



Language Maintenance or Shift in Gilan-e Gharb: Exploring Linguistic Attitudes of Kalhuri Kurdish Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explore the current status of the Kalhuri Kurdish variety in Gilan-e Gharb and to determine the factors that contribute to its maintenance or shift. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study employed the focus group interview method. The participants consisted of 24 native speakers of Kalhuri Kurdish, aged 22 to 55 years, who were purposively selected from three age groups. Following the audio recording and transcription of the interviews, the data were examined using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that although Kalhuri Kurdish continued to be used in family interactions, everyday communication, and informal settings in Gilan-e Gharb, its use had declined among younger generations, particularly in educational, occupational, and formal communicative contexts, where it was increasingly being replaced by Persian. Moreover, factors such as the role of the family, the influence of educational institutions, and sociocultural pressures exerted by the dominant language played a significant role in the process of language shift. Based on these findings, strengthening linguistic identity, raising awareness through education and media, and providing institutional support for linguistic diversity are identified as effective strategies for the maintenance and revitalization of this linguistic variety. The study underscores the necessity of developing targeted and sustainable language policies to support indigenous languages in multilingual contexts.

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1. Introduction

According to the most recent *Ethnologue* report, a widely recognized reference that provides statistical information on all known living languages, there are currently 7,159 living languages worldwide (Eberhard et al., 2025). Scholars and researchers generally agree that linguistic diversity is rapidly declining across the globe. It is estimated that within the next century, a significant number of these languages will be replaced by dominant languages and may eventually disappear entirely (Crystal, 2000). The loss of languages is no less consequential than the extinction of biological species. With the death of each language, a substantial portion of accumulated human knowledge, experience, and scientific understanding—developed over millennia and crucial to humanity's adaptation to its environment—is irretrievably lost (Bromham et al., 2022; Harrison, 2007). Factors such as globalization, imperialism, colonialism, governmental and familial language policies, the expansion of universal education, economic pressures, the proliferation of mass media, and the emergence of the global internet—particularly digital media platforms—have created conditions conducive to the disappearance of numerous languages. This process continues to accelerate (Leonard, 2023).

The linguistic landscape in Gilan-e Gharb appears to be undergoing gradual transformation. Although Kalhuri Kurdish has historically been the dominant and prevalent language in the region, and intergenerational language transmission has traditionally occurred uninterrupted, field observations suggest that this cycle has been disrupted in recent decades. In certain functional domains, Kalhuri Kurdish is increasingly being replaced by Persian, the official and dominant language. As is widely recognized in studies of language shift—that is, the replacement of language A with language B—a change in the linguistic attitudes of bilingual speakers toward their indigenous and local languages often constitutes one of the earliest indicators of impending language replacement.

The present study focuses on the Kalhuri Kurdish-speaking community in Gilan-e Gharb and seeks to investigate the current status of Kalhuri Kurdish in the region and to identify the factors affecting its maintenance or shift. In this context, the linguistic attitudes of Kalhuri Kurdish speakers and their perceptions of the status and prestige of their language are examined. Furthermore, generational differences in the use of the mother tongue and in the willingness to transmit it to subsequent generations are explored. In addition, the study addresses the role of media—including television, radio, and online platforms—in shaping linguistic attitudes and influencing the linguistic vitality of speakers in the region.

Linguistic and Social Landscape of Gilan-e Gharb

According to *Britannica* (n.d.), Kurdish is one of the Northwestern Iranian languages and ranks third in terms of the number of speakers, after Persian and Turkish. Kurdish is not a single, homogeneous language; rather, it is more accurately described as a “group of Kurdish languages” or even a “Kurdish language family.” The divergence and heterogeneity among the languages and dialects within this group are such that mutual intelligibility between different varieties can be limited or even nonexistent. In a widely recognized classification, the Kurdish language group is divided into three major subgroups: Northern Kurdish, Central Kurdish, and Southern Kurdish (Haig & Öpengin, 2018).

Within Iran, Southern Kurdish is prevalent in the provinces of Kermanshah, Ilam, Kurdistan, and Hamedan. Southern Kurdish itself comprises several geographical varieties, known under different names such as Kalhuri Kurdish, Zangeneh Kurdish, Sanjabi Kurdish, Kolyaei Kurdish, and Feyli Kurdish. In Iran, Kalhuri Kurdish is primarily spoken in Kermanshah Province and the northern part of Ilam Province, while in Iraq it is used in the cities of Khanaqin, Mandali, and Kalar. It constitutes the primary language for a substantial portion of the Kurdish population in these areas.

