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## The Linguistic Heritage of the Maṣlāwī Dialect in Iraq

Maha Ibrahim Jasim

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Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID),

Institute of Development Studies (IDS),

Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

Tel: +44(0) 1273 915704

E-mail: [creid@ids.ac.uk](mailto:creid@ids.ac.uk)

Website: [www.ids.ac.uk/creid](http://www.ids.ac.uk/creid)

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Maha Ibrahim Jasim

## Summary

This paper deals with the linguistic heritage of the Maṣlāwī dialect in Iraq spoken by the diverse communities in the city of Mosul, known for its very rich cultural heritage in northern Iraq. Fears among the speakers of the Maṣlāwī dialect, particularly the Christian Maṣlāwīs in Iraq, of losing their unique and multicultural dialect due to demographic changes that affected the city of Mosul is leading researchers to reflect on the many linguistic and cultural affiliations of the Maṣlāwī dialect associated with the religious communities in Mosul, in an attempt to preserve the very unique and vital linguistic heritage of the city.

**Keywords:** Mosul; Iraq; Maṣlāwī; Maṣlāwī dialect; linguistic heritage; crafts; family names; language contact; linguistic history; religious communities and groups.

**Maha Ibrahim Jasim** is a Lecturer in phonetics and phonology at the University of Kirkuk, Iraq with research interests in Mesopotamian Arabic dialects, heritage-related studies, and language contact.

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# 1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a real threat to the Maṣlāwī dialect losing another group of speakers; that is, Christian Maṣlāwīs who make up the second-largest community in Mosul after Muslims and Jews (*cf.* Jastrow 1978; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020).

Christian Maṣlāwī speakers are among the largest religious communities in Mosul and Maṣlāwī Arabic is their means of communication with Maṣlāwī speakers of other communities (Talay 2011; Ahmed 2018). In addition, Christian Maṣlāwī Arabic has over the decades shaped the linguistic history and heritage of the city of Mosul (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b).

## 2 The importance of the Maṣlāwī dialect in the linguistic history of the region

The Maṣlāwī dialect is spoken by the people of Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city situated in northern Iraq. The dialect is affiliated with the term 'Maṣlāwī' which is derived from the name of the city of Mosul (Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). Maṣlāwī is well known for the diversity of its speakers who belong to different ethnic and religious communities, and who, overall, have shaped the linguistic heritage of the city (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). The main religious communities in Mosul before 2003 were different Muslim sects such as the Šabakīz and Kurds, Christians who are the Syriac Orthodox, Armenians and Assyrians, and Jews who were forced to leave the city and resettle in Israel after 1960 due to displacement campaigns which had affected them since 1940 (Blanc 1964).

During the last forty years, Maṣlāwī has been under real threat because it is losing one of its largest communities; that is, the Christian community. This is due to demographic changes that affected the city after the series of resettlements of people from outside the city into the city of Mosul which has caused a growth in population. After the fall of Baghdad in 2003 due to the US war, many vulnerable people in various cities of Iraq moved to Mosul to settle. This series of settlements has brought with it the first signs of extremist domination and organised campaigns to marginalise the Christian community in Iraq, and Mosul specifically, where Christians are highly concentrated. Furthermore,

real demographic changes took place with the Daesh invasions in 2014. The Maṣlāwī people fled the city in fear of their lives and the largest community that was forced to leave was the remaining Christians (Al-Damluji 2014; Ahmed 2018).

The Maṣlāwī dialect has key features that are used to identify Maṣlāwīs as Muslims, Christians, or Jews. This used to be the linguistic code through which Maṣlāwīs were easily identified among the three groups, based on their religious affiliation. On the other hand, the Maṣlāwī dialect also shares similar key linguistic features which groups people as Maṣlāwī speakers (Al-Siraih 2013; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). Therefore, with the displacement of Maṣlāwī Christians, the linguistic history and diversity of the city of Mosul is facing a real threat as it is losing one of its key group of speakers who have enriched the cultural diversity of the city. In addition, displaced Christian Maṣlāwī speakers will suffer the long-term effects that displacement has had on their identity as Maṣlāwīs and on their spoken dialect of Maṣlāwī Arabic.

