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Cultural Identity Among Early Kurdish Bilinguals in Erbil: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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Abstract

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this article examines the impact of acquiring English on the acculturation of Kurdish adolescents in Erbil. As language and culture are interconnected, cultural identity is constructed through language, yet it also influences how language is used. Problems arise when extended exposure to a foreign language leads to a loss of sense of identity. Contemporary research has indicated that the culture associated with a globalised language (English in this case) either subtracts from or adds to a speaker's existing cultural identity. This study employs a quantitative approach, using data collected through a questionnaire from 116 respondents. The results show that the impact of English on cultural identity has either diminished the subjects' original Kurdish language and cultural identity or led to a hybrid formation of identity, blending elements of both cultures.



About the Journal

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1. Introduction

Language is more than just a tool for communication; it is deeply connected to the cultural values and behavioural norms that shape an individual's identity (Gao et al., 2005). The way people speak reflects their cultural heritage, serving as a medium to share traditions, values, and beliefs (Rabiah, 2012). This connection is especially significant in bilingual societies, where individuals move between two linguistic and cultural contexts. Bilingualism allows people to engage with different languages and cultures, which in turn influences their cultural identity.

Norton (2000) suggests that identity can be defined as “How a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future.” (Norton 2000: 5). Rampton (2017) shares a similar view, arguing that identities are socially constructed, negotiable, and dynamic, evolving through interaction. As a result, learning a new language can lead to identity changes. Factors such as globalisation, education policies, and the dominance of English as a global language contribute to the rise of bilingualism (Kachru, Quirk and Widdowson, 1985). Graddol (2001) and Jenkins (2007) argue that the increasing use of English among non-native speakers in global communication, international business, and social and cultural affairs influences its future norms. Similarly, Crystal (1997) highlights the widespread use of English across many countries.

While language preserves cultural heritage (Rabiah, 2012), the global dominance of English brings challenges, including identity ambiguity (Miyahara, 2010). It can also generate tensions between preserving local languages and adapting to global influences (Szymanski and Kalra, 2023). On one hand, English serves as a bridge between communities; on the other, it may risk overshadowing local languages and identities. However, bilingualism and cultural exposure also foster hybrid identities, where elements of different cultures combine to create a dual sense of self (Kanno, 2003). Similarly, Hogan (1996) warns that while we “think globally,” we must also “act locally,” recognizing the impact of English on local communities and identities.

In Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), Kurdish, Arabic, and English are spoken in different settings, evidence of a mix of local traditions, regional and global influences. As a symbol of cultural identity and heritage, Kurdish holds historical significance. It is the dominant language in Erbil, and it is spoken on a daily basis (Jukil, 2005:37). Arabic is spoken by refugees or indigenous residents from different ethnic groups coexisting with Kurds and serves as a lingua franca for governance and interethnic communication across Iraq (Hassanpour, 1992). Although Kurdish is the majority language, there is growing concern that new generations of Kurdish children are losing touch with their own language.

English has become increasingly significant in the KRI due to several factors. To begin with, historical events, such as the instigation of the No-Fly Zone (1991) and the 2003 United States-led invasion, brought Western influences, foreign organizations, and Internet access, all of which elevated the role of English. Moreover, private schools and universities prioritise English as a medium of instruction (EMI), making it symbolic of academic achievement and career success. Consequently, the language has a growing impact on the aspirations and identities of Kurdish youth (Hasan and Hasan, 2020), corroborated by Saeed (2021).

Globalisation and policies supporting English Medium Instruction have also reinforced its importance in education and career development. The Ministry of Education in KRI has implemented measures to prioritise English as a second language, gradually replacing Kurdish as the medium of instruction in certain stages of education (Saeed and Jukil, 2018). This reflects the Region's recognition of English as a global language and its value in increasing socioeconomic opportunities. Early bilingualism, defined as the acquisition of two languages during early childhood, typically before the age of five, a critical period for linguistic and cognitive development (Cummins, 1981), is increasingly common in Kurdistan. As Baker and Wright (2017) note, such bilingualism often occurs naturally through daily interactions rather than formal instruction. Including English in school curricula worldwide, often from younger ages, is intended to enhance students' language proficiency and global competitiveness (Butler, 2015). For early bilinguals in

Kurdistan, moving between Kurdish and English, both acquired during their formative years, profoundly shapes their cultural identity. Adolescence, a critical period for identity formation, often involves cultural blending or conflict (Efremova and Simbirtseva, 2020). In this context, the dominance of English can either lead to subtractive bilingualism (Lambert, 1975), where the acquisition of English undervalues Kurdish language proficiency and cultural ties, or hybridity: the blending of cultural identities due to exposure to multiple languages and cultures (Bhabha, 1994). In this respect, Faridy and Syaodih (2017) found that the use of the mother tongue is declining due to factors like population movement and globalisation. For Kurdish, the growing influence of English is making the language and its culture less prominent. This leads to concerns among academics, politicians, and cultural experts, who worry that Kurdish youth may develop a new cultural identity that moves away from their traditional heritage. Shifting identities among Kurdish youth and early bilinguals have led to cultural identity crises (Sleman, 2022: 505). This idea is supported by Fillmore (1991), who suggests that the greater the use of a foreign or second language, the more damage is done to the mother tongue and its associated cultural identity.

2.Literature Review

2.1 Language and Cultural Identity:

Language is primarily a means of conveying thoughts, feelings, and information, playing a variety of functions in a community. Different languages, tied to various geographical regions, convey people's voices and reflect their cultural identities. Through human interaction, language and culture collaborate continuously, developing cultural values, customs, and identities (Maine et al., 2019). Language also helps people to reveal their hidden social and cultural realities, particularly when they form their lifestyle and culture with their family and community at a young age. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), a person's identity is shaped by their social and cultural encounters with language, not merely by their inner thoughts. This implies that language use shapes and reflects their cultural identity, affecting how they speak and perceive the world.

