Kurdish youth from the village on tests and for future jobs greatly influenced local beliefs and talk about the status of languages:

We don't have to tell students to speak Turkish anymore in this village because they come to school knowing what the school language is. This is my first year in this school but I was working in a village nearby. They were Kurds, too. They spoke Kurdish at home, too. I have been familiar with this village because we had communications with this school, as we were very close. I believe these students would be more successful if they didn't need to catch up with the classroom language. However, students can change everything. I trust students will be fine if they work very hard to be able to catch up with their peers especially on nationwide exams. Parents are important but these students should know that they can't get any support from their parents and work according to that. I believe it all depends on students' determination. (Autumn, 2012)

Tahsin was aware that his curriculum did not meet the needs of Kurdish students and that the school failed to prepare its students for life after graduation; however, he believed that individuals who did not meet the criteria of mainstream policies were responsible for (and capable of) catching up with the standards. The "standards" that influenced curriculum in Guzelyurdu Primary School were shaped by three beliefs that shaped a number of policies and practices. These were: (1) students start school already behind because "they need to catch up with their peers"; (2) that students have little or no educational support from parents because there is a gap between school and home

practices; and (3) that current educational policies leave all responsibilities on students' shoulders rather than providing support for them.

Later in our conversation, Tahsin shared with me that he does not directly encourage parents to speak Turkish to their children but he encourages them to view their children's education as important. In a focus group conducted in December 2012, he said that parents could not change easily so, he is more focused on students. This matches what I observed during his time advising students. He encouraged them "to study very hard, respect their teachers, and stay away from bad friends." Although such advice would be expected from a principal in general, in this context it was interesting to know that he believed that doing well included using Turkish as much as possible, no matter what the consequences were for Kurdish. Tahsin confirmed that educational policies define standards and fail to fulfill needs of minoritized groups when he spoke about the responsibility for meeting the standard criteria to individual students without any support or consideration for their home language's status.

In this village, administrators have the responsibility to organize the school and communicate with parents for official paper work. During a focus group interview, the second vice principal, Kemal, mentioned the gap between teachers' expectations and families' practices when he explained their expectations from children. Kemal is ethnically Turk and a monolingual Turkish speaker. Similar to Mesut, Kemal thought that school administrators and teachers needed to consider the background of families while defining their expectations of students. In the last focus group conversation, Kemal shared, in a self-critical way, that the gap between school and parents most probably is because they did not visit students' families at home. Later in our conversation he said:

I am telling it here in front of my teacher friends. You have been observing us in school and visiting families. Even if I don't tell it, you already know. We are not close enough with families. For example, you know them [families] better than us. We see them only if they come to school. In such a village where students need more support [because of their language and social practices], we should be visiting their homes often to be able to explain to them what they need to do for their children. If we get closer with families, students will feel more affiliated and comfortable in school. Circumstances do not allow us to do that but we can work on it and do it. (Winter 2013)

Kemal positioned families as “others” for teachers and administrators. This position of “other” also supported the gap he talked about. I also observed there was a gap between school and family practices in Guzelyurdu; however, as a teacher and vice principal, Kemal's talk about this gap showed that teachers were aware their expectations were not likely to be met by Kurdish families. Other teachers and the principal agreed with Kemal on what he said to me. They also agreed they could partly, if not completely, fill out this gap if they were to get closer to families with home visits. I am not sure if they started to visit parents after I left the village, but their agreement about the value of building closer relationships with parents show Kemal and other teachers' acknowledgement of the challenges of their Kurdish students. One teacher Cengiz, gave examples from his past experiences to support what Kemal said:

I used to visit the homes of my students. I knew every single member of my students' families. They loved and respected me as a teacher like a part of their families. They considered highly important whatever I told to them to do for students. Also, students were aware of these close relations with their families. They knew that I was collaborating with their parents and cared for them. So, they were working harder and felt more involved in classroom. (Winter 2013)

Kemal and other teachers viewed building personal relations with families as a way to increase Kurdish students' success, because they thought they would be able help

Kurdish parents catch up with the standards of curriculum and support their Kurdish students. Since there was no space for students' language and cultural practices in school, teachers thought they needed to be more involved with families to mediate students' home practices. Kemal and teachers considered explaining the desired practices and school policies to families in their homes as the most effective way to help students achieve the standards. He believed that knowing more about a student's family life and home environment would help teachers better understand students' needs. The teachers believed strong personal relationships with families would be valuable to build linguistically and culturally relevant pedagogy although they also viewed this as an effective way of policing home practices of Kurdish families. In other words, they thought that Kurdish children could catch up with the standard curriculum easier and faster if teachers get more involved in their family practices by visiting homes.

The recent policy shift in Turkey I discussed in the first chapter, allowed the Kurdish language to be taught as elective classes although this did not seem to be practiced. In the school, there was no student who elected Kurdish. In my interviews with parents it emerged that parents did not even know their children could learn Kurdish if they elected it as a class. Based on what they shared with me on how they value Turkish, and English in addition to devaluation of Kurdish in their talk and practices, I do not think that they would elect Kurdish even if they had known about this possibility. Since teachers were aware that Kurdish students' native language and cultural practices were not given its due recognition by the education system, they mainly focused on preparing their students according to the expectations of the school. By doing so, teachers did not consider the importance of the Kurdish language as the students' native language. Instead



they recommended that parents use Turkish with their children and encouraged them to speak Turkish as much as possible.

It is important to mention that I did not witness any teacher or administrator explicitly tells either parents or students they should not speak Kurdish. Although they suggested more Turkish practices for students' success, they did not think their students should lose Kurdish. Kemal, when he spoke about the expectations of school from students, pointed out the gap between families and school to highlight the challenges that Kurdish students face. The excerpt below is from one of our personal conversations about the schools' expectations from students:

I suggest to parents to try to help their children at home and say that this is what teachers expect them to do. Just yesterday, I was talking to a parent. He said he couldn't do it [what teachers expect] because he didn't understand what the book says. Even the ones who have primary school degree, don't understand the material. In such a situation, how can we expect parents to help their children with their assignments? But, most of the teachers expect, they give homework for which students would need help. They are right, too. They have to improve students' [Turkish] language, understanding and expression skills while teaching [the standard] curriculum which makes teachers' job harder. (Winter, 2013)

Even though teachers were aware of Kurdish parents' background, they still seemed to expect them to help their children catch up with the standard curriculum because teachers were required to teach, and it essentially failed to include the needs of students with diverse language and cultural practices. This situation left Kurdish students alone with the responsibility to meeting these expectations at home and at school.

When Kemal answered my question about what he thinks these students will be doing in the future, he spoke of his aspiration to see one or two succeed to become doctors or teachers. He said, "I have hope that some students will be at high positions."

But he also added he thinks many of the students will become farmers or animal breeders. In reference to the current situation, Kemal felt that parents were becoming more aware of the importance of language shift to Turkish for their children and they were changing their practices as well. When he reflected on his experiences as the vice principal and as a former teacher in Guzelyurdu Primary School, Kemal described his hope for the students' future and emphasized the current circumstances and the education system are not enough for students to be successful. In one of our individual interviews, he responded to my question and asked these questions:

**Kemal:** I would move school starting age to earlier like 2-3 years old rather than 6 or 7. So, students wouldn't have a problem [in learning Turkish] when they start to learn the academic material. All students would have the same level of school readiness at the same age period. Teachers would teach the curriculum without worrying about students with diverse practices. I am sure almost all students would be successful [able to cope well with the academic expectations] in such a system.

**Me:** Would you do anything to maintain diverse home languages such as Kurdish? Do students have to forget all their diverse practices?

**Kemal:** No, they don't have to forget. They can speak their home language at home with their families. I wouldn't ban it or something. I think it would be enough for them to maintain their mother tongue because they don't need it in school anyways. (Winter, 2013)

In this conversation I had with Kemal, it is clear that standards in policies become standardization in practices. His idea of taking children to school earlier reminded me of the discussion by Fishman (1996) and McCarty (2011) on institutionalization and standardization of ethnolinguistically diverse students through education systems because schools are perfect places to prepare students according to the expectations of mainstream society and policies. Kemal believed that an education system should start the schooling of children at an earlier age to better serve students with a different home language rather than the alternative of a culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum.

At this point I would like to explain that all teachers and administrators worked and hoped for the social and academic wellbeing of their students; however, they did so with the needs and priorities and values as well as policies of the larger society (in Turkey and in the region) in mind. In other words, their views and practices about language were shaped by social, historical, and ideological factors and by pragmatic goals based on their assessment of those influences. While they imagined that their students participated in and took advantage of educational and employment opportunities, they were advocates for the use of Turkish over Kurdish. Local priorities (e.g., animal breeding, farming, maintaining relations with grandparents) were considered secondary to acquiring the communicative competence valued by imagined peers and potential employers who lived elsewhere. In other words, expectations of children and what they “need” evolved within a context that included assumptions about what was valued in distant places as much as what was valued in the immediate community.

I believe the main reason for considering diverse language and community practices as secondary to current educational and language policies was because these policies were also the ones in teacher training. Another reason was nationwide standard tests emerged in the talk and practices of administrators. Students needed to be successful at this exam to be able to enter prestigious high schools that were believed to be “the easy path to success in the future.” Policies observed in the practices of administrators and teachers were mediated heavily by mainstream policies, such as one standard nationwide curriculum and teacher education. Teachers’ aimed to prepare their students for what they needed to be socially and academically well in a mainstream context.

### **“These children are already behind”**

During the first conversation I had with teachers in the lounge during lunch break, I explained in detail what my research was about and answered questions about my study and my goals. After they learned about my research, teachers “warned” me that their school might not be the ideal context for my research because they did not have any “language problems” in their school. Looking back, I wonder if what the teachers told me that day was because they did not want me to observe their practices and talk with their students. My observations of teachers’ practices and my subsequent conversations convinced me they viewed a home language different than Turkish a problem when students brought it to school. They shared with me that there was no problem in their school because their students came to school aware the school language was Turkish. Teachers stated further that their students come to school knowing what they need to do in school. They concluded that, based on these facts, students did not have any language-related problems. Teachers also stated they did not have to tell them to speak Turkish in school anymore.

However, what teachers shared during my first day in school was not supported by either what I heard or what I observed. For instance, teachers shared with me later during our personal conversations and interviews that they think their students will most likely not be very successful when compared with their Turkish speaking peers from the city because they could not prepare their students for standardized exams as they already had difficulty catching up with the curriculum.

I observed that teachers whose practices were defined and ruled by official policies, experienced a conflict between the curriculum material and students’ actual

needs in the classroom. The standardized curriculum relied too much on teachers especially those who had students with different home language practices. The education material and curriculum considered all students as “standard” and all at the same level of school readiness with the same language and cultural practices. This meant the teachers were responsible for teaching the material to students no matter what kind of language and cultural practices they brought from home. When I discussed the modification of materials during a conversation with vice principal Kemal, he told me: “teachers are not allowed to change the material or the curriculum by law. They have to implement the given curriculum [by Ministry of Education] in their classrooms”. This appeared to fail to include the needs of students with diverse home practices.

Later, during a conversation in the teachers’ lounge, one teacher said:

Those students from the city come to school ready because their families help them at home and if they realize that their child is a little behind, they immediately start extra study courses for their children. All families send their children to test preparation courses so that they can do well on the tests. So, how would you expect our students to compete with those students? We need to catch up our students with the curriculum first here at the first grade while teaching how to read and write. Then we need to revise the materials every year since the children lose what they learn when they spend summer away from school. They don’t even talk about school at home. It is all farming and animal breeding. This is the world of the child here. (Autumn, 2012)

Although teachers were aware of their students’ needs and that the curriculum did not consider the needs of their students, they still had to use the materials dictated by policies. To handle this challenge, teachers expected support from families and extra work from their students so they could catch up with other students who came to school “ready” to learn the standard material. For instance, teachers often suggested that students read books/texts in Turkish so they could understand the school material better. With this

expectation from teachers, Kurdish students were in a position to not only meet school requirements, they also had the additional responsibility of working overtime to learn Turkish as the language of instruction well enough to keep up in a context where few if any accommodations were provided to second language learners.

In one of the parent-teacher meetings, one teacher was talking to both a parent and the student at the same time about teacher expectations to catch up with the curriculum:

These children are already behind because they don't have much support at home. You, as parents of these students, need to encourage them to study often. Of course, they need to play, too. But, they should be reading often to improve their language and understanding. They should be studying what they learned at school that day. Even if you don't understand the material, sit with your children till they finish their homework. And, you as a student should know your responsibilities. If you want to be successful, you should study twice as much as the other students. You should know that you don't have all the opportunities they have. We are here for you. If you don't understand something, come and ask me. (Autumn, 2012)

This conversation showed that teachers expected parents and students to share school practices together no matter which background parents had. Even though teachers may have been aware that students had responsibilities to help with farming or animal breeding at home, they still expected them to study more than a standard city student who did not have similar responsibilities. This conversation also highlighted how teachers explicitly shared with Kurdish families and their children that their linguistic and cultural practices were an obstacle in their schooling and learning process. Most importantly, this conversation illustrates that teachers have a mediating role on ideologies and practices of Kurdish parents. This influence of teachers get even clearer when we think about the contradiction between parents' ideologies of languages and their practices (i.e. valuing

Turkish over Kurdish language because of academic success while practicing Kurdish in their daily life).

My findings show that Kurdish families are not the only group who experience a contradiction between their beliefs and practices. Teachers also experience a dilemma between what they (have to) do and what they say they believe. During our last focus group interview with teachers, one teacher shared that:

Actually, we can do more. We can spend extra time with students especially the ones who need more support. We know that there are students would be more successful if they had extra language and academic support. Rather than expecting from parents, we can go visit their homes to talk to them. But, some regulations and some parents' attitudes discourage us. Policies do not respect us enough as teacher of the students and they limit what we can do. They only want us to implement the curriculum given to us, that's it! If we do more than that, we can get in trouble with the ministry. Also, some parents came here and argued with us in the past for something, which were done extra for the good of their own children. Otherwise, we would do more because we know our students need more (Winter, 2013).

What this teacher shared with me illustrates the bounds of the dilemma teachers have in Guzelyurdu village. First: teachers realize students need support with their language and learning process. Second, they understand their expectations from families to support children's schooling process are not very realistic. Third: they accept the current curriculum does not fulfill their students' language and learning needs. Last, they were limited to teaching recommended by official policies otherwise they would get into trouble with the Ministry of Education.

So far in this discussion, I cannot say that teachers' practices were linguistically or culturally responsive enough for their students. Their practices were focused on the preparation of students for mainstream contexts outside of the village for building a life outside of village. Specifically, aim for a profession other than animal breeding or

farming: however, I can say from my observations and conversations with them that teachers did care about their students. This dilemma between what their practices were as a teacher are and what they believed they should be doing for their Kurdish students was another constraint they experienced. This was reflected in the linguistic and academic needs required catching up with the curriculum for academic success in nationwide tests.