### 3 Who are the Maṣlāwīs?

Maṣlāwī Christians along with Maṣlāwīs from other religious groups are referred to with the terms *qīqu* and *qhah* when introduced to other communities in other parts of Iraq. The two shibboleths are derived from the ‘q’ sound which identifies the speech of Maṣlāwīs and it is the one sound they are proud still survives in their speech when compared to Christians in Baghdad, where ‘q’ has undergone a change to ‘g’; a Bedouin sound in origin (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991; Ahmed 2018). However, after 2003, the situation changed for Maṣlāwī Christian speakers. The younger generations, who moved to the Kurdistan regions or other parts of Iraq, started speaking the one form of Arabic that descends from the Arabic of the communities who live in Baghdad. That is, where the ‘g’ sound is quite common in their speech in words such as *‘gilitla’* (‘I told him’), used by Baghdadi speakers of all communities and religious groups, instead of *‘quttūlu’*, in Maṣlāwī Arabic (*cf.* Abu-Haidar 1991; Yaseen 2015a, 2015b; Ahmed 2018).

## 4 Why it is important to preserve the linguistic heritage of the region

As discussed earlier, in war-torn countries such as Iraq, it is not only the tangible heritage that has come under threat but also the intangible heritage whereby traditions, customs, and ways of living that are communicated verbally are on the verge of being lost if no effort is put into preserving them and keeping them alive for future generations.

Languages through which the identity and heritage of people are expressed are subject to being lost, changed, or undergoing linguistic interference in war-torn countries, where demographic changes have happened in cities such as Mosul and in the surrounding Nineveh Plains (*cf.* Yaseen 2015a, 2015b; Jasim 2020). The identity of future (young) generations is subject to being lost through the loss of their language/dialect that is core to the culture of the people who are inhabitants of a particular region (*cf.* Rogers 2020).

Therefore, it is essential to relate to language/dialect which is subject to being lost in such situations, as part of an identity protection method. Language serves as a medium for cultures and traditions in such a way that the loss of such a precious part of the culture may have detrimental effects on the group or community as a whole (*ibid.*). Within a specific dialect, a whole history of heritage lies; in the sense that dialects are subject to dying out if we don't document them, help younger generations to find a way to preserve their dialect, and keep track of the main linguistic and heritage-related facts of the dialect that are subject to change in relation to demographic change (*cf.* Ahmed 2018).

In addition, the displacement that has taken place since 2006 has meant that many families in Mosul City, specifically Christians, are in fear of returning to their own land, which has made the situation very critical. When it comes to the younger generation, part of their linguistic heritage is associated with crafts, practices, and even lexical items of the older generations that are communicated through a unique form of Maṣlāwī Arabic. This is at risk of dying out when its speakers are forced to live in a different city or even country and have to accommodate new practices, dialects, and even languages (*cf.* Ahmed 2018).

The geographic and linguistic distribution in Iraq comprises areas and regions that are divided into towns, villages, and the main cities which, as a whole, make up the 18 governorates of Iraq. The northern and northeastern areas (the Kurdistan Region)

includes three main governorates: Duhuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. The majority of Kurdistan Region inhabitants are Kurds from two groups, identified as *sōrāni* and *bahdināni*, where *sōrāni* is the spoken dialect of the Sulaymaniyah governorate and the surrounding towns and villages, and *bahdināni* is the spoken dialect of the Erbil and Duhuk governorates.

The northern region outside the Kurdistan Region includes the city of Mosul and the Nineveh Plains, and other towns and villages to the east and west of the city, with the majority of the population being Arabs in central Iraq followed by Kurds, then Christians and Jews (*cf.* Holes 2007). However, Jews have not lived in the region since the 1960s when they last left Iraq after being exiled, and the Israeli government relocated them to Israel (*cf.* Blanc 1964). In essence, Syriac Orthodox Christians were highly concentrated in the city of Mosul. There were fewer minority Christians, the Chaldeans, who were more concentrated in the Nineveh Plains. This area also hosted *telkēf*, *ba' čiqā*, and *beḥzāni* communities, with the majority being Chaldean Christians, followed by Yezidis and some Kurds, in addition to Arabs. The majority of the population in the towns of Baḡdēda (Hamdāniya) and Barṭella were Syriac Orthodox, followed by some *Šabakīz*, a minority with Muslim *š' i* religious affiliation. These areas still carry their Christian names, revealing the history of the region as being highly populated by Christians before Arabs and other minorities came and settled in the region.

## 5 The history of Mawṣil

The name 'Mawṣil' stands for the city of Mosul. It is derived from the standard Arabic word 'Muṣil', which in Arabic means 'connecting' as it was the city that connected trading with different parts of the world. Different etymologies suggest that the name of Mawṣil comes from Mespila in 401 BCE (Rawlinson 2014, cited in Ahmed 2018). Other etymologies suggest that the name Mawṣil is derived from the word *muslīn* (muslin), the textile that was produced in the city of Mawṣil (Ahmed 2018).

