The Standard Language Problem in Kurdistan of Iraq

Abdullatif A. Al Jumaily   Prof.Emeritus
College of Arts
University of Baghdad

In an attempt to devise a unified orthography for Ponapean (a language of Eastern Caroline Islands), Gravin (1959) and his colleagues posited the following four functions of a standard language: 1. the unifying, 2. the separatist, 3. the prestige, 4. the frame of reference functions with the first three considered symbolic, whereas the fourth objective (p.522).

By "unifying" the standard is meant to unite several dialect areas into a single standard- language community (ibid). I remember, in this respect, the time when I was studying in Edinburgh. Arabs from different vernacular backgrounds, some of which were mutually unintelligible, used to convene in the common room. In order to communicate we used to resort to the only shared variety, Standard Arabic. The function of the standard as "separatist" is to set off a speech community as separate from its neighbours. The third function refers to the prestige resulting from the possession of a standard language (ibid) Until some time ago no Briton could be assigned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or a in the BBC unless he spoke the standard variety of English , namely the Standard Southern English with the RP pronunciation. The situation in the case of Arabic is more clear cut: no one can get a decent job anywhere unless one can read and write the standard variety. Finally, by the fourth function, the standard language serves as a frame of reference for correctness and the perception and evaluation of poetic speech (ibid).

What is a standard language?

"The underlying assumptions of sociolinguistic typology are language may be differentiated into types in terms of attributes which demonstrate a consistent tendency to affect social attitudes towards them" (Bell, 1976:147). The most comprehensive set of attributes for such typology was put forward by Hymes (1971), as reported in Bell (ibid: 150ff). The model comprises seven attributes, *standardization, vitality, historicity, reduction, mixture,* and *de facto norms.*

"*Standardization*" means, according to Stewart (1962), as cited by Bell (ibid: 148), whether or not the language possesses an agreed set of codified norms which are accepted by the speech community and form the basis of the formal teaching of the language, whether L1 or L2. "*Vitality*", on the other hand, means whether or not the language possesses a living community of native speakers. Lack of this attribute is what distinguishes the classical languages of the Middle East, Arabic, Assyrian, etc. which are restricted to religious purposes (cf. Ferguson, 1959). As for "*historicity*", what is intended is that whether or not the language has grown up or grew up through use by some ethnic or social group.

The attribute "*autonomy*", according to Stewart (1968), as reported in Bell(1976:149f), has to do with whether or not the language is accepted by the users as being distinct from other languages or varieties. No question arises as to the autonomy of systems with substantial structural differences between them. However, dispute will occur, when there are substantial similarities between the two varieties. Political and/or social attitudes play a major role in this respect, For instance,

Persians who deny the right of the Kurdish people for autonomy in Iran allege that the language the Kurds of Iran speak is not an autonomous language and that it is only a Persian dialect. Socially, there will be those who claim and those who deny autonomy for the lower variety (ibid). Hymes's 1971) remaining three attributes are explained by Bell (1976: 151f)as follows: "*Reduction*" is whether, or not the language makes use of smaller set of structural relations and items in its syntax and phonology and a smaller lexicon than some related variety of the same language. Concerning "*mixture*" it means whether or not the language consists of items and structures derived from no source outside itself. Here, it is significant to note that some languages at different times in their development are more or less willing to borrow from others. Finally," *de facto norms*" has to do with whether or not the language possesses norms of usage which, though unmodified, are accepted by the community. The table below provides the most comprehensive and accurate sociolinguistic typology of human language with examples of English

Sociolinguistic Typology of Language Following Hymes (1971)

Attributes							Language Type	Examples
1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
+	+	+	+	-	±	+	Standard	Standard English
+	-	+	+	-	-	+	Classical	K. James' Bible English
-	+	-	+	-	-	+	Vernacular	'Black English'
-	+	-	-	-	-	+	Dialect	Cockney
-	+	-	-	+	+	+	Creole	Krio
-	-	-	-	+	+	+	Pidgin	Neomelanesian
+	-	-	+	+	-	+	Artificial	'Basic English'
-	-	-	±	-	+	?	Xized Y	'Indian English'
-	-	-	-	+	+	-	Interlangauge	'A's English'
-	-	-	-	+	±	-	Foreigner Talk	'B's simplified English'

Key:
+ possession of attribute
- lack of attribute
± either + or −
? in sufficient evidence

