The Impact of Gender, Age, and Education on Language Attitudes among Kurdish Speakers in Mahabad: A Matched-Guise Approach[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of gender, age, and education on the attitudes of Kurdish speakers in Mahabad towards standard Persian and the Kurdish language. Since people's emotions towards their own or others' languages are related to their language attitudes, this important component plays a significant role in measuring success in language planning, learning speed, language selection and use, and predicting the extinction or sustainability of a language. The study's statistical population consisted of 80 Kurdish-Persian bilinguals in Mahabad who were randomly selected. This study is situated within the theoretical framework of sociocognitive linguistics, and the research perspective was measured through an indirect method (matched-guise test). After distributing the questionnaire and conducting the matched-guise test, the collected data were analyzed. The results of the statistical analysis showed that the variables of gender, age, and education in Mahabad had no significant impact on the attitudes of bilingual Kurdish speakers towards standard Persian and the Kurdish language. The Kurdish speakers of Mahabad exhibited numerically positive attitude towards the standard Persian language compared to Kurdish language, but no significant difference in terms of any of the mentioned variables was observed between the two languages under study.

Key words: Sociolinguistics, Language attitude, Bilingualism, Matched-guise test

1. Introduction

Language is a social institution, which means that the people of a community have established it in the order to know each other's intentions and to communicate, so language should be examined in society because communication occurs in society. People think based on their own personal experiences, and this leads to their different attitudes. So, the study of the language attitude in the society is of great importance and by examining it, information can be provided to researchers, according to which they can predict the future state of that language. Attitudes can also play a decisive role in the choice of language and its use by speakers and language learners. In other words, a more positive attitude of people towards a language will increase their motivation in learning that language. Otherwise, having a positive or negative attitude towards language diversity not only profoundly affects the people who learn and use it but also plays a critical role in the field of language policy and planning. Therefore, knowledge of language attitudes is essential for formulating language planning policies, and without such knowledge, it is not possible to predict which policies will be successfully implemented and which policies will fail (Cargil et al., 1999). In sociology of language, two direct (questionnaire, interview, observation) and indirect (matched-guise-test) methods are used to measure the language attitude of bilinguals. Kurdish is one of the languages spoken in parts of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Turkmenistan and Syria. Kurdish speakers of Iran mostly live in the province of West-Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Lorestan and Ilam. Kurdish is a group of Iranian-Aryan languages or the Iranian branch of the great Indo-European family.

Mahabad is one of the Kurdish cities in West-Azerbaijan province and it is the center of Mukry Kurdistan. People in Mahabad speak Sorani Kurdish with the Mukryani dialect of the Kurdish language and most of them are familiar with Persian language. The people's religion in this area is Islam (Sunni shafi'i). In this research, we investigate the attitude of Persian bilinguals in Mahabad towards standard Persian language and Kurdish language using matched-guise-test.

1.1. Research background

Following introducing the concept of attitude by Allport in 1935, the first studies concentrating on attitude in psychology and sociology were conducted in European countries, but the first researches on attitude in linguistics was conducted in Canada in 1960. First, (Lambert et al. (1960) measured and investigated people's language attitude using the matched guise test. They conducted their research in the English-French bilingual community of Quebec province in Canada. The results of their study showed that English speaking Canadians evaluated the voices that recorded in English as more positive and pleasant than the voices of French-speaking speakers and French-speaking Canadians considered the English-speaking voice more positive than the voice of their French-speaking counter parts.

Later on, a study by Anisfeld et al. (1962) considered whether subjects would exhibit differential reactions to the same speaker when speaking in "pure" English and in English with a Jewish accent; i.e. the matched-guise-test was used again in its original form, since there were the same speakers speaking with a different variety. The results indicate that when the same speakers use Jewish-accented English, they are rated much less positive and were labeled "immigrants" based on their accent.

Hapea (1999) examined the attitude of Finnish students towards varieties of English language and their speakers by using questionnaire and matched-guise-test and found out that female students evaluated a different varieties of English and their speakers more positive than the student of vocational college or the male student. Kercher, (2009), using matched-guise-test and questionnaire, examined the attitude of English-speaking and French-speaking students in Montreal towards three languages: English, Quebec French and European French. The findings showed that the attitudes towards French and English were positive, but the attitude towards French was more negative compared to English.