Gilan-e Gharb County, with Gilan-e Gharb city as its administrative center, is located in the western part of Kermanshah Province. According to local beliefs and historical accounts, Gilan-e Gharb is regarded as the capital of the large Kalhur tribe. The Kalhur tribe is among the most distinguished and historically prominent Kurdish tribes in western Iran. Based on the 2016 national census, the population of Gilan-e Gharb County is approximately 57,000, of whom around 22,331 reside in the city of Gilan-e Gharb. The city consists of several neighborhoods, in which different clans and sub-tribes of the Kalhur tribe typically inhabit specific sections.

All residents of Gilan-e Gharb speak Kalhuri Kurdish. Nevertheless, dialectal variations can be observed across different parts of the city, reflecting both geographic location and tribal distinctions.

2. Literature Review

The study of language maintenance and shift has attracted considerable attention from linguists and sociolinguists, who argue that language vitality is influenced by a range of social, cultural, political, and economic factors. Previous studies have provided insights into the mechanisms of language decline, intergenerational transmission, and the role of language attitudes in sustaining or replacing minority languages.

Moddaresi and Bashirnejad (2006) examined previous research and analyzed available data to identify the factors contributing to language death. They argued that languages, like living organisms, go through a life cycle encompassing birth, growth, decline, and death. They identified factors such as globalization, migration, bilingualism, sociocultural change, and language ideologies that could weaken a language and ultimately lead to its extinction. To counteract this trend, the authors emphasized the importance of language planning, documenting endangered languages, and fostering positive attitudes toward indigenous languages. Their work highlighted the need for proactive measures by communities and policymakers to ensure language survival, rather than relying solely on passive preservation.

Zahrakar (2013) investigated the linguistic convergence and structural changes in the Feyli dialect of Luri. Employing a descriptive-analytical methodology and field observations, the study analyzed the influence of Standard Persian on the syntactic, phonological, and lexical structures of Feyli. The findings revealed that the Feyli dialect was undergoing extensive change toward Standard Persian, leading to the erosion of its original words, verbs, and phonemes. This study illustrated the susceptibility of minority dialects to dominant languages and underscored the importance of strategic lexical interventions and documentation in maintaining language vitality.

Azizi et al. (2024) investigated language attitudes among speakers of Kurdish, Kermanshahi Persian, and Standard Persian in Kermanshah City through a sound-matching test. Using a descriptive survey method, they collected data from 80 bilingual participants across two age groups via a researcher-designed questionnaire. They found that attitudes in Kermanshah were most positive toward Standard Persian, followed by Kurdish, whereas Kermanshahi Persian was evaluated least positively. The findings also showed that although age did not significantly impact these attitudes, gender made a difference: men expressed more positive attitudes toward Kurdish than women did. This research highlighted how attitudes toward different languages within the same sociolinguistic environment could vary depending on perceived utility, prestige, and identity, influencing the likelihood of language maintenance or shift.

Farmahini Farahani and Abolhasani Chimeh (2019) explored the relationship between native speakers' attitudes toward their linguistic varieties and the degree of endangerment. They utilized nine UNESCO's (2003) indicators for living and endangered languages and employed a researcher-developed attitude survey to evaluate ten language varieties across ten

villages in Tehran, Alborz, and Hormozgan provinces. Their findings revealed a positive linear relationship between language attitudes and vitality: dialects with more positive native speaker attitudes demonstrated greater security, while those with negative attitudes faced a higher risk of endangerment. For instance, residents of Tehran and Alborz villages exhibited negative attitudes due to socio-economic incentives favoring the dominant language. In contrast, residents of Hormozgan maintained positive attitudes, contributing to stronger language vitality. This study reinforced the critical role of attitudes in either sustaining or endangering minority languages.