Mawṣil is the second-largest city with the second-largest population in modern Iraq. Mawṣil is located on the West Bank of the River Tigris and has two sides, the Right Bank, 'Āl sāḥel 'āl 'ayman' and the Left Bank, 'Āl sāḥel 'āl 'aysar' which are separated by the river (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b). The Right Bank is surrounded by seven gates where mostly Maṣlāwī people are concentrated. The gates are named in the pure Maṣlāwī dialect as



follows: *bāb`ilṭōb*, *bāb`ġdīd*, *bāb`aġāq*, *bāb`il`ġisīr*, *bāb`sinġār*, *bāb`il`bēz*, and *bāb`legeš*.

Mawṣil was the centre of the province Ninawah or Naynawah (Nineveh) from the time of the Assyrian Empire, when Mawṣil was made the capital of Assyria by King Ashur-Nasir Pal II (who reigned between 884–859 BCE) (Ramirez-Farai 2007, cited in Ahmed 2018). Ninawah also covers a wider area with surrounding villages to the north, south, northwest, and southwest of Mawṣil, as discussed earlier.

Mawṣil has been the homeland of many communities and religious groups who have inhabited this area for thousands of years. The Assyrian Empire was the most powerful and resilient empire during this era (Ahmed 2018). The Jews presently in Mosul are the descendants of the Jews who were exiled by the Assyrian King, and they identify themselves as Arab Jews nowadays, while the Christian community is reported to have settled in Mosul after the fall of the rule of the Sassanid Dynasty in 224 CE (Huebner 2014, cited in Ahmed 2018). The Muslim presence in Mosul came after both the Christian and the Jewish arrival when Arab Muslim tribes started marching towards Mosul after the fall of the Assyrian Empire (*ibid.*) and they started building a life there. In addition to these three religious groups, five main ethno-religious groups, the Kurds, Šabakīz, Yezidis, Turkemen, and Kakais were also part of the heterogeneous Mawṣil community (Ahmed 2018). They mainly lived in the surrounding villages in Nineveh Province, known as the Nineveh Plains.

This culturally rich mosaic has shaped the identity of the city. The linguistic identity of the city will now be further discussed in the following sections.

## 6 The historical background of the languages spoken in Iraq: the situation of language contact

The state of Iraq dates back to 1912 and encompassed the two provinces of Baghdad and Basra. We can see that Mosul was not part of Iraq at that time and was only declared a province by a League of Nations decision in 1925 and added to the country as the result of the British conquest (Baarda 2020).

In Iraq, Arabic is mainly spoken in Mesopotamia, whereas in the mountainous areas in the northern and northeastern regions, namely the Kurdistan Region, the Kurds live (Procházka 2020). Arabic is the majority language spoken in the central and southern parts of the country by Muslims and non-Muslims, followed by the first minority language, Kurdish, which is spoken by the Muslims and Yezidi Kurds living in the northern and northeastern regions (Jasim 2020). The neo-Aramaic language with its sub-dialects, specifically the North Eastern Neo-Aramaic (NENA) dialect, is the second minority language spoken by Christians of all sects and Jews (Khan 2011; Coghill 2014).

Arabic belongs to the Central Semitic language family, along with Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Phoenician (Watson 2002; Jasim 2020). It has a standardised written form called Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and many spoken dialects, some of which are mutually unintelligible (Owens 2006, 2013; Jasim 2020). The emergence of the Arabic language in its MSA form spoken by Arabs is not recent compared to the history of other languages and nations such as the Assyrians, Babylonians, Akkadians, and Persians that existed in what is known as Mesopotamian Iraq which later became part of the Arab world (Jasim 2020).

Akkadian was spoken in southern Iraq until the first century (Procházka 2020). Following on from this, different varieties of Aramaic became the main language in Iraq (*ibid.*: 85). Aramaic during that era was spoken by three religious groups, the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews; this explains the influence of each group's mother tongue on Arabic (Talay 2011). After the Muslim conquest, Arabic became the majority language. In Iraq, Aramaic continued to be spoken in rural areas following Arabisation but not in the larger cities (Magidow 2013; Procházka 2020). Ultimately, Aramaic continued to be the language of Christians and Jews but not Muslims (Procházka 2020).

Due to language contact, Aramaic speakers learned Arabic as a second language. This therefore explains the huge amount of linguistic transfer apparent in the phonology and lexical items of their Arabic, including their spoken forms of Iraqi Arabic, and more specifically in the Mašlāwī where this transfer tends to show in the spoken language of native Arab speakers as well (Al 'obaydi 2010; Abu-Haidar 1991; Procházka 2020).