Fuller (2007) supports this: Interactions between people and their linguistic choices in various social contexts form a cultural identity. Similarly, Vygotsky (1980) states that relationships between people and their communities also have semiotic purposes. He sees language as a linguistic and cognitive instrument, helping children in first internalizing the social and cultural concepts of others. However, some argue that language is not the only factor in shaping cultural identity and that it can even contribute to cultural identity crises. A study by Giri (2010) found speakers of English and Nepali had greater power and control over minority language speakers in Nepal, resulting in linguistic and sociocultural disorders, identity crises, and socioeconomic displacement. Based on this argument, in Kurdistan, as English becomes more dominant in the media, business, and education, a possibility arises that Kurdish language cultural identity might be endangered. When English is seen as more prestigious, it disconnects people from their heritage and traditions (Sleman, 2022). For early Kurdish bilinguals, this can create a feeling of duality. Blending Kurdish and English-speaking cultures, they may struggle with conflicting identities, trying to fit into both worlds, leaving them uncertain about who they are and where they truly belong.

Edewor et al. (2014), in a Nigerian study, found that language can lead to a crisis in cultural identity, but suggested that these problems could be resolved by redefining identity. Likewise, Gelman and Roberts (2017) found that language acquisition occurs before identity crises. This indicates that while language is the greatest factor in shaping cultural identity, sociopolitical factors are also important.

2.2 Bilingualism and Cultural Identity

Bilingualism, per Ali (2022, 2023), is defined as the ability to know and use two languages, often with equal skill in both. While this definition seems simple, it becomes more complex upon closer examination. There are various definitions of bilingualism depending on how frequently and efficiently individuals use each language. Some bilinguals are fluent in both languages, while others are more fluent in one and less so in the other. In other words, some bilinguals have a dominant or preferred language in which they are more proficient. Therefore, before categorizing bilinguals, it

is important to consider the varying levels of bilingualism.

For this study, the definition of bilingualism per Baker (2001) will be used, which describes bilingualism as the ability to speak two distinct languages or varieties in different contexts. Bilingualism is classified into two types: additive and subtractive. Additive bilingualism occurs when a learner acquires both a second/foreign language and their mother tongue without losing proficiency in their native language. In contrast, subtractive bilingualism refers to a situation where a learner loses their first language while learning a second/foreign language. In Kurdistan, subtractive bilingualism might be common among early Kurdish bilinguals, where individuals sometimes lose proficiency in both written and spoken Kurdish. As a result, they may switch to English or blend English and Kurdish structures when speaking Kurdish. This phenomenon is known as code-switching (Barker, 1972; Blom and Gumperz, 1972; Ali, 2022). Subtractive bilingualism and code-switching are connected because people may switch between languages when they are not fully fluent in one of them.

Culture is a fluid and evolving concept. Per Dervin and Liddicoat (2013), culture is no longer seen as fixed but as something enacted by people, constantly changing and crossing boundaries. Moreover, cultural identity refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a particular culture, influenced by shared traditions, values, language, and customs that distinguish one group from another. This identity could be both personal and collective, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived in various social contexts (Chen and Lin, 2016). In particular, "cultural identity" can be described as "the relationship between individuals and members of a group who share a common history, a common language, and similar ways of understanding the world" (Norton, 2000: 19).

The interconnected nature of language, culture, and identity is well-recognized by others – (Al Dabbagh, 2005; Jenkins, 2007; Karmani 2005; Kramsch, 1998; Suleiman, 2003). As Kramsch (1998: 3) states, "Language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways". In this sense, it could be said that "language captures culture" meaning "losing a language is losing culture, and losing culture is losing one's identity" (Said, 2011:191). Kramsch (1998) sees bilingualism as connecting different cultures, often creating unique, blended identities. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) focus on how bilingual individuals negotiate their identities in contexts of power and resistance. Fishman (1999) looks at how maintaining or losing a language affects the cultural identity of minority communities. Wei (2000) explores how people balance and adapt their identities in multicultural settings. Lastly, Romaine (2012) highlights how bilingualism influences both individual and group identities through social and cultural connections.

Bucholtz (1999) suggests that in bilingual settings, individuals who reject the identity of one community often distance themselves from it, aligning with a community holding more positive attitudes towards them.

Liebkind (2006) view cultural identity as complex and not limited to ethnicity or language. People can identify with multiple cultures, even if not speaking their associated languages. However, this contrasts with Goffman's (1963) who argues that identity is not self-selected but imposed by others based on their perceptions and language use.

Cultural identity is essential in examining how the process of learning a new language influences learners' cultural identity. (Aboulfetouh, 2011). Leveridge (2008) show that culture and identity are expressed through language; Weedon (1987) highlights that language plays a central role in shaping individual identity. Ethnic identity has a significant role in maintaining a language and distinguishing a group from others. Language is way individuals can differentiate themselves from other identities, reflecting ethnicity (Giles et al., 1977).

One framework dealing with language and identity is the Subtractive Bilingualism Theory (Lambert, 1974) being that learning a dominant language, like English, can diminish the use of one's mother tongue and weaken cultural identity, especially when the dominant language is associated with higher socioeconomic status.

Gallagher's (2011) study supports this. It found English dominating education and business in the

UAE, particularly in cities like Dubai, where Emirati youth often prioritise English for work and study. This has led to a noticeable decline in daily use of Arabic, raising concerns about cultural preservation.

Similarly, Hopkyns (2017) studied the impact of learning English on cultural identity among Emirati students. Learning English developed students' confidence and independence, giving them access to global opportunities. However, it also raised concerns about the decline of Arabic fluency and traditions, as younger generations often preferred speaking English over Arabic. Some students noticed changes in traditional practices, like clothing and naming, and feared losing touch with their heritage. While many valued English for its benefits, 51% felt their identity had shifted, with some even thinking or expressing emotions more easily in English.

Segalowitz (1977) found bilingual speakers develop an internal duality of culture, synthesizing the cultures of the two languages they speak. Thus, when a new language is acquired, people are exposed to a new culture and make adjustments to how they view the world. This idea aligns with Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which suggests that the blending of cultures through bilingualism can create new, dynamic cultural identities that are not fixed but constantly evolving.

Alotaibi and Abahussain's (2024) study found that learning English often leads Saudi Arabians to develop a "hybrid identity." While preserving their heritage, they gained traits like openness, tolerance, and confidence. They viewed English as crucial for success and personal growth, considering it a means to enhance cultural awareness without weakening identity.