Mirvahedi (2016) examined the role of the family in maintaining Azerbaijani Turkish in Tabriz and transmitting it to subsequent generations. He emphasized the family as a central agent in language preservation within an urban environment dominated by Persian as the national language. Mirvahedi found that continuous use of the mother tongue in daily interactions, early childhood education, and informal social engagements was pivotal to successful intergenerational transmission. He also highlighted the importance of providing children with opportunities to use Azerbaijani Turkish in public spaces—such as schools, markets, mosques, and local media—to enhance the social and functional status of the language. Furthermore, he discussed the challenges families faced, including societal pressures favoring Persian and limited institutional support for minority languages, illustrating the delicate balance between domestic language practices and broader societal influences.

Kedrebeogo (1998) examined the dynamics of language preservation and replacement in a multilingual and multiethnic context. His study focused on the pressures faced by local languages in Burkina Faso from dominant languages. Kedrebeogo emphasized that the social and political structures within a community often played a more decisive role in language maintenance than the number of speakers alone. His findings demonstrated that institutional support, educational policies, and community attitudes were key factors in determining whether a language was sustained or replaced. Overall, the study suggested that even small linguistic communities could successfully maintain their languages if they received adequate social and institutional support.

Melaku and Semu (2023) investigated language maintenance and shift in the Diraytata community in Ethiopia. Their study examined the use of Diraytata in daily life, social interactions, and intergenerational transmission. The authors found that the language remained actively used within households and local cultural contexts; however, factors such as intermarriage, migration, and exposure to dominant regional languages contributed to gradual language shift. This research highlighted how community practices and sociolinguistic environments influenced whether a minority language was maintained or endangered, offering a useful comparative framework for studying Kalhuri Kurdish in Gilan-e Gharb.

Alafifi (2025) explored heritage language maintenance among second-generation Hispanic immigrants in the United States. The study emphasized the roles of settlement context, community networks, and family attitudes in either sustaining the heritage language or contributing to a shift toward English. The findings revealed that supportive communities and positive attitudes toward the heritage language were associated with higher rates of language retention, whereas weaker community connections and pressure to assimilate accelerated language shift. This study demonstrated the significance of linguistic attitudes and social factors in shaping language maintenance outcomes, paralleling the sociolinguistic considerations relevant to Kalhuri Kurdish speakers.

These studies collectively provide a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding language maintenance and shift in minority language contexts. They demonstrate that language survival is contingent upon a complex interaction of attitudes, intergenerational

transmission, institutional support, societal pressures, and broader political and economic factors. For the current study of Kalhuri Kurdish in Gilan-e Gharb, these findings underscore the importance of investigating not only patterns of language use but also the socio-attitudinal and institutional factors that shape the vitality of the language. By synthesizing insights from diverse linguistic contexts—ranging from Iranian minority dialects to multilingual West African communities—the present research situates Kalhuri Kurdish within a broader comparative framework, enabling a more nuanced understanding of its maintenance or potential replacement by Persian.

3. Theoretical Framework

Language maintenance and language shift in bilingual and multilingual communities are complex and multidimensional phenomena influenced by a wide range of social, cultural, historical, economic, and political factors. Language dynamics in such societies are shaped not only by official language and educational policies but also by speakers' attitudes, the frequency and intensity of contact among speakers of different languages, and the role of language in the construction of individual and group identity. In this study, concepts and theories from sociolinguistics are employed to examine the status and sociolinguistic position of Kalhuri Kurdish in Gilan-e Gharb County.

Within this broader framework, one of the central mechanisms influencing language continuity is intergenerational transmission. Language transmission refers to the process by which a language is passed from one generation to the next through family interactions, educational contexts, and social engagement. This process occurs within the cultural and social fabric of a community and is influenced by factors such as language attitudes, educational policies, exposure to other languages, and the socio-economic position of speakers. Fishman (1991) categorizes language transmission into two main types: stable transmission and unstable transmission. The first, stable transmission, occurs when the mother tongue is consistently passed on to subsequent generations without significant alteration and continues to serve as the primary means of communication within both the family and the wider community. This typically occurs in societies where speakers' linguistic and cultural identities are reinforced, and where policies support the continued use of the mother tongue.