Pishghadam & Sabouri, (2011) investigated the attitude of English language learners towards different varieties of English language using the matched-guise-test. In this research, 165 English learners were asked to listen

to a text read by native speakers from the following accent groups: British, Persian, American and Arabic. Subjects, then, recorded their attitudes toward each of the readers using a semantic differential scale. Based on the results, the learners considered American accent to be quiet superior to the others.

Mozafari, (2014) investigated the attitude of the speakers of Fars province towards Shirazi variety and standard Persian by using three survey methods, matched-guise-test and interview. This research was conducted by 490 participants from cities near Shiraz. The findings of the research showed that the attitude of the surveyed people was positive towards the use of standard variety. They also had a positive sense of loyalty towards their native city and local varieties; and the local variety of each city was the dominant type in the environment of family and friends, while in other social areas the standard variety was dominant.

Pirouzfar & Elyasi, (2014) investigated the attitude of Kurdish speakers in Sanandaj towards standard Persian by using matched-guise-test. The result showed that the attitudes of Kurdish speakers of Sanandaj towards standard Persian were not positive and speakers' emotional attitude towards this language was different.

Fereidoni (2003) investigated multilingualism in Urmia, a city in West Azerbaijan Province of Iran. The population of Urmia consists of Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian people, where Turks are bilingual and Kurds and Armenians are trilingual. Parasher's model (1980) was used in this research and participants in different age groups and different education participated in this test. The results of the research showed that among the Turkish-speaking community Turkish was the dominant language in all domains except the domain of education, and the age variable had an important effect on the choice of language used among the three mentioned groups.

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The statistical population of this research was made up of 80 bilingual Kurdish-Persian people living in Mahabad, who were in two age group of 15-35

years and 45-75 years, in two levels of education, namely high school students or dropout ones as well as academic students. Each age and education group included 40 bilingual men and women from Mahabad. The number of participants in all three groups was the same and 10 people were also selected through random sampling. High school students and dropouts were selected from urban environment such as streets, markets, schools and mosques; and people with academic education were selected from academic and official environments. In addition to the participants in the test, 3 male speakers also collaborated to prepare the matched-guise-test, two of them were Kurdish-Persian bilinguals and one of them was Persian. Among the speakers, one person was chosen as the main speaker, who read the text in Kurdish and Persian, and his voice was recorded.

2.2. Variables

The independent variables in this research are gender, age and level of education, and the dependent variable is the language attitude of Kurdish-Persian bilinguals living in Mahabad towards standard Persian and Kurdish language.

2.3. Data collection tools

In this research, two instruments, a questionnaire and matched-guise-test, were used.

2.4. Questionnaire

The questionnaire of the research consists of three parts. The first part contains the subject's personal information such as gender, education, age, place of birth and place of residence. The second part of the questionnaire is the level of Persian and Kurdish languages used in daily conversations, and the last part of the questionnaire, based on Lamberts questionnaire (1960), consists of 14 sentences. One of the sentences wherein the word "ambitious" was used was removed since it is a positive adjective in English and a negative one in Persian. This questionnaire was designed based on Likert's 5-point scale of agreement,

ranging from completely agree to completely disagree, to indicate the cultural index of the region regarding subjects' attitude towards the standard Persian language.

2.5. Matched-Guise-Test

To perform the matched-guise-test, first a text with a general and topic was prepared and the prepared text was translated into Sorani dialect from Kurdish language. The text was given to several local male speakers and the correctness of the text was confirmed in terms of words, grammar and spelling. Then three men who were fluent in both languages were chosen as speakers. It should be noted that the voices of the spokespersons did not have special and exceptional characteristics and were also not similar to the voices of radio and television hosts. After selecting the spokespeople, they were asked to read the selected text in Persian and Kurdish languages. The characteristics of prosody, such as reading speed, leaning and pausing were controlled and normalized. The duration of each recorded sound was approximately two minutes and twenty-three seconds. In this experiment, three spokesmen were investigated, one person who was fluent in standard Persian and Kurdish read the text in both languages and his voice was recorded, and the two other spokesmen were used as fillers, one in Kurdish and the other in Persian. The recorded voice of this group did not play a role in the statistical analysis and research results. In this research, four recorded voices were actually prepared, while the voices of three spokesmen were recorded, one main voice and two fillers (two texts in Persian and two texts in Kurdish). The point that was very important in this research was that the subjects should not have realized that one of the spokesman read the text in both languages and his voice was recorded twice. For more certainty, after each spokesman voice, a soft and wordless song was played for thirty seconds. After providing all requirements for conducting the matched-guise-test, including determining the personality characteristics, choosing the text, recording the voices of the spokesmen, and designing the questionnaire, the test began. Before taking the test, each of the subjects was given a brief explanation about how to do the test and answer the questions,