Lee (2002) found how learning their heritage language shaped the cultural identity of 40 Korean-American university students. About 80% of the participants identified as bicultural, with American-born students more likely to find a balance between Korean and American identities. The study showed that stronger Korean language skills were linked to a deeper connection to both cultures, but many students experienced a decline in Korean fluency as their English improved, reflecting the lower value placed on heritage languages in society. Family support was crucial, as parents encouraged speaking Korean at home and maintaining cultural traditions, helping students stay connected to their roots. Most participants achieved a balanced bicultural identity, combining the best of both cultures.

2.3 Bilingualism and Cultural Identity in Kurdistan

Kurdish in IKR has a significant role in maintaining cultural identity. Since 2003, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has exerted efforts to promote Kurdish as an official language alongside Arabic. This includes incorporating Kurdish into schools and government institutions, reinforcing its role as a symbol of ethnic identity and a tool for political empowerment (Gunter, 2011). Media outlets and online platforms have also become essential in maintaining Kurdish and preserving its cultural heritage despite the increasing influence of globalisation and dominant languages (Sheyholislami, 2010).

The future of Kurdish might be threatened by the increasing dominance of English in media, industry, and education. Similar trends can be seen worldwide, such as in Saudi Arabia, where local languages have been neglected due to the dominance of English (Hanani, 2009). As a solution to this problem, the importance of additive bilingualism must be considered, where learners maintain proficiency in their mother tongue while learning a second (Chunyan, 2005; Enstice, 2017). This strategy suggests Kurdish will continue to play a significant role in education and regional cultural identity (Baker, 2001).

Another problem facing the preservation of the Kurdish language is the multilingual environment in Iraqi Kurdistan, where creating a single standard language is challenging due to dialectal variations like Kurmanji and Sorani. Preserving a unified cultural identity requires the creation of precise language policies that take these variations into account (Sheyholislami, 2010).

In examining the relationship between language and identity, Abdulla and Hamd (2023) explored the impact of English on Kurdish bilinguals' identity formation, cultural practices, and linguistic behaviour. They found the dominance of English led to significant changes in participants' sense of identity. They developed different identities such as dominant, submissive, resistant, or productive, which influenced their academic engagement. English also affected participants' behaviour and

dress, with some maintaining their traditional attire as a cultural symbol, while others adopted aspects of English-speaking cultures. The study also found a conflicting viewpoint regarding the impact of English on national identity, with some participants experiencing a revived sense of pride in their Kurdish history while others felt a reduced connection.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Several theories examine the connection between language, bilingualism, and cultural identity. This study uses three that are essential for understanding how bilingualism affects cultural identity. They are outlined below.

2.4.1 Domain and Domain Analysis Theory:

The Theory of domains (Fishman, 1965) is that language choice in multilingual communities depends on the context influenced by interlocutors, occasions, and topics. Fishman identifies five main domains: family, friendship, religion, education, and employment. This is particularly relevant to Kurdish bilinguals, as Kurdish is often used in family and social settings, while English dominates education and professional contexts.

2.4.2 Subtractive Bilingualism Theory:

Lambert (1974) found that subtractive bilingualism occurs when learning a second language (L2) leads to a decline in proficiency in the first language (L1). For Kurdish bilinguals, the dominance of English might weaken their native language, resulting in diminished cultural ties. This aligns with the hypothesis that English impacts Kurdish proficiency and, in turn, affects cultural identity. Subtractive bilingualism often emerges in environments where the home language is undervalued, particularly in English-medium schools in Kurdistan.

2.4.3 Hybridity Theory: Bhabha's Theory of Hybridity (1994) explains cultural identity as something flexible and constantly evolving. A key idea in this theory is the "third space," where different cultures meet and interact. In this space, individuals can mix elements of their native culture with those of a dominant culture, creating a new, hybrid identity. For Kurdish bilinguals, this means blending Kurdish traditions with influences from English culture.

3. Methodology

This article, through a sociolinguistic lens, explores how globalisation, bilingualism, and the rising impact of English are influencing the cultural identity of Kurdish bilinguals who grow up speaking both Kurdish and English from an early age in Erbil.

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between bilingualism and cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals. Quantitative methods are particularly useful in sociolinguistic research for identifying measurable patterns, trends, and correlations across a larger population. By using structured instruments such as surveys, this approach provides statistical data that can be analyzed to draw objective conclusions. The research aims to answer the following questions:

Firstly, to what extent does proficiency in the English language affect the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals? Secondly, what role does social context play in the relationship between language and cultural identity? Finally, does fluency in English lead to the development of a hybrid cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals?

3.2 Participants

The sample chosen for the current study involves 116 early Kurdish bilinguals from 15–17 years, all living in Erbil. Per (Chouali, 2016; Ali, 2019) this size is adequate to provide representative data. Adolescence is an important time for forming personal identity (Erikson, 1968). Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure they met the study's definition of early bilingualism—those exposed to both Kurdish and English before the age of six. The sample was nearly balanced: 64 females and 52 males, with participants from diverse sociocultural backgrounds. Participants were chosen through social networks and local community connections to ensure a diverse sample.

3.3 Data Collection Tool

Data was collected through a questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section collects basic sociodemographic details, such as gender, age, and the languages most commonly used. This

information provided context for understanding the relationship between language use patterns and cultural identity. The second, quantitative section, consists of 30 close-ended statements assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree.' These statements focused on three key areas: language proficiency, cultural identity, and language use in different contexts.

A copy of the full questionnaire is included in Appendix A, covering demographic questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions.

The charts below summarize the participants' background information.

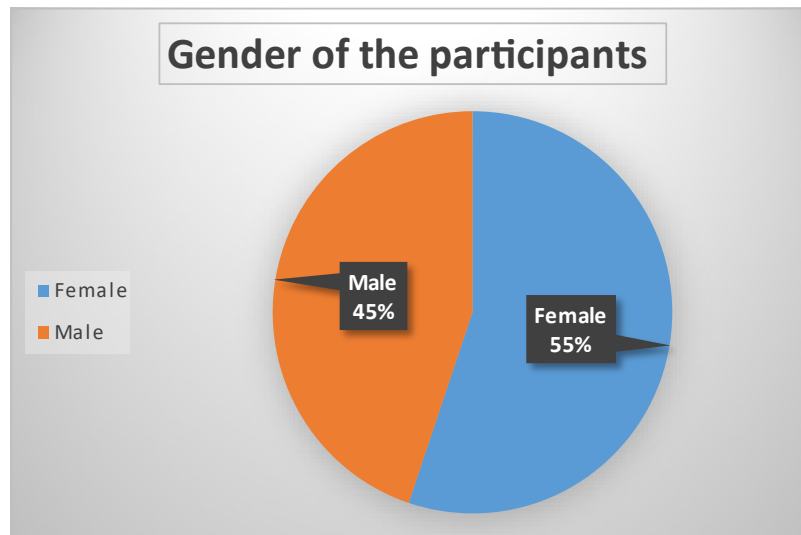


Chart 1. The gender distribution of 116 Participants

The above chart shows the participants' gender and illustrates that 55% (64 individuals) of the participants were female while 45% (52 individuals) were male.