Conversely, unstable transmission occurs when the process of passing the language to younger generations weakens, leading to gradual replacement by a dominant or alternative language. This form of transmission is common in communities where social, economic, or political pressures reduce the use of the mother tongue, ultimately facilitating its replacement. Together, these two patterns illustrate why intergenerational language transmission is widely recognized as one of the most crucial indicators of language maintenance or shift. Specifically, if children in a linguistic community acquire their native language and use it in daily life, the likelihood of the language's survival increases significantly. In this regard, language attitudes play a decisive role: positive attitudes toward the mother tongue contribute to its sustainability, while negative attitudes create conditions conducive to language replacement. Indeed, intergenerational transmission occurs primarily when parents or older generations actively teach their language to children, which is precisely why this process is considered one of the key factors in language survival.

Closely related to intergenerational transmission is the concept of language attitudes. Language attitudes refer to individuals' evaluative orientations toward a language, dialect, or speech variety. In sociolinguistics and social psychology, attitudes are commonly described as comprising three interrelated components: cognitive, which involves beliefs about a language and its speakers; affective, which concerns feelings toward the language; and behavioral, which relates tendencies to use or avoid the language (Garrett, 2010). Language attitudes are socially shaped and closely connected to issues of identity, prestige, and power within a

community (Baker, 1992). Research in second language acquisition further suggests that positive attitudes toward a language and its speakers can strengthen motivation and learning, whereas negative attitudes may hinder acquisition (Gardner, 1985). In multilingual settings, attitudes also play a crucial role in processes of language maintenance and shift, since unfavorable evaluations of a minority language may contribute to its gradual decline (Baker, 1992; Garrett, 2010). Building on these insights, in the present study, language attitude is considered a critical variable. A positive communal attitude among Kurdish speakers in Gilan-e Gharb toward Kalhuri Kurdish is likely to support intergenerational transmission and language maintenance, whereas a negative perception of the mother tongue—coupled with the perception that Persian holds higher socio-economic value—can accelerate the replacement of Kalhuri Kurdish with Persian.

When negative attitudes persist and transmission weakens, the process of language shift becomes increasingly likely. Language shift refers to the process by which one language gradually gives way to another. Fishman (1991) notes that this phenomenon is particularly observable in minority language communities which are in sustained contact with a dominant language. Several interrelated factors influence this process. First, social and economic pressures play a role, such as the penetration of the dominant language into educational systems, labor markets, and media. Second, political and legal factors, including official language policies, may either weaken or support a specific language. Third, individual and psychological factors, such as speakers' attitudes and willingness to maintain their mother tongue, also play a significant role. Finally, social institutions—including family, school, and cultural organizations—exert a strong influence on intergenerational language transmission.

Building on the discussion of language maintenance and shift, it is crucial to understand the phenomenon of language contact. Language contact occurs when two or more languages interact and influence one another. Such contact is most pronounced when speakers of different languages share a common geographical environment, often resulting in multilingualism, lexical borrowing, code-mixing, the emergence of pidgins or creoles, and, in some cases, language death (Weinreich, 1953). Several factors affect language contact, including the duration and intensity of contact, the number of speakers involved, and language policies. Among these, the duration and intensity of contact appear especially decisive: short-term contact often results in lexical borrowing, while prolonged and intensive contact can lead to language shift or replacement (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

In contrast to language shift, the concept of language maintenance explains the conditions under which a language continues to survive. Language maintenance is the situation in which a linguistic community preserves its language despite external pressures, transmitting it to subsequent generations. This phenomenon typically counteracts the forces of language shift (Fishman, 1991). Several factors contribute to language maintenance, including supportive policies, bilingual educational programs, and active encouragement from family and community members to use the native language in domestic and social settings. In addition to these structural and educational supports, media and technology also play a role, as content produced in the native language on television, radio, and digital platforms supports language retention. Beyond these external supports, positive attitudes toward the mother tongue, emotional attachment, and pride in the language further increase the likelihood of its maintenance.

To evaluate these dynamics more systematically, the Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory offers a comprehensive analytical framework. This theory, developed by Giles et al. (1977), assesses language sustainability through three key criteria: (a) status, which examines the formal and informal position of a language within society, including its presence in education, government institutions, media, and commerce; (b) demographics, which considers the number of speakers, birth rates, migration patterns, and population movements that may either reinforce or weaken the language; and (c) institutional support, which assesses whether the

language receives backing through schooling, print media, and local media usage. Applying this theory makes it possible to evaluate the current vitality of Kalhuri Kurdish and determine whether its usage is being maintained or is at serious risk of replacement by Persian.