The Linguistic Situation in Kurdistan of Iraq

The Kurdish language and its local dialects spread widely to all southern and south eastern parts of Turkey, the northern border edges of Syria, the northern and north eastern part of Iraq and the whole of western Iran with the exception of the Arabistan region (Khorshid, 1983:30). As far as Kurdistan of Iraq is concerned, the Kurdish language (Kurdish, henceforth) forms a mosaic of interwining dialects and sub-dialects so large in number and diversity that it is not only impractical, but also impossible to cover in the space allotted to such a piece of research. However, the present day Kurdistan of Iraq is dominated by two sub-dialects, the Sorani in all parts of Kurdistan other than those of the Governorate of Duhok and the Governorate of Ninewa to the Syrian borders where Bahdini dialect dominates: this is quite a

simplification of the situation since Sorani, according to Khorshid (ibid:35), is restricted to the Governorate of Arbil with the exception of Zibar County, whereas the dialect used in Sulaimaniya Governorate and some Khanaqin regions is called, Sulaimanya. Girmyania covers the varieties used in the city of Kirkuk and some counties around it. However, currently the term ' Sorani' is used as an all-covering term to embrace all the sub dialects other than those covered by the term ' Bahdini'; which is, by itself, according to Khorshid (ibid:34) restricted to sub-dialects of the Governorate of Duhok and the counties of Zibar and Sinjar in the governorate of Ninewa.

The problem, at the present time, is that there is no universally recognized standard language in the whole Kurdistan. Sorani; however, is adopted for official use by the central government of the Region in Arbil: the dialect is used for written correspondence between the Central and the Local governments. Sorani is the dialect being taught as the native language in the schools all over Kurdistan of Iraq.*

Interestingly, the President of the Government of the Region, who is originally a native speaker of Bahdini, uses Sorani in his official speeches.

To the on-looker this will seem to be a natural situation of   a standardization process taking place. However, the case is far from being so. The problem is that Sorani, though has forced itself as the official language of the Central Government and into the education system, it has not yet won the acceptance of the Bahdini speech community. Bahdini is still used in the local government in Duhok which means that Sorani is till unacceptable there. Evidence of this rejection and adherence to the local dialect can be noticed everywhere. We list instances of the conflict. As is well known, the vehicles for the different purposes of the local government are provided by the Central Government. Consequently, their registration plates are assigned and designed in Arbil. The result is that the vehicles carry registration plates with the names of the offices they belong to in Sorani, whereas the official names of the offices are in Bahdini. Thus you see a car with the legend (Municipality)شاره وانی parked outside a building with the legend بازێرفانی, the Bahdini equivalent of ,Sorani term, above the entrance. The same is true of ته ندروستی (Health),ساخله میا, (agriculture) جاندن, etc…كشتوكالَ

Even at the university level, forms that are meant to be sent to the Centre are written in Sorani and those that are for local use, where different, are written in Bahdini. Thus, in order to put your signature on a form that is bound for the Centre you you see the Sorani word وازوو (signature), whereas in the second the word is ئیمزا (the Bahdini equivalent) is used.

Personal communication with scholars who took part in the debates about standardization showed that they are vehemently adamant in sticking for their native dialect having the "right to be the standard" claiming that it has all the attributes of a standard especially with respect to historicity and vitality. For the latter they claim that the Bahdini speech community, a community extending to include the Kurds of Syria, and Turkey, is by far larger than that of the Sorani. They also argue that their dialect also owns a literary heritage deep in history.

In spite of all that, it is felt here that the Sorani is forcing itself as a standard dialect whether the Bahdini speakers like it or not: evidence of this is in the fact that Sorani is stealthily creeping into the everyday life of the Bahdini speech community. Recently, road signs all around the Governorate of Duhok have been changed from Bahdini to Sorani. Even some commercial advertisements in the streets of Duhok have started to carry Sorani names such as شه قامی(street) instead of the Bahdiniجادەه

It remains to be seen whether a situation will develop where speakers speak their local dialect at home or among family or friends of the same dialect area but use the standard language in communicating with speakers of other dialects or on public

occasions. It is possible that diglossia may develop, "standardization where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play" (Ferguson, 1959:429).

Regardless of what will take place, it is felt here that in order for the Kurdistan people to identify themselves as a nation they have to have a variety that they can use to communicate all over Kurdistan. The first step for them is to sit together, put aside dialect prejudice, and agree on a variety as their *lingua franca* to be used as a standard and a means of communication initially in Iraqi Kurdistan, and hopefully later, by the Kurds all over the world

Notes

*After the writing of this paper the authorities in Duhok changed the language of instruction and are now using the Bahdini dialect of Duhok in order to add weight to their argument in favour of the selection of their dialect as the standard variety. I thought that it is better not to change the original statement so as to highlight the *die hard* attitude of the Bahdini speaking community in this respect.

References

Bell, Roger T. (1976) Sociolinguistics; Goals, approaches and Problems. London:B.T. Batsford Ltd.

Ferguson, Charles A. (1959) "Digloss" Word 15:325-340 Reprinted in Hymes, Dell (ed) Language in Culture and Society. New York: Harper and Row, publishers: 429-439.

Gravin, Paul L. (1959) "The standard language problem: concepts and methods", AA, 1(2): 28-31.

Hymes, Dell (1971) "On communicative competence" original paper. Excerpts in pride J.B and Holmes J. (eds.) (1972) Sociolinguistics:Selected Readings269-93. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Khorshid, Fuad H. (1983) The Kurdish Language and the Distribution of its Dialects. Baghdad: Al.Wisam Printing Press (in Arabic).

Stewart, W.A. (1962) "A Sociolinguistics typology for describing national multilingualism." In fishman. (ed.) (1968) Readings in the sociology of language, 531-545 The Hague: Mouton.

The Standard Language Problem in Kurdistan of Iraq

The research is the gist of an experience the researcher went through while working as a professor at the college of Arts/University of Duhok, the city considered as the heart of Kurmanji dialect. It is well –known that two major Kurdish dialects are the Kurmanji which is the dialect of the Government of Duhok and some areas of the Government of Ninawa as well as those of the Kurds in Syria and Turkey and Sorani, the dialect of the remaining Kurdistan of Iraq and some undecided upon areas in Iraq as well as that Kurds in Iran. This division is far accurate since communication between some sub-dialects within the mother dialect may be impossible.

In a nutshell, the problem lies in the fact that although Central Government of Kurdistan has adapted the Sorani as the official language it has not been accepted by the native speakers of Kurmanji which has resulted in the dilemma of having two parallel sets of vocabulary as the Sorani is used for correspondence with Centre whereas the Kurmanji is used for local communication in the majority of cases such as ساخلەمیا and تەندروستی, ضاندن, and كشتوكاڵ. In spite of that we find that within the context of Sorani has been creeping quietly into the different aspects of work official and private as Kurmanji signs have been subtitled by Sorani ones and some

advertisements have been adopted Sorani vocabulary. The other side has changed the language of pedagogy in the government of Duhok into Sorani.

Among the basics of the adaptation of a standard language is acceptance by all native speakers of the language involved. Thus, the research concludes that it is necessary for the Kurdish nation in order to sustain its identity to the world as a whole, that there should be a language used by all Kurdish native speakers as is the case with Arab countries resort to Standard Arabic to communicate when they meet abroad. The solution could be in the linguists of both dialects getting together and decide on one dialect either one of the two or a blend of both. And if the two sides stick to their guns it is possible to create a unifying language as it the case with South Africa who created Afrikaans on condition that this process should be made as soon as possible.

مشكلة اللغة الفصحى(الرسمية / المعتمدة) في كردستان العراق

البحث خلاصة تجربة عاشها الباحث خلال عمله استاذا في كلية الأداب/ جامعة دهوك المدينة التى تعد الان قلب اللهجة الكرمانجية. من المعلوم ان اللهجتين الرئيسيتين الكردية هما الكرمانجية وهي لهجة محافظة دهوك وبعض مناطق نينوى ولهجة الكرد في سوريا و تركيا والسورانية لهجة ماتبقى من كردستان العراق والمناطق المتنازع عليها في العراق و لهجة الكرد في ايران. ان التقسيم هذا بعيد عن الدقة حيث ان التفاهم بين بعض اللهجات الفرعية ضمن اللهجة الأم قد لايكون ممكنا.

تتلخص المشكلة في رغم تبني الحكومة المركزية الكردستانية للسورانية لغة رسمية فأنها لحد الأن لم تلاق القبول عند الناطقين بالكرمانجية مما خلق ازدواجية في التواصل حيث تستعمل السورانية في دهوك عند التخاطب مع المركز فقط في حين تستعمل الكرمانجية في التخاطب محليا مما اوجد نوعين من المفردات في معظم الحالات مثل ساخلةميا و تةندروستى، ضاندن و كشتوكال الخ. برغم ذلك و ضمن الشد و الجذب بين اللهجتين نرى ان السورانية تزحف بهدوء لتشمل مجالات مختلفة من العمل الحكومي والخاص فعلامات الشوارع جرى تغييرها الى السورانية بعد ان كانت كرمانجية كما بدأت الاعلانات التجارية بتبني السورانية فيما قام الطرف الأخر باستبدال لغة الدراسة في محافظة دهوك الى الكرمانجية بعد ان كانت سورانية.

ان من اساسيات اعتماد اللغة الفصحى القبول من جميع الناطقين باللغة المعنية عليه. يخلص الباحث الى انه من الضروري للشعب الكردي لكي يحقق هويته للعالم كله ان تكون له لهجة يستعملها كل الناطقين الكرد كما هو الحال في العربية حيث يلجأ العرب من مختلف اقطارهم الى اللغة الفصيحة للتخاطب عندما يلتقون خارج ديارهم. ويكون الحل بأن يلتقي اللغويون من الهجتين و يتفقوا على لهجة واحدة أما أن تكون احدى اللهجتين او مزيجا من كليهما واذا أصر الجانبان على موقفهما فمن الحكمه اعتماد لغة موحدة جديدة كما هوالحال في جنوب افريقيا عندما ابتكروا الأفركانية على أن يتم ذلك بأسرع وقت.

<div dir="rtl">

گیرو گرفتی زمانی ستاندارد له کوردستانی عیراقدا

ئهم تویژینهوهیه پوختهی ئهزموونێکه که تویژهر له ماوهی کارکردنی وهکو پرۆفیسۆریک له زانکۆی دهۆك بینوویه ئهو پاریزگایه ناوهندی بهکارهێنانی دیالیکتی کرمانجی ژووروه : ئهوهندهی زانراوه که دوو دیالیکتیکی سهرهکی ههیه (کرمانجی ژوورو) دیالیکتیکی کوردهکانی دهۆك و ناوچهی موسل و سوریا و تورکیایه، دووهم دیالیکتیك کرمانجی خواروه که که دیالیکتیکی ئهو کوردانهی تری کوردستانی عیراقدایه. ههروهها کوردهکانی رۆژههلات (ئێران).

ئهم دوو   دیالیکته، دیالیکتیکی لقیان لێ دهبێتهوه: ههندێ جار له یهکتر ی گهیشتن قورس و گرانه له نێوانیاندا.

گرفتی ئهم تویژینهوه ئهوهیه که ههر چهنده میری دیالیکتیکی کرمانجی خواروو (سۆرانی) وهکو زمانی فهرمی بهکار دههێنێت، بهلام پهسهند نهکراوه لهلایهن کوردانی کرمانجی ژووروو و ئهمهش بۆته هۆی دوو فاقی له بهکارهێنان لهگهڵ حکومهتی ههرێمی کوردستان سۆرانیهکه بهکار دههێنێت کهچی خۆ چییهتی له نێوان خۆیاندا کرمانجی ژووروه که (بادینانی) بهکار دههێنن.

ئهمهش بۆته هۆی هێنانهکایهههوهی دوو جۆری زاراوه ، بۆ نموونه سهخلهمیا و تهندروستی، چاندن و کشتوکاڵ ... هتد.

لهگهڵ ئهوهش له نێوان هێنان و بردنی ههر دوو دیالیکت دهببینین سۆرانی شوێنی خۆی دهکاتهوه لهسهر خۆ بۆیه زۆربهی بواره جیاجیاکانی حکومی و تایبهت گرتۆتهوه و هێماکانی سهر شهقامهکان بۆتهوه سۆرانی که پێشتر کرمانجی ژووروو بوو ، ههتا ریکلامهکانی بارزگانی به سۆرانی دهکرێت له کاتێکدا زمانی خوێندن له سۆرانییهوه کرایه کرمانجی ژووروو له شاری دهۆك. بناغهی زمانی ستاندارد ئهوهیه که ئهم زمانه ستانداردده پهسهند بکرێ لهلایهن ههموو ئهوانهی زمانی کوردی بهکار دههێنن.

لهلایهن تویژهردهووه گهلی کورد پێویسته دیالیکتێکی ههبیت ههموو قسهکهرانی کورد بهکاری بهێنن تاکو ناسنامهی کورد بهێتهدی بۆ جیهان. ههر وهکو چۆن عهرهب له ههموو وولاتهکان زمانی ستانداردی عهرهبی بهکار دێنن له کاتی که له دهرهوهی وولاتی یهکتر دهبینن.

چارهسهرهکه لێرهدایه که زمانهوانانی کوردی ههر دوو دیالکتیك بگهنه یهکتر و رێك بکهون له سهر یهك دیالیکتێك، یان یهکێکیان یاخود تێکهلاوکردنی ههر دوو کیان. وه ئهگهر ههر دوولا سووربوون لهسهر ههلۆیستیان، زانایی لهوه دایه پشت به زمانێکی یهکگرتووی تازه ببهستن ههر وهکو چۆن له باشوری ئهفریقا که (دا هێنانی زمانی ئهفریکانی) هێنایه کایهوه، ئهم داهێنانهش دهبێ به زووترین کات بێت.

</div>