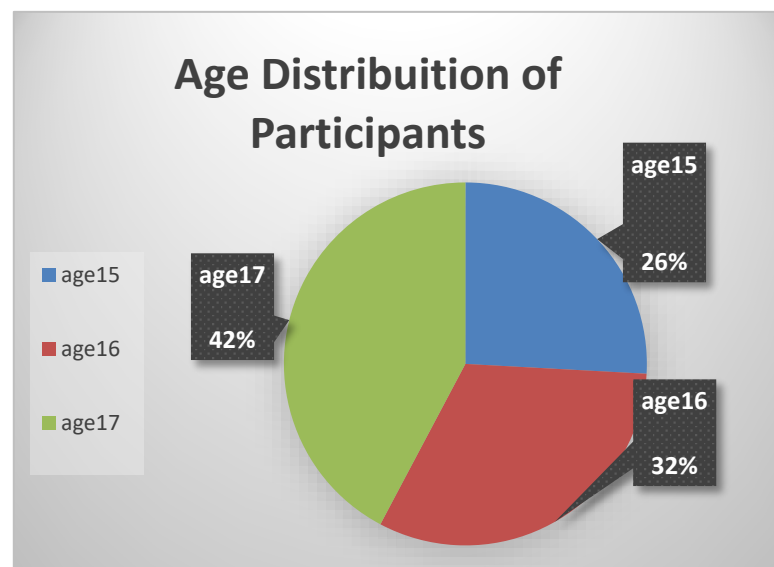


Chart 2. Age distribution of participants

Chart 2 illustrates the participants' ages, revealing that 26% (30 individuals) were 15 years old, 32% (37 individuals) were 16, and 42% (49 individuals) were 17.

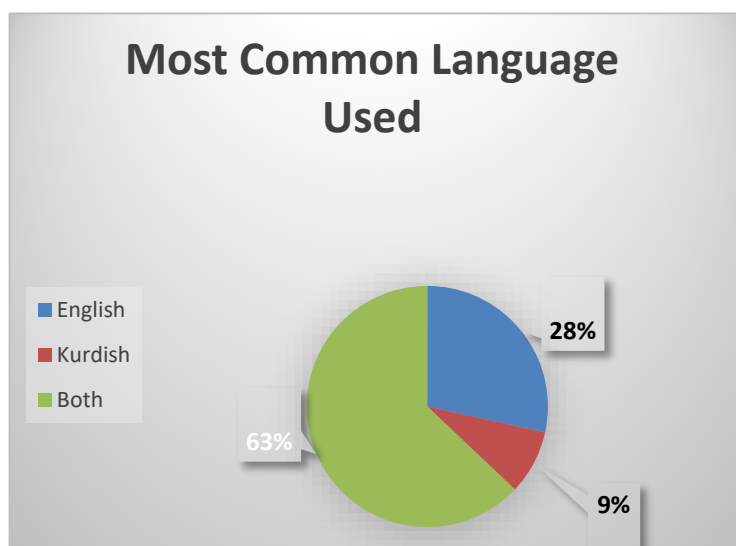


Chart 3 shows the most commonly used languages among participants. 28% (33 individuals) use English, 9% (10 individuals) use Kurdish, and 63% (73 individuals) use both English and Kurdish in their daily lives.

3.4 Data Analysis

This study uses quantitative statistical analysis to explore the relationship between language proficiency, cultural identity, and social integration among early Kurdish bilinguals. Responses to the Likert-scale statements were analyzed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. This method provided insight into patterns of language use, self-assessed proficiency, and cultural identity. The use of Excel ensured accuracy, efficiency, and clear visualization of the results.

3.5 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

To ensure the reliability and validity of the questionnaire, a small pilot test was conducted with a group of early Kurdish bilinguals prior to full distribution. This helped evaluate the clarity, relevance, and structure of the items. Based on participant feedback, several questions were revised to improve transparency and alignment with the research objectives.

Additionally, the questionnaire was reviewed by senior academic staff in multiple rounds of consultation, which contributed to establishing content validity. During the main data collection process, questions were explained to participants as needed, sometimes in both English and Kurdish, to ensure full comprehension. Since all participants were minors, parental consent was also obtained in advance to meet ethical requirements.

4. Findings and Discussions:

As mentioned in section 3.3, the data collection tool used was a questionnaire divided into three parts to gather demographic information, quantitative data.

The data gathered through these sections will help explore the study's hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 asserts that proficiency in English weakens the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals by reducing their connection to the Kurdish language and culture. Hypothesis 2 emphasizes that social context plays a significant role in shaping the language use and cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals, influencing their language preferences and sense of belonging. Finally, Hypothesis 3 proposes that fluency in English fosters a hybrid cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals, combining elements of both Kurdish and English cultures. By analysing the data with these hypotheses in mind, this section will provide a deeper understanding of how language proficiency and social context influence the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals.

Table 1. How proficient are you in Kurdish and English? And when do you use them?