Finally, language policy provides the broader structural context within which vitality, transmission, and attitudes operate. In his book *Language Policy*, Spolsky (2004) analyzes how government and societal policies impact language usage and status in different communities. He defines language policy as a set of decisions and actions taken by governments or other authorities to regulate, manage, and direct language use within society. Such policies, which may operate at national, regional, or local levels, significantly affect minority languages, official languages, and those at risk of extinction. Spolsky emphasizes why some languages are accepted and maintained in specific communities, whereas others are marginalized. He argues that minority languages must have a presence in education and official domains to ensure their survival. As language is directly tied to cultural and social identity, language policies can profoundly shape individuals' sense of belonging and affiliation with particular linguistic groups. His work further references numerous case studies from different countries, illustrating both successes and failures in language policy implementation.

4. Method

In this study, given the nature of the research topic, a qualitative approach was employed to explore the attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of Kalhuri Kurdish speakers in Gilan-e Gharb. The participants consisted of 24 native speakers, purposefully selected to ensure diversity in terms of gender, age, education level, and occupation. They were organized into three focus groups, each comprising eight members. Previous studies have shown that these demographic factors—particularly gender, age, and education—influence speakers' attitudes toward language change. Therefore, their distribution was carefully considered in the selection of participants. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted to allow participants to discuss their use of Kalhuri Kurdish, its intergenerational transmission, and their attitudes toward the language in both informal and formal contexts. All interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. Data collection continued until saturation was reached. Data analysis followed a three-stage thematic content analysis procedure. First, the Kurdish transcripts were translated into Persian and carefully reviewed to identify recurring patterns. Second, these patterns were grouped into broader conceptual themes and refined through an iterative process. Finally, core themes were extracted and labeled to capture the main insights related to language use, attitudes, and intergenerational transmission. This hierarchical and systematic process, grounded in the participants' perspectives, enhanced the credibility, coherence, and relevance of the findings, providing a strong foundation for interpreting the sociolinguistic dynamics of Kalhuri Kurdish in Gilan-e Gharb.

5. Results

This section presents and interprets the qualitative findings regarding the linguistic attitudes of Kalhuri Kurdish speakers in Gilan-e Gharb. Data were collected through three focus groups, comprising 24 participants. A thematic analysis employing a deductive-inductive approach was used for data interpretation. The data collection followed the principle of theoretical saturation, as no new themes emerged after the second group. Analysis was conducted according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, beginning with the meticulous transcription and translation of interviews from Kalhuri Kurdish into Persian. Subsequently, a line-by-line coding process was undertaken, leading to organization and refinement of themes, culminating in the final naming of core themes. The primary focus was on examining the status of the Kurdish language, speakers' attitudes toward their identity and functions, intergenerational differences, language transmission to future generations, and the role of media in either supporting or weakening the mother tongue.

Regarding the first research question, the findings indicated that Kalhuri Kurdish held a deeply emotional and identity-based place for most participants, serving as an inseparable part of their cultural roots, heritage, and collective memory. Most participants perceived Kurdish not merely as a tool of communication but as a key component of ethnic and social identity, and they confirmed its extensive use in family settings and everyday interactions. However, alongside this positive perception, concerns were raised about its decreasing use among younger generations. Participants cited the influence of Persian, formal institutional pressures, media exposure, and the perception of Persian as the socially dominant language, warning that these factors could gradually weaken Kurdish, particularly in public spaces and among youth. Thus, Kurdish was found to occupy a dual status: deeply rooted and culturally significant on the one hand, yet functionally vulnerable to erosion on the other.

For the second research question, speakers' attitudes toward their mother tongue compared to the dominant official language showed a diverse and sometimes contradictory spectrum. A significant portion of participants maintained a deep emotional and identity-based attachment to Kurdish, viewing it as a source of pride, psychological comfort, and a key marker of identity. They considered teaching Kurdish to their children a cultural responsibility. In contrast, a smaller group consciously distanced themselves from Kurdish and preferred Persian or foreign languages—a choice largely influenced by parental decisions, the educational system, and aspirations for social mobility. In addition to these two poles, two other attitudes were observed: one ethnocentric view that considered Kurdish superior and more authentic than Persian, and another pragmatic, context-dependent attitude that valued both languages depending on the social situation. Overall, the strength of identity attachment significantly shaped speakers' attitudes toward Persian and their patterns of language use, revealing a tension between maintaining linguistic identity and practical adaptation.