**“I am not saying it [speaking Kurdish] is a bad thing but...”**

I conducted the majority of my classroom observations and conversations or interviews with Cengiz in his classroom. This detailed analysis of his classroom practices includes snapshots from his first-grade classroom to support the discussion of teachers’ views and practices. In one of our conversations, Cengiz stated that teaching Kurdish students in this village was easier because students heard Turkish from television and their elder siblings. From his perspective, students were prepared enough for school as long as they understood and responded to daily life conversations such as “What is your name?”, “How are you?”, “How old are you?” and basic classroom language such as “come here”, “sit down”, “look here.” He further added in one of our personal conversations that his students did not have to be fluent in Turkish when they started school:

After that point [students start school understanding daily life conversations in Turkish], it is teacher’s job to improve students’ Turkish language. If they understand the basic, it is fine. I [as teacher] don’t (and shouldn’t) expect more from these students because their families speak Kurdish. It is my job to improve their Turkish in school. (Winter, 2013)



As I explained in chapter four, Cengiz had taught before in another Kurdish village. His previous experience influenced his current beliefs about the Kurdish language, Kurds, and his practices in our conversations. His belief that students in Guzelyurdu village were ready enough for the school curriculum reflected the influence of this experience where he said, “Turkish did not even exist.” Obviously, the students in his class had a more expanded repertoire of Turkish than Cengiz’ former students. However, during other conversations Cengiz shared with me he said his students in Guzelyurdu village needed support with their language. For example, he was the teacher who pointed out in focus group conversations that students in this village needed more linguistic support because most families spoke Kurdish at home. During our informal conversations, I learned that he was more reflective and critical than his practices indicated.

In Cengiz’s teaching practices and meetings with parents, his separation of “Turkish as a language” and “Turkish as a course” was evident. His teaching was mostly focused on academic literacy (reading and writing) development in Turkish. For example, I did not observe him telling stories, asking his students to tell stories, or plan activities that encouraged students to talk about a topic more than a few times during my four months of classroom observations. He let his students draw pictures in the classroom and do some other handcrafts, but he did not ask them to talk about their drawings afterwards. According to him, “Turkish as a language” covered only speaking and understanding while “Turkish as a course” was different than students’ Turkish skills and covered only writing and reading skills of his students. One day I asked him to tell me more about the two approaches:

**Me:** You are using two terms: “Turkish as a language” and “Turkish as a course.” How would you describe these two? How are they different?

**Cengiz:** Yes, they are different. For example my students do not have any Turkish language problem because they understand what I say and they can tell me what they need. I mean, they can speak everyday / casual Turkish. However, they have a hard time understanding textbooks and test questions as they get to higher grades. That is why I focus more on their writing and reading skills. I aim all my students to read and write Turkish very well so that they don't have any problems in future, in higher grades. (Winter, 2013)

Cengiz perceives the speaking skills (or proficiency) of students as distinct from their writing and reading skills (or their academic literacy). He thinks students are proficient but they need greater academic literacy. Cengiz viewed language as parts rather than as a whole process. And, he prioritized academic literacy over proficiency. This prioritization also influenced his teaching practices.

Unfortunately, this focus on academic language and literacies seemed to misunderstand some of the other real needs and challenges his students had and will continue to face. Although he is right that his Kurdish students needed to expand their language repertoire of academic literacy of Turkish, he did not seem to fully understand the costs and consequences of valuing Turkish over Kurdish or of asking parents to do the same. His use of Kurdish in the classroom demonstrated that Cengiz's practices indirectly shaped how much Kurdish was valued, used and prioritized by the students he taught.

### **Kurdish use in classroom**

I observed students using Kurdish to understand a new word or to describe what kind of picture was shown to them, especially the words they had not heard or used in class before. During one of the activities when was introducing a new sound in Turkish,

he drew a horse on the board and asked, “What is that?” Children shouted “Kirris” altogether in Kurdish to say the name of the animal. Cengiz did not correct the students. Instead, he listened and then translated the word to Turkish: “Bu bir at [This is a horse].” After saying the name of the animal a few times, he asked his students to repeat the word so he was sure students learned it (Field notes, 12/14/2012). Although Cengiz did not celebrate or explicitly acknowledge his students’ use of Kurdish, he seemed to accept their need to use their first language while learning a second. Such practices showed that although the Kurdish language was not highly valued in this context, it also was not strictly prohibited either. This tolerance offers some hope for Kurdish language maintenance among Kurdish children and youth. However, when we consider how the language is devalued and stigmatized position in mainstream society, policies, and even in the ideologies and attitudes of Kurds, it is difficult to know how hopeful one should be.

One day I was helping Cengiz to tutor students one-on-one. We put our nearby in a half circle with empty chairs for two students, and one chair for Cengiz and one for me. Students came individually with the storybook they were assigned to read. The texts were for children to practice the words they had learned that week. Words replaced pictures that students had not yet learned. I was listening to Berfin read the text. She said “Becik” [means sheep in Kurdish] rather than “koyun” in Turkish. I wanted to hear her say more about this so I asked. She said “becik” one more time. Cengiz heard it, too, and asked her to repeat what she had said because he did not hear it well. However, this time, the student did not respond. Cengiz insisted on hearing it one more time. She then repeated the word after a few moments of silence. As she was one of the shyest students who preferred to keep quiet, Cengiz smiled and acted like he was happy she had read the word

rather than being silent. Cengiz taught her how to say the animal in Turkish and made her repeat this (Field notes, 11/16/2012). Cengiz affirmed the student's existing knowledge and competencies while also teaching her a new word in Turkish so that "the student could learn the correct one." His practices, in response to students' use of Kurdish, demonstrated the widespread belief among teachers, parents and students that students should increase their knowledge of Turkish even at the expense of strengthening their Kurdish.

### **Language Sharing in Teacher's Practices**

Although mainstream policies describe Turkish as the only language of instruction, Cengiz did not mind using Kurdish occasionally to teach students basic words in Turkish. For instance, I once witnessed him using "Erê [Yes]", "Na [No]", "Vara vara [Come here]", "ez te xez dikim [I love you]" (often in a funny way) to communicate with students and make them laugh. Every time he used Kurdish words, his students seemed to enjoy it and they laughed at what he said. His recognition of Kurdish seemed to also help quiet students feel more comfortable speaking publicly in Kurdish:

**Teacher:** Why didn't you do your homework Dilan?

**Dilan:** [silence]

**Teacher:** Don't worry [I am not going to punish you], I am just asking to learn why you didn't do your homework?

**Dilan:** [silence]

**Teacher:** Do you understand me?

**Dilan:** [silence]

**Teacher:** Then answer this. Kirman dizanî? [In Kurdish. Do you speak Kurdish?]

**Dilan:** Erê [In Kurdish. Yes]

**Teacher:** Oh, see! You can speak. (Winter, 2013)

Other students laughed after this conversation. Dilan did not explain why she did not do her homework in either language. The teacher stopped asking after a few more tries.

During a similar conversation with other students, Sibel, asked Cengiz whether he knew Kurdish. Cengiz did speak Kurdish. He shared that he had only the familiarity of Kurdish from his parents who preferred speaking Turkish to their children. He improved his Kurdish repertoire in Kurdish communities where he taught. As a child of Kurdish speaking parents who did not maintain their native language with their children, and a person who learned Kurdish when he became an adult, Cengiz had experienced language diversity, language maintenance, and language learning. Based on this, he agreed with his parents' home language strategies. During one of my conversations on this issue he said:

They did the right thing. I am glad that they did not speak Kurdish to us. Most probably, either my siblings or me could not be as successful as we were in school if they spoke Kurdish [to us]. I would do the same thing.  
(Winter, 2013)

Cengiz viewed Kurdish as a potential obstacle for his school life and he held a similar perspective for his students. In his talk, he sounded as if he was an advocate for monolingual home practices. However, based on his talk about languages and how he valued English, I do not think he would support monolingual practices if students' home language were a different language than Kurdish (i.e. English). Because of his concern that Kurdish was a potential obstacle in school, he preferred to not share that he spoke Kurdish with either his students or their families. So he responded to Sibel's question as "No!" Even though he did not mind using Kurdish words in his classroom, according to

what he shared with me several times he did not want to be associated with Kurdish identity. When I asked why he wanted to hide that he spoke Kurdish, he said:

This would encourage my students to speak Kurdish with me in the class. I don't want this happening. I am not saying it [speaking Kurdish] is a bad thing but I want my students to improve their Turkish and speak Turkish better. (Winter, 2013)

Cengiz's comments on why he didn't speak Kurdish reflected a lot of thoughtfulness. His comment also captured the complexity of the situation, the practices, the values, and the ideologies in this community. It was evident in Cengiz's experiences as well as his talk. For instance, while he personally valued Kurdish (i.e. he learned Kurdish) and stated that he did not view the language as "a bad thing", he explicitly devalued Kurdish in his teaching practices.

### **"I am doing my best here": Influence on Family Practices**

Cengiz's practices in the classroom seemed to influence the practices of not only his students but also their families. During the time I was there, Cengiz sent several invitations for parent meetings and notes on handouts written in Turkish even though most parents were not literate in Turkish. The first time he prepared these, I helped him put the papers into envelopes and I asked him about this:

**Me:** Do you generally send letters to parents to invite them to school?

**Cengiz:** Not always. I send letters like that if it is for all parents. If I want to meet with one parent, I send a child from higher grades to call the parent or send message with their children in higher grades.

**Me:** Whom are you going to send these letters with?

**Cengiz:** With my students. I will tell them to put these envelopes into their backpacks so that they don't forget. I will also announce during flag ceremony that I will have parents' meeting and [older] students, who have

siblings or cousins in my class, know that I am sending the invitation with my students. They will do it.

**Me:** These letters are written in Turkish. As far as I know there are families who cannot read or understand Turkish. Do you think they will understand this letter?

**Cengiz:** No worries, they will find a way for it. First, fathers can read Turkish more or less. There are children, who are our students in higher grades in every family; they can read the note to their parents. Or, they [parents] can take the letter to somebody who can read. So, it is not a big deal. (Autumn, 2012)

Cengiz expected parents to deal with the existing situation and did not believe he should make accommodations for them. Cengiz's practices placed many responsibilities on the children. He relied on the children, especially elder siblings, to be able to communicate with parents that made the students brokers for language and culture (discussed further in Chapter 6). Cengiz's attitude in his response also showed the normalization of multilingualism in the village. He was well aware that villagers could and did speak, read, and write in more than one language. His talk provided insights into the multilingual context of Kurdish youth. In addition, it pointed out the strength of policies that placed Turkish over other languages in Kurds' multilingual practices. Parents who could not read the letter had to ask for help from others but no one in the village thought about accommodations to prepare the letter to correspond to parents' linguistic practices.

Most of the parents in Guzelyurdu village were unfamiliar with the school material. Even the ones who were literate in Turkish did not know how to assist their children with assignments. Cengiz's practice of giving homework to his students meant that there were students who were left behind in class because they seemed to have no help at home. Filiz and Sahra were two of who had difficulty catching up with their classmates. One day Cengiz called Filiz's father and Sahra's mother and said that he

needed to discuss an emergency situation with them. Both parents came that day at different times. He explained to both of them that their children were not doing well in school. If this situation continued, they would fail. He also complained that the students did not get any support for their assignments at home. The parents acknowledged that they did not help their children because they did not feel they could. Filiz's father said he did not have time because of farming and animal breeding. Sahra's mother said she did not know how to help because she did not know how to read and write in Turkish. As a result, Cengiz taught them the same material he was currently using in his class. Then, he explained to them in Turkish why and how to help to their children with these assignments. He said:

I am doing my best here. I push myself, and all opportunities I have to teach [reading and writing] to your children. However, it is not easy without your help at home. You have to help, too. If you don't know how to do it, you need to try to learn. You can come ask me or you can make your elder children or [student's] cousins to study with your child. Otherwise, I can't do anything. (Winter, 2012)

During my classroom observations, I witnessed Cengiz going above and beyond for the success of his students. However, I did not observe any specific strategy that was used to support children's home language and cultural practices. Cengiz, he did not get angry with students when they used Kurdish words to respond. However, he did teach them how to say specific words in Turkish. His priority was teaching Turkish to his students in ways that the curriculum and education system required. When he talked about the special needs of his students during our second recorded interview, Cengiz said "I do not need to do anything special because students [would] catch up with the curriculum as they move on." According to Cengiz, students who understand basic



phrases in Turkish (such as come here, go there, sit down, stand up, write, read) were ready for school and did not need anything special. To him, these students were able to “go with the flow.”

Even though Cengiz often explained his views that students did not need any support to be engaged with the course material, in some conversations he talked about his efforts to help students achieve academic success. During our focus group interview in a conversation about what Kurdish students might need in school and what teachers think about these students’ home practices, Cengiz said that he was aware of the needs of Kurdish students and even parents. But he also claimed that he did not do anything special for his students:

I used to come visit my students’ families at their homes one by one. If I could not find time to visit them, I was coming to village during weekends. I built a strong relation with all my parents. We were able to collaborate with them perfectly. Those were perfect times. The times I enjoyed teaching most. Entering the classroom and knowing who your students really are, what kind of circumstances they have at their homes, and what they do at home was a great feeling for me. My students also felt more attached to and involved in school. I agree that there is a gap between the parents and me now. (Winter, 2013)

During first year of his teaching, Cengiz decided to spend extra time with his students because he realized the standard curriculum would fail to meet the needs of his students. This personal effort did not take longer than two years according to what he said. Because Cengiz focused mostly on enhancing the academic language of Kurdish children (and did not think about how to maintain or encourage Kurdish language practices), his efforts were important for Kurdish students to catch up with their Turkish speaking peers.

What Cengiz shared during the focus group interviews also shows that individual efforts and practices were not long lasting or effective by themselves because these individual efforts were not parallel with mainstream policies. Recall that McCarty, Collins, & Hopson defined language policies as “the complex of practices, ideologies, attitudes, and formal and informal mechanisms that influence people’s language choices in profound and pervasive everyday ways.” (2011, p.355) According to this discussion, mainstream language policies are active and influence the lived experiences of people. In addition to the influence of those policies on teaching practices in my research context, those policies also influenced the consequences of children’s language and learning experiences. As seen in teachers’ and administrators’ talk and practices as well as in Cengiz’s practices, their main focus covered only academic success of their students even if this success meant a loss of their native language. Teachers were not expected to spend extra time for their students’ academic success, but they stated they worried that they could have done more for their students’ academic achievement even though they were not officially supported for such individual efforts.

Although I appreciate that teachers were interested in their students’ academic wellbeing and did as much as they could for this, and this was considered something good even by parents, my analysis points out negative implications for Kurdish language maintenance in Kurdish children’s practices. The one way administrators and teachers focused on the academic success of students show that both normalized a restricted multilingualism which means other languages such as) were welcomed as long as they were not an obstacle for Turkish practices of students. The restricted position of Kurdish limited its functions and use in practices of Kurdish youth to a community language.

Teachers and administrators' talk and practices also show that Kurdish students were expected to handle their social and linguistic practices while working on their academic success in their multilingual local context.

### Summary

This chapter discussed and analyzed the complex and contradictory nature of language practices in Guzelyurdu village the primary school. With a focus on the contradiction between people's beliefs and practices I discussed the influence of administrators, teachers, and family members on Kurdish children's language and learning process. I examined how each participant group influenced the language and learning practices of the Kurdish children, the complexity between those practices and beliefs along with potential reasons for this complexity. Findings show that administrators and teachers had similar views and practices.