S	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I am equally proficient in both Kurdish and English.	3 (3%)	4 (3%)	20 (17%)	54 (47%)	35 (30%)
2	I use Kurdish more often than English in my daily life.	10 (9%)	34 (29%)	32 (27%)	24 (21%)	16 (14%)
3	I use English more often than Kurdish in my daily life.	4 (4%)	26 (22%)	27 (23%)	33 (29%)	26 (22%)
4	I prefer speaking Kurdish with friends.	20 (17%)	39 (34%)	16 (14%)	15 (13%)	26 (22%)
5	I prefer speaking English with friends.	8 (7%)	10 (9%)	20 (17%)	39 (33%)	39 (34%)
6	I feel more confident communicating in English within professional contexts.	1 (1%)	8 (7%)	10 (9%)	40 (34%)	57 (49%)
7	I prefer using Kurdish to express my feelings (Anger, disappointment, stress, happiness, excitement)	24 (21%)	40 (34%)	14 (12%)	17 (15%)	21 (18%)
8	I prefer using English to express my feelings (Anger, disappointment, stress, happiness, excitement)	7 (6%)	13 (11%)	31 (27%)	25 (22%)	40 (34%)
9	Losing proficiency in Kurdish may lead to feeling socially disconnected or isolated within Kurdish society in the future.	4 (3%)	15 (13%)	22 (19%)	39 (34%)	36 (31%)
10	Acquiring English at an early age has, in some ways, contributed to a decline in my proficiency in Kurdish.	13 (11%)	21 (18%)	18 (15%)	39 (34%)	25 (22%)

The findings in Table 1 show participants' self-assessed proficiency and patterns of language use in different contexts. Data shows the complex connection between language proficiency, usage preference, and effect on sociocultural connections. The majority of participants (89) agreed or strongly agreed they are proficient in both Kurdish and English, indicating a state of balanced bilingualism which refers to individuals who are equally fluent and proficient in two or more languages (Moradi, 2014). In contrast, 7 participants disagreed, and 20 remained neutral in response to Statement 1. However, other responses show they do not use both languages equally. For instance, only 46 participants agreed that they use Kurdish more often than English in their daily lives, while 59 disagreed (Statement 2). Similarly, 78 participants reported a preference for speaking English with friends (Statement 4), suggesting a shift toward English in informal social interactions, potentially influenced by its perceived modernity or practicality.

In addition, English is dominant in professional settings, with 97 stating they feel confident using it in formal environments (Statement 6), compared to only 9 who disagreed, and 10 who remained neutral. This preference for English extends to personal and emotional contexts. For example, only 38 indicated a preference for using Kurdish to express emotions, whereas 65 preferred English (Statements 7 and 8). This shift shows that English is becoming more influential in personal and emotional communication, pointing to a deeper cultural change. Despite this, Kurdish remains emotionally and socially significant for many participants, with 75 agreeing or strongly agreeing that losing proficiency in Kurdish may lead to social disconnection or isolation within Kurdish society (Statement 9). Furthermore, 64 agreed or strongly agreed that acquiring English at an early age has contributed to a decline in their Kurdish proficiency, referring to the challenges of maintaining native-language skills in the context of bilingualism (Statement 10).

These findings provide important information about how bilingualism affects the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals, helping to answer the study's research questions. The first question examines the effect of English proficiency on cultural identity. Responses to Statement 10 reveal that acquiring English at an early age has contributed to a decline in Kurdish proficiency, supporting the hypothesis (H1) that English proficiency may weaken connections to Kurdish heritage, including language and cultural practices.

The second research question explores how social context affects the relationship between language use and cultural identity. English is dominant in professional settings, as shown in the responses to

Statement 6. This supports the hypothesis (H2) that social environments like workplaces have a strong influence on language preferences and cultural identity. Conversely, language use in friendships (Statements 4 and 5) is more complicated. While some participants prefer speaking Kurdish with friends, others choose English, this reflects the effects of urbanization, peer influence, and social networks. These mixed preferences show how social environments allow English to coexist with or even replace Kurdish, influencing participants' cultural identity in more complex ways. Although most participants speak English with their friends, Kurdish is used more frequently in social interactions with friends compared to its use in professional settings.

The third research question examines whether bilingualism leads to a hybrid cultural identity. Responses to Statement 8, which show participants' preference for using English to express emotions, suggest that English is increasingly shaping their personal and cultural identity. However, Statement 7 shows that Kurdish is still an important language for expressing emotions for some participants, reflecting an evolving cultural identity rather than a complete change. This aligns with the hypothesis (H3) that early Kurdish bilinguals are developing a hybrid cultural identity blending elements of both Kurdish and English. The strong agreement in Statement 1, where many participants consider themselves equally proficient in both languages, further supports the idea of dual cultural competence.

Concerns in Statements 9 and 10 about prioritizing English over Kurdish relate to the idea of subtractive bilingualism, which refers to the idea that learning a second language can reduce proficiency in the first language, possibly weakening cultural identity. At the same time, mixing of Kurdish and English, seen in Statements 7 and 8, connects to Hybridity Theory, which suggests the development of a dual cultural identity shaped by both languages and cultures. While Kurdish is still important for some emotional and social expressions, many participants are also using English in similar ways, showing signs of a dual identity. However, balancing this hybrid identity can be difficult, as some participants worry that relying more on English could make it harder to stay connected to Kurdish society.

Table 2. How do you define your cultural identity and what are the concerns over the mother language (Kurdish)?

S	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	I identify more strongly with Kurdish cultural values than with English cultural values.	39 (34%)	43 (37%)	14 (12%)	14 (12%)	6 (5%)
2	I identify more strongly with English cultural values than with Kurdish cultural values.	8 7%	21 18%	9 8%	45 39%	33 28%
3	I feel a sense of pride in my Kurdish cultural identity.	30 26%	29 25%	8 7%	31 27%	18 15%
4	I feel a connection to English cultural values as well.	6 (5%)	21 (18%)	23 (20%)	44 (38%)	22 (19%)
5	I feel more comfortable with people who share the Kurdish culture.	41 (35%)	32 (28%)	12 (10%)	12 (10%)	19 (17%)
6	I feel that I have a balanced identity between Kurdish and English cultures (equally connected to both Kurdish and English cultures).	6 (5%)	14 (12%)	24 (21%)	37 (32%)	35 (30%)
7	My bilingualism helps me understand and relate to both Kurdish and English cultures.	1 (1%)	4 (3%)	14 (10%)	41 (36%)	56 (50%)
8	Low Kurdish language proficiency means a lack of respect for the culture.	30 (26%)	26 (22%)	4 (3%)	31 (27%)	25 (22%)
9	Maintaining the Kurdish language helps me value my heritage and identity, which contributes to a positive self-concept.	27 (23%)	29 (25%)	17 (14%)	28 (24%)	15 (14%)
10	The loss of the Kurdish language erodes my sense of identity and belonging and might uproot the community.	13 (11%)	27 (23%)	32 (28%)	31 (27%)	13 (11%)

Table 2 examines the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals and their connection to their

mother language, Kurdish, revealing the connection between bilingualism, cultural identity, and language preservation. The data shows that most participants (82) disagree or strongly disagree with identifying more strongly with Kurdish values than English values (Statement 1). A smaller group of participants (14 agree, 6 strongly agree, and 14 neutral) indicate a weaker alignment with Kurdish values. In contrast, 78 participants agree or strongly agree with identifying more strongly with English cultural values (Statement 2), with only 29 disagreeing and 9 remaining neutral. These results suggest that many participants have a stronger connection to English culture than to Kurdish culture, reflecting the fast growth of English in social and professional contexts. This shift in cultural identification demonstrates how English proficiency has influenced participants' sense of cultural belonging, reducing the prominence of Kurdish cultural values.