The third research question focused on younger generations and revealed a complex intergenerational picture. Many participants noted that the youth—especially males—maintained strong Kurdish language skills, using it actively in friendships, emotional expression, and public interactions. However, a shift toward Persian among some young people, particularly females, was frequently reported, linked to Persian-language media, social pressures, gender norms, and perceptions of Persian as a more “prestigious” language. From an intergenerational perspective, older generations maintained Kurdish naturally and intuitively, while the youth approached its use more consciously, often motivated by identity considerations. Participants also highlighted lexical changes and the integration of Persian elements into previous generations' speech, which some perceived as undermining linguistic authenticity. Despite these changes, Kurdish remained the dominant language in daily communication, with Persian largely restricted to formal, administrative, and educational contexts, highlighting an important functional, emotional, and identity-based distinction.

Regarding the fourth question, participants' attitudes toward intergenerational transmission of Kurdish were generally positive. Most considered teaching Kurdish to children a cultural and identity imperative, vital for preserving heritage, fostering a sense of belonging, and maintaining family bonds. Differences in opinion primarily concerned methods of transmission: some advocated for direct teaching and even formal incorporation into the educational system, while others favored natural acquisition within family and community contexts. Only a few participants were indifferent or opposed to mother tongue education. These findings indicated a relatively favorable social environment for intergenerational transmission, though targeted policies and institutional support were necessary for full effectiveness.

The fifth research question examined the role of media in shaping linguistic attitudes, revealing one of the most critical findings. All participants expressed dissatisfaction with national media, citing marginalization, trivialization, and stereotyping of Kurdish. According to them, the absence of respectful and serious representation on television and radio weakened

the language's symbolic and social status. In contrast, digital media emerged as a dynamic and effective platform for representing, promoting, and even revitalizing Kurdish. Social networks enabled free content creation, expansion of local vocabulary, music, storytelling, and informal language learning, particularly among younger generations. This duality between official and digital media underscored the need for media policy reform and support for local-language content.

6. Discussion

The findings derived from the content analysis of focus group interviews with Kalhuri Kurdish speakers in Gilan-e Gharb County indicate a multifaceted and dynamic situation regarding the Kurdish language in this region. The extracted themes suggest that, while Kurdish maintains strong emotional, cultural, and symbolic significance, it faces functional challenges at the practical level of everyday use. The results confirm that the mother tongue, in the lived experiences of speakers, represents far more than a mere communicative tool; it embodies identity-related, social, and even political dimensions.

In examining participants' attitudes toward Kurdish, most describe their mother tongue as a symbol of "authenticity," "identity," "heritage," and "roots." This perspective aligns with identity-based approaches in the sociology of language (Edwards, 2009), which conceptualize language as a carrier of both individual and collective identity and as an inseparable component of cultural and cognitive structures. Similarly, within Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic capital, language—particularly the mother tongue—is understood not only as a medium of meaning-making but also as a form of social and cultural capital that contributes to processes of distinction, power reproduction, and the consolidation of social position. The findings indicate that Kurdish fulfills such a role in the studied community, as speakers use it to connect themselves to local traditions, history, and the broader social fabric of the region.

However, themes related to generational differences reveal that intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue no longer occurs automatically. Unlike older generations, who acquired Kurdish naturally and inevitably through daily life, younger generations are increasingly confronted with choice. In many cases, learning or using Kurdish is viewed as conditional upon conscious awareness, family support, or identity-based motivation. This shift corresponds to what Hornberger and King (1996) describe as a transition from "natural transmission" to "conscious transmission." For younger speakers, the language has become a selective element whose survival depends on the redefinition of its functions and the creation of emotional and social incentives for its use.