The other languages that have been spoken in Iraq and have in one way or another influenced the Arabic language of Iraq are Persian and Kurdish. Persian and Kurdish have also influenced each other (Jastrow 1978; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). The influence has

existed since the presence of Persian communities in Iraq in the mediaeval period, when economic and cultural contacts between Mesopotamia and Iran were prominent (Gazsi 2011; Procházka 2020). Therefore, we can trace the numerous loanwords from Kurdish and Persian into Iraqi Arabic in general and into Maşlāwī in particular, due to the rule of the Abbasid caliphs in the eighth century CE, and to the present day, the influence of Persian is quite clear in the region. This is in addition to the number of intellectuals, poets, and writers who have influenced the Arabic language of Iraq (Procházka 2020).

Moreover, in the Ottoman period, the Turkish language also influenced the Arabic language in many ways; this is very clear in the borrowings of many loanwords from Turkish. In Mosul specifically, Turkish loanwords are very prominent in the Maşlāwī dialect, as will be discussed in the following sections with relevance to family names and lexical items borrowed from Turkish (*cf.* Jastrow 1978; Abu-Haidar 1991; Jasim 2020).

The other influential language which affected Iraqi Arabic and from which the borrowing of many words is vast, is English (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991). In other words, after the First World War up to now, the effect of the British mandate was very obvious in the number of loanwords that have been adopted in Iraqi Arabic in general and Maşlāwī in particular (Blanc 1964).

## 7 The Arabic situation among minorities in Iraq in recent history: the case of Arabic in Mosul

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Assyrians were setting up their own intellectual and educational infrastructure. Some of them arrived as refugees from the Ottoman Empire and spoke a dialect of neo-Aramaic called Swadaya, which is also known as Modern Assyrian (Baarda 2020: 143). At the same time, the Patriarchate of the Chaldean Catholic Church imposed the use of Arabic as the language of the state out of fear of persecution. Chaldeans would read, write, and teach in Arabic (*ibid.*). They endorsed Arabic as their own language (Baarda 2020). Similarly, the Syriac Orthodox Church endorsed Arabic as their language.

In Mosul, all three religious groups, namely, the Assyrians, Syriac Orthodox, and Chaldeans showed huge differences in their approaches towards the Arabic language in the region and towards the ideology of Arab nationalism (*cf.* Abu-Haidar 1991; Baarda 2020). Under the mandatory ruling of Iraq, the identity and ideology of the Syriac Christians in relation to Arabic has always been controversial. Syriac Christians used Arabic as their everyday language and identified themselves as Arabs when the authority was in the hands of the Arab rulers. Others, however, preferred to be referred to as Aramaic and they referred to their mother tongue as Syriac Aramaic (Baarda 2020). We see Aramaic spoken by both Christians and Jews in Iraq, and the influence on the Arabic language due to language contact specifically in Mosul has been considerable (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991; Ahmed 2018). The phonology of the dialect of Mosul has adopted much of the Aramaic phonology of both Christians and Jews with regard to particular sounds, linguistic features, and so on (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978; Abu-Haidar 1991; Ahmed 2018).

## 8 Arabic dialects in Iraq

In Iraq, two Arabic dialects exist, each of which have a number of linguistic features (Blanc 1964; Jasim 2020), and are broadly classified based on what is known as the urban/Bedouin dichotomy in the Arabic region (Jasim 2020). These are the *qəltu* dialect and the *gilit* dialect respectively (*ibid.*). The names of the dialects are derived from the dialect reflex of the word meaning *qultu* ('I said') (Blanc 1964; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). The latter dialect is of Bedouin origin and is spoken by the Muslim population (sedentary and non-sedentary) in central and southern Iraq and by the non-sedentary population in the rest of the area. The former dialect is urban and is spoken by the non-Muslim population of central Iraq including Baghdad, southern Iraq, and the sedentary population (Muslims and non-Muslims) of the rest of the area (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978; Abu-Haidar 1991; Talay 2011; Jasim 2020).

*Qəltu* is an urban dialect in origin while the emergence of *gilit* dates back to the time of the Mongol raids of the twelfth century CE. Nomads migrated from the surrounding towns and villages to the cities (*cf.* Blanc 1964; Versteegh 2001; Cadora 1992). *Gilit* originally emerged as an outcome of the later process of de-urbanisation (Bedouinisation) and tribalisation that attacked the southern and central parts of Iraq during the siege of the Mongols on Baghdad in 1258 CE (*cf.* Jastrow 1994). Baghdad, unlike other Arabic cities,

was Bedouinised as a capital and the Muslims were speakers of *gilit*. Christians and Jews, on the other hand, were not affected by the process of Bedouinisation. They did not mix and socialise with Muslims and therefore they preserved their spoken form of *qəltu* (cf. Abu-Haidar 1991).