This situation is further reflected in Statement 3, where participants have mixed feelings about pride in Kurdish cultural identity. While 49 participants express pride in their Kurdish heritage, 59 disagree, and 8 remain neutral, indicating uncertainty or a weak connection to Kurdish traditions. Similarly, Statement 4 shows that 66 participants agree or strongly agree with feeling connected to English cultural values, compared to 27 who disagree and 23 who remain neutral. These findings show the significant role English has in shaping cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals.

Even though participants feel more connected to English values, they still recognize the importance of protecting Kurdish culture. For example, in Statement 8, 56 participants agree or strongly agree that low Kurdish proficiency reflects a lack of respect for Kurdish culture. However, the same number of participants disagree or strongly disagree with this idea. This division shows the struggle between valuing English for practical reasons and recognizing the cultural significance of Kurdish. Similarly, Statement 9 suggests mixed views on the importance of maintaining the Kurdish language for heritage and identity, with 44 agreeing or strongly agreeing, 56 disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, and 17 remaining neutral. These responses show how bilinguals struggle to keep their culture while also adjusting to the growing use of English.

Social context also influences language use and cultural identity. In Statement 5, 73 disagree or strongly disagree with feeling comfortable with people who share Kurdish culture, while 31 agree and 12 are neutral. This sense of disconnection from Kurdish culture may result from the increasing use of English in social, academic, and professional environments. However, responses to Statement 6 reveal that bilingualism enables participants to maintain a balanced identity, with 72 agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel connected to both cultures, while only 24 disagree.

The positive role of bilingualism in developing cultural understanding is clear in Statement 7, where 97 agree or strongly agree that bilingualism enhances their understanding of both Kurdish and English cultures. Only 5 participants disagree, and 14 remain neutral. This supports the idea of a hybrid cultural identity, where bilinguals integrate elements of both cultures. However, the data also show that this blending may not be equally balanced. While bilingualism helps to a connection to both cultures, the preference for English cultural values (Statement 2) suggests that English has a stronger influence on participants' hybrid identity. For Kurdish bilinguals, the hybrid identity appears to favour English cultural elements, reflecting the practical and professional advantages of English in their lives.

Statements 8 and 9 show the challenges bilinguals face in balancing their connection to Kurdish culture with the influence of English. In Statement 8, participants are equally divided: 56 believe that low Kurdish proficiency shows a lack of respect for Kurdish culture, while another 56 disagree. This suggests contrasting views on whether language proficiency is necessary to respect Kurdish traditions. Moreover, statement 9 shows a similar division. While 44 participants believe maintaining Kurdish is important for heritage and identity, 56 disagree, and 17 are undecided. This suggests that some view Kurdish as essential to their cultural identity, while others feel their identity is less tied to language.

Finally, responses to Statement 10 highlight the complex relationship between language and identity. While 44 participants agree or strongly agree that the loss of the Kurdish language impacts their sense of identity, 40 disagree, and 32 remain neutral. This highlights the diverse perspectives among participants, with some expressing concern for maintaining linguistic heritage, and others

developing an identity that's less connected to Kurdish traditions.

Table 3. How has bilingualism influenced your cultural identity?

S	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
1	Bilingualism has enriched my sense of cultural identity.	4 (4%)	6 (5%)	29 (25%)	48 (41%)	29 (25%)
2	I feel a sense of loss because of my bilingualism.	44 (38%)	26 (22%)	22 (19%)	17 (15%)	7 (6%)
3	I feel "in-between" Kurdish and English cultures because of my bilingualism.	9 (8%)	25 (21%)	25 (21%)	40 (35%)	17 (15%)
4	My Kurdish heritage is important to me, regardless of my English proficiency.	17 (15%)	23 (20%)	21 (18%)	28 (24%)	27 (23%)
5	I feel that my identity shifts based on the language I am using.	11 (9%)	18 (16%)	20 (17%)	32 (28%)	35 (30%)
6	My identity as a Kurdish speaker influences my perspective on social and cultural issues	17 (15%)	25 (21%)	39 (34%)	20 (17%)	15 (13%)
7	The English language has influenced me to adopt aspects of English mannerisms and culture.	2 (2%)	11 (9%)	23 (20%)	45 (39%)	35 (30%)
8	I believe bilingualism has helped me to form meaningful connections across different cultures	0 (0%)	4 (3%)	14 (12%)	40 (35%)	58 (50%)
9	I believe that learning multiple languages has enhanced my overall ability to acquire new knowledge and skills.	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	9 (8%)	37 (32%)	68 (58%)
10	I believe the language I choose to speak is a reflection of my cultural identity.	16 (14%)	14 (12%)	29 (25%)	29 (25%)	28 (24%)

Table 3 examines how bilingualism affects cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals, explaining both the benefits and challenges. The findings show a complex relationship between language use, cultural alignment, and social context, revealing how bilingualism influences their identities. A great majority of participants (77) agreed that bilingualism has enriched their cultural identity, while only 10 disagreed, and 29 remained neutral (Statement 1). This suggests that most participants believe that bilingualism is a positive factor that improves their cultural experience and increases their understanding of both Kurdish and English cultures. This finding supports the Hybridity Theory, which suggests that individuals blend elements of different cultures to create a richer identity. It also aligns with Fishman's Domain Analysis Theory, which emphasizes how language use varies across social contexts.