The findings further demonstrate that in some cases, complete language discontinuity occurs. A number of participants explicitly identify Persian as their mother tongue, even when they are raised in Kurdish families, reporting that Persian is used with them from early childhood. Such deliberate language choice may be motivated by aspirations for improved educational opportunities, greater social prestige, or avoidance of ethnic stereotyping. These observations are consistent with studies on language loss and the gradual erosion of minority languages (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006). In such contexts, intergenerational transmission may not only cease but also become irreversible unless deliberate and systematic interventions are implemented at the levels of family practice, media representation, and language policy.

Another significant finding concerns the functional differentiation between Persian and Kurdish across social domains. Kurdish is primarily associated with intimacy, everyday interaction, and cultural identity, whereas Persian is predominantly used in formal, administrative, and educational settings. This functional separation between the "language of the people" and the "language of power" corresponds with research on language and domination (Blommaert, 2010; Heller, 2007). The official language often operates as an instrument of institutional integration;

however, in doing so, it may marginalize local and minority languages or exclude them from public domains. Some participants even describe Persian as an “imposed language,” suggesting that its use in certain contexts produces a sense of linguistic alienation.

In addition to these polarized language perceptions, participants express important views regarding the transmission of Kurdish to their children. Most participants support teaching the mother tongue, whether through direct instruction or natural acquisition within the home environment. This stance contrasts with findings from some minority-language communities, in which mother tongue education is perceived as limiting social mobility (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). In the present study, participants regard Kurdish language instruction as a means of preserving connections to cultural roots, strengthening identity, and fostering community participation. Such attitudes may provide a favorable foundation for the implementation of bilingual education policies.

Finally, media emerge as a prominent factor in the findings. All participants express dissatisfaction with the performance of national broadcasting institutions in representing the Kurdish language, perceiving them as contributing to marginalization, stereotyping, and symbolic exclusion. In contrast, digital media platforms are viewed as supportive spaces for the revitalization of Kurdish language and culture. Participants highlight the role of social media in promoting Kurdish music, local expressions, traditional clothing, and ethnic identity. This finding aligns with research such as Androutsopoulos (2014), which identifies digital environments as important arenas for the representation of minority languages and the reconstruction of ethnic identities. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that media power can function both as a mechanism of linguistic suppression and as a resource for cultural revitalization, depending on which groups possess access to and control over content production.

7. Conclusion

This study, focusing on the Kalhuri Kurdish-speaking community in Gilan-e Gharb, examines speakers’ linguistic attitudes and their implications for the maintenance or shift of the Kurdish language. Data were collected through focus group interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that for many speakers, Kalhuri Kurdish serve a role beyond mere communication, functioning as a fundamental component of their ethnic, cultural, and emotional identity. These results align with theoretical perspectives on the link between language and identity, as well as with the concept of symbolic capital in language.

The study shows that Kurdish remains the dominant language in everyday, family, and informal interactions, whereas Persian is largely confined to formal, educational, and institutional domains. This functional distribution reflects a form of pragmatic bilingualism, in which Kurdish is treated as the “home” or “intimate” language, while Persian is regarded as the “official” language with social prestige and authority. However, signs of weakening language loyalty are observed, particularly among some younger speakers in formal or public contexts.

Regarding youth attitudes, the findings reveal that although Kurdish usage remains strong among young men, young women tend to favor Persian in public and media spaces. This difference appears to be influenced by formal education, social pressures, and media exposure. Meanwhile, when the younger generation actively maintains Kurdish, they do so more consciously and deliberately than previous generations, and some show heightened concern for preserving authentic Kurdish vocabulary.

In terms of intergenerational transmission, the majority of participants emphasize the importance of teaching and passing Kurdish to children, viewing this as crucial for preserving identity and family bonds. This positive attitude toward mother tongue transmission reflects a high level of linguistic awareness within the community. In contrast, national media are perceived

to have a negative impact by marginalizing and weakening Kurdish, whereas digital media and social networks are regarded as innovative spaces for the reproduction, representation, and reinforcement of Kurdish language and identity.

Overall, the study concludes that Kalhuri Kurdish in Gilan-e Gharb remains vibrant and dynamic, yet it faces gradual challenges across certain domains and generations. The future of the language largely depends on institutional support, deliberate language policy, the role of the education system, and active engagement by families and local communities. The findings highlight the critical role of linguistic attitudes in the continuity or decline of minority languages and provide a foundation for cultural and educational planning aimed at preserving linguistic diversity.

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The author declares no conflicts of interest related to this research.

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