## 9 The Maşlāwī linguistic heritage

Maşlāwī is a term which refers to a person who is born and bred in Mosul and who has ancestors who lived there and who come from Maşlāwī families in origin (Al 'obaydi 2010). In other words, it is typical for Maşlāwī people to trace their roots to Mosul, no matter which religious or family communities they come from, as long as they have their origins in the city of Mosul (*ibid.*). The Maşlāwī people and dialect also substitute the original name of one form of Arabic dialect spoken by the people of Mosul from three religious groups: Muslims, Christians, and Jews (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1979; Talay 2011; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020).

The Maşlāwī linguistic heritage is unique in that many linguistic features, family names, and non-Arabic (foreign) lexical terms have been brought into the dialect from other languages and other forms of Arabic, as spoken by the different communities who have lived in Mosul (ancient Nineveh) throughout history. This reflects the rich cultural mosaic of the city (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978, 1994; Abu-Haidar 1991; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). Among these communities are the Kurds, the Chaldeans, the Armenians, and the Assyrian Christians, in addition to the Arab Jews, who lived together as one community in Mosul and who have all contributed to the history and heritage of the city (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978, 1994; Jasim 2020). For these communities, the Maşlāwī dialect is their first, second, or in some cases, third spoken language that unites them with the Arab Maşlāwīs (Ahmed 2018).

## 10 The situation of Christians in Iraq after 2003

As discussed earlier, Iraqi Christians belong to several sects which include the Chaldeans (who belong to the Eastern sect of the Catholic Church), the Assyrians (Church of the East), the Syriacs (Eastern Orthodox), Armenian Catholics, and Roman Catholics who are

mainly concentrated in Baghdad and northern regions such as Nineveh, Erbil, Duhuk, Kirkuk, and Sulaymaniyah (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2009). Christians have been the target of extremists in Iraq since 2003. They have been threatened, intimidated, attacked, kidnapped, and even killed in the cities of Mosul and Baghdad where they mainly reside. They have been the victims of organised campaigns by extremists who gained prominence in Iraq mainly during 2006.

Many females, including Christians who resided in Mosul at this time, had to keep their identities safe by abiding by the Islamic dress code for fear of being raped, abducted, or killed. There were also organised attacks on priests and churches in Mosul where many of them closed their doors. A priest from the Syriac Orthodox Church was killed in 2006, a Chaldean priest was killed in 2007, and in 2009, the Archbishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church was kidnapped and killed.

These organised campaigns were targeted at people from the public, mainly Christians. Subsequently, after 2003, a large number of internally displaced Christians fled Baghdad and Mosul to the Nineveh Plains in fear of their lives, while others registered as refugees in Syria and Jordan, and a number of them fled to the Kurdistan Region, mainly Duhuk and Erbil (*ibid.*).

## 11 The Maṣlāwī dialect under threat

The city of Mosul has suffered a number of demographic changes over the last two decades which in one way or another have affected the linguistic situation in the city (Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). Palva (1983) argues that due to radical changes in modern society, local dialects have been exposed to linguistic interference (p.101). This type of immigration to the cities has led to complete demographic changes across the whole country; mostly in its effect on the dialect(s) spoken by its inhabitants (Holes 2007: 130; Jasim 2020).

With many minorities having already left the city, in addition to Arab Muslims who are pure Maṣlāwīs in origin, spoken Maṣlāwī is on the verge of dying out or becoming extinct. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this change in the dialect, and the fear among its speakers of losing the dialect has become very obvious in their communications with others (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b; Ahmed 2018).

Many non-Maşlāwī linguistic forms started appearing in the Maşlāwī dialect as a result of migrants moving from the villages and towns to the city of Mosul after the Iraq-Gulf War, in search for better job opportunities. Mosul was considered a key economic centre for employment after migrants' sources of income as peasants and workers had been affected (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b; Ahmed 2018). Following this, in 2003, after the US-led operation in Iraq, Mosul received a great number of people moving there as they had lost their own homes in other parts of Iraq. These migrants started mixing with Maşlāwī people and building a life in Mosul. Therefore, language contact started to become prominent in the spoken word of the Maşlāwīs (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b).

In contrast, Maşlāwīs started migrating to outside of the city to the nearby governorates, and many of them moved to outside of Iraq or were resettled through UN organisations in Europe, the UK, the US, and Canada. A great number of Maşlāwīs from Christian communities moved to the towns and villages of the Nineveh Plains in search of a better life and safer situation (Ahmed 2018).

Furthermore, the Daesh war in 2014 brought with it a real threat for Maşlāwīs and the Maşlāwī dialect as Daesh forced all religious minorities to leave Iraq and executed those who worked in the army, police officers, and academics. In addition, the liberating process organised a war against Daesh in which many lives were lost, especially on the Right Bank of the city where the Maşlāwī population is concentrated (Yaseen 2015a, 2015b).