and they were allowed to read the text. The purpose was to fully familiarize them with the topic of the text, so that while listening to the sounds, they focus only on the language and voice of the spokesmen. Questionnaires were also handed to the participants and they were asked to complete it while listening or after finishing each sound.

3. Discussion and conclusion

The gathered data in this study were coded, then entered into Excel software, and finally imported into SPSS software for statistical analysis. The reliability of the instrument used in the present study was tested using Cronbach's Alpha formula, which is used to determine the reliability of a questionnaire or test with an emphasis on its internal correlation. The results showed Alpha coefficient of 0.807 for the matched-guise-test questionnaire in this study. Therefore, the matched-guise-test questionnaire is reliable in this study and the results are completely reliable.

Table 1

One Sample t-Test results for the attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish and standard Persian language compare to number 3.

Variable	n	M	T	P-value
Emotional attitude towards the Kurdish language	80	2.584	-6.017	0.000
Emotional attitude towards the standard Persian language	80	2.540	-8.077	0.000

To measure the attitude of Kurdish speakers of Mahabad towards the Kurdish language and standard Persian language, by using one sample T-test and comparing means with the number 3, it shows the attitude of Kurdish speakers of Mahabad city towards Kurdish and Persian language and how it is., and the significance level of the test will indicate the type of attitude towards that language. The test results of Kurdish language are shown in Table 1. As shown, the attitude means of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish language was 2.584, which is smaller than 3 and also the test significant level

was 0.000 that is smaller than 0.05. Therefore, this result showed that Mahabad Kurdish speakers have positive attitude towards Kurdish language. Moreover, the attitude means of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards standard Persian language was 2.540 which is smaller than 3 and test significant level was 0.000 that is smaller than 0.05. These results showed that Mahabad Kurdish speakers have also positive attitude towards standard Persian language.

A paired T-test was used to evaluate the differences between the attitudes of Kurdish speakers of Mahabad towards the Kurdish language and standard Persian language. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Paired-Samples t-Test results to compare the attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish and Persian speakers.

Variable	speakers	n	M	T	P-value
attitude	Kurdish	80	2.584	0.650	0.518
	Persian	80	2.540		

As it is seen in Table 2, the attitude means of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish speakers and Persian speakers was equal to 2.58 and 2.54, respectively; and the test significance level is greater than 0.05 (p=0.518). Therefore, it is clear that there is no significant difference between the attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards the Kurdish speaker and the Persian speaker. The results related to the impact of gender on the attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards a Kurdish language and the standard Persian language are shown in Figure 1. As shown, the attitude means of men and women towards the Kurdish language was equal to 2.654 and 2.514 respectively. Also significant level of one-way ANNOVA test was 0.315. Thus, this result showed that there were not significant differences between Mahabad Kurdish men and women speakers towards Kurdish language. What is more, attitude means of men and women of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards standard Persian language was 2.585 and 2.495, respectively; and significant level of one way ANNOVA test was 0.429. Hence, these results showed that there were no significant difference between men and women of Mahabad

Kurdish speaker towards standard Persian language. Pirouzfar and Elyasi (2013) stated that there was no significant difference between the emotional attitude of Kurdish-speaking women and men living in Sanandaj towards the standard Persian language which is similar to the result of our research, but gender had an effect on the attitude of Mazandarani speakers towards the Persian language, and the attitude of girls towards the Persian language was more positive (Esmaieli et al, 2007).