For instance, they believed that Kurdish students needed more support than they are currently getting with learning academic Turkish (and developing the literacy practices of academic Turkish). Although they do not directly interfere with or prohibit the use of Kurdish among their Kurdish-speaking students, teachers' and parents' practices do not value the Kurdish practices of their students either. Findings also show that administrators and teachers experience a dilemma between their practices and what they think their practices should be.

My analysis highlighted the many ways in which people simultaneously value and devalue Kurdish. In addition, I showed the many complicated factors that influence the language and learning practices of Kurdish children (e.g., teachers' talk and practices, parents' talk and practices, and siblings' talk and practices). All of these findings raise

questions about the status of Kurdish language in practices of Kurdish children youth and provide reasons to wonder what the implications might be for language shift among first-grade children in particular and in the community more generally.

## **6: CHILDREN'S USE OF MULTIPLE LANGUAGES ACROSS TIME, SPACE AND MODALITIES**

In Chapter 4, I presented my analysis of the language ideologies that appeared in parents' and teachers' talk to provide a snapshot of what people think about Kurdish children's language and literacy practices. Then in Chapter 5, I discussed how policies that were implemented in the practices of teachers and school administrators affected parents and children, a minoritized group, in their local contexts. Each chapter provided a context to understand some of the accumulated language practices I observed among Kurdish children. These are described and analyzed in this chapter.

I examined Kurdish children's multilingual and multiliterate experiences with a focus on language sharing, language policing, and multimodality. In order to understand the situated and contextual nature of children's language choices, I describe the kinds of practices the children used before and after entering the school domain along with the practices they used over time. Throughout my analysis, I examine who/what mediated Kurdish children's practices and how that changed over time and across spaces. I was impressed with the rich practices of Kurdish children and the resources they brought to their school (Even though the school did not always recognize them as resources.) beginning with the very first day I conducted research in Guzelyurdu village. My view of multiliteracy was not limited to reading/writing in both languages. Instead, I drew on Hamilton & Barton (2000), Street (2003) and Warriner (2012). I analyzed the contexts in which Kurdish children use language and literacy to examine broad social, cultural, ideological, and political aspects of their literacy.

I learned that children were well aware of their multilinguistic repertoire and were very good at using their multiple languages interchangeably throughout my participant observations across their school and community contexts. They focused on meaning making and seemed to prioritize authentic conversations that were facilitated by the use of multiple languages. The children I observed were also strategic and purposeful in their language practices, and I wondered if this was a response to policies implemented in their local contexts. For example, students chose to stop speaking Kurdish in the presence of their teachers even when this choice constrained their efforts to communicate or understand meaning. These young Kurdish speakers demonstrated a solid understanding of the role of audience, context, and situation on communication across multilingual situations and contexts. Their multilayered practices were primarily focused on communication and their multilingual practices were strategic and intentional.

#### Children's Language Practices While at Home

During my visits to families, parents often spoke Turkish to their children. When I mentioned this during conversations with parents, eight out of eleven parents said they spoke Turkish to their children at home because they believed it would make their children feel most comfortable. Even parents who preferred speaking Kurdish at home often switched to Turkish because use of the language seemed to generate more responses from their children. For instance, Tarik's parents (Aras and Zehra) spoke Kurdish to each other and with Tarik's grandparents (who lived in the same household) but spoke Turkish with Tarik. "[My son] knows Turkish better than I [do]" says Zehra. She added further:

Tarik speaks Turkish even if I speak Kurdish to him. [He speaks Turkish], [e]ven with his grandmother [pointing out his grandmother]. So, we start speaking Turkish when he responds in Turkish. I mean, not his grandmother, but his father and me. He knows it better than me [laughing]. (Winter, 2013)

Although Zehra preferred to speak Kurdish at home, her husband Aras, stated that he spoke Turkish at home. However, Zehra did not mind as long as it was for the children's own good. She said:

No, I wouldn't mind it at all. Why would I? My priority is my child's well being. The rest doesn't mean much to me. (Winter, 2013)

During my conversation with Tarik about his home language practices, he told me he understood Kurdish, but he liked speaking Turkish more:

My mother and father speak Kurmanji between them. My father speaks Turkish with me. My mother speaks sometime Kurmanji, sometime Turkish. I speak Turkish all the time. (Winter, 2013)

He said that his younger sister also speaks Turkish at home. Although he did not explain the reasons for diverse language choices by members of his family in this conversation the reason appeared to be that it was his father's desire to speak, and act like a Turk by practicing Turkishness.

Kurmanji means Kurdish in the Kurdish language. I used this word in my conversations with children to refer to Kurdish because it was easier for them. Here, we see that Tarik was somewhat of a language policy maker, and that his choices about what language to use on what occasions (and with whom) were influenced by his preferences, the background of the audience, and the context of the communication. Situated language

choices in the family domain were supported by beliefs about what language might be the most practical and useful language outside of that domain. The children and then their parents demonstrated how locally relevant language policies were constituted by interactional practices and routines that made sense within the context of the situation when they chose Turkish over Kurdish.

Filiz (6 years old) had experiences that were similar to Tarik's. Filiz's parents preferred speaking Kurdish at home because Filiz's monolingual Kurdish-speaking grandmother lived with them. Although Filiz spoke and understood Kurdish well, she preferred speaking Turkish. Her parents told me that Filiz felt most comfortable speaking Turkish and that she speaks it better than her family. "Even if I told her to speak Kurdish, she wouldn't. No, I am sure she wouldn't." her mother said. Her father expanded on his wife's comments by describing Filiz's choices as a "natural process":

**Faruk:** Yes, yes, that's right. We speak Kurdish to Filiz, but she speaks Turkish with us in return. Her generation is changing. It is [a] natural [process] because time is changing. It is about tongue, I think. She can twist her tongue easier for Turkish than Kurdish. She finds Turkish easier because she watches television in Turkish, school is Turkish, [and] she does homework in Turkish. So, it is easier for her.

**Me:** What do you do when she speaks Turkish to you?

**Faruk:** I don't do anything. It means child feels more comfortable that way. I respond in Turkish, too because I can. But, my mother speaks Kurdish to her all the time. So, we have two languages at home. I mean Filiz speaks Turkish most of the times. It is about her tongue, her tongue is developing different than ours. (Winter, 2013)

Filiz's and Tarik's preferences to speak Turkish at home and the way their families responded to these preferences point to the early stages of language shift at the family level in the village. Parents not only welcomed their children's Turkish preferences in a communication that was initiated in Kurdish, they also shifted to Turkish



and let their children decide the language of the communication because they believed Turkish was more comfortable for their children.

On another occasion, I asked Filiz which language she spoke at home and she said “Turkish” and her intonation implied “Isn’t that obvious?” She said she speaks Kurdish with her grandmothers because they do not understand Turkish well but she prefers to speak Turkish and does so with her parents. Even though she speaks Kurdish to her grandmother in the same household, she chooses to speak Turkish with her parents even if they attempt to speak Kurdish to her, as she knows that they understand and speak Turkish. Tarik’s and Filiz’s language preferences at home show the children were purposeful in choosing the Turkish language rather than Kurdish and their parents allowed this practice.

### **What influences children’s practices?**

These two families said they value Turkish over Kurdish (and allow their children to use Turkish) because they believe it will improve their children’s future outside of the village. A close look at the interactions that Kurdish youth had with siblings and with television demonstrates that situated social practices shape—and sometimes mediate—the experiences that Kurdish children in this study had with their family members.

### **Older siblings**

Elder siblings and cousins who had already started school influenced family practices at home. There were many families who shared a big house with several separate rooms built on shared land. Cousins interacted with each other as if they were

siblings in these families. The older children, who started school with more limited Turkish than their first grade siblings, spoke only Turkish at home.

During my conversations with some of the sisters and brothers of first graders, they shared with me that they not only spoke Turkish to their siblings, but they also told their parents to speak Turkish at home. They did not want their younger siblings to have any problems in school. Seventh grader Meryem, sister of Zerrin, shared her experiences and what she wanted for Zerrin during one of our recorded conversations:

I learned Turkish during 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I did not even understand what my teacher said during the first three years and couldn't tell what I wanted to do or did not understand. I got punished many times in school just because I could not express my feelings. (Autumn, 2012)

Meryem preferred to speak Turkish with her friends and family. The challenge of her school experiences seemed to influence her view and practice of languages. However, she still valued Kurdish because of her family members in Syria. Meryem believed that her younger siblings had already learned enough Kurdish to communicate with their extended family back in Syria as needed. So she thought the focus should be to improve Zerrin's Turkish proficiency and academic literacy. The conversation that follows demonstrated her views on Turkish relative to Kurdish:

I like Turkish better and think it is more important because this is what we need here. It is the language in Turkey. Kurdish is not something I need here. I generally speak Turkish. I prefer doing it. I speak Kurdish to my dad because, you know, he can't speak Turkish. Me, Zerrin, and other sister of us are all speaking Turkish to each other. (Autumn, 2012)

Because of the challenges she had during her primary grades, Meryem developed a pragmatic perspective of social and linguistic experiences for both herself and her

siblings. Even though her father is a Kurdish-Arabic bilingual speaker (He barely spoke Turkish.), and their extended family did not speak Turkish, Meryem viewed Turkish as what she and her siblings should practice because it is what they needed to gain social well-being in Turkey. During a conversation with her mother, Ayse, we talked more about their family language practices as well as Meryem's efforts for language planning:

**Ayse:** The difficulties Meryem had were a lesson for me to speak Turkish to my children. Meryem had too many difficulties. My daughter, a child, came to me and said: "*Speak Turkish to my younger siblings, they need this. I don't want them to have [the] same problems I am having in school.*" She was right! What Meryem said was an eye opener for me. I am a mother and I need to think about my children's education and their wellbeing. (Autumn, 2012)

According to this, Meryem's language-planning efforts seemed to be purposeful and strategic because she wanted to protect her siblings from challenges similar to those she experienced in school. Since Ayse felt responsible for her children's educational success and wellbeing as a mother, she responded positively to Meryem's language-planning efforts and she let her children speak Turkish among themselves even though their father did not speak Turkish. In this family's context, Meryem's practices constituted a form of language-planning that contributed to a shift of language practices from Kurdish to Turkish for members who spoke the language. In addition, these strategies seemed to bolster the ideology that Turkish was more valuable than other languages for all family members including their father.

In another conversation, Meryem said she did not speak Kurdish unless she "has to speak it." In our first conversation she described why she encourages her sister to speak and use Turkish:

I remember going back home [after school] and crying under my blanket. It was so hard not being able to say what you want to say. I don't want my sister to have the same problem. Even if my mother and father speak Kurdish to us, I speak only Turkish to my sisters so that they learn [Turkish] and do not have any problems in school and be successful. (Autumn, 2012)

Meryem had a language-plan for her sister informed by the difficulties she had in school because of her limited understanding of and proficiency in Turkish. Here we see that there is a clear distinction between home and school languages in her mind. She is a hardworking and successful student in her school. Her priority is her own and her siblings' educational success, and she believes that speaking Turkish leads to success in school. Meryem influences her family language practices in ways that appear to contribute to the shift from Kurdish to Turkish within her family.

The third-grade cousin of another first grader student, Gulnaz, shared similar views as those of Meryem:

I used to speak Kurdish much better. I don't speak it that well now, after starting school and [needing to] do homework. I speak Turkish with my siblings and cousins, too. It is easier. If I speak Kurdish at home, I forget to tell the words in school [in Turkish]. So, I speak Turkish, it is easier that way. (Winter, 2012)

Gulnaz pointed out that his practices began to shift when he started school. Although he did not mention having any challenges like Meryem did, he was afraid he might have difficulty expressing himself in school. For him, since he spoke Turkish at home it helped him avoid language-related problems in school.

The siblings' daily life language practices shed light on their social and linguistic experiences. I observed siblings use their multi-language skills to broker situations between parents and teachers when it was required. However, I also observed them using

Kurdish among themselves as a “code” without a contextual requirement. These real life language experiences were also significant to better understand the ways children influenced family language practices.

### ***Language broking***

In the village, older siblings have more responsibilities to be a language broker in their roles than their peers who fit with the definition of standard in Turkey. As a result, these children serve as a broker between parents and teachers. They draw on their knowledge of the school system and teachers’ expectations to interpret for their parents. In addition, they are expected by parents and teachers to help their younger siblings with school assignments. They are positioned as an arbiter by their teachers and parents and trusted by both sides. These responsibilities and roles can be interpreted as a form of policy making within the family.

One day Zerrin’s mother Ayse came to school to talk to Cengiz about how her daughter was doing. Cengiz was happy to see her. As he explained how Zerrin was doing in class, he started to tell her about what she needed to do. He recommended that Zerrin be more careful to keep her backpack tidy and to wash her hands. Her mother agreed and explained she was also working on teaching these things to her. After he established these expectations, Cengiz described several supplies they needed to get and ways the parents needed to help Zerrin with her homework. In response, Ayse asked him to document the instructions and requests:

Mr. Cengiz, I know what you say but I don’t know these things well. I am sure I will forget what you said when I get back home. Could you write it down for me so that Meryem can read it? (Autumn, 2012)

Mr. Cengiz had asked Meryem to come to his classroom while Ayse was there to make sure his expectations were understood well. He sent a student to Meryem's class to retrieve her and waited a few minutes for Meryem. Once she arrived, the conversation continued and requests were made:

**Teacher:** Meryem, look dear. Your sister needs something, I will explain what she needs and you can relay the message to the stationer when your mother takes you there. Okay dear?

**Mother:** My dear daughter, listen to what your teacher says carefully. Mr. Cengiz, can you write these down just in case?

**Teacher:** No need to do that. Meryem will remember, she is a smart girl.

**Meryem:** I will remember. Yes, teacher [letting know that she is listening]

**Teacher:** Zerrin needs a new notebook. This should not be the same one. I want you to get notebooks with underlines, not classical lined notebooks. Let me explain it to you. Each main line of the notebook should have one upper, one under, and three invisible lines between these two. (Autumn, 2012)

After he explained what else they would need to get, Mr. Cengiz asked Meryem to help Zerrin with her homework every night. "Otherwise your sister will fail," he said. He asked her to read his notes about Zerrin's homework, and asked Meryem to make Zerrin read the sounds out loud a few times after she wrote them. He also explained specific ways she would need to show her sister how to write and asked Meryem to write a few examples in front of him and her mother to confirm her understanding. Meryem agreed to help. Having the older sibling as language and cultural broker as seen in this conversation was a practice common in Guzelyurdu Primary School.

During the semester I spent in Guzelyurdu primary school, only two parents did not need a language-broker or additional help to understand what the teacher wanted from her/him. One was Aras who finished middle school and the other one was Enver who graduated high school. They were both approximately the same age, one was 30 and

the other was 32. Other parents explicitly said their children spoke and understood Turkish as well as school material much better than they had.

Teachers often relied on siblings more than they relied on parents. Siblings who had gone through the school system without much support from home were trusted as the biggest source of support for their younger siblings. As seen in Meryem's responsibilities, she was expected to help with her sister's assignments regularly no matter how much school work she had for her own classes. In order to help her sister, she also needed to become familiar with the material and curriculum taught in the first grade.