In Statement 2, while most participants view bilingualism as enriching, a smaller group (24 participants) feel a sense of loss or disconnection due to bilingualism, while 70 disagree with this statement. This finding shows that bilingualism is mainly perceived as an additive process, but for some individuals, the dominance of English may lead to challenges in maintaining connections to Kurdish culture.

In Statement 3, 57 participants agreed or strongly agreed that bilingualism makes them feel "in-between" Kurdish and English cultures, while 34 disagreed, and 25 remained neutral. This experience of managing two cultural worlds suggests the development of a hybrid identity. Statement 7 provides further evidence of hybridity, with 80 participants reporting that learning English has led them to also adopt English mannerisms and cultural practices.

Statements 8 and 9 highlight the social and cognitive benefits of bilingualism. In statement 8, 98 participants agreed that it helps form meaningful connections across cultures, while only 4 disagreed and 14 were neutral. This shows that bilingualism enables connections with people from diverse backgrounds. It supports Hypothesis H2, suggesting that social context significantly influences language use and cultural identity. Bilinguals adjust their identity in different social domains—family, education, and work—strengthening their sense of belonging in various cultural groups. In addition, in statement 9, 105 participants, nearly all the participants agreed that learning multiple languages enhances their ability to acquire new knowledge and skills. Only 2 participants disagreed, and 9 remained neutral. These findings emphasize that bilingualism provides more than cultural benefits—it also offers significant intellectual advantages. The flexibility of identity is further clear

in Statement 5, where 67 participants agreed or strongly agreed that their identity shifts based on the language they use, while 29 disagreed, and 20 remained neutral. This highlights how bilinguals adjust their cultural identity depending on linguistic context, reinforcing the role of social settings in shaping identity.

In Statement 6, 35 participants stated that their Kurdish language affects their views on social and cultural issues, while 42 disagreed and 39 were neutral. This shows that, for some bilinguals, language influences cultural identity, without the same impact on everyone's views. The role of language as a marker of cultural identity is explored in Statement 10. While 57 participants agreed or strongly agreed that the language they chose reflects cultural identity, 30 disagreed, and 30 were neutral. This variability indicates that while language is an important identity marker for many, others, in defining their identity, may prioritise different factors, such as social or personal experiences.

5. Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that bilingualism has a complex role in shaping the cultural identity of early Kurdish bilinguals, as the results support the study's hypotheses. For instance, the data confirms Hypothesis 1, asserting that proficiency in English weakens the connection to the Kurdish language and culture. Relying on the data gathered, for example, in Table 1, 59 participants agreed with the statement, "I use English more than Kurdish in my daily life." Moreover, in Table 2, 78 participants agreed with the statement, "I identify more strongly with English cultural values." Additionally, in Table 3, 80 respondents agreed that "the English language has influenced them to adopt aspects of English mannerisms and culture."

While bilingualism provides practical, cognitive, and social benefits that enhance cultural identity, the findings indicate that it also provides challenges in maintaining Kurdish cultural traditions and language connections. The declining use of Kurdish, combined with the dominance of English, raises concerns that the Kurdish language and culture might diminish in the future. This dual impact shows the challenge bilinguals face in balancing the preservation of their heritage with adapting to the pressures of a globalised world (H1).

The results also support Hypothesis 2, which states that social context plays a key role in shaping language choices and cultural identity. Participants showed flexibility by adjusting their language and cultural connections depending on the context, for example, using Kurdish in family and traditional settings while prioritizing English in professional and academic domains.

Furthermore, the study confirmed Hypothesis 3, suggesting the development of a hybrid cultural identity among bilinguals. Participants integrated elements of both Kurdish and English cultures, creating a flexible and evolving sense of self. However, this hybrid identity tends to be more influenced by English culture due to the strong presence of English in professional and social settings. Still, bilingualism enhances cultural identity by helping participants build meaningful relationships across different cultures and interact successfully with various social groups.

Finally, while bilingualism provides opportunities for personal and cultural growth, it also causes challenges in maintaining strong connections to Kurdish traditions. These findings suggest the importance of balancing the practical benefits of bilingualism with the need to preserve cultural and linguistic heritage. Bilingualism, especially for early Kurdish bilinguals, makes cultural identity more complex and changes both personal and cultural aspects of their lives.

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ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری له نۆوان دوو زمانه سه‌ره‌تاییه‌کانی کورد له هه‌ولێر: شیکارییه‌کی کومه‌لایه‌تی زمانه‌وانی

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پوخته

ئهم توێژینه‌وه‌یه له روانگه‌ی زمانناسی کومه‌لایه‌تییه‌وه، کاریگه‌ری فیزیوونی زمانی ئینگلیزی له‌سه‌ر کولتورگرته‌ی هه‌رزه‌کارانی کورد له شاری هه‌ولێر ده‌خاته ژێر لیکۆلینه‌وه‌وه. له‌به‌ر ئه‌وه‌ی زمان و کولتور ته‌واوکه‌ری یه‌کترن و په‌یوه‌ندییه‌کی به‌هیزیان هه‌یه، ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری له‌ریگه‌ی زمانه‌وه‌ داده‌مه‌زیت و کاریگه‌ری راسته‌وخۆشی له‌سه‌ر چۆنیه‌تی به‌کاره‌ینانی زمان هه‌یه. ئاسته‌نگ و کیشه‌کان له‌و کاته‌دا سه‌ره‌له‌ده‌دن که به‌رکه‌وتنی درێژخایه‌ن له‌گه‌ڵ زمانیکی بیانی‌دا ده‌بیته‌هۆی له‌ده‌ستدانی هه‌ستی ناسنامه. توێژینه‌وه‌ هاوچه‌رخه‌کان ئه‌وه‌یان سه‌لماندوه که کولتوری په‌یوه‌ست به‌ زمانیکی جیهانی (له‌م حاله‌دا ئینگلیزی) یان ده‌بیته‌هۆی که‌مکردنه‌وه‌ یاخود زیادکردن له‌ ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری ئاخوهر. ئهم توێژینه‌وه‌یه به‌ به‌کاره‌ینانی میتودۆلۆژیایه‌کی تیکه‌لاو، هه‌ردوو داتای چۆنایه‌تی و چه‌ندایه‌تی له‌ ریگه‌ی راپرسییه‌که‌وه له 116 به‌شداربوو کۆراوه‌ته‌وه. ده‌ره‌نجامه‌کان ده‌ریده‌خه‌ن که کاریگه‌ری زمانی ئینگلیزی له‌سه‌ر ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری یان بووه‌ته‌هۆی لاوازیوونی زمانی کوردی و ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری ره‌سه‌نی به‌شداربووان، یان بووه‌ته‌هۆی سه‌ره‌له‌دانی ناسنامه‌یه‌کی هاوبه‌ش که تیکه‌له‌یه‌که له هه‌ردوو کولتور و تایبه‌تمه‌ندییه‌کانیان.