Figure 1

The average emotional attitude of female and male Kurdish speakers living in Mahabad towards Kurdish and standard Persian languages
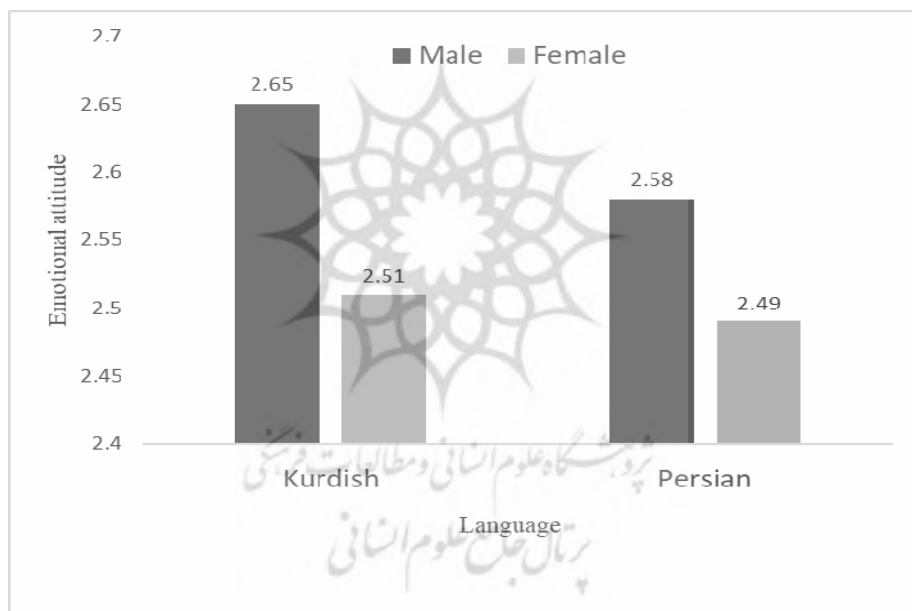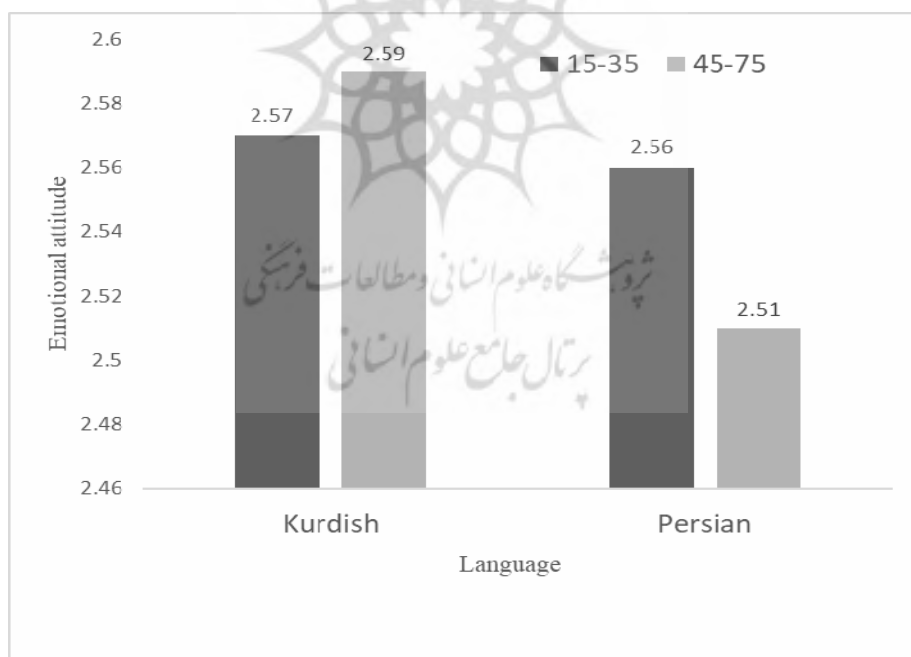

The result of age impact on Mahabad Kurdish speaker's attitude towards Kurdish language and standard Persian language are shown in Figure 2. As shown, the attitude means of 15-35 years old and 45-75 years old people towards Kurdish language were 2.571 and 2.597, respectively. Furthermore, the significance level of one way ANNOVA test was 0.854. This result showed that there was no significant difference between attitude of 15-35 years old and 45-75 years old towards Kurdish language. Besides, the attitude means of 15-

35 years old and 45-75 years old Kurdish speakers of Mahabad towards standard Persian language was 2.569 and 2.511, respectively; and the significant level of one way ANNOVA test was 0.609. Accordingly, this result showed that there was no significant difference between attitude of 15-35 years old and 45-75 years old group. In a research, Pirouzfar & Elyasi (2013) found that there is no significant difference between the emotional attitude of Sanandaj-speaking Kurdish teenagers and young people towards the standard Persian language, and the attitude of both groups towards the standard Persian language is positive. However, by examining the effect of age on Urmia's multilingualism, Fereidoni (2003) showed that the age variable was effective on the choice of the language used.