## 12 The linguistic features of the Maşlāwī dialect: language contact and dialect divergence

Maşlāwī shares many lexical items with other languages such as Aramaic, Kurdish, Persian, and even English. Maşlāwī is also distinctive regarding its unique sound system where special sounds such as /p/ and the final /č/ are affiliated with Maşlāwī family names. Many lexical items have also been brought into the dialect from Aramaic, Kurdish, and Persian (Blanc 1964; Jastrow 1978; Abu-Haider 1991; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020).

Feminine adjectival inflections are one of the really distinctive features of Maşlāwī and are used to describe a time of the day: for example, *‘aşriyye* ('afternoon'). Or they can be used to describe both things and people; for example, *qāsiyyi* ('hard'), *hadiyyi* ('quiet' (f.)), or

heights such as *'ēliyyi* ('high'). Nominal adjectives such as *jayyi* ('coming'), *baghdiyyi* ('cold'), *maṭghayyi* ('rain'), and nouns such as *zibdiyyi* ('pot') and *zūliyye* ('carpet') are commonly used in their feminine form in the Maṣlāwī dialect (cf. Jastrow 1978).

The final feminine morpheme /ki/ is another feature associated with Maṣlāwī, whereby a speaker can be clearly identified as Maṣlāwī as represented in verbs such as *'aqellelki* ('I tell you' (f.)) and *da xaberki* ('I'm calling you' (f.)). Similarly, the final feminine /i/ in *xayfi* ('scared' (adj.)) and in nouns such as *xa:fi* ('scariness'), and *mo:ti* ('death') (cf. Jastrow 1978). Also, the final stressed feminine form /a/ is present in the Maṣlāwī dialect in colour adjectives such as *ṣafġā* ('yellowish'), *bēthā* ('whitish'), and *soda* ('black') (Jasim 2020).

The other linguistic feature which is a hallmark of the Maṣlāwī dialect is the presence of what is known as inclination or raising of particular vowel sounds. This is a feature brought into the dialect from the Aramaic as spoken by Christians and Jews. It is the division of the historical /ā/ sound into /ō/ and /ē/ (Blanc 1964; Ahmed 2018; Jasim 2020). In other words, some verbs and nouns in the Maṣlāwī dialect have a special pronunciation which identifies the people who produce it as Maṣlāwīs in all parts of Iraq. This feature is also very prevalent in the vocal production of Christian Maṣlāwīs where inclination tends to be very clear and common in most of the words in their speech. An example of this is the pronunciation of words such as *nās* ('people') as *nēs* ('people') and in verbs such as *mēken* ('competent').

The /r/ vocalisation is another feature of the Maṣlāwī dialect. It is frequently used among the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Maṣlāwīs of the older generation, or the younger generation when they are mixing with other Maṣlāwī families (Ahmed 2018). It is found in words such as *ōba' a* ('four'), *qōṣa* ('a piece of bread'), *'agōs* ('bride'), and *xōqa* ('a piece of cloth'). The other common feature of the Maṣlāwī dialect is the 'p' sound that has been introduced into the dialect through loanwords from Aramaic, Kurdish, Persian, and English and is substituted for the 'b' sound in many words in Maṣlāwī. For example, *tabbūli* ('tabūla salad') is produced as *tappūli* by Maṣlāwīs and *ṭāba* or *ṭōba* ('ball') in Baghdadi *gilit* Arabic is produced as *ṭappi* (cf. Abu-Haidar 1991).

Another feature is substituting 'r' for 'ġ' in nearly all 'r' productions, except when it causes a change in meaning or in proper names. This feature has been introduced into the dialect through language contact with the Arabic spoken by Jews in Mosul and other parts of Iraq (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991; Yaseen 2015a, 2015b; Ahmed 2018; Jasim



2020; Procházka 2020) in words such as *'arīd* ('I want') produced as *'aġīd* in the Maşlāwī dialect, *marrāt* ('sometimes') produced as *maġġāt*, and *'araf* produced as *'oġof* ('he knew') with a

vocal 'o' preceding any 'r' sound (*cf.* Blanc 1964). This feature is considered the hallmark of the Maşlāwī dialect, and it is not found in other Arabic dialects of Iraq or even in any other Arabic dialect in the Arab world.

### **12.1 Linguistic and cultural affiliations in family names in the heritage of Mawşil**

The Maşlāwīs are known for their family names (Al 'obaydi 2010), and they are keen to pass them on from grandparents to grandchildren. Their goal is to distinguish their families in the community and to be proud of their origin and their prestigious position among other families. In Mosul, it has become difficult for a person to introduce himself to a group of people without mentioning the surname of the family to which he/she belongs (*ibid.*). Therefore, a group of families kept their title for a long period of time extending to the present day.