Even when teachers sent personalized invitations, not all families were able to come to school to learn how their children were doing. Cengiz chose to talk to elder siblings when parents did not come to school. He asked the older students to help their younger siblings as he needed to move on with the curriculum and the material, and he did not want his students to fall behind. After witnessing this, I asked Cengiz whether he thought that second grade girl could be helpful for her brother. He said, "What else can I do? I haven't even seen their parents. This child needs support at home. So, I had to talk to his sister, the only person I can find. At least, she can tell her parents that I want to see the parents." (Autumn, 2012) The other day, the second-grade girl verbally reported her parents's message to Cengiz by coming to his class. She told that her father would come visit him as soon as his work in the field was over. In this specific situation, she became a language and culture bridge between parent and teachers without having parents present in school.

Another older sibling, Oznur, shared similar experiences to Meryem when he talked about why it was important to speak Turkish especially for her younger sisters.

Oznur was a college graduate and was a substitute kindergarten teacher during the time I was in Guzelyurdu village. She was the first woman from the village to graduate from college. According to her, this was a big success when we consider her circumstances, but she also thought she could have been more successful if her schooling experiences had been different:

**Oznur:** You know, I went to school here [the same school]. Everything is better now. Teachers are more interested in teaching. My teacher used to eat, sleep in class while we were sitting and watching him. I mean he did everything, except teaching to us. I remember him saying “*you can’t learn anyways. You don’t even understand what I say, do you?*” If we were able to speak what we wanted to say, I am sure it would be different. I am sure I would be at a better position now. I tell this to my sisters. I tell them to know what they really need. I already speak Turkish to them and tell them to speak Turkish all the time. My father and mother, you know, they can’t speak Turkish well. I don’t expect them to change. They are kind of old, you know. I speak Turkish with my sisters though. All young generation does the same because they know that it is better for us. (Winter, 2012)

Oznur has three sisters as well as cousins in different grades, 1<sup>st</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup>. She thinks their teachers’ attitude would be different if her sisters were able to express how they felt as student. Hence, she encourages her three sisters to speak Turkish at home. During my several visits to Oznur’s home, I listened to her speak Turkish to her siblings even when they spoke Kurdish to her. As Oznur explained why she and “all [the] young generation” spoke Turkish with each other, she voiced a rationale reflected in the educational and language policies that circulated widely in society—e.g., those that valued Turkish over Kurdish across domains such as education, society, politics and economics. Like Meryem, Oznur seemed to believe that any challenges she had in school were because of her Kurdish language practices.



When I looked closely at siblings' "talk about talk", the siblings' practices potentially contributed to the language shift toward Turkish. In both Meryem's and Oznur's talk, there was a shift from valuing and using Kurdish to Turkish because of their school experiences, the challenges they faced in school, and their beliefs in the relative value of each language. As seen in the experiences of Meryem and Oznur, siblings not only changed their own language practices, but also made an effort to change their siblings' language use and practices.

Similar experiences emerged during my conversations with a third grader, Selman, the cousin of Sibel. He pointed out the role of school on his language practices by saying "My Kurdish was much better than this [as it is now]. I started school and it is not that good anymore." Another student, a fourth grader, Dilek, cousin of Filiz, told me she started speaking more Turkish after she started school:

You know, we read and write in Turkish. We speak Turkish in class. And, we do homework in Turkish at home. So, Turkish becomes the language we speak more than Kurdish. I only speak Kurdish with my grandparents, and some uncles. My mother speaks Kurdish sometime, too. But, only sometimes. I mean Turkish is the language I use more. (Winter, 2012)

According to Dilek, a shift in her language practices was a natural process and it was greatly influenced by the practices and policies in a local school. She could see how the school dominated her daily life with its own culture and requirements such as reading, writing, learning, and doing homework in Turkish. Siblings and cousins talked about a clear shift from Kurdish to Turkish in their practices while they also pointed out language planning at the individual level that potentially influenced their family language practices.

The school experiences of siblings (and the challenges they had) appeared to be the main reasons for siblings' language choices. Language-broker responsibilities could be considered another challenge because of the diverse language practices of their families. However, these practices also show the influence siblings had on families' language practices and views. With these practices, they were in the position to lead their parents in the school process of their younger sisters/brothers. Both teachers and parents relied on them for the success of their younger siblings. Parents did not stop or try to change their Turkish language practices at home because of their Kurdish practices. It was the siblings who encouraged their younger sisters' and brothers' Turkish language practices even before the younger ones started to school. This finding shows how practices valued at school may have indirectly influenced family language practices—and the potential consequences for language shift.

### ***Kurdish as a code***

One day during recess, I witnessed siblings' using Kurdish among themselves “secretly.” Whenever they realized I was around them, they stopped speaking Kurdish. I also witnessed their teachers asking them “What are you talking about? I don't understand what you say? Tell me, too!” In response, the Kurdish-speaking students said “Nothing!” They seemed to be using Kurdish as a secret code to hide what they spoke especially from their teachers who did not understand Kurdish. They all looked like they were having fun because they knew a language special to them.

During one of my personal conversations with an eighth-grade sibling, he confirmed they use Kurdish as a code if they talk about something they want to keep among themselves:

We use it [Kurdish] as a code among ourselves. Let's say we are having a conversation that our teachers should not understand, we use it. If we are criticizing a teacher, or the school, I mean not bad things, but you know...some stuff about exams or so. We use Kurdish. It is more comfortable and safe that way. (Autumn, 2012)

Kurdish youth enjoyed their native language as way of keeping their talk private because they knew their teachers did not understand Kurdish. I did not observed any student using Kurdish in front of their teachers. Rather I observed them stopping such conversations as soon as they saw a teacher.

Within these contexts siblings valued Kurdish in their practices: as a code among themselves and as a tie to other family members. Although most of what they shared with me pointed out a potential language shift in the practices of siblings and their families, there were also signs the Kurdish language was valued in practices of Kurdish youth.

### **Television**

The findings of this study show that television programs children watch during most of their time at home influence their language and literacy practices. All families I visited had one television at home. My observations and interviews indicated children watched television programs, especially cartoons, at least a couple of hours every day. Families did not have computers at home, so students were not very familiar with digital technology. First graders practiced Turkish with their siblings and got more language input from cartoons they watched. For example, most students were able to say the colors

and names of some animals in Turkish by the second week of school even if they did not attend kindergarten.

During the second week of school, Cengiz did an out loud question and answer activity cued with a song. He sang a song about the animals living in the forest. After the song, he asked students to tell which animals lived in the forest. Students answered elephant, lion, rabbit, turtle, monkey, and giraffe. During this lesson Cengiz made it obvious he was surprised with the answers from his students. After I observed and talked with the students, I learned they all knew the word giraffe because it was the best friend of their favorite cartoon hero, Pepee. In addition to Pepee, children watched two cartoon shows called Caillou and Keloglan every day. These cartoons followed their own, informative curriculum that was not related to school curriculum. The role of television was reflected in students' language and literacy repertoire in their daily life conversations. When students were doing an individual writing activity in class, Sahra started a conversation:

**Sahra:** Keloglan went to the big mountain yesterday by flying. Umm, to find the egg of a bird.

**Ugur:** Oh yes, by "adımhopter" [name of Keloglan's helicopter. A word made up in the cartoon to make it funny for children.]

**Dilan:** I watched it, too. They had difficulty flying it.

**Sahra:** Bird was important to save farms from snakes. I think bird was eating snakes or something. Then, she died.

**Ugur:** No, she did not die. I mean, there was no bird. None of them. They had only one egg [left].

**Tarik:** Yes, that's right. Keloglan went to save the egg from bad people.  
(Winter, 2013)

This conversation showed that children developed their knowledge and reflections on setting, plot, and heroes of stories they watched in cartoon shows. This conversation provided insight into the contributions cartoon shows had for students' accumulated

bilingual language and literacy repertoire. Especially when we consider the engagement of students and the involvement of the most silent students in the conversation (e.g. Dilan), shaping role of television on children's language practices becomes obvious.

Cartoon shows also influenced Kurdish students' Turkish language learning process. Since current educational and language policies assumed that all students in Turkey arrived at school with the same "standard" language, literacy, and school readiness level, Kurdish students started school behind other students who met the "standards" defined by those policies. Cartoons appeared to contribute to school linguistic readiness of children because the children learned Turkish words and were exposed to conversations they might not have heard in their community.

#### Children's Language Practices When Entering School

When first graders got to school they knew the language of instruction would be Turkish; many had heard about this from their siblings and cousins. Although I observed older students speak Kurdish with their friends during recess, I rarely observed first graders speak Kurdish among themselves during recess or free time. I noticed they spoke Turkish among themselves or were silent. A teachers felt one reason first graders did not speak Kurdish was because they were still new to the context. She said:

They don't feel comfortable speaking Kurdish here. Older students speak more Kurdish among themselves than the young ones. The young ones are still discovering school and so they feel nervous speaking Kurdish at this point. Also, the number of monolingual Kurdish students is decreasing every year. More students come to school speaking Turkish well these past few years. (Winter, 2012)

I learned from observations and conversations that all 14 students in Cengiz’s class spoke conversational Turkish. Because of this they were thought to have “no language problem”. This was based on the report of children and parents, and my observations. Although all students were Kurds (At least one parent was Kurdish.), not all of them spoke Kurdish. The table below shows students’ home language, their community language<sup>4</sup>, and their proficiency in Kurdish. It displays the contexts in which Kurdish children use different languages, and it illustrates that language learning is a cumulative process and a set of practices rather than a combination of decontextualized skills.

**Table 1: Children’s Language Practices across Their Domains**

Student	Home Language	Community Language	Kurdish
Ugur	Turkish	Turkish and Kurdish (when Kurdish speaking people came over)	No
Gulnaz	Kurdish	Kurdish- Turkish (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes

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<sup>4</sup> A community language is a language shared and spoken by community members and not always the same as the family’s language.

Tarik	Kurdish-Turkish mixed	Kurdish-Turkish mixed	Yes
Sibel	Turkish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (when Kurdish speaking people came over)	Yes
Sahra	Turkish	Turkish- Kurdish mixed (when she heard people speak Kurdish)	No
Filiz	Kurdish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes
Ferhat	Turkish	Turkish- Kurdish mixed (when she heard people speak Kurdish)	No
Zerrin	Turkish, Kurdish, and Arabic	Turkish-Kurdish- and Arabic	Yes
Kareem	Kurdish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes

Berfin	Kurdish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes
Selda	Turkish	Turkish- Kurdish mixed (when she heard people speak Kurdish)	No
Mehmet	Turkish	Turkish- Kurdish mixed (when she heard people speak Kurdish)	No
Dicle	Kurdish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes
Reyyan	Kurdish	Kurdish-Turkish mixed (with monolingual Turkish speakers)	Yes

The table illustrates the readiness of students varied for a classroom environment in which Turkish was the language of instruction. We also see students had multiple language and literacy resources to draw upon and utilize across contexts (i.e. home, school, community). For example, students who typically spoke Turkish at home heard Kurdish from their friends whose home language was Kurdish. Their social interactions were multilingual and rich in terms of practices they exchanged with each other. It was



also true that students whose home language was Turkish, and whose parents prioritized the maintenance of Turkish practices, such as Ugur and Sibel, were more talkative, active, and confident compared to other students who were around and they used more Turkish. No matter what their home language was, all students in Cengiz's class spoke and understood everyday conversational Turkish.

Based on my observations and what parents and children shared with me, children heard Turkish and communicated with their friends in Turkish. During a free time activity, Cengiz asked for volunteers to choose a song to sing. Some children sang Arabesque style songs in Turkish. This showed me the children and their families were listening to Turkish songs at home. This was even true in situations where the home language was Kurdish. It is important language and literacy practices be understood with such contextual details in mind and with an understanding of the ways in which Kurdish children's linguistic experiences, repertoires and practices merged across spaces of learning.

### **Language sharing**

Although the language of instruction was Turkish, and although Kurdish-dominant first grade students were generally careful not to speak Kurdish during recess or free time, I observed they did use/speak Kurdish occasionally. Language sharing between Kurdish speakers and monolingual Turkish speaker students was practiced in Cengiz's class. I viewed language-alternating activities among ethnically diverse people through the lens of belonging and membership (Rampton, 1995). The findings of this study allow me to expand Rampton's discussion about language alternating practices to

suggest they might also occur among people who are not ethnically diverse, e.g., Kurdish children. I also used Paris' (2012) language sharing term to refer to language alternating practices, because I align myself with Paris' discussion that language sharing practices of students should be utilized in their learning process to provide insights into students' multilingual awareness.

One day after Cengiz asked students to practice writing the letter “a”, he left the room for a few minutes to talk with the principal. While he was out of the room, Zerrin, a Kurdish-speaking student, started a conversation with his classmates:

**Zerrin:** Do you know my grandmother is coming to visit us this weekend?  
Her name is *Pitey* [while laughing a little].

**Ugur:** *Pitey*?

**Sahra:** I mean, it is a name... right? What does it mean [turning back to Zerrin who was sitting behind her]?

**Sibel:** [Jumping into conversation but sitting away from Zerrin and Sahra] It is a name. It means: “drop”. *Pitey* means “drop.” *Pitey*...

**Zerrin:** [responding to Sahra] Yes, it is her name. It means: “drop” but we say *Pitey*. (Autumn, 2012)

In Zerrin's explanation “We say *Pite*,” use of the pronoun “we” shows that she positioned herself and other Kurdish speakers as a group of which she is a member while she positioned Sahra, a monolingual Turkish speaker, as someone outside the group. Language-sharing practices highlighted the border between groups of students with Zerrin's position. Students defined themselves as “us” and “you” during such conversations.

I observed that Kurdish students also used language-sharing practices during several of our conversations. In one of my first conversations with children, they were not sure about the names of the languages they talked about. To refer to Turkish they said “böyle (as such)” since they were speaking it at that moment, and they referred to

Kurdish as “another/the other”. During a conversation with Gulnaz, a Kurdish speaking student, I referred to Turkish as “the language we speak in school” and Kurdish as “the language you speak at home.” We had the conversation below:

**Gulnaz:** You mean *Kurmanji* ? We speak *Kurmanji* at home.

**Me:** Oh, yes! I mean *Kurmanji* .

**Gulnaz:** *Kurmanji* means Kurdish. *Kurmanji* ...

**Me:** Thanks! I will call it *Kurmanji* after now on. (Winter, 2012)

Gulnaz wanted to teach me what *Kurmanji* was so that I could use it later in our conversations. She wanted me to call the name of the language as it was called in the language itself. Gulnaz was one of the shyest and quietest students in Cengiz’s class, and this experience with her surprised me a little. Obviously, teaching me the name of the language was very important to her because Kurdish was called as *Kurmanji* in their language, not Kurdish.

During the second month in Guzelyurdu village, and after students were sure I was interested in learning more about their language and literacy experiences, they started to ask me if I spoke Kurdish or not. Once they learned that I did not speak Kurdish, they were excited to teach me Kurdish. When I sat and watched children play in the garden during recess, Sibel, Filiz, Zerrin, and Filiz’s cousin in fourth grade approached me to ask:

**Sibel:** Teacher, *Kirman dizanî* [Do you speak Kurdish]?

**Me:** No, I don’t

**Filiz’s cousin:** Do you want to learn, teacher? We can teach you if you like.

**Filiz:** I can teach. For example when someone asks you: *nava de çiyê?* means what is your name? Tell it like me.

**Me:** *Nava de çiyê?*

**Filiz:** Yes [laughing]. You should say to answer...

**Sibel:** [Interrupting Filiz] I am going to say it. Teacher, you should say *Navê min* Ayfer because your name is Ayfer. So, you are saying, “my name is Ayfer” in Kurdish. Let’s do it. *Navê de çiye?*

**Me:** *Navê min* Ayfer.

**All students:** Yes, she did it! (Winter, 2012)

Students wanted to teach me Kurdish when they learned I was interested.

This conversation with Sibel illustrates my complicated role as a researcher in Guzelyurdu as I was both an outsider and insider in the community. Although I was an outsider to their language and community, I valued their language and cultural practices and they knew this very well. They appreciated that I valued Kurdish although I did not speak it, and they most likely had not experienced this before. In addition to this insight into the relationship between the researcher and researched, the children’s eagerness to share their language with me showed me that children still valued Kurdish as their “own” language. This left me with some hope for Kurdish language maintenance in Kurdish youth’s practices.

### **Children as cultural and language brokers**

In addition to language sharing practices, Kurdish children began to act as culture and language brokers after they entered school. They became a bridge between the school and their families when they explained what their teacher said in letters they took home. Siblings also served as culture and language brokers during parent-teacher meetings (e.g., between their younger siblings and Cengiz).

During a home visit in Guzelyurdu village, a next-door neighbor invited me to his home. He was the father of Serdar, a fourth grade student I knew well because he was the cousin of a student in Cengiz’s class. I walked to Serdar’s home with his father and they

welcomed me very nicely. After a brief discussion, Serdar's father passed me a letter to read. It was an autopsy report of his sister who had passed away a few months ago:

**Hasan:** Could you please read this for me? This arrived yesterday. What does it say?

**Me:** [After reading the letter] It says: "there was no evidence found of being murdered on the body. Our doctors found the evidence of a heart attack."

**Hasan:** So, this means that nobody murdered her, right?

**Me:** Yes, that's how I understand the letter.

**Hasan:** Thank you! I wanted to make sure one more time. I have lost my sister two-three months ago. She just got married one month before dying. Some people spread a gossip that her husband murdered her. I could not even allow myself to mourn because of this gossip. Then, I decided to send her body for autopsy. This report is autopsy report as you read. Thank you again.

**Me:** No problem! I am so sorry for your loss. Hope she rests in peace.

**Hasan:** Thank you! This [letter] arrived yesterday. As soon as I read, I was not sure if I understood it well. So, I made Serdar to read the letter aloud. Then, I took him to village coffee house<sup>5</sup> and he read the letter in front of everyone so that everyone hears the result. Hopefully, this will stop all gossips.

**Me:** You can read in Turkish, right?

**Hasan:** Yes, yes, I can. But, Serdar's reading is much better than mine. He read very well mashallah [an Arabic phrase used to show appreciation for a person or happening]. I read very slow and can't read some words. I didn't even take his brother. Serdar is more successful in school [than his brother]. Everyone knows that. I took especially him not his brother. So, I made him read the report so that all men get convinced. (Winter, 2013)

Serdar's read the autopsy report for his family first, and then in front of other people in the village coffee shop, and this showed his role as a language and culture broker, not only between the school and home but also within his family and community. His school success, academic knowledge, printed literacy repertoire, and understanding of academic contexts made him a language and culture broker between the official institution that sent the report and his community. Although this may not have been a

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<sup>5</sup> Village coffee house is where men spend their time there. They usually play some card and stone games there. It is generally the only social place for them to come together in villages.

good idea, his language and literacy repertoire made him the only one eligible for this role. Serdar's experience shows that written literacy is social capital in his community. Hasan's preference to take the autopsy report along with "a good reader" to convince other people (rather than telling them) demonstrated the importance they gave to written literacies. This is one example of how a Kurdish child who was not literate in the standard language (because of their home practices) now had additional responsibilities and roles in this context.

All parents were explicit when they shared with me that their children knew more than they did about society, digital culture, and school learning. They shared many times, in different conversations, that their children spoke Turkish better than they did. I observed that children's Turkish language practices, and their roles as language and cultural brokers, allowed them to gain more respect from members of their family.

When I entered Filiz's home for my third family visit, she and her father were working on Faruk's cell phone in the front yard. Filiz was explaining something to her father by showing him something. They quickly ended their conversation once they saw me. Filiz had been showing Faruk how to set a call tone on his cell phone. They explained what they were doing:

**Faruk:** You know I have difficulty understanding this phone. While I am working in the field, it rings and I don't hear. So, I told Filiz to set a louder sound for me. She did it mashallah. She knows it better than me. She even plays games on the phone.

**Me:** Voaw, Filiz! Good job! Do you know everything on the phone?

**Filiz:** [Nodding] I do everything.

**Faruk:** Yes, yes. Mashallah. She knows everything. I bring the phone to her when I need it being set up. I don't know much about it. It just rings and I pick up. That's it. (Autumn, 2012)

Filiz was a language and digital culture broker for his father when he showed him how to change phone settings. Filiz did not know how to read or write in Turkish at that time, and according to her teacher she was also behind her classmates in terms of understanding the material. Even so, as a language and culture broker, Filiz demonstrated her ability to use a cell phone and even taught her father how to use it. Similar to Serdar, Filiz's language and culture broker practices were made possible by their diverse language and literacy repertoire. They had many responsibilities, resources, and competencies—even though they were considered to be “behind” in school (according to top down educational and language policies).

#### Children's Language Practices Over Time

Kurdish children whose practices were not only influenced by situation and context were also purposeful across their school and home spaces, and the children blended already existing practices with ones they gained after spending time in school. This close examination of the types of brokering practices the children were engaged in shows how they constructed their practices to be strategic and purposeful.

#### **Language policing in/through conversations**

Language policing was one of the practices I observed Kurdish students initiate in Guzelyurdu village—in both Kurdish and Turkish dependent on the context, situation, and audience. I observed them policing each other in the classroom even though the vast majority of them understood and/or used Kurdish and this reduced the possibility that they felt isolated from conversations. During one of the conversations I recorded, three

students who were waiting for friends to bring snacks to them during recess, began talking about what languages they spoke under what circumstances:

**Sahra:** You say that I don't speak Kurdish but I really do.

**Filiz:** You do?

**Sahra:** Yes, my father and brother speak it. I hear it from them. See...

*Kirman dizanî* [Do you speak Kurdish]?

**Filiz:** ... [silence]

**Sahra:** Then, ask me something.

**Filiz:** Everybody knows *Kirman dizanî*

**Sibel:** Don't speak Kurdish in school. Teacher will get mad at you. (Autumn, 2012)

Sahra is one of the students whose home language was Turkish because her mother was from another village and could not speak Kurdish at all. That is why Sahra did not speak Kurdish; however, according to her parents, she may have been hearing it from her friends. In the previous conversation Sibel, Sahra, and Filiz, Sahra was the only one who did not speak Kurdish. As Sibel's final comment to Filiz and Sahra indicates, the girls were aware of the questionable status of Kurdish in school, and they discouraged each other from using it in the classroom or in front of any teachers. In addition to language policing by Sibel, this conversation shows that Sahra wants to be a member of her "Kurdish speaking friends" group, which was the majority of the class.

The Kurdish students I met and observed initiated language-policing practices with family members as well. Some students whose families spoke Kurdish at home asked their parents to speak Turkish especially while they were doing their homework. Gulnaz was one of these students. Her father, Rasit, said, "She gets nervous about making mistakes while studying as it is school work. She always speaks Turkish while doing her homework. She also wants me to speak Turkish while I am showing to her [helping with



her homework]. So, I speak Turkish to her while showing [how to do] her homework.”

Gulnaz also preferred for her parents to speak Turkish to her at home:

**Me:** You do great job with your homework. Does anyone help you while you are doing your homework? Your father or mother?

**Gulnaz:** My father...

**Me:** Does he write with you?

**Gulnaz:** No, I do it. He sometimes shows... Sometime, he says “do it that way.”

**Me:** Does he say “do it that way” in *Kurmanji* or in Turkish?

**Gulnaz:** *Kurmanji*

**Me:** Do you speak *Kurmanji* with him, too?

**Gulnaz:** No... I tell him to speak like me.

**Me:** What does he do?

**Gulnaz:** He speaks like me. (Winter, 2012)

Gulnaz was not comfortable communicating in Kurdish with her father especially while doing her homework. She asked her father to speak Turkish to her, perhaps because she believed this would help her make fewer mistakes. Gulnaz imposed ideologies and policies dominant in school on practices in her home space when she asked her father to not speak Kurdish. Even though her teacher was not present at that moment and even though they were not in school, Gulnaz wanted to complete her homework (a school practice) in the school language in order to do everything right.

Different spaces (i.e. school and home) that are associated with dominant language ideologies and policies have an effect on the language practices of students. Gulnaz wanted to do her homework in the language valued at school and by teachers. In Gulnaz and her father’s experience, the school language, Turkish, was considered to be a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) even in the space of their home. This experience also illustrates practices of children are built across various spaces and the practices can be

independent from their space because of potential consequences (i.e. missing the requirements of homework if it is done in Kurdish).

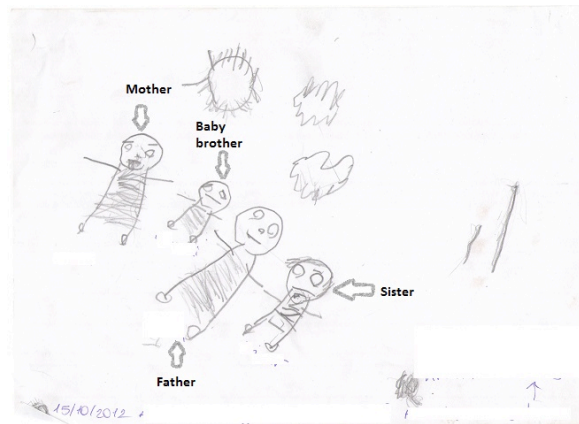
### **Multimodal literacy practices**

Doing research with young children was a great joy for me. I always felt they were presenting a treasure about not only their language practices but also their perspective to their own diverse and unique experiences from many aspects. This evolved and challenged my thinking and perspective on the central questions and concerns of this study. I have always viewed diversity as a resource, and the children in Guzelyurdu village showed me how their experiences and background were real resources for educators, researchers, and social linguists to build on. In addition to interviews and observations, Kurdish children's drawings and handmade materials they gave me were examples of their multimodal literacy practices.

In the remainder of this chapter, I have examined how Kurdish children positioned themselves relative to the surrounding social context in their drawings, in their stories about their drawings, and in other artifacts they created. The analysis provided here illustrates the varied and diverse language and literacy repertoires of Kurdish students. Plus, I gained a deeper understanding of how children's language and literacy repertoire shapes and was shaped by context, situation, purpose, and audience when I examined what children revealed about themselves through these multimodal practices

My first finding is that children preferred to position themselves as separate from other family members and their village. For instance, they did not picture themselves animal breeding or farming. This picture was drawn by Tarik whose father worked as

both a farmer and animal breeder for other villagers determined by the daily jobs he could find as they did not have land or any animals.

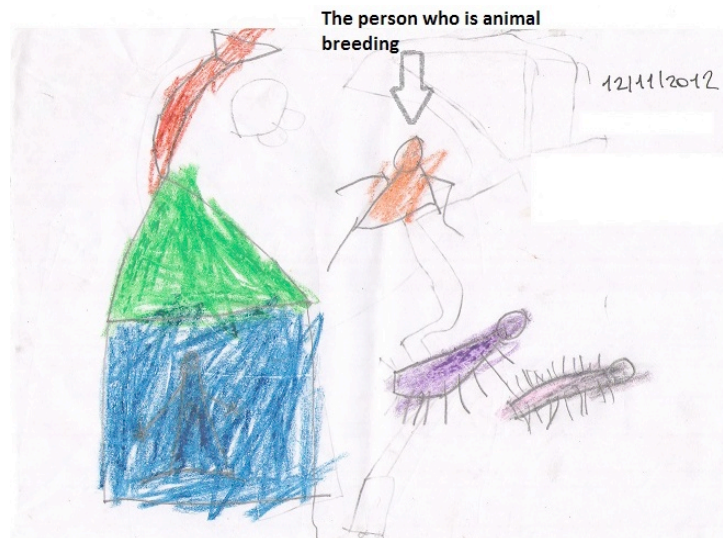


**Figure 1: Tarik’s Drawing of his Family Members**

During one conversation, Tarik drew a picture of his family (his father, mother, brother, and sister) and explained who the people in his picture were as he gave it to me. When I asked Tarik what was happening in the picture, he said that his family was walking in the village on a sunny day. When I asked him why he was not in the picture, he explained that he was not with them because he was at school. I wondered whether he preferred being at school rather than “going somewhere in the village on a sunny day” along with his family because he had drawn this picture at home while he was with his family.

In the village there were two kinds of occupations for people -farming and animal breeding. Earning a living in the village was only possible by doing one of these jobs. Although it was the lifestyle of the people, I did not witness children drawing themselves breeding an animal or farming. They drew animals in their pictures but they never

positioned themselves as the breeder. The picture below was drawn by Ugur. His father was a farmer. His father also practiced animal breeding and they had several sheep.



**Figure 2: Ugur's Drawing: An Animal Breeder**

In his picture Ugur has drawn a person who is an animal breeder. When I asked him to explain what was going on in the picture he said that the person was an animal breeder but no one that he knew.

In other drawings, children from the village seemed to position themselves in relation to their environment by distancing themselves from farming and the practices involved. I saw a number of drawings that contained people with western clothing, big houses, and more modern streets. In these pictures no one wore traditional clothing or did something related to their daily life in the village.

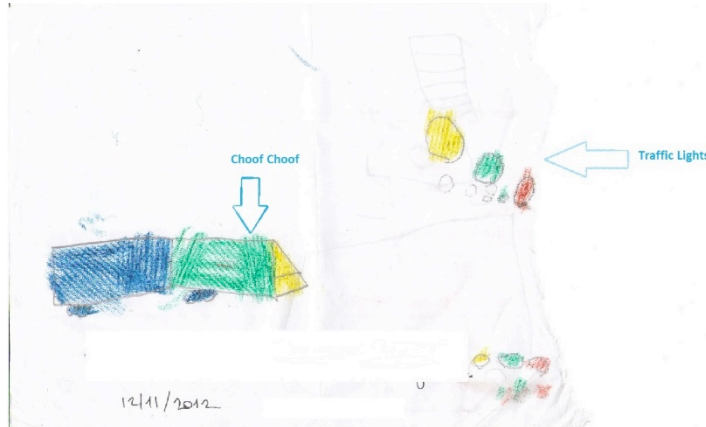


**Figure 3: A Child's Drawing of Herself**

A first-grade girl gave me this picture. She visualized herself in “princess clothing among flowers”. She said she had a tiara with this “pinky princess clothing.” All other female students pictured people in such clothes like this student. They drew women in princess clothing and men in western clothing (e.g. suits, pants and shirts). I came to believe that many young Kurdish students preferred to position themselves as separate from than their family, culture, and current environment. I did not see any pictures in which they drew themselves as a part of their environment, culture, or family.

My second finding was that the pictures contained evidence of their multilingual literacy repertoire. In their pictures, the children included people, things, and practices they had seen on television programs, especially cartoons. They also learned words and concepts that did not exist or were not taught to them either at home or school. For instance, Ferhat drew traffic lights in the picture below. When I asked Ferhat what the picture was about he explained what each light meant and what people should do when

they see these lights. Although they had not learned traffic lights in school and there were no traffic lights in their village, the student was aware of the concept of traffic lights and understood their meaning.



**Figure 4: Ferhat's Drawing of Traffic Lights**

**Me:** What are those?

**Ferhat:** Traffic lights. These are like that: green means go, red means stop, and yellow means get prepared.

**Me:** What is that one (the image like a train)?

**Ferhat:** Choof Choof. This is traffic light and this is Choof Choof. I saw them [traffic lights] on Choof Choof. (Autumn, 2012)

Choof choof is one of the cartoons shown on television and children watched this cartoon very often. In another picture, Sibel drew a woman with “super powers”. Words she used during my conversation with her about the picture are important to focus on.



**Figure 5: Sibel's Drawing of a “Super Woman”**

**Me:** Who is this?

**Sibel:** A woman

**Me:** Who is this woman?

**Sibel:** She is a woman with *super powers*

**Me:** What are her super powers?

**Sibel:** These *wings can be hidden* when she needs. She can fly. She is like a *robot* but not [robot]. She *lives among people* like *normal people*. She becomes a hero in her *locker room* when *good people need her help*. (Winter, 2012)

During my observations in their homes and in school, interviews with parents and teachers, I did not witness that they heard words and concepts such as “super power”, “hidden wings”, “human robot” and “locker room” in daily life conversations. Kurdish children learned different contexts from the television programs they watched. We can observe similar cases in many young children’s experiences. What makes this more interesting for Kurdish children was their linguistic and cultural background. These children who were second-language learners in school improved their literacy repertoire by watching television that was an independent practice from their school curriculum and family practices.

Reissman (2007) discusses how members of minority groups sometimes use others’ voices in their narratives. In the children’s drawings, I found examples of this— e.g., when the drawing portrayed teachers and other members of mainstream society in a positive light. For instance in the picture below, Zerrin drew her teacher, Cengiz, and his home although she had never been to his home. This picture shows Zerrin’s assumption that her teacher Cengiz lived apart and different from most families in the village.



**Figure 6: Zerrin's Drawing of her Teacher**

Of the 74 student drawings that I collected, almost half of them were of teachers, me or my and Cengiz's home and family. Children seemed to prefer drawings that were about other people's lives and stories. This picture is one about me and my family. While giving this picture to me, Zerrin said that "This is you and this is your daughter." In addition to the student's choice of drawing me, my physical appearance and the fact that I did not have a daughter (all students knew this), the drawings are significant.



**Figure 7: Zerrin's Drawing of Ayfer (The Researcher)**

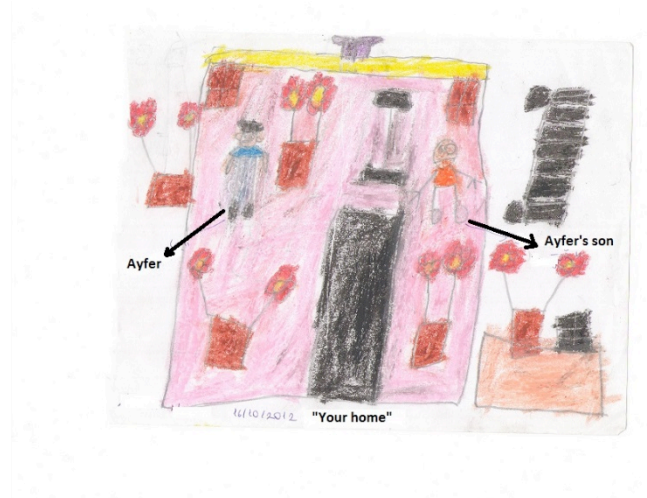


In this picture, my clothing is different than what I usually wore. In fact, I was wearing the same clothes that a typical teacher would wear. In our conversation, I asked Zerrin “You know I do not have a daughter, right?” She answered, “Yes, I know but it is nice to see a daughter with you.” I am not sure if she drew herself as my daughter but she did not say more about who my daughter was in the picture.

Another picture by a male student had my house and my son in it. I would like to say that all their pictures of me made me really happy as it showed their interest in me; however, when I consider all their pictures, I realize that other people’s stories were more influential in Kurdish children’s lives than their own. Children preferred to depict stories about other people’s life such as their teachers, cartoon heroes, or even mine rather than their own or someone in their immediate environment.

Only Ugur gave me a picture that included the animal breeding practice common in the village, but he preferred to tell a story that included an unfamiliar person as the main hero. Kareem was another student whose drawings exemplified that other people’s stories were more influential on Kurdish children’s drawings than their own lives.

Kareem, who generally drew cars rather than homes and people figures, gave me the picture below. This is the only picture he drew that included a home and people. Kareem explained that the one on the right side was my son, and the other one was me with flowers everywhere. I would like to note here that in pictures where students drew me and my child, girls preferred drawing a daughter for me while boys mostly preferred drawing a son. Only one boy student drew a daughter with me.



**Figure 8: Kareem's Drawing of Ayfer (The Researcher)**

Based on this analysis of their multimodal practices, it seems that Kurdish students positioned themselves in ways that distinguished them from their village, their family, and community traditions. They seemed to prefer the idea of participating in mainstream society or the school environment, and their drawings indicated active participation in realms outside their homes and communities. They also seemed to prefer seeing themselves as someone more prestigious like a Walt Disney princess. I could see that television had an important influence on their multiliteracy repertoire from the figures they drew in their pictures. They learned concepts and words at home from cartoons they watched. The school context was an independent practice from their home and school learning. Although I could see home practices such as animal breeding in their pictures, they did not picture either themselves or their families engaged in any of those practices.

### Summary

In this chapter, I have described and analyzed the language and literacy practices of Kurdish children across multiple spaces--home, school, and community. I also

discussed how the practices of the local students evolved after they spent some time in school. Findings of this study show that Kurdish children engaged in a variety of practices across time, space, and with various modalities such as language brokering, language sharing, language policing, and telling stories about their drawings. My findings also show that these practices were purposeful, strategic, and consequential. For example, while some children preferred to remain silent rather than speak Kurdish to their teacher, other children were comfortable speaking Kurdish across contexts. Some even engaged in language sharing activities with their friends who did not speak Kurdish during their recess.

Another key finding of the study is that these practices were historically and interactionally situated. For example, students used Kurdish as a “code” among themselves to create a safe zone within school. These kinds of Kurdish language practices by children can be viewed as a “bottom-up language policy” (Hornberger, 2001) in a context where the Kurdish language seems to be rapidly shifting to Turkish. Practices such as language sharing and using Kurdish as a code, are a glimpse of hope for reversing the current language shift as these practices show that children still value Kurdish. My findings also demonstrate the expanding language repertoire of Kurdish children with these practices. Children who were well aware of their audiences, the context of communication, and social positions during interactions still used Kurdish actively in their daily life practices in spite of statements and beliefs that Turkish was more valued than Kurdish.

Findings from this chapter point to the possibility of expanding the language and literacy resources of bilingual children as one way to halt the language shift. Kurdish

children and youth's multilingual language practices such as language sharing, language use as a code, and language brokering show they valued Kurdish in their practices despite its socially and politically low status. Multilingual youth who were strategic, purposeful, and well aware of their language experiences were good at negotiating practices at school and home. Findings of this research, which documents an early language shift, suggest it is important to use these multilingual language practices to increase the value of Kurdish for Kurdish youth and encourage them to enjoy the resource of being multilingual.

## 7: CONCLUSION

The existence of Kurdish language and practicing it (i.e. speaking, teaching) has been a politically and socially controversial issue in Turkey since even before the foundation of Turkish Republic, when the area was ruled by the Ottoman Empire. For many years, official bans and stigmatization left Kurdish people with challenges for practicing their native language and maintaining ties to their history and culture. All of these issues have influenced debates about the rights of Kurdish children to be educated in their mother tongue while attending school. I hope that this study will inform larger conversations about the experiences of Kurdish children, their parents, and teachers in an ideologically and politically complicated multilingual local context.

In order to document and examine the educational and language learning experiences of Kurdish-speaking children living in a rapidly changing and dynamic context, I used ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observations in both home and school spaces, multi-modal data collection, interviewing, and focus groups) to try to understand the perspectives and practices of one first-grade classroom (14 students). While I was primarily interested in the children's experiences, I also talked with seven parents, three teachers, and two administrators. Findings show how Kurdish parents and teachers talked about and used Turkish, English, and Kurdish languages in a context where languages are politicized and minoritized historically.

A careful analysis of data collected from observations and interviews shows that there is a clear hierarchy among languages—Turkish, English, and Kurdish. The children, their parents, and their teachers all valued Turkish and English more than Kurdish. While

explaining the reasons for this view, they discussed the status and functions of each language in society with emphasis on their different functions across spaces (including educational spaces). In this hierarchy, the value of one language was always and intimately tied up with the value of other languages and influenced by other factors such as policies and society's expectations. For instance, even though English did not have any functions in the Kurdish community, both children and parents valued it because of the functions it had outside of the community. In other words, the prestige of English in wider society (and internationally) influenced the beliefs of people even though they did not seem to have any use for it in their context. My analysis also shows that, although participants devalue the Kurdish language in theory (in part because of the socially, politically restricted functions of the language), they continued to value Kurdish in their talk and practices because they believed it would connect them to their ethnic roots.

A close look at the kinds of policies that appear in teachers' talk and practices seemed to show how everyday understandings of policy (official or not) might become robust mediators of language beliefs and practices. For instance, among the Kurdish parents who participated in my study, school was thought to provide an opening to the bigger society and to prestigious jobs, especially for Kurdish children who do not want to be stuck in the village. For some parents, the choice to learn or use a particular language was seen as a life choice—one that would influence trajectories in significant ways. Many believed that Kurds who choose to improve their school language, Turkish, would not only be successful in school but would likely have access to better job positions such as teaching and engineering. Conversely, the ones who used Kurdish more often were seen to have fewer employment options (e.g., animal breeding or farming). In these ways,

policies directly and indirectly influence the language practices of parents, children, and teachers.

Yet, at the same time, I found that, although the Kurdish children that I observed subscribed to ideologies that valued Turkish and English over their native language, they did not entirely abandon their Kurdish language. Instead, they were involved in Turkish-Kurdish bilingual practices such as language broking, language sharing, and language crossing. Kurdish children, whose diverse home practices are not recognized in school, have significant roles across their home and school spaces where top down policies are seen to be dominating and getting to be complicated with the policies and practices at grassroots. Kurdish students who are expected to catch up with the school curriculum and at the same time who need to remain as members of their communities become policy makers; cultural and language brokers; and responsible for “earning their life” in Guzelyurdu village. As the observations and analysis provided in earlier chapters illustrates, Kurdish youth’s language and literacy practices are strategic, purposeful, multilingual, and multimodal.

#### Contributions of the Study

This study makes several contributions to what we already know about language ideologies in relation to the policies and practices of minority groups; it also contributes to conversations about bi/multilingualism in relation to education and minority language orientation. The analysis shows how the diverse language practices of minoritized groups reflect and influence language ideologies and policies in context. As the close examination of language beliefs, language policies, and language practices demonstrates, there are sociolinguistic implications for research on language shift and maintenance.

This study's findings point out a critical time period for the future of Kurdish language in a politically and linguistically complicated, local context. This study also makes contributions to discussions about the role of bilingual youth in language maintenance efforts, and understandings of the consequences of mainstream beliefs and policies with its findings on Kurdish youth's multi/lingual, intentional, and multimodal practices. In addition, this study has pedagogical implications based on its findings about schooling and learning experiences of Kurdish children. With its close examination of policies in teachers and families' practices, this study also has policy implications.

Last but not least, the ways that I negotiated access, the methods I used for data collection and analysis as well as my role as a researcher have useful methodological implications for people who plan to conduct research on language practices and experiences of a historically minoritized group and their children. I will discuss these implications along with the related recommendations in the remainder of this chapter.

### Sociolinguistic Implications

#### **Learning a language is not enough**

In Turkey, because Kurdish continues to be associated with rural people and places, it is stigmatized. As a result, many Kurdish families prioritize Turkish language over Kurdish because of its wider functions, the social and financial power associated with Turkish language, and the access it is believed to bring to various contexts in mainstream society. Kurdish parents, who desire social and financial wellbeing for their children, often told me that they want their children to speak Turkish. Further, if their children could speak Turkish, they wanted them to do so without an accent. This was



especially true for parents who had worked outside of the village but was also true among those who practice “Turkishness” within their Kurdish community in order to try to speak Turkish without an accent. Recall Rasit’s comment that “ they are looking at your accent while hiring you.” As a parent who spoke Turkish with an accent, Rasit, said that he was hired for jobs which did not require him to communicate with people (e.g., gardening, cleaning) because he does not speak the desired language in specific context. Blommaert (2009) defines the existence of normativity of the language societies based on the defined norms by either official state or the society’s itself. In Rasit’s case, workplaces define their language norms as speaking Turkish language and speaking it without an accent. Rasit does not feel confident that he will find employment because of his Kurdish-accented Turkish. In addition to valuing the language(s) valued by the local community and/or the larger society, the shame that some parents feel about their Kurdish language also increases their desire to speak Turkish (without accent if possible). For instance, Aras worked on improving his Turkish to speak it without Kurdish accent by watching television as much as he could so that he could improve his Turkish proficiency while learning how Turkish people act and do things.

According to Cummins (1981), minority families may feel ashamed of their cultural background and do not want to pass these practices on to their children in large part because of mainstream attitudes toward their language and culture. Feeling oppressed and ashamed of their language for minority groups is a potential reason for native language loss. According to my findings, the Kurdish language is threatened by the fact that locally the Turkish language is more valued, more prestigious, and more

widely used. Put simply, beliefs about language status are increasingly influencing (sometimes dominating) the situated practices of Kurdish families, including children.

### **Language Shift and Maintenance**

The Kurdish language is neither endangered nor threatened in terms of its population of speakers. However, being threatened is not always associated with the number of its speakers but also its loss of power, which can lead to the extinction of the language in the near future. This statement is based on the nature of language and planning which is not only about the language per se, but also about the power issues in the society and the identity (both individual and ethnic) of its speakers. For years Kurdish was officially banned in Turkey, even in the homes of Kurds. The status of Kurdish (and its speakers) in this particular local context has been influenced by Turkification that required speaking Turkish and defining yourself as Turkish while in Turkey. However, Kurdish and Turkish people now both ask for solutions to the problems that Turkification caused (e.g., the mother tongue education needs of minority children).

Finding from this study show clearly that people in the Village of Guzelyurdu devalue their native language Kurdish and value Turkish (or English) instead. Both Kurdish parents and youth value English more than Kurdish (even though the English language does not have any functions or use in their context) because of its prestige in mainstream society. Findings also show that younger generations speak more Turkish than their parents did and devalue Kurdish more as well. In other words, because people who can communicate in Turkish are the ones who end up going to school and doing well in school, then proficiency and literacy in Turkish are equated (ideologically and in

practice) with being educated and therefore with being better off (socially and economically)—especially among the younger people who are at their early 30’s. Because older people in the village generally cannot speak Turkish well, they prefer speaking Kurdish. Hence, Kurdish is considered as the language of older generations. The younger people are the less Kurdish they speak. For example, one parent, Faruk, said “it is enough to understand if possible to keep the ties with grandparents alive.” Similar to what Faruk said, Rasit, Aras, and Suzan stated that their children do not have to speak Kurdish and they keep their Kurdish language skills only if their circumstances allow it. Within this context, families seem to not worry about the future of Kurdish language in their children’s practices as long as their children are doing well socially, academically, and financially well. Further, they seem to be ready for a language shift in their children’s practices from Kurdish to Turkish, and even English, because these two languages offer more social prestige, financial and academic value to their children with their wider functions in mainstream society while Kurdish is limited with its local functions. Based on their perceptions and practices, families seem to overestimate the ethnolinguistic vitality of Kurdish language. However, the moment is a critical one. The consistent and widespread devaluation of Kurdish by Kurdish speakers themselves (particularly the youth) is likely to contribute to a long-term shift from Kurdish to Turkish (or what Wyman calls “tipping” to Turkish). We see evidence of this in the beliefs and practices of adults and children in this seemingly “isolated” community. At this moment, Kurdish is highly devalued for certain purposes and in certain domains (e.g., the home, the field, while communicating with elders, maintaining connections with culture) but does not

seem to have much value outside of those limited domains. As a result, Kurdish has started to be viewed as the language of elders.

The main function of Kurdish in this community, according to the families and teachers I observed and interviewed, is that it connects children to previous generations and their elders. Also, this provides an environment for Kurdish youth to hear from their grandparents and speak Kurdish language with grandparents in their family contexts. Additionally, multilingual practices that Kurdish children are engaged such as language broking, language sharing, and Kurdish use as a code show that they do not completely abandon Kurdish from their practices although they devalue the Kurdish language in their beliefs. With this complicated context, and the status of Kurdish, in relation with the status of Turkish and English languages, the community is on the verge of tipping to Turkish. But it is an important and interesting time. Because the “tip” (Dorian, 1989, p.183) has not yet occurred, the children (and their parents) might be able to influence the future of Kurdish language because the language is not completely devaluated in the practices and beliefs of people.

Policy implications: Top down policies are not magical sticks

After being banned for many years (1923-1991) from use in public and formal education (Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994), the official policy on using the Kurdish language in public settings was changed. Starting in 1991, people were not judged for speaking or reading Kurdish in Turkey. While this change is a step in the right direction, it did not immediately eliminate the stigmas that had become attached to Kurdish in the larger society. Some of the steps taken to restore value to the language include: launching a government-run Kurdish television channel, allowing Kurdish lessons to be taught

privately, and establishing a Kurdish language and literature department in Mardin Artuklu University, located in the eastern side of Turkey. Another policy change that seemed to reflect the increased value placed on Kurdish in Turkey occurred in September, 2014 (which was after the data collection for this study was completed but which indicates influences that were at work during data collection). The national assembly passed a bill that would allow private schools to use Kurdish and other minority languages and dialects as the medium of instruction. In addition, many cities, towns, and villages in Turkey began using Kurdish name in place of the Turkish names that had been assigned under the unification strategies of the Turkish Republic (1923-present)

I align myself with Spolsky's (2004) view that language policy consists of three components: language practices (ecology), language beliefs (ideology) and language management (planning). I also agree "the real language policy of a community is more likely to be found in its practices than in management" (p. 222). With this in mind, I carefully analyzed the practices of Kurds in Guzelyurdu village along with the language management strategies that existed at what had been called the "macro" level in Turkey. In such ways, this study sheds light on how language policies are enacted in practice at the local level. I have closely observed and examined people's daily life practices, their languages choice, their beliefs of languages, and even their expectations from each language exist in their local context. I have observed and learned from Kurdish children, their parents, and teachers parallel with Spolsky's suggestion about language management and policy. Unfortunately, no one in the Guzelyurdu primary school where I did my observations elected to study the Kurdish language once it was an option. Findings from this study show that the Kurdish families that I observed and talked with

do not think it is important for Kurdish to be taught in school now that it was allowed. From the conversations we had, it is clear that Kurdish is not valued as much as the other two languages present in this linguistic ecology, Turkish and English. Another contributing factor may have been that the school had some difficulty finding a Kurdish teacher. It was also difficult to publicize the Kurdish course as electives to parents and their children. All of this demonstrates how difficult it is to reverse language shift once it is underway, and the limits of top-down policies in the face of ideologies of language that are robust and widespread. The Kurdish parents' pragmatic perspectives on their sociolinguistic landscape were not overturned by a policy change because Kurdish still does not have enough functions to meet the needs of people in the society.

Pedagogical Implications: Influence of teachers and school on parents' practices

The crucial role of schools in language policy and planning has taken its place in several scholarly discussions (e.g. Fishman, 1996; Hornberger, 2008; McCarty, 2011; Wiley, 1996). When a language is used in schools, the value of that language is usually increased in the local society (Fishman, 1996). In this case, using Turkish as the language of education for a number of generations had the long-term and sustained effect of reinforcing the value of Turkish while contributing to the lower status of Kurdish. Even parents who were not highly educated thought of the Turkish language as a critical component in their children's education. Several parents told me that their children would be more successful if they started school by speaking Turkish rather than Kurdish, and many of these parents talked about their own schooling experiences as a reason for this opinion. Findings also show that teachers remind Kurdish families and their children that their linguistic and cultural practices become an obstacle in their Kurdish children's

schooling and learning process. Most importantly, school and teachers seem to be representative of mainstream ideologies and policies with their practices at grassroots. Teachers seem to have a mediating role on parents' ideologies and practices especially when we think about the contradiction between parents' ideologies of languages and their practices (i.e. valuing Turkish over Kurdish language because of academic success while practicing Kurdish in their daily life).

In addition to the influence of school on families' beliefs and practices, I have observed teachers attempt to mediate family practices. During a parent-teacher meeting, while the teacher was talking the parent and the student, the teacher said that students are already behind because of their diverse home language practices and lack of support. He told to the parent, "even if you don't understand the material, come and ask me to learn how to do it and I will show you." The teacher also told to the student to study twice as much as their Turkish speaking peers do. On another occasion, I observed the same teacher explain the school material to parents so that they could be more helpful with their children's assignments at home. He showed his dedication, compassionate, and thoughtfulness of him as a teacher and this exemplify his good teaching practices that I mentioned and appreciated in several places. The point I try to make here is that the current period is a critical for the future status of Kurdish language. Teachers' practical influence on parents to increase their awareness of the importance of Turkish language for their children's academic, social, and financial wellbeing seems to fasten the language shift from Kurdish to Turkish for Kurdish families. Current mainstream policies and ideologies that ignore Kurdish language practices of children, seem to be effectively

implemented through teachers' practices even though this is obviously not the purpose of the teachers.

### Methodological Implications

Before going into the details of the methods I used, I would like to share that I have always treated this research as a learning experience for myself from the very beginning to the end. During this study, my thinking about and perspectives on conducting research, bi/multilingualism, and even parenthood evolved. I used to think that we own the language we speak. I now believe that we do not own any languages—we just speak them with socially situated purposes. Let me clarify what I mean with an example. I am a Turkish native speaker and can speak three different accents in Turkish, which are very local and cannot be understood by other Turkish native speakers. I can also understand several different accents because of the diverse nature of my hometown. I am a speaker of English as a second language and a former teacher of English. I have done my graduate studies in English and plan a career in academia of which language is English. I also speak German. My writing and reading repertoire in German allow me to reach more contexts than my speaking. I am literate in Ottoman Turkish; I can read, write and understand the texts in Ottoman Turkish. I can read and write Arabic and understand a little. I am writing my doctoral dissertation in English. If I try to write the same dissertation in Turkish, I am not sure if I could (even though it is my native language) because some of the terms I use in my dissertation do not exist in Turkish. Likewise, if I listen to somebody speaking German with an accent, I may not be able to understand the person because I have learned German in classrooms. As a person who is multilingual, I think every piece of a language we have expands our multilingual repertoire.



In addition, my perspectives on languages, maintaining mother language, and social aspect of languages and multilingualism have evolved during my graduate studies. While examining what a language means to Kurdish children, their families, and teachers, and how their views shape their language practices according to context and spaces they are in, I revisited my perspective on what speaking a language means. I now believe that it is important to consider what language practices are associated with in specific contexts, and how those meanings change over time, across situations, and according to purpose, audience, and agenda. In the data analysis chapters presented here, there are many examples of Kurds in Guzelyurdu village making decisions about their practices that are influenced by the reactions they receive from mainstream society on the value of “their language.” To provide a holistic picture of children’s experiences, I examined parents’ practices and views in their talk. After listening to stories of Kurdish parents, I now have a changed perspective on parenthood especially for parents with diverse practices. Although I used to think families need to be strict to maintain their children’s native language no matter what circumstances they have, I now view either parenthood or maintenance of native languages are not as straight as I used to think. In one of our conversations about her children’s language practices, Ayse, Zerrin and Meryem’s mother, told to me that “I am a mother and I need to think about my children's education and their wellbeing.” (I discussed in chapter 6), showed to me that people’s role as a parent who is responsible for caring their children, and planning for better life circumstances for their children in future is more important than other things. And, when people are left with two options, parental responsibilities (i.e. prioritizing children’s academic, financial, and social wellbeing) and maintaining their native language, and

expected to pick one, it is not surprising for them to pick parenthood and desire social, financial wellbeing of their children especially in a context where minority languages (i.e. Kurdish) are stigmatized.

Although the status of Kurdish has been a hot topic of discussion in Turkey, these discussions do not go beyond being political. Social linguistic experiences of Kurdish people are an understudied topic. Very few studies have been conducted to investigate the language and literacy experiences of Kurdish children. In order to understand the experiences, perspectives, and practices of Kurdish children along with their families and teachers, I engaged in various ways to conduct research with children on their social linguistic experiences that I consider as an accumulated process. To capture this process with all its dynamics, I modified ethnographic research methods by adding research methods with young children such as multimodal data collection and analysis, play and story times with children. Unlike the traditional approaches to language and literacy research of young children that prioritize observing the practices of children in home context, I considered their experiences across home and school spaces. My discussion of diverse home language practices of children in this study includes their community practices as well. Although some studies focus on community practices of diverse groups, I discuss Kurdish children's home and community language practices together as part of their linguistic repertoire because of the social structure of the village I conducted this research. With these in mind, I paid close attention to the practices and beliefs of their families and teachers (including administrators) in this research because without attention on families and teachers, a holistic understanding of children's language and learning experiences would not be possible.

I considered interviews with participants as personal, authentic conversations that allow me to Kurdish people to listen to their experiences, beliefs, and practices. As a researcher who is truly interested in their practices and experiences, I treated these interviews as learning experiences from Kurdish people and did not mind that the participants led the conversations. During my interviews with children, I included games so that they were more interested. Also, I was very careful to keep the time short enough to not make feel children bored. During this research, I had different roles; I was a “teacher but a different teacher” for Kurdish families, and I was a researcher and former teacher for teachers. I considered myself as both an insider, because I was from the same hometown with the participants of this study and was familiar with their culture, and outsider to this research, because I am ethnically defined as a Turk. During this research, I was able to utilize these roles because I considered my observations and conversations as situated learning experiences, as well. For example, I showed my interest in the experiences of families as being “a different teacher” who cares about their children’s wellbeing. And, I utilized my former teacher role during my conversations with teachers because they knew that I also experienced the same challenges they had.

I viewed my participant observations as a two way street that I was able to interact with Kurdish children while also learning about their practices. Rather than viewing participant observations and interviews as a way to gather data from them, I also shared my own experiences and perspectives. There were times when we talked about topics that did not have anything related to this study such as my childhood. I did my best to engage with students, parents, and teachers in manner that was honest, respectful, authentic, and sincere. I did my best to build and maintain trust throughout the study. I

was very well aware that teachers were skeptical about me, and my “observations” at the beginning. To build their trust, I spent more time with them than I planned and shared many details of my research agenda with them. I also talked openly about my personal life and past experiences so that they would be able to know me better. I was always sincere and honest.

As a result of this positioning (and the sincerity and honesty that I embodied), I was able to observe the influence of my role as a researcher during this study. For example, during the last focus group conversation, Kemal shared in a self-critical way that the gap between school and parents most probably is at least in part because he and other teachers did not visit students’ families at home. Later in our conversation he said:

I am telling it here in front of my teacher friends. You have been observing us in school and visiting families. Even if I don’t say so, you already know. We are not close enough with families. For example, you know them [the families] better than us. We see them only if they come to school. In such a village where students need more support [because of their language and social practices], we should be visiting their homes often to be able to explain to them what they need to do for their children. If we get closer with the families, their children will feel more affiliated and comfortable in school. Circumstances do not allow us to do that but we can work on it and do it.  
(Winter 2013)

I was intentionally a researcher who conducted research with families in their households and school, and I worked hard to establish relationships with families. But, in part because of the ways in which I did this, Kemal ended up reflecting on his relationship(s) with families in the community—and the way such relationships facilitate or limit what he is able to accomplish as a teacher. Since I agree with Kemal that teachers need to know families better to be able to understand their students’ background, my role’s influence on participants’ beliefs, and hopefully practices, seems as an unexpected

outcome. This influence also assures me that I was able to treat this study as a two-way learning experience.

By being fully aware of multilingualism, its implications for language learning and processes of social identification, and the very diverse background of the participants, I made some linguistic accommodations during data collection. I used Turkish with participants, the only common language we have. By so doing, I had the chance of having a better understanding of Kurdish families' diverse language practices. In order to make my interviews with parents more comfortable and conversational I worked with a person from the same community to conduct interviews with parents in their dominant language (Kurdish).

Recommendations

### **Functions of Kurdish should be increased across Contexts**

The findings of this study exemplify the kind of language shift that Fishman has described and theorized. The Kurdish language is not endangered in terms of the population of its speakers within Turkey. However, in terms of its politically restricted functions and historically marginalized position in society, it needs careful attention for revitalization. Kurdish languages fall into both stages 1 and 2 in Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS). As Fishman (1991) discusses in stages 1 and 2 of GIDS, the Kurdish language is used in homes, in the community, and in the neighborhood and it has some functions at higher levels such as the mass media. However, Kurdish speakers do not view it as a language their children would need now

or in the future (while pursuing higher education) because its functions are very limited in schools and it is still not prestigious enough to be spoken by mainstream society.

In addition to these findings that parallel with Fishman's GIDS (1991) discussion, the ways of seeing language vitality and shift in GIDS discussion misses speakers' overestimation of ethnolinguistic vitality. One finding of this study, which contributes to Fishman's discussion, shows that Kurdish speakers seem to assume that the Kurdish language will continue to be available as a choice for their families, even in the absence of actively promoting and using it. The problem with this, as we know from extensive research on minoritized languages and language shift processes, is that the slope (towards shift) is not only slippery but also increasingly steep. It does not take long (2 or 3 generations) for a language that is devalued by its community members to lose both its vitality and function. Based on this study, the Kurdish language is revalued by increasing its functions in contexts, which can add prestige to the language in the society such as school. Rather than top down policies such as allowing Kurdish as elective classes that either does not seem to revalue Kurdish language or does not meet the needs of Kurdish people, functions that meet the needs of Kurdish people at grassroots should be increased. Policy makers must be aware of the socially stigmatized status of Kurdish language while making policies to revalue Kurdish.

### **Curriculum should include diverse practices of Kurdish children.**

Based on the findings of this study, policy makers should redesign the curriculum in Turkey according to the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students such as Kurdish children. Rather than viewing their home language a deficit and considering

these children as if they did not know anything, their linguistic and cultural background should be respected in educational places. Children's strategic, multilingual, and multimodal practices as well as their language broking, language sharing activities show that they are very good at negotiating diverse language practices across their spaces. So, I recommend that curriculum should be prepared according to local contexts rather than according to a one-size-fits-all model. The curriculum prepared for local contexts, different schools, and individual learners should view and treat children's multilingual repertoires and practices as resource rather than as deficits. New learning should build on what students already know and do; it is both inefficient and ineffective (and unnecessary) to try to subtract or replace those existing resources with something else.

Given the current context and the findings reported here, it is difficult to imagine bilingual education working in this village; yet, that is precisely what needed to revitalize and maintain Kurdish as a community language. I hope there will be room for discussions of bilingual education and welcoming centers in schools in multilingual contexts where students speak a different language at home.

**Linguistically Diverse Children's Practices Should be considered as a whole accumulated process**

Kurdish children's bi/multilingual, multimodal, purposeful, and strategic practices across school-home-community spaces demonstrate that linguistically diverse children's practices should be considered as a process rather than as one time situated actions in sociolinguistic research. Rather than fitting bilingual skills into separate languages such as school and home language, future researchers should investigate these children's

practices across all of their social contexts and should consider all dynamics of these contexts such as family, and teachers. Researchers who are interested in minority youth's experiences should closely examine how the youth use their multi languages, when they use their languages and in which context. In doing so, they will also be able to investigate how specific language policies and other parameters of the contexts children live in manipulate/affect children's language use and practices. And, in doing so, I believe, they will be able to see how successful language policy and sociolinguistic contextual analyzers young children are.



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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

**To:** Doris Warriner

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 10/10/2012

**Committee Action:** Expedited Approval

**Approval Date:** 10/10/2012

**Review Type:** Expedited F7

**IRB Protocol #:** 1209008283

**Study Title:** A Study of Language and Literacy Practices of Kurdish Children in Turkey

**Expiration Date:** 10/09/2013

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

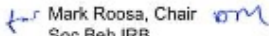
Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.



APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD RENEWAL FORM

**To:** Doris Warriner

**From:**  Mark Roosa, Chair  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 08/29/2013

**Committee Action:** **Renewal**

**Renewal Date:** 08/29/2013

**Review Type:** Expedited F7

**IRB Protocol #:** 1209008283

**Study Title:** A Study of Language and Literacy Practices of Kurdish Children in Turkey

**Expiration Date:** 08/28/2014

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

APPENDIX C  
INFORMATION LETTER

## INFORMATION LETTER

### Title of Research Study:

#### A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF KURDISH CHILDREN

Date:

Dear Teacher:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Doris Warriner in English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn more about language and learning experiences of Kurdish children who speak different languages at home and school.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve regular observations of your classroom over the first semester of 2012-2013 Education year, informal conversations about Kurdish native speaker learners' classroom participation and academic progress, and 4 or 5 recorded interviews. I am interested in hearing your perspective on language policies and different language practices of your students and their academic process. I am also interested in discussing with you my observations and findings. I would like to audiotape the interviews, but the interviews will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want a conversation/interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty or negative consequences.

Because I believe this study will provide insights that may benefit other teachers with the experiences of children who have different language background and practices in classrooms, I hope to disseminate my findings through conference presentations and publications. However, even though the results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, your real name will not be known or used. To ensure confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms for the village, the school, the students, or you (the teacher). Digital recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer following data collection and analysis.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact either Ayfer Gokalp at 0555-494-3309 or Doris Warriner at 480-459-7226. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788. Please let me know if you wish to be part of the study.

APPENDIX D  
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

## **RECRUITMENT SCRIPT**

### **A Study of Language and Literacy Experiences of Kurdish Children**

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Doris Warriner in English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn more about language and learning experiences of Kurdish children who speak different languages at home and school.

I am recruiting first grade students who speak Kurdish at home and Turkish in their classrooms in Camuz Kislasi Primary School to participate in this study. Because they are under the age of 18, I am seeking their parents' permission to allow first-hand observations and digital recordings of classroom interactions and informal interviews over the first semester of 2012-2013 Education year. I am also recruiting the first grade classroom teacher. Classroom interactions will be recorded to insure accuracy in representation and analysis of findings. Identifying information (of the students, teachers, school, and the village) will be replaced with pseudonyms in all presentations and publications coming out of this study. Digital recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer following data collection and analysis.

Your consent is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no adverse consequences. If you have any questions about the purposes or goals of this research study, please call me at 0555-494-3309.

APPENDIX E  
STUDENT RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

## **RECRUITMENT SCRIPT**

### **A Study of Language and Literacy Experiences of Kurdish Children**

Good afternoon! My name is Ayfer Gokalp and I am a student at Arizona State University. This year, I will be conducting a research study that I would like you to help me with. I want to investigate the experiences of students in school. I plan to use the information I learn from this study for my school work and I plan to share the information with other people who want to help kids who speak a different language at home like Kurdish, and people who want to help kids learn to read and write.

I am asking for help from all of the students in Mr. Celal Dolasir's 1<sup>st</sup> grade class. I would like to record your conversations for several times in a week until school ends this semester. I have to record what you say so I can make sure that I don't forget what I hear and I want to make sure I correctly understand what you are saying. I will also collect examples of your classwork and look at your notebook and study papers. When I share what I learn from this study with other people, I will never use your real name. Instead, I will give you a pretend name. If you would like to help us with our research study, your parents will have to fill out a permission form that says you can participate. If you don't want to participate that is ok. You will not be in trouble and you will not earn a bad grade in your school.

However, if you would like to help me with my research, you will have to take the permission form home and ask your parents to fill out the form completely. Do you have any questions?



APPENDIX F  
TEACHER CONSENT FORM

**Teacher Letter of Permission:**

**A STUDY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EXPERIENCES OF KURDISH CHILDREN**

Date:

Dear Teacher:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Doris Warriner in English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn more about language and learning experiences of Kurdish children who speak different languages at home and school.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve regular observations of your classroom over the first semester of 2012-2013 Education year, informal conversations about Kurdish native speaker learners' classroom participation and academic progress, and 4 or 5 recorded interviews. I am interested in hearing your perspective on language policies and different language practices of your students and their academic process. I am also interested in discussing with you my observations and findings. I would like to audiotape the interviews, but the interviews will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want a conversation/interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty or negative consequences.

Because I believe this study will provide insights that may benefit other teachers with the experiences of children who have different language background and practices in classrooms, I hope to disseminate my findings through conference presentations and publications. However, even though the results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications, your real name will not be known or used. To ensure anonymity, I will use pseudonyms for the village, the school, the students, or you (the teacher). Digital recordings will be kept on a password-protected computer following data collection and analysis.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact either Ayfer Gokalp at 0555-494-3309 or Doris Warriner at 480-459-7226. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

\_\_\_\_\_ YES, I give consent to participate in the study described above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX G  
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

## **A Study of Language and Literacy Experiences of Kurdish Children**

### **PARENTAL CONSENT/PARENT PERMISSION FORM**

Dear Parent:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Doris Warriner in the English Department at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to learn more about language and learning experiences of Kurdish children who speak different languages at home and school.

I am inviting your and your child's participation, which will involve weekly observations of your child, document collection (her/his notebook, drawings, and school handouts), and recorded conversations with you and your child. My goal is to understand his/her experiences and time in school, his/her time with friends, and what she/he thinks about the languages that he/she uses and your views and time with him/her. I expect to spend 2-3 hours with your child on a weekly basis and have 2-3 conversations with you. Your and your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If either you choose not to have your child to participate or you choose to not participate or to withdraw yourself and your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. It will not affect your child's grade in any way or there will not be any negative consequences for either of you. Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

Although there may be no direct benefit to you and your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is having a better understanding of his/her own diverse language experiences and increasing the awareness of your and his/her different environments along with these two languages. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you and your child's participation.

The name of your village, the name of the school, and name of you and your child will not be used in this study. Any information which can be description of you and your child's identity will not be used in this study, either. Responses will be confidential. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your and your child's name will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning this research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at (0555) 494-3309 or Dr. Doris Warriner at (480) 727-6967.

Sincerely,

Ayfer Gokalp

By signing below, you are giving consent for you and your child \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the above study.

APPENDIX H  
STUDENT ASSENT FORM

A Study of Language and Literacy Experiences of Kurdish Children  
Assent Form

I have been told that my parents (mom or dad) have said it is okay for me to take part in a project about my language learning and language use.

I understand that I will be asked to talk about my school experiences with Ayfer, my time in school, the time I spend with my friends, and how I study at home.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grade in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_

Sign Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_

Print Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

APPENDIX I  
CHILDREN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Children Interview Protocol

**Information:** This protocol is adapted from Mosaic Approach by Clark and Moss (2001). The first part contains questions that will be asked during informal conversations with the children, without recording the conversation. After the child is asked to draw a picture of their family, the picture drawn will serve as a cue for the conversation between the investigator and the child. The second and third parts contain questions that will be asked during recorded interviews. During these interviews, the interviewer may reference the child's drawing, a picture or a toy to make the interaction more comfortable for the child. Interviews will not be more than 15-20 minutes because of the young age of the participants.

A parental checklist will be consulted when talking with the child's parents in order to achieve triangulation as described in the Mosaic Approach. The parental checklist has been submitted as a separate document.

### Part I

- How old are you?
- Tell me about this picture of your family
- How many brothers/sisters do you have?
- Do they go to school?
- What language did you learn first, when you were a baby?
- What language(s) do you speak now?
- What language(s) do your parents/grandparents speak at home?
- What language(s) do you like speaking at most?
- What is your favorite activity in school?
- Which language do you prefer to speak in your classroom? Kurdish? Turkish?

Let's talk about your friends

What do you like to do with your friends most?

- Which games do you like playing with them?
- Which language(s) do you speak with your friends?
- Do you come together with them after school?
- Which friend do you like most? Why?

Let's talk about your first day in school

- How did you feel?
- Did your feelings change? How do you feel now?
- What do you think about speaking Turkish in your classroom? Do you like speaking Turkish? Why or why not?



## Part II

When I was in your classroom, I noticed you really seemed to enjoy...

- Tell me a little bit about the reason you like doing it
- When did you start doing that? Do you do that at home?
- Would you want to do the same at home?

When I was in your home, I were very good at doing...

- Tell me more about how you can do it
- Do you do that with your friends?
- Do you do that in your classroom?
- Would you want to do that in your classroom (In case we talk about a practice which the child does not do in their classroom)?

Can you tell me more about your plans?

- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- If you were a teacher, what would you do in your classroom?
- Which language would you speak in your classroom?

APPENDIX J  
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Information:** This protocol is adapted from I.E. Seidman's (2006) 3 part interview method.

## **Parent Interview Protocol**

### **Part I: Focused Life History**

Please tell me a little about you and your family background

- Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- What language(s) do you speak?
- What language(s) do your parents speak? What language did they use with you while you were growing up?
- What did/do they do for a living?
- Where did you go to school?
- Were your school experiences generally positive? Is so, how? If not, why?
- What do you remember about your language experiences in school?
- Can you tell a little bit about your experiences learning a second language?
- How many children do you have?
- Which language do you speak to your children? Why?
- Which language do you prefer talking with your friends? Why?

### **Part II: Details of Experience**

Please tell me more about your experiences

- Which language(s) do you use during in a day? Where do you use those different languages?
- What language(s) do you use at home? Why do you use that/those language(s)?
- Are you able to read and write in Kurdish?
- Are you able to read and write in Turkish?
- What is your current job? What do you like about it? Is there anything you dislike about it?
- Which language do you use at work to speak with your colleagues?
- Before, you told me that you are/ are not able to read in Kurdish/Turkish. What do you think is the reason for this?
- How do you feel while speaking Kurdish/ Turkish?

### **Part III: Reflections on Meaning**

- What do you think about your children's learning/studies in school?
- What do you think about the relation between their language and school experiences?
- What do you think about current school system?
- What would you do if you were able to change/ control the school system? Why?
- What do you think about the status of minority languages in local schools? Would you like this to change? If so, why? If not, why not?

Based on what I have observed that..., could you tell me a little bit of that?

- What do you think about...?
- How is ... important to you?

Please tell me about your thoughts about children's future

- What do you wish for your children for their future?
- How would you want to see them when they become adults?
- What do you think about your role on their future?
- What do you think about school's role on their future?
- What do you think about their Kurdish/Turkish practices role on their future?
- Do you have anything else that you would like to add?

APPENDIX K

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Information:** This protocol is adapted from I.E. Seidman's (2006) 3 part interview method.

## **Teacher Interview Protocol**

### **Part I: Focused Life History**

- Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- Where did you go to college? What was your major?
- Which language(s) do you speak?
- Where did you learn to speak [your second language]?
- What languages did your parents speak? What did they do for a living?
- Which language did your parents speak to you while you were growing up?
- What do you remember about your second language learning experiences in school?
- What do you remember about your second language learning experiences out of school?
- Do you have any children?
- Do they go to school? What do you think about your child's experiences in school?

### **Part II: Details of Experience**

Please tell me more about your experiences

- What do you like the most about teaching?
- What parts of the job do you find the most challenging?
- How do you manage bilingualism or multilingualism in your classroom?
- Do you make any special accommodations for your Kurdish students? If so, what are they and how do you implement them?
- Are there any specific strategies you use to help your Kurdish students adjust to the classroom environment? Are there any strategies you use to help them learn and use the school language, Turkish?
- What are your experiences with your students' language learning process?
- What are your experiences communicating with the parents of your students?
- What do you think about the use of Kurdish in classroom? How do you think the use of Kurdish influences your students' experiences in the classroom?
- Do you think they are learning and using Turkish? What do you think helps them with this? What obstacles do you think they face?

Based on what I have observed in your classroom, I have noticed that you/students...

- Can you tell me more about your rationale for that? And how you accomplish ...?
- When the students..., what do you usually do? Why?

### **Part III: Reflections on Meaning**

- What do you think about your students' language practices at home?
- Do you think that home and school language practices are related for your students? If so, can you describe what that relationship is?
- What do you think about the role of your students' parents on their school learning?
- What do you think about your role as a teacher on your students' language and learning practices?
- What do you think about school curriculum when you consider your students' language background?
- Do you think the curriculum meets the needs of your students? If so, how does it do so? If not, what changes would you recommend?
- What would you do if you were able to change something about the school system?
- What do you think about the current change in education system which allows minority languages to be taken as electives in schools?

Based on what I have observed that..., could you tell me a little bit about that?

- What do you think about that?
- How does it affect the language and learning experiences of your students?

Let's talk about your thoughts on the future of your students

- Where do you see your students in the future?
- What would be the role of their Kurdish/Turkish practices in the future?
- Which language do you think your students will be speaking more in future? Why?
- Which language do you think your students should speak more in future?
- What is role of the school on their future practices?
- Do you have anything else to add?