Figure 2

The Average emotional attitude of Kurdish speakers 15-35 years old and 45-75 years old living in Mahabad towards Kurdish and standard Persian language


The impact of education level on Mahabad Kurdish speakers' attitude towards Kurdish language and standard Persian language is shown in Figure 3. As indicated, the attitude means of Mahabad Kurdish high school or dropout

speakers and academic ones towards Kurdish language was 2.475 and 2.692, respectively. Additionally, significant level of one-way ANNOVA test was 0.117. Therefore, the results showed that among the Kurdish speakers of Mahabad, there was no significant difference between the attitudes of people with low or high levels of education towards the Kurdish language. Also, the attitude means of Mahabad Kurdish speakers having low and high education levels towards standard Persian language was 2.61 and 2.46, respectively. Moreover, the significance level of one way ANNOVA test was 0.183. It showed that among the Kurdish speakers of Mahabad, there was no significant difference between the attitudes of people with high or low levels of education towards standard Persian language. After examining the effect of education level on the emotional attitude of Kurdish-Persian bilinguals living in Sanandaj, Pirouzfar and Elyasi (2013) concluded that education had no effect on peoples' attitude towards standard Persian language. But as Ahmadi and Zandi (2018) investigated the position and use of Persian and Kurdish language in Uramanat, it was found that illiterate people use Kurdish language the most, and on the other hand, the most use of the Persian language belonged to the group with academic education.

Figure 3

The average emotional attitude of Kurdish speakers with different levels of education living in Mahabad towards Kurdish and standard Persian language
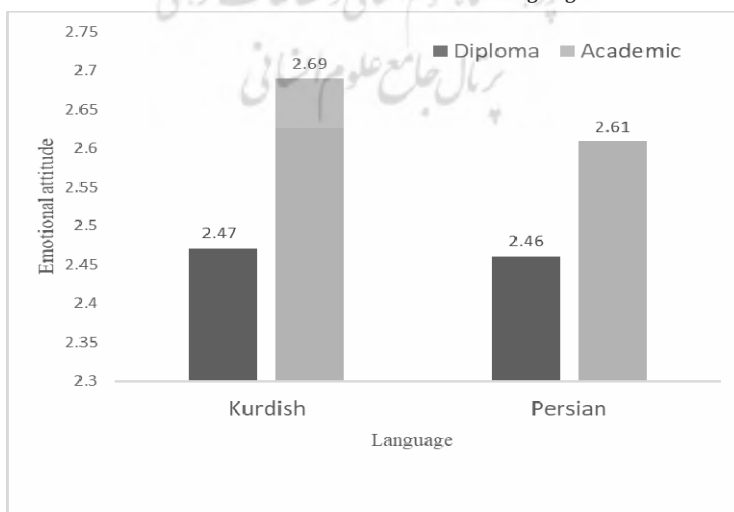
The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the emotional attitude of bilinguals in Mahabad towards standard Persian language. It also tried to evaluate the effect of gender, age and education variables on peoples' language attitude. Based on the results, the findings of the research can be summarized as follows: overall, there was no significant difference between men and women attitude towards Kurdish and standard Persian language. Furthermore, the age variable had no effect on emotional attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers toward Kurdish language. Also the education level had no effect on emotional attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish and standard Persian language. Also, the results of the study showed that there was no significant difference between emotional attitude of Mahabad Kurdish speakers towards Kurdish and standard Persian language, so that their attitude towards Kurdish and Persian language was positive. However, their attitude towards standard Persian language was a bit more positive compared to that of Kurdish language. On the other hand, Mahabad Kurdish speakers had positive attitude towards both languages, which is probably because Mahabad is a mono-ethnic society and the inhabitants of this city do not make an effort to show themselves differently in linguistic societies. Although it is probably the case that Persian language has more linguistic validity from their point of view, no difference was observed in this research in this regard. The results of this research are similar to those of Lambert et al, (1960) who believed that the attitude of people towards the speakers of a language shows their attitude towards that language.

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