In Mawşil (Mosul), family history can be traced back hundreds of years through family names. Family names that identify the people of the city as Maşlāwīs are associated with trading with different parts of the world, and this subsequently led to the development of different types of crafts. Among the linguistic features that identify Maşlāwī family names is the final /č/ affiliation brought into the dialect from Aramaic, Turkish, Kurdish, and Persian during the reign of the Ottoman Empire (1534–1920). Kurds were highly concentrated in the city of Mosul during this era following the Abbasid period which founded the city of Baghdad (known as Baxdād back then), the capital of Iraq where Persian culture and Persian poets flourished, as well as in Kufa (a southern city in Iraq) (Baarda 2020).

### **12.2 Heritage-related crafts linguistically associated with family names in Mawşil**

As discussed previously, the cosmopolitan heritage of Mosul City is reflected in the family names (*bēt flān*) that are associated with heritage-related crafts. It is one of the richest and oldest cities in terms of the number of crafts people have undertaken (Al 'obaydi 2010). The *sūq* (*sōq* in the Maşlāwī dialect) is the place where many crafts were first

established and family names have been associated with these crafts since. *Sōq 'al ṣaffārīn* ('the copper craftsmen *suq'*) in Mosul is one the oldest and most well-known *sūqs* in Mosul. The older family generations used to work in this craft and have passed it down from one generation to the next. They are identified by the family name *ṣaffār* ('the copper craftsman') in relation to the craft they are associated with.

Similarly, *sōq 'al samak* ('the fish *suq'*) has been associated with the family name '*al sammāk* ('the fish seller') in Mosul. Another well-known *suq* is *sōq 'al 'attārīn* ('the spice seller *suq'*) which the family name '*attār* ('the spice seller') is associated with. There is also *sawwāf* ('the wool maker') and *dabbagh* ('the fabric dyer'); both family names are associated with the crafts the families have inherited from one generation to another. Another of the well-known *suqs* in Mosul is the jewellers' *suq*, called *sōq 'al ṣiyyagh* ('the jewellers' *suq'*) in which the people who worked in this craft were identified as *bēt 'al ṣiyyagh* ('the family of jewellers') and were given the family name *sayegh* ('the goldsmith').

There are some crafts that no longer exist in Mawṣil due to the change and development of the modern world. However, the families still carry the name associated with the craft they inherited; so family names such as *bēt 'al sarrāj* ('the saddle sellers') are among the most well-known and famous families in Mawṣil. Also *bēt 'al wattār* (they 'who play on the musical strings') and *bēt 'al bazzāz* ('the fabric seller'). In contrast, some Christian family names are very well known and a Christian living in Mosul can be identified as a Christian Maṣlāwī through his family name.

Some family names are associated with the history of the family, while others are religiously associated or have craft-related associations. There are a large number of families who live in Mosul and among the most famous Christian families are *bēt 'al sarsam* (proper name), *bēt 'al rassam* ('the painter'), *bēt 'al qas* ('the pastor'), *bēt 'al maṣlūb* ('the crucified'), *bēt 'al matlūb* ('the wanted'), *bēt 'azūz* (proper name), *bēt baythūn* (proper name), *bēt sallo* (proper name), *bēt ballūla* (proper name), and *bēt findaqli* ('the hotel managers'), among a number of other family names. However, there are particular family names that are associated with the crafts that the family has practised such as *bēt ḥaddād* ('the blacksmith') and *bēt 'al ṣaqqāl* ('the enameller'). These latter two crafts (and their associated family names) are among the crafts that Christian families in Mosul were famous for.

### 12.3 The 'č' affiliation in craft-related Maşlāwī family names

The 'č' affiliation is associated with craft-related Maşlāwī family names. Among these names are the *aṭraqčī* ('the rug and carpet seller'), *čaqmaqčī* ('the person who sells phonographs'), *abāčī* ('the *abaya* seller'), *čakarčī* ('the sugar seller'), *šābūnčī* ('the soap seller'), and *pāčāčī* ('who sells *pāčā*, food made with stuffed rice in cow or sheep intestines

in addition to an animal head (*cf.* Abu-Haidar 1991). The 'č' affiliation is also associated with foreign-non-Arabic Maşlāwī family names such as *čindāla* ('the fast water moving over the rocks') due to the place where the family used to live (*ibid.*).

### 12.4 The 'č' affiliation for personification

Maşlāwīs tend to associate words with a final 'č' with the personification of the different practices in Maşlāwī heritage and traditions. For example, *ħammēmčī* and *mdallekčī* refer to the people who work in Turkish-style sawna rooms. Similarly, practices such as *bawwābčī* ('the concierge'), *ħizmačī* ('who works for people in the houses'), and *pančarčī* (from the English term 'puncture', 'the person who fixes punctures'). Other practices such as *arabančī* ('the one who pulls the cart') have both positive and negative connotations. When people tend to refer to someone who doesn't have social etiquette and manners, they use the expression *arabančī*.

Medical practices are also personified in the Maşlāwī heritage. For example, practices such as *mṭaħerčī* ('the circumciser') is only found among the Muslim and Jewish populations but not among other religious groups such as Christians as it is religiously associated with the heritage of both Muslims and Jews but not Christians (*cf.* Abu-Haidar 1991).

Similarly, practices such as *qahwačī* ('the coffee maker'), *qondarčī* ('the shoe seller'), and *sufračī* ('who sets the food table in restaurants') are among the well-known practices in Maşlāwī culture and heritage and are practised by all religious groups from all the communities living in Mosul. On the other hand, there are particular practices that Christians are very famous for, such as *ṭōrnačī* ('turning machine mechanic').

## 13 Lexical items reflecting the cosmopolitan heritage of Mosul

There are a number of linguistic terms that are affiliated with the Christian communities in Mosul and reflect the Christian heritage in the region (Abu-Haidar 1991). Among these terms are lexical items such as *bali* ('yes') which is said for approval when starting a conversation and *šaddeq* ('believe it' (m.)) when addressing males, or *saddqi* when addressing females, a term used by Christians to emphasise that their words are true and to avoid using the name of God, unlike Muslims who say *wallah* ('in the name of God'); for example, when emphasising the truth (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991).

Other pure Christian Mašlāwī terms are '*kē*', a modifier preceding the verb and showing continuity in words such as *kējake* ('he is eating') and *kēješgab* ('he is drinking'), whereas for females they say *kētākel* ('she is eating') and *kētešgab* ('she is drinking'). On the other hand, Muslim Mašlāwīs, for example, use the modifier '*qā*' instead, in words such as *qajākel* ('he is eating') and *qajeešgab* ('he is drinking'), and for females, *qatākel* ('she is eating') and *qatešgab* ('she is drinking') (cf. Abu-Haidar 1991; Ahmed 2018). There are also very particular lexical items that are only used by Christian Mašlāwīs, such as *yzableq* ('slither or slip'), *ḥasīni* ('beautiful'), *hōnak* ('there'), *biğgān* ('for'), and *zāmōg* ('big wrap') (cf. Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991).

## 14 Non-Arabic loanwords in the Mašlāwī dialect

Non-Arabic loan words in Mašlāwī combine a number of foreign sounds, such as /č/, /p/ and /g/, in addition to foreign lexical items that have been used among Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Among these items are the following (Blanc 1964; Abu-Haidar 1991):

*čaṭal* ('spoon')

*šandaliyyi* ('wardrobe')

*čakmača* ('draw')

*gōzani* ('storage')

*qanšōg* ('wardrobe')

*marbič* ('hose')

*qawāti* ('cans')

*čikkāḥa* ('fork')

*čakar* ('sugar')

*pūlak* ('tiny ornaments')

*pāra* ('money')

*paysikil* ('bicycle')

*parda* ('curtain')

pančar ('puncture')

*parča* ('piece')

*pās* ('bus')

*panka* ('a ceiling fan')

*pākēt* ('packet')

## 15 Conclusion

This paper has reflected on the linguistic history of the Maṣlāwī dialect where different communities comprising different ethnic and religious groups have shaped the identity of the region. The history of the region has enriched the culture and heritage of its people to a great extent, especially the linguistic history of the Maṣlāwī dialect. This has given the Maṣlāwī dialect its own uniqueness regarding its linguistic features and spoken form, among other spoken dialects in Iraq. However, in the last two decades, the Maṣlāwī dialect has been at risk of dying out, especially among young Christian Maṣlāwīs, due to several displacements. Therefore, there is real concern among the Christian Maṣlāwī community that the younger generation will no longer use the dialect and a very impressive part of the history of the Christians of Mosul will be under real threat. This has not only affected the Christian community of Mosul but also the city of Mosul and its unique dialect. This dialect has defined the identity of this cosmopolitan region that has at one time or another hosted all sects and communities.

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**CREID** is an international consortium led and convened by the Institute of Development Studies, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK

**T** +44 (0) 1273 606261

**F** +44 (0) 1273 621202

**E** [creid@ids.ac.uk](mailto:creid@ids.ac.uk)

**W** [www.ids.ac.uk/creid](http://www.ids.ac.uk/creid)

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