وشه سه‌ره‌کییه‌کان: دوو زمانی، دوو زمانه کورده ده‌ستپێکییه‌کان، ناسنامه‌ی کولتوری، زمانناسی کومه‌لایه‌تی

الهوية الثقافية بين الأكراد ثنائيي اللغة المبكرين في أربيل: تحليل لغوي اجتماعي

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المخلص

تتناول هذه المقالة، من منظور اجتماعي لغوي، مسألة ما إذا كان تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية يؤدي إلى الاندماج الثقافي مع الثقافات الناطقة باللغة الإنجليزية، وكيف يمكن أن يؤثر ذلك على الهوية الثقافية في إقليم كردستان. تركز الدراسة على المراهقين في مدينة أربيل. وبما أن اللغة والثقافة مترابطتان، فإن الهوية الثقافية تُبنى من خلال اللغة التي يتحدثها الأفراد، حيث تؤثر هويتهم على طريقة تحدثهم. تظهر المشكلة عندما يؤدي التعرض المطول للغة أجنبية إلى فقدان الفرد لإحساسه بهويته. أشارت أبحاث سابقة إلى أن الثقافة المرتبطة بلغة العولمة إما أن تنتقص من الهوية الثقافية الحالية للمتحدث أو تضيف إليها. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجية مختلطة تجمع بين البيانات النوعية والكمية. تم جمع البيانات الكمية من خلال استبيان منظم، في حين تم جمع البيانات النوعية من خلال إجابات مفتوحة ضمن نفس الاستبيان. ولأغراض البحث، تم اختيار 116 فرداً كردياً ثنائيي اللغة تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و17 عاماً لجمع البيانات لفحص العلاقة بين اللغة والهوية الثقافية. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن تأثير الثنائيي اللغوية على الهوية الثقافية يمكن أن يقلل من الهوية الثقافية واللغوية الكردية الأصلية لدى الأفراد، أو يؤدي إلى تشكيل هوية هجينة تجمع بين عناصر من كلا الثقافتين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثنائيي اللغوية، الثنائييون الكرد في سن مبكرة، الهوية الثقافية

Appendix1: Questionnaire

As part of my MA thesis at Salahaddin University, I am conducting a questionnaire on "**Cultural Identity Among Early Kurdish Bilinguals: A Sociolinguistic Analysis**". This research aims to explore the influence of bilingualism on cultural identity among early Kurdish bilinguals, focusing on how the use of a second language impacts their connection to Kurdish language and culture. It also investigates the potential effects of subtractive bilingualism on native language proficiency and cultural ties, considering the widespread use of English as a globalized language in media, communication, education, and other societal contexts. I would appreciate it if you could complete the following table. Any information collected in connection with this study that could be linked to you will remain confidential.

Directions: For each statement in the survey, please indicate how much you **agree** or **disagree** with the statement by **putting a tick in the box** on the right side of each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will be kept **strictly confidential** and you will not be identified.

SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Code: MA2412-

2. Age:

3. Gender:

4. Which language do you use most in your everyday communication?

Kurdish English Both

Parent Consent:

Parental consent has been obtained for all participants involved in this study, ensuring their understanding and agreement with the research objectives and procedures.

SECTION 2: QUANTITATIVE SECTION (5 POINT LIKERT SCALE STATEMENTS)

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neutral (3) Agree (4) Strongly Agree (5)

How proficient are you in Kurdish and English? And when do you use them?

S	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am equally proficient in both Kurdish and English.					
2	I use Kurdish more often than English in my daily life.					
3	I use English more often than Kurdish in my daily life.					
4	I prefer speaking Kurdish with friends.					
5	I prefer speaking English with friends.					
6	I feel more confident communicating in English within professional contexts.					
7	I prefer using Kurdish to express my feelings (anger, disappointment, stress, happiness, excitement)					
8	I prefer using English to express my feelings (anger, disappointment, stress, happiness, excitement)					
9	Losing proficiency in Kurdish may lead to feeling socially					

	disconnected or isolated within Kurdish society in the future.					
10	Acquiring English at an early age has, in some ways, contributed to a decline in my proficiency in Kurdish.					

How do you define your cultural identity and what are the concerns over the mother language (Kurdish)?

S	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	I identify more strongly with Kurdish cultural values than with English cultural values.					
2	I identify more strongly with English cultural values than with Kurdish cultural values.					
3	I feel a sense of pride in my Kurdish cultural identity.					
4	I feel a connection to English cultural values as well.					
5	I feel more comfortable with people who share Kurdish culture.					
6	I feel that I have a balanced identity between Kurdish and English cultures (equally connected to both Kurdish and English cultures).					
7	My bilingualism helps me understand and relate to both Kurdish and English cultures.					
8	Low Kurdish language proficiency means lack of respect for the culture.					
9	Maintaining Kurdish language helps me value my heritage and identity which contributes to a positive self-concept.					
10	The loss of the Kurdish language erodes my sense of identity and belonging, ultimately uprooting the community.					

How has bilingualism influenced your cultural identity?

S	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	Bilingualism has enriched my sense of cultural identity.					
2	I feel a sense of loss because of my bilingualism.					
3	I feel "in-between" Kurdish and English cultures because of my bilingualism.					
4	My Kurdish heritage is important to me, regardless of my English proficiency.					
5	I feel that my identity shifts based on the language I am using.					
6	My identity as a Kurdish speaker influences my perspective on social and cultural issues					
7	The English language has influenced me to adopt aspects of English mannerisms and culture.					
8	I believe bilingualism has helped me to form meaningful connections across different cultures.					
9	I believe that learning multiple languages has enhanced my overall ability to acquire new knowledge and skills.					
10	I believe the language I choose to speak is a reflection of my cultural identity.					

Parent Signature: