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The Preservation of the Heritage of the Armenian Community in Kurdistan, Iraq, Intergenerationally

Juwan Mohammed Mohammed Mahdi Almofti
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The Preservation of the Heritage of the Armenian Community in Kurdistan, Iraq, Intergenerationally

Իրաքի Քրդստանի տարածաշրջանում հայ փոքրամասնության լեզուն անցյալի և ներկայի միջև

Juwan Mohammed Mohammed Mahdi Almofti and Yarjanik Aqob Kerob

Summary

This topic is significant because it considers the language of an ethno-religious group, the Armenian people, in Iraq with non-Arab or Kurdish origins. The Armenian people did not originate from Iraq but from Armenia, one of the smaller countries in the former Soviet Union. Many Armenians were forced to migrate in 1915 to different countries in the Middle East due to ethnic cleansing under the Ottomans. This study explores the different methods by which the Armenian community has maintained its native Armenian language during its history in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

To this end, the study includes a comparison of how the language was viewed and maintained across two successive generations of Armenians in KRI. The findings show that the first generation is divided into those who speak Armenian and those who assimilated and speak Kurdish. Those who no longer speak Armenian prioritised integration and moved away from their mother tongue. This posed a threat to the ongoing maintenance of the language in these communities. However, the younger generation has worked to revive its mother tongue by learning it in schools established in the region approximately 20 years ago.

It is worth mentioning that Armenians established a school in Baghdad, namely the 'Mixed Private Primary Armenian School' on 15 October 2004. This was the first mixed primary school opened in Iraq after the American-British invasion of Iraq in April 2003. Armenians were the first subgroup to get approval to reopen private schools in Iraq. The bishop, head of the Armenian Orthodox denomination, was responsible for managing the school in the first year of its opening to help it establish itself. Armenians who migrated to other countries, particularly the US, as well as other Armenian families contribute to supporting the school with their donations. Furthermore, a committee of previous students supports school

activities with annual donations. Armenians succeeded in getting the approval of the Ministry of Education in KRI in October 2006 to open a new mixed preparatory Armenian school in Abzarouk, to be the first mixed preparatory school in Iraq. There is another Armenian primary school, in Zakho originally established in 1923. This school is for Armenian students and although most subjects are taught in Kurdish, the Armenian language and Christian education classes are taught in Armenian. The church has also played a significant role in reviving the Armenian language by holding mass in Armenian, as well as opening classes to teach the language to younger generations in KRI.

The Armenian state has also had an important role in Armenian language learning in Iraq in general, and KRI in particular, by granting Armenians in KRI an Armenian passport to be able to travel to Armenia. Nayery Bashir Jacob, a heritage collector born in 1988, said she learned the Armenian language when she enrolled in an Armenian language course at the Virgin Mary Church, Zakho. She reported that it was difficult for her to learn Armenian when she was younger because she spoke Kurdish at home. She enrolled in the course because she wanted to be fluent in Armenian at home. In addition, the Armenian Government has opened a direct link between Armenia and Kurdistan through opening an Armenian Embassy in Erbil, which has provided support to the Armenian churches that have been responsible for reviving language teaching. Also, the Government of Armenia has opened the way for young people to complete their university education in Armenia. Each student pays study fees and if a student has a GPA of 75 per cent or above, she or he receives a discount for the fees paid, according to Ervan Eyshikhan Arashak Kiforkian, born in 1996. Ervan is the first Armenian student to study architecture at Yerevan State University in the Armenian capital and has helped other students to enrol in Armenian universities. It should be noted that study in Yerevan State University in the Armenian capital is delivered in Armenian and English, however Armenian young people selected Armenian language because the church in Duhok sends student documents to the church in Baghdad, which in turn sends them to the Armenian Embassy. The Armenian Embassy approves the student's application because it is filed by the church. Students spend a year studying their language before being enrolled in university. According to Ervan Eyshikhan, in order for students to enrol in the Armenian University, they have to pass an exam. So, if the students who want to join the university don't know Armenian language, they have to apply for a six-month Armenian language course to be able to pass the acceptance exam in the Armenian University. (Interview with Irvan Ishkhan Arshak). Many youths increasingly want to learn Armenian language in order to be able to visit their relatives and study in Armenia.

After 2003, Iraqis were allowed to travel abroad for tourism and/or study. This had not been possible during Saddam Hussein's regime, as Iraq was subject to economic sanctions and Iraqis were not allowed to travel. The most important thing that being able to travel and visit Armenia has touched in the Armenian young people is their national motivation and sense of belonging to their mother country. All the above-mentioned factors have helped the younger generation learn the Armenian language.

This study is informed by an empirical dataset comprised of personal interviews with a total of 40 people, all of whom are Armenian. Of the 40, two were from Baghdad, two from Mosul and one from Basra, with the remainder from Duhok. However, since 2003 they have all been residing in KRI. Interviews were conducted with prominent Armenian figures, including: Mr Wartkes Moses, the former Director of Education in Duhok governorate, KRI; Father Masis, Pastor of the Armenian Church in Duhok; and Assistant Professor Nishan Surin Moses, of the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok; as well as Armenian professionals working in health, education and local government, and one retired teacher. The remaining 17 interviews were conducted with Armenian young people enrolled in a heritage gathering project with the University of Duhok. These were 26-42 year-olds selected following an advertisement in the Armenian Church in Duhok. Most were graduates of universities and other educational polytechnic institutes except for one female interviewee who completed her second year of preparatory school up to age 16 and was a housewife and fluent in English. Interviews were conducted via the Zoom app.

Keywords: Armenians; Armenian language; linguistics.

Վերացական

Մեր ուսումնասիրության ընթացքում մենք ընտրել ենք ոչ արաբական կամ քրդական ծագում ունեցող էթնիկ փոքրամասնության լեզուն, և դրա ծագումը չի վերագրվում Իրաքի Նախորդ ժամանակներից ոչ մեկին, քանի որ հայերի ծագումը վերագրվում է Հայաստան պետությանը, այն մարդիկ, ովքեր ստիպված էին գաղթել Մերձավոր Արևելքի տարբեր երկրներ՝ իրենց սահմաններին մոտ լինելու պատճառով: «Հայ փոքրամասնության» վերաբերյալ այս ուսումնասիրությունը ցույց է տալիս, թե ինչպես են հայերը պահպանում իրենց մայրենի լեզուն Իրաքի Քրդստանի շրջանում իրենց երկար պատմական կյանքի ընթացքում: Ուսումնասիրությունը ներառում էր հայոց լեզու երկու հաջորդ սերունդների միջև. Նախորդ սերունդը ներգաղթից հետո խառնվել է իրենց ապրած հասարակության հետ՝ նրանց ստիպելով բացահայտորեն հեռանալ մայրենիից նույնիսկ իրենց մեջ, և նրանց լեզուն դարձել է բուժման մեքենա տարածաշրջանում: Նոր սերունդը աշխատել է վերականգնել իր մայրենի լեզուն՝ սովորելով նրանց երկու տասնամյակ առաջ հիմնադրված դպրոցներում և հայ դպրոցականների համար նախատեսված այդ դպրոցներում, որտեղ նրանք նույնպես ուսանում են քրդերեն, երկու առարկայով. (Հայերեն սովորելը, իսկ մյուսը՝ հայերեն սովորել քրիստոնեությունը): , Եկեղեցին նույնպես կարևոր դեր ունեցավ այս լեզվի վերակենդանացման գործում, որը քիչ էր մնում վերանա այդ տարածքում, և երրորդ գործոնն այն էր, որ կենտրոնից և հարավից տեղահանված հայերը, որոնց լեզուն անվտանգ էր եկեղեցիներում և տներում, կարևոր դեր ունեցան նոր սերնդի հայերի հետաքրքրությունը իրենց մայրենի լեզվով: Հայկական պետությունը նույնպես կարևոր դեր ունի լեզուն սովորելու շահագրգռման մեջ՝ նրանց հայկական անձնագիր տրամադրելով և Արմինայում համալսարանական կրթությունն ավարտելու համար ճանապարհի բացելով: Այցեր հարազատներին և տուրիստական ճանապարհորդություններ: Եվ մենք գտնում ենք, որ այս բոլոր գործոնները դրդել են նոր սերնդին սովորել լեզուն.

Հիմնական բառերը. Հայերեն - հայերեն լեզու - լեզվաբանություն:

Contents

Summary, keywords, author notes	1
1 Introduction	7
2 Methodology	9
2.1 Challenges facing the Armenian language as investigated by this research	9
3 Armenia – past and present	10
3.1 International recognition	11
3.2 Armenian culture	13
3.3 The Armenian language	15
3.4 The effect of Arabic and Kurdish on the language of the Armenian ethno-religious group	17
3.5 Factors that led to a lack of Armenian language use in the Kurdish regions	23
4 Results	25
4.1 The Armenian language from the viewpoint of our study sample (young people)	25
4.2 Indication of sharpness, relative weight and arrangement	29
5 Findings	29
5.1 Recommendations on how to preserve the Armenian language	30
Bibliography (translated from Arabic)	31

Figures

Figure 1: The Armenian alphabet	16
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Tables

Table 1: Armenian population of Iraq, 1924	12
Table 2: Armenian population worldwide, 1970	12
Table 3: Armenian population of Iraq, 1977	13
Table 4: Some common words in Armenian, Kurdish and Arabic	19
Table 5: Indication and sharpness, relative weight and arrangement	29

1 Introduction

The Armenian people can be traced back to 3000 BC and are thought to have originated from south-eastern Europe before migrating to the Caucasus, where the modern state of Armenia is now located. However, as a result of conflicts, most Armenians do not now live in Armenia, having been forced to migrate. Armenians have therefore become dispersed throughout the Middle East, particularly to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran, and to European countries (Al-Hashemi 2016: 15–16). This study focuses on Armenian Christians who live in Kurdistan as a distinct ethno-religious group.

The Armenian language is part of the Indo-European group of languages. The purpose of this study is to explore the Armenian language as an ethnic language in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and to explain the difference between the past two generations of Armenians born between the 1920s and the 1980s, who were prevented from speaking their language, and the younger generation, born in the 1980s and 1990s and subsequently, in knowing and speaking the language. It also explores the extent of the commitment of young Armenians to speak their language and know and preserve all its vocabulary by combining a primary data collection approach involving a survey and interviews with a secondary data collection approach involving books and grey literature available online. The information was validated by prominent Armenians, Professor Nishan Surin Moses (Head of Geography at the University of Duhok) and Mr Wartkes Moses (the former Director of Education in Duhok governorate). As a result, the study explores the extent to which the Armenian language is used and preserved in KRI.

This research explores the impacts on the Armenian language, over time, of living as an ethno-religious subgroup in KRI. This is significant because the Armenian community had been predominantly educated in Arabic as a result of the commands of the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Hussein in Iraq. After the fall of the regime, and the establishment of KRI and the Kurdistan government in 1991, education was delivered in Kurdish. Furthermore, the Iraqi community contains many sects and ethnic groups, including: Arab, the majority; Kurds, who live in Kurdistan region; Turkmen; Christians, who consist of many sects (including Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian and the Armenians, a majority who belong to the Orthodox Church, and a subgroup who belong to Catholic and Protestant churches); as well as Yazidi, Shabak, Kakai, Bahai, and Sabeian Mandaeans. The diversity of Iraqi society has provided a conducive environment for Armenian Christians as they are among many different ethno-religious groups.

Within this paper, we address the following questions:

1. Was the Armenian language lost between the past three generations?
2. To what extent is the younger generation eager to learn the language?
3. How is the language used among Armenians?
4. How can the Armenian language be preserved?

This research elaborates on part of the history of the Armenian language and furthers understanding of how it has been maintained. It also points to gaps in research on the Armenian language for those who wish to continue studying the future of its preservation in Kurdistan.

Christians, of all denominations, used to speak their mother language. They also used to learn letter writing in churches before being allowed to study their language in their own schools or in classes in the public schools of KRI (Salem Ishac, pers. comm.). Moreover, in his 2016 book, *Iraqi Armenians: History, Culture and Identity*, Al-Hashemi said that Armenians used to teach their children the Armenian language in private schools or institutions, including churches or cultural clubs, in case they were not allowed to open private schools. In addition, Pastor Ashiknian, Pastor of the Apostolic Church of El Gadria, reported that every Armenian in Iraq learns the Armenian language in early childhood. He added that Armenia provides a small amount of financial aid to the Armenian Orthodox churches in Iraq (Al-Hashemi 2016: 67).

In general in KRI, ethno-religious groups have kept their languages. This is particularly the case regarding Syriac languages, which are spoken among Christian Chaldeans, Assyrians and Syriacs.¹ This study uncovers the relationship between the Armenian language and other languages used in Kurdistan, using a sociolinguistic approach. We understand sociolinguistics to be the study of the difference of languages among groups that are separated by social factors, including religion, race, ethnic group, sociocultural level, education level, age, and other factors. In addition, sociolinguistics is concerned with language usage and establishing the rules and understanding of how language usage varies according to different social factors such as social classes or socioeconomic status (Tawab 1996: 35).

¹ See [Assyrian Democratic Movement study](#).

2 Methodology

This paper looks at the Armenian language from the point of view of the research sample of 40 Armenian interviewees, including 17 young people aged 20–40 years. Alongside a set of individual interviews, an anonymous questionnaire was undertaken to assess the attitudes of the Armenian community towards their language. This was distributed via the website of the Armenian Church of Duhok due to limitations imposed under Covid-19. For the questionnaire, 36 participants replied to all questions, while 4 sent blank answers. Responses were analysed according to the averages.

The following have been among the greatest challenges faced while writing this paper:

1. A lack of sources, on Armenians in general and in particular for the Armenian language, for which sources are almost non-existent.
2. A difficulty in distributing the questionnaire form directly, as a result of Covid-19-related restrictions.

2.1 Challenges facing the Armenian language as investigated by this research

1. Armenian society is closed. People do not readily give information, including to other Armenians, for fear that their secrets will be used in personal disputes.
2. The Armenian community in KRI is an ethno-religious group. Armenians are mostly required to speak languages other than their mother tongue to integrate into society and form social relationships with peers of other nationalities.
3. The Armenians from Van predominantly used to speak Kurdish. It was their language in Turkey, from where they originated, and they learned Arabic as the official language in Iraq in schools, institutes or colleges as well as in their everyday dealings.

The first half of this paper (Section 3) is divided into three subsections: Section 3.1 provides an introduction to the Armenian state, past and present, the international recognition of Armenia and the culture of Armenians; Section 3.2 focuses on the Armenian language; and Section 3.3 considers the influence and effects of Arabic and Kurdish on the language of the Armenian community and factors that inhibited the use of the Armenian language in the region.

The second half of the paper (Section 4) analyses responses to the questionnaire from Armenian young people in order to understand their responses and reactions to maintaining a connection to their language in KRI. It details the historic and ongoing challenges faced in preserving the Armenian language among the Armenian community in KRI, before going on to detail recommendations as to how to promote and preserve the language.

3 Armenia – past and present

Armenians are among Indo-European peoples, along with Persians, Anglo-Saxons, Germans, Slavs, and others. The Indo-European peoples spread across Central Asia and migrated; the Armenians entered Europe from the south and lived there for many generations. They crossed the Danube River and settled in Trakya, then crossed the Dardanelles to Asia Minor. From there, they reached Greater Armenia (for more information see Estarjian 1951: 49; Al-Lahibi 2013: 17; Rasull 2001: 46).

Historian Moses Khurinatsi, author of *History of the Armenians from the Beginning to the End of the Fifth Century AD*, said that the first Armenian kingdom was founded by the father of the Armenians, 'Hayek', in 2107 BC, and that kingdom was called the Heikanese state, or the Heikazan state – the country of Beni Hayek – meaning the state of the children of Hayek. It was also known as 'Hay Stan', meaning the state of the Armenians. Hayek laid the initial foundations of the Armenian community, taking the Babylonian laws known as the Code of Hammurabi as the basis for governance (Khurinatsi 1999: 36–39).

The Republic of Armenia, as it has been known since independence in 1991, is located in south-west Asia and its capital is Yerevan. To the west it is bordered by Turkey, and to the north by Georgia. Armenia is separated from the Caspian Sea by Azerbaijan from the east. As for the south, it is bordered by Iran. The total size of Armenia is 29,734 km² (El-Modawar 1982: 68–81). The country is penetrated by many mountain chains of a dormant volcanic nature, the most notable peaks being the Great Mountain of Ararat, which is also called Mountain of Fire (at 5,205 metres), and small Ararat (at 3,914 metres) (*ibid.*). Many big and medium-sized rivers and streams originate in Armenia as a result of floods that come down from the mountains, the 1,000-metre Aras River being an important one. Armenia also has many lakes, including Van, Sivan, Sifat, and Urmia (*ibid.*).

3.1 International recognition

International recognition of Armenia as a nation state went through three phases:

1. The phase of international recognition necessary to achieve the policies and changes that the Ottoman Emperor Abd El Hamid promised the Armenians in Armenian states as part of the Ottoman Empire in March 1895, including the return of migrated and exiled Armenians to their countries, compensating them for their losses and caring for Armenian affairs in the Armenian states of Turkey (El-Modawar 1982: 445–449). This phase lasted from 1836 to 1878 when the treaties of San Stefano and Berlin were signed.
2. International recognition of the Armenian Republic as an **independent country**. This second phase started in 1908 under the overarching Ottoman Constitution declaration and lasted until 1920 when the Armenian Republic fell.
3. The third phase started with the **Lausanne Treaty**² in 1922 and is ongoing. The state of Armenia was created under this treaty, but it was only to last for 100 years, after which time Turkey could reclaim its previous territories (El-Modawar 1982: 449–450). The international community still needs to reach a solution on this.

Iraq is one of the countries bordering Armenia to the south. The relationship between what is now considered Iraq and Armenia is an ancient one, with the first Armenian communities in northern Mesopotamia formed during the rule of the Armenian Ardashis Kingdom 189 BC (Azazian 2000: 93). Additionally, when great famines occurred in Asia Minor, in the years 1079–1080 AD, thousands of Armenians migrated and settled in Mesopotamia and northern Syria (*ibid.*). The second migration began in March 1917 AD, when Britain occupied Baghdad and many Armenians were forced to flee from Turkey to Iran and Iraq because of ethnic cleansing (*ibid.*). Table 2 illustrates the numbers of Armenians as they were spread throughout the world in 1970, as a result of these forced migrations.

² The Lausanne Treaty was signed on 17 October 1922, when England, France, and Italy called the Lausanne conference with Russia, the United States of America (USA), Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Turkey.

Table 1: Armenian population of Iraq, 1924

شخص Persons	عائلة / Households	المناطق والمخيمات،	Areas and camps	
1,995	628	مخيمات نر هومر	Nerhomer camps	1
427	152	البصرة	Basra	2
2,222	647	مخيم كيلان في بغداد	Kilan camp in Baghdad	3
111	33	منطقة هنايةت في بغداد	Hanayit district in Baghdad	4
445	134	بغداد	Baghdad	5
115	99	القرى المجاورة في بغداد	Nearby villages in Baghdad	6
640	191	الموصل	Mosul	7
1,584	173	منطقة جاروخ في الموصل	Jarukh district in Mosul	8

Source: Authors' own. Created using data from 1924 census (Azazian 2000: 105).

Table 2: Armenian population worldwide, 1970

Soviet Republic of Armenia	2,600,000
Soviet Union	1,400,000
Lebanon	300,000
USA	350,000
Canada	250,000
France	350,000
Turkey	200,000
Syria	150,000
Iraq	50,000
Egypt	50,000
India, Iran, Polonia, Balkans, Latin America and western Europe	500,000

Source: El-Modawar 1982: 591–592.

As a result of the 1917 exodus from what is now Turkey, in 1918 AD, refugee camps in the town of Bacuba (Baqubah) in Iraq housed between 5,000 and 6,000 Armenian and Assyrian refugees. Of these, 1,500 were Armenians who had been exiled from Van in East Anatolia by the Ottomans. During this period, the number of Armenians in Mosul reached 8,000, and in 1924 AD, the Armenian Orthodox Diocese in Iraq organised a census on the distribution of Armenians in Iraq. At that time there were 1,987 Armenian families, consisting of 6,539 individuals in Mosul (Azazian 2000: 93–105).

One interviewee, whose father was among the first to flee from Dehe in south-east Turkey to Iraq, said:

After the Armenians fled to Iraq, the first city they entered was the Zakho district of the Duhok governorate. At that time, Agha Hazem Bey Shamdeen Agha [a prominent leader in Zakho] received them and provided them with assistance. He

gave the Kistah area [in Zakho] to the Armenians to live in, and he gave them a plot of land to build their own church and helped them build it. He built a private school for them to learn the Armenian language, and the area and school were named after the Armenians, and the church was called the Church of the Virgin Mary. After that, some of them migrated to Mosul, Kirkuk, and Basra.

(Interview with Maryam Seban Merian, born 1 July 1933)

With the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the number of Armenians in Iraq was estimated at between 20,000 and 25,000, distributed throughout Iraqi cities, while the number of Armenians in Kurdistan was estimated at 2,000 (Ogholo 2010: 78–79). It should be noted that these figures are estimates as there was no accurate census of Armenians in Iraq after 1977. The 1977 census is the most recent documentation that focuses on the religious and ethnic distribution of the inhabitants of Iraq's governorates. Censuses conducted after 1977 categorised Armenians as Christian Iraqis because only three categories were recognised: Kurds, Arabs, and Christians, in all their different ethnic and religious denominations (Al-Hashemi 2016: 50–51).

Table 3: Armenian population of Iraq, 1977

Governorate	Number of Armenians	Governorate	Number of Armenians	Governorate	Number of Armenians
Baghdad	9,554	Erbil	147	Babel	19
Basrah	1,774	Diyala	117	Al-Qādisiyyah	Missing
Duhok	878	Nineveh	75	Salah el Din	Missing
Kirkuk	578	Slinaya	52	Wasit	Missing
Al Anbar	734	Misan	48	Najaf	Missing
Karbala	Missing	Al Muthanna	Missing	Dhi Qar	Missing

Source: Authors' own. Created using data from 1977 census (Al-Hashemi 2016: 73).

3.2 Armenian culture

Within the Armenian community, and especially among the Armenian diaspora, Armenian culture is strongly maintained through the churches. This is because the education system is closely linked to the religious authority, with the religious authority organising and supporting the educational system. Moreover, charity and humanitarian work are also connected to the church. Connections within the Armenian community are also maintained in Iraq through sports clubs, as these are often established on an ethno-religious community or group basis.

Iraqi Armenians have a particularly long history of establishing social, cultural, and sports associations. In an interview with the *Al Mada* newspaper, Archbishop Dr. Avak Isadorian (n.d.) said:

The first Armenian charity association was established in Iraq in 1911 and was reopened in 1959. The juvenile association was established in 1926. Also, the Armenian choir for folkloric songs was established in 1954. In addition, the first Armenian sports club was established in 1949 and the Cultural Association for Armenian Women was established in 1961. These clubs and associations have held cultural, social evenings and also sports festivals.

He added (*ibid.*):

Many Armenian newspapers were issued in Baghdad. For example, in 1890 a printed scholastic newspaper, called Bong, was issued for two years. In 1924 Degla newspaper issued a number of volumes and then stopped. Also, a weekly newspaper called Struggle of Existence was issued from 1948–54 and from 1957–58. In addition, the United Private Armenian School based in Baghdad published a newspaper called The Spark and an annual book called Mashdots. These newspapers and media outlets created a sense of Armenian community among those who resided in Baghdad and who could read the Armenian language; however, this may not have extended to those in other regions or parts of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Isadorian also mentioned a number of historic Armenian figures (*ibid.*):

The Iraqi Armenians are proud to have Armenian people who served Iraq and have been influential in the past and present. Iraqi history mentioned two kings who are Armenian, namely King Arakha bin Khaldita (Nebuchadnezzar IV) who led Babel revolution in 521 BC against the Achaemenid King Darius (Darius I), and Badr al-Din Lu'lu', the ruler of Mosul who was known as Ali Ben Yahia the Armenian. He was known in the Arab history.

Furthermore, he mentioned Armenian characters in the fields of art and photography: 'As for the field of photography, cinematographer Khajik Misak Kevorkian was a pioneer in Iraq and the Arab world.' Isadorian named Armenian characters that have contributed to Iraqi culture (*ibid.*):

In literature, Mr Yacoub Sarkis, historian and archiver of Baghdad history, born in 1975 [and] who wrote about (Iraqi Issues); Mr Abd El Messieh El Wazir, who came to Iraq with King Faisal, the first King of Iraq, and [who] was hired as a translator of the Ministry of Defense in Iraq in February 1921, then promoted to be the director of the translation department in that ministry in August 1933. He was full of knowledge, and he edited the military dictionary and other books. In the field of parenting, there was Mr Mahran Saphgian, who gave lectures in French in 1908 in El Gafaria school.

In this way, as well as creating and maintaining their Armenian culture, the Armenian community in Iraq also contributed to Iraqi culture through literature and the arts.

3.3 The Armenian language

Language is the identity, history, and civilisation of every nation, and it is a source of pride (Tawab 1996: 166). The decline of any language means the decline of that nation's civilisation and its demise. Adherence to linguistic heritage is the basic factor on which the culture of a nation or people is built, and it must be preserved in speech and writing (*ibid.*). As the Armenian subgroup lived in a society in which there was a mixture of languages, including Arabic and Kurdish, and because of that mixing and the coexistence of different ethno-religious groups, Armenians learned the language of the people they lived among. This meant that their language was at risk of being lost among the population of KRI. However, in other Iraqi governorates (that is, except for KRI), Armenians would speak their own language in their homes and in churches, and learn it at their own schools, such as in Baghdad, Zakho, and Abzarouk, where they were concentrated.

Historically, the Armenian language was predominantly spoken rather than written (Al-Hashemi 2016: 63). Armenia was the first state in the world to convert to Christianity, as it is believed that two disciples migrated to Armenia, namely Taddaeus and Bartholomew (El-Modawar 1982: 297). However, after declaring Christianity as the formal religion of the Armenian government in 301 AD, Armenians started to think about having an independent alphabet (*ibid.*). From the fourth century to the beginning of the ninth century, church rituals, songs, and books were written in Persian, Syriac or Greek letters, depending on the countries that subdued the different Armenian regions. For example, the Persians occupied east Armenia and the Byzantine state occupied west Armenia based on the division of 387 AD (*ibid.*).

The Armenian language traces its origins to Aramaic and according to Father Narek, Pastor of the Armenian Orthodox Church in Baghdad, ‘the letters, they were created in 403 AD by Father Masrob Mashtout. He conducted research in Mesopotamia and the Nile Valley to find the alphabet other than vowels’ (Al-Hashemi 2016: 64). As for the vowels, the Armenians believe that ‘God is the one who had written it with His hand. The Armenian language is considered an independent branch of the Indo-European language families. It was formed as a language specific to the Armenian ethnicity after its separation from the Indo-European languages 5,000 BC’ (*ibid.*). After that, the Armenian language became a written language, developed with accurate expressions, terminology, and rules of grammar. However, it does not distinguish the masculine from the feminine (El-Modawar 1982: 296).

Armenians celebrate 15 October every year as the anniversary of the Armenian alphabet and ‘translator’s day’. The day is also celebrated in schools, as Armenians consider school to be the most important institution for socialising, feeding, and continuing cultural identity for future generations (Al-Hashemi 2016: 65).

Figure 1: The Armenian alphabet

Աա	Բբ	Գգ	Դդ	Եե	Զզ	Էե	Ըը	Թթ	Ժժ
a	b	g	d	je	z	e	ë	t'	ž
Իի	Լլ	Խխ	Ծծ	Կկ	Հհ	Ձձ	Ղղ	Ճճ	Մմ
i	l	x	ts	k	h	dz	ř	tš	m
Յյ	Նն	Շշ	Ոո	Չչ	Պպ	ՋՋ	Ռռ	Սս	Վվ
j	n	š	vo	tš'	p	dž	r	s	v
Տտ	Րր	Ցց	Խլ	Փփ	Բբ	Օո	Ֆֆ		
t	r'	ts'	w	p'	k'	o	f		

Source: มอญโกเสี่ย๔๔ [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

The Armenian language is divided into three parts:

1. **Ancient classic Armenian.** This was spoken between the fifth and eleventh centuries. It had a great social and religious status, and was practiced through religious literary rituals and historical writings (El-Modawar 1980: 66). It is one of the languages that is still alive and circulates among Armenians in Armenia and in Iraq. It has sub-dialects in modern Armenian. As a result, the Armenian language has roots that go back more than 1,500 years (Ketani 2002: 244).
2. **Middle Armenian.** This was spoken between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries.
3. **Modern Armenian.** This has been spoken since the twelfth century to the present day, and is divided into two branches, each with its own literature featuring slight differences in grammar and morphology (Al-Hashemi 2016: 65). This was also mentioned by Dr Nishan Surin Moses, one of the teaching staff at the University of Duhok, and Mr Wartkes Moses, the former Director of Education in Duhok governorate. The two branches are:
 - Eastern Armenian, spoken by Armenians in Armenia and Iran.
 - Western Armenian, spoken by Armenians in the diaspora.

3.4 The effect of Arabic and Kurdish on the language of the Armenian ethno-religious group

Iraqi society consists of several nationalities and ethnicities, including Arabs, Kurds, Chaldeans, Assyrians, and Armenians. Each group has its own language, and that language differs from one region to another in ways known as dialects.

Each language is influenced in terms of vocabulary by another. The Armenian language is influenced by Arabic, Kurdish, Chaldean, Assyrian, and vice versa. This phenomenon is called 'linguistic borrowing'. This is one of the means by which the world's languages have developed and it is as a result of the great impact of cultural and civil relations in society. Language is affected by friction resulting from daily and commercial transactions or interactions among members of a single community:

This contact between languages is a historical necessity, and this friction leads to their overlapping, whether by little or by a lot. As a result, very few languages are isolated from all external friction and influence. So linguistic purity is very rarely achieved. This means that linguistic borrowing often plays an important role in linguistic development, and it has far-reaching consequences, to an extent that

some scholars say that there is no developed language that has not mixed with others.

(Tawab 1996: 171)

Linguists believe that in the Middle Ages, about 700 words of Arabic origin entered the Armenian language as a result of friction between two peoples: Armenians and Arabs. These words included those in the fields of religion, medicine, chemistry, and astronomy, among others (Marefa n.d.). There are also Arabic words in the Armenian language that are pronounced similarly, such as 'shop, box, mukrat, general, court, sickle, land, throne, Taj (a crier), lamp and others' (Zahreddine 1988: 27). There are also common words between Armenian and Kurdish – for example, *tak*, meaning locality, and *bazish*, meaning doctor, as well as many others. This stems from the Kurdish and Armenian languages originating from the same Indo-European family. Table 4 shows some of the vocabulary that matches its meaning and pronunciation with the Arabic and Kurdish languages.

Armenians in KRI live in a mixed society of several nationalities, so it is not surprising that they borrow vocabulary from the languages around them, with many of them speaking Kurdish. As Mullah Mahmoud Al-Bayazidi³ said:

The Armenians in Kurdistan are similar to Kurds in all affairs, and there is no difference between them, most of them speak the Kurdish language, and their women and children speak Kurdish only and do not know any other languages, and their norms, customs and traditions are the same as the norms, customs and traditions of the Kurds, then the Kurds and Armenians become kriv⁴ 'blood brothers' and they live together in peace and do not oppress each other.

(Cited in Coley 2017: 282)

³ Mullah Mahmoud Al-Bayazidi (1797–1863 AD) was a Kurdish philosopher. He was born in Bayazid, Turkey, and is the founder of Kurdish prose. Bayazid is a city that is home to many Kurdish scholars and poets.

⁴ A '*kriv*' means when two families of different religions become close to each other or become one family in blood, by baptising the new male baby of one family with another.

Table 4: Some common words in Armenian, Kurdish and Arabic

The word in Kurdish	The word in Arabic	Pronunciation in Armenian	Writing in Armenian	Meaning in English
حلال	حلال	حلال	Հալալ	Halal
حرام	حرام	حرام	Հարամ	Haram
ژحر	سم	ژحر	Ժահրու	Poison
باغ	حديقة	باغ	Բաղ	Garden
پزشک	طبيب	پزشک	Բժիշկ	Doctor
تہر مکتہ	ممثل	تہر مکتہ	Տարակտր	Character
خیر	خير	خیر	Խեր	Good
ساخ	حي	ساخ	Սախ	Healthy
پارہ	نقود	پارہ	Պարա	Money
شہکر	سكر	شہکر	Շագար	Sugar
اغ / خوی	تراب / ملح	اغ / خوی	Աղ	Dirt/Salt
یار	حبيب	یار	Յար	Lover
حيوان	حيوان	کيانه وه ر	Հայուան	Animal
گنژ	جوز	گنژ	Գիժ	Crazy
کھيڤ	فرح	کھيڤ	Կայֆ	Nut
داهول	طبل	داهول	Դահուլ	Drum
زرنا	مزمار	زرنا	Չրնա	Flute
خيار	خيار	خيار	Խյար	Cucumber
شہریت	شربت	شہریت	Շարբատ	Syrup
بنير	جبين	بنير	Բանիր	Cheese
ژاژى	جاجيك	ژاژى	Շաշի	Cheese mixed with herbs
گلاس	كلاس	گلاس	Գլաս	Class
سینی	صينية	سینی	Սենի	Plate
نامان	مواعين	نامان	Աման	Utensils
دكان	حانوت	حانوت	Խանութ	Shop
منجل	منجل	منجل	Մանգաղ	Sickle
تاج	تاج	تاج	Թագ	Crown
		لامب	Լամպ	Lamp

Source: Authors own. Created using data from Young Heritage Collectors.

The official languages of Iraq are Arabic and Kurdish, as recognised by the Iraqi Constitution (Constitute 2005: Article 4:1). It also recognises the rights of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, including Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian. A decree was issued by the Parliament of the KRI on 29 October 2009, and approved by the former President of KRI Massoud Barzani, stipulating that ethno-religious languages in the region are official and spoken languages. Within the Constitution of Iraqi Kurdistan, Article 7(1) indicates that Kurdish and Arabic are considered the official languages of KRI, while Article

7(4) refers to considering the languages of other peoples, such as Turkmen and Syrians. The Armenian language is not specifically mentioned (Unrepresented Nations & Peoples Organization 2004), although the use of the Armenian language did grow following this decree as people began to speak their language outside of their homes, in schools, centres, etc. For example, in KRI, in Armenian schools, they study both Kurdish and Armenian languages.

As stated, Arabic was the formal language in Iraq under Saddam Hussein's regime. During this period, minorities in Iraq did not have their own language programmes on radio or television (TV). Even the Kurds did not have their own media channels and there was only one Kurdish school in Duhok. Smaller minorities, such as Christians (including Armenians), were only allowed to learn and use their languages in churches. After 1991 and the popular uprising in Kurdistan, which led to the establishment of the Kurdistan regional government, all minorities were allowed to open their own schools and teach all subjects in their own languages. The Syriac school in Duhok is a good example of this.

Armenians in central and southern Iraq found that they preserved their language and used it in their religious rituals in churches and at home. They were keen to speak their Armenian language to preserve it for future generations; they taught reading and writing in Armenian in churches, and had private schools in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk, as Azazian noted:

The oldest Armenian school is the Garnkaforats school in Baghdad founded in 1852 AD, and the school of Zablian for girls, which was established in 1901 AD. The 'Vartanants' school was also established in Basra in 1910 AD, and today there are five schools in Iraqi provinces in which Armenians live, namely Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk [an Iraqi Kurdish city, the subject of a dispute between KRI and Iraq's central government] and Zakho.

(Azazian 2000: 103)

As Armenians in Iraqi provinces had their own schools, it is not surprising that they have preserved their language (*ibid.*).

Al-Hashemi found that Armenians in areas outside KRI spoke their own language in the areas they lived in before the displacement of 1915–17: 'The Armenians wherever they were found used to teach their children their mother tongue (Armenian). Among them are

the Armenians of Iraq' (Al-Hashemi 2016: 67). On the other hand, in KRI there is only one school, in Zakho, for Armenians to learn their language, and many Armenians in KRI chose not to speak Armenian in their homes because of the persecution they have faced and because they used to speak Kurdish in the areas they lived in before arriving in KRI from Turkish Kurdistan.

The co-author of this paper, Father Masis, Pastor of the Armenian Church in Duhok, said that he and his wife have worked to open courses to teach the Armenian language since 2010. They used to divide participants into groups – children, adults, and according to education levels – so they could develop appropriate programmes. As a result, two groups were formed: a beginner level, for those who did not know the Armenian language at all; and a higher level, for those who knew how to speak a little. These courses continue to this day and people have become increasingly keen to learn their language (interview with Father Masis, 22 August 2020).

In the four interviews with Father Masis, Artiks, Professor Nishan and Hosib Varant Manuel, they explained where their families lived before migration, the places where they used their language, and the places where their language was not used. In these interviews, they each concluded the same thing: the Armenians who lived in the Van region in eastern Turkey and the surrounding areas – the former homeland of the Armenians – used to speak the Armenian language in all areas of their lives. They had schools and churches where mass was held in their mother tongue, and when they were forced to leave for Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and other countries, they preserved their language, using it and speaking it among themselves. They also built private schools to help preserve their language. For example, in Iraq, in the village of Havresk, Duhok (as we mentioned earlier), they study and use their language among themselves.

This is different from the Armenians who lived in the Kurdish regions in the south-east before their displacement. As a result of their proximity to the Kurds, they spoke the Kurdish language and many did not know the Armenian language. These communities have migrated to the northern regions of Iraq and speak Kurdish. They do not know Armenian but for a few words they have learned while visiting Armenia. This was mentioned by Mr Wartkes, Father Masis and Professor Nishan.

After the displacement of Armenians from Turkey to northern Iraq, Kurdistan, and, in particular, Zakho district (as it was the first city that Armenians entered in Iraq), Armenians established a school in Zakho called the Armenian school. This was built with the support of Shamidan Aga, a rich person in Zakho in the 1920s. He welcomed the Armenians and gave them a place called Kissatta to live. After nationalisation in 1972, private schools for Armenians were closed down throughout Iraq and incorporated into government schools. As a result, according to the four interviewees, language education could then only be carried out by teachers in churches.

The following is an excerpt from an interview conducted by a heritage collector, Hosib Varant Manuel, with Mr Bashir Hagop on 28 March 2021:

The spread was towards Arab countries such as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, but the emigration to Syria and Iraq was more than in Lebanon and the rest of the countries. The Armenians who migrated to Syria or Lebanon used to speak Armenian even in their hometown and it was a great proof of their mastery of the Armenian language by virtue of being Armenian people. And considering the Armenian language as the mother tongue of all of us Armenians, and even for people who did not always speak Armenian, Armenian was considered their mother tongue. And because of the existence of schools at the time and the Armenian language was the language in which they spoke, whether at home or elsewhere, and there were no other languages they spoke. Even after their emigration, there were schools in those areas, and except for schools as well, as we said, they spoke Armenian because it was their vernacular language. So we see that their mastery of the Armenian language was great because, as we said, the large number of schools and the abundance of speaking the language in all the places where they are.

But we who emigrated to Iraq, or rather, our ancestors who emigrated after the massacre, after the First World War in 1914 to Zakho, did not speak the Armenian language, but rather spoke Kurdish, because our surroundings and the area in which we lived are like the district of Sharnkh and because the sub-districts that belong to it were the majority of the Kurdish nationalism, and the majority of the people who lived in it were from the Kurdish majority. So the spoken language in it was the Kurdish language. So, we used to also speak the Kurdish language, and even after our emigration, the language we spoke was Kurdish because, as I said,

our ancestors spoke Kurdish and did not learn Armenian either in schools or elsewhere, and even after the migration when we came in 1923, despite the building of a church for us, we continued to speak in Kurdish, for the reasons already given... Only those who lived in the village of Havresk were speaking Armenian because they were displaced from the city of Van in Turkey and originally they spoke Armenian and had a school, so they kept it and continued to speak it, even after their migration.

One of the most important motivations currently for the younger generation to learn the language is that the Armenian state is granting citizenship to Armenian citizens in Iraq. This is to encourage young people to visit Armenia, know its history and language, and to be connected to their mother country. This was clear after finding some Armenian young people in Kurdistan who married Armenian women while studying in Armenia. Armenia has succeeded in building good relations with Iraq. One heritage collector mentioned that Armenia is his mother country. These young people want to write historic stories about Armenia. Al-Hashemi (2016: 67) mentioned that Armenia provides small donations to Armenian churches and cultural clubs that are to be used to learn the Armenian language.

3.5 Factors that led to a lack of Armenian language use in the Kurdish regions

During phone interviews with 19 Armenian participants, including Manoush Morris, a former member of the governorate council of Duhok, and Wartkes Moses, on 18 March 2021, we discussed the reluctance among the Armenian community to speak their native language and to use the language of the society in which they live. These interviews found that:

1. The language Armenians spoke in their original homeland, south-east of Turkey, was Kurdish. Having lived in Kurdish areas where Kurdish was the dominant language, those from this part of the country had not had the same opportunities to learn and speak the Armenian language (19/40 interviews, including Manoush and Arif).
2. Fear of persecution among the Armenian community has been a driving force in the loss of their language in these areas. As a result of the ethnic cleansing and oppression they faced at the hands of the Turkish government, they felt the need to integrate into their new societies and to learn their languages. However, this is changing, as Father Masis explained: 'Now they are free to speak, learn or teach

their own language, and the obsession with fear no longer exists' (interview, 10 May 2021).

3. As Armenian was an unofficial language in the countries where Armenians lived (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and elsewhere), they did not need to speak or use it in formal writing. (Even in their private schools, they studied only two lessons to learn the language, and to learn the teachings of Christianity in the Armenian language.)
4. Religious ceremonies were sometimes held in Arabic or Kurdish. (Mass was conducted in the Armenian language and simultaneously interpreted into Kurdish because the language of the region is Kurdish and not Armenian. This made the mass accessible while at the same time cherishing the Armenian language and creating a sense of belonging or connection to Armenia) (interview with Father Masis, 10 May 2021). However, it may also have decreased the imperative for those speaking Arabic and Kurdish as their main languages to study the Armenian language.
5. There was a lack of Armenian churches in the former Kurdistan region. There was only one church in Zakho, Duhok governorate, as Armenians were concentrated in this area, while in Duhok there was no Armenian church until 2008. As a result, Armenians attended mass and other religious events with the Chaldeans and Assyrians, which exposed them more to Syriac than Armenian languages. Now, the number of Armenian churches in KRI and Iraq has increased to 16: six are located in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad; three are in Mosul; two in Basra; two in Zakho; one in Kirkuk; one in Duhok governorate; and one in Bashiqa, affiliated to Mosul. Gregor church is the oldest Armenian church in Baghdad. It was built in 1639 during the Ottoman rule at the request of the Armenian military leaders after registering Armenian as a Christian sect (Al-Hashemi 2016: 75–76).
6. The marriage of Armenians to non-Armenian Christians encouraged them to learn the language of their new families and vice versa. Although in previous decades the marriage of Armenians to non-Armenians was not desirable and not permitted by families, this has slowly changed, and now, marriage between Armenians and Chaldeans and Assyrians is on the increase. This has been a result of mixing within the Catholic church and because Armenians did not have a church in Duhok until recently. The migration of many Christian young people to European countries has also reduced young people's opportunities to marry their Armenian peers.

7. There is a lack of mass media in the Armenian language (newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV channels). As mentioned, in Iraq it was not possible for any ethno-religious communities to have radio and TV channels under the Saddam Hussein regime. Iraqi TV channels broadcast using Arabic, with the exception of a one-hour programme broadcast in Kurdish. It is worth mentioning that in Iraq, until now, these ethno-religious groups have had no radio or TV channels available to them; however social media has helped these communities to learn their languages, letters, writing, and pronunciation. Moreover, the Armenian satellite channels have encouraged Armenians to visit their country and learn about its culture and language. On the Armenian church page on Facebook, those posting were writing in the Armenian language and translating their posts into Arabic.⁵
8. There is a tendency to prioritise other languages. The era of globalisation has negatively affected the preservation of the Armenian language, as young people today want to learn English as the dominant international language, and this has made them less likely to study their mother tongue.
9. There is a lack of awareness among the younger generation of the importance of their language, and that preserving it is a means of sustaining their culture and heritage.

4 Results

4.1 The Armenian language from the viewpoint of our study sample (young people)

The study electronically distributed a questionnaire consisting of 10 questions to 40 young people aged between 20 and 40 years from the Armenian ethno-linguistic group, to find out the extent to which they speak and learn the Armenian language, and the reasons behind the revival of the Armenian language in KRI (as many of the older generation in KRI do not know the Armenian language). Thirty-four young people, representing 85 per cent of the sample, completed the questionnaire, with six failing to respond.

⁵ See [Nerseschurch Armrnian Dohuk Facebook page](#).

The results of the questionnaire were as follows:

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
1.	Can you speak the Armenian language?	61.8	5.9	32.4

Question 1: Can you speak the Armenian language? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 21 answering 'yes' (61.8 per cent), 2 answering 'no' (5.9 per cent), and 11 answering 'a little' (32.4 per cent). These answers indicate that a majority of respondents can speak the Armenian language.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
2.	Can you write in the Armenian language?	55.9	20.6	23.5

Question 2: Can you write in the Armenian language? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 19 answering 'yes' (55.9 per cent), 7 answering 'no' (20.6 per cent), and 8 answering 'a little' (23.5 per cent).

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
3.	How much do you use your 'Armenian' mother tongue?	41.2	14.7	44.1

Question 3: How much do you use your 'Armenian' mother tongue? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 14 answering 'a lot' (41.2 per cent), 15 answering 'a little' (44.1 per cent), and 5 answering 'I do not use it' (14.7 per cent). Participants' responses indicate that there are similar proportions of young people who use and do not use their Armenian mother tongue, while those who do not use it (or only very little) are relatively few. As a result, it is possible to see that the Armenian language is still in common use among the younger generation.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
4.	Do you know the Armenian letters?	85.3	8.8	5.9

Question 4: Do you know the Armenian letters? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 29 answering 'yes' (85.3 per cent), 3 answering 'no' (8.8 per cent), and 2 answering 'a little' (5.9 per cent). The responses indicate that a large proportion of respondents know the Armenian letters, while relatively few either do not know them or know them only a little.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
5.	Do you know how to read Armenian?	61.8	14.7	23.5

Question 5: Do you know how to read in Armenian? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 21 answering 'yes' (61.8 per cent), 5 answering 'no' (14.7 per cent), and 8 answering 'a little' (23.5 per cent). The responses indicate that many more young people know how to read the Armenian language while comparatively few do not.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
6.	Do you think there is no need to learn the mother tongue to read and write because it is not used in official institutions?	0	88.2	11.8

Question 6: Do you think there is no need to learn the mother tongue to read and write because it is not used in official institutions? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 30 answering 'no' (88.2 per cent), 4 answering 'perhaps' (11.8 per cent), while none answered 'yes'. The responses indicate that participants want to learn their mother tongue. This offers evidence of the possibility of preserving the language.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Maybe (%)
7.	Do you prefer to learn the Kurdish language instead of Armenian, as it is the official language in the region?	5.9	70.6	23.5

Question 7: Do you prefer to learn the Kurdish language instead of Armenian, as it is the official language in the region? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 2 answering 'yes' (5.9 per cent), 24 answering 'no' (70.6 per cent), and 8 answering 'maybe' (23.5 per cent). The responses indicate that a large majority of participants prefer to learn the Armenian language. This offers evidence of the possibility of preserving the language.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Maybe (%)
8.	Do you prefer to learn the English language instead of Armenian, being an international language?	5.9	70.6	23.5

Question 8: Do you prefer to learn the English language instead of Armenian, being an international language? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 2 answering 'yes' (5.9 per cent), 24 answering 'no' (70.6 per cent), and 8 answering 'maybe' (23.5 per cent). The responses indicate that participants prefer learning their own language and do not prefer to learn English – which is the same percentage as in Question 7. This offers evidence of the possibility of preserving the language.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
9.	Can Armenians in Iraq still preserve their language?	91.2	0	8.8

Question 9: Can Armenians in Iraq still preserve their language? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 31 answering 'yes' (91.2 per cent), 3 answering 'perhaps' (8.8 per cent), and none answering 'no'. The responses indicate that participants have the potential to preserve their language.

Part	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)	Perhaps, a little (%)
10.	Is it important for you to learn the Armenian language in speech and writing?	97.1	0	2.9

Question 10: Is it important for you to learn the Armenian language in speech and writing? Thirty-four participants responded to this question, with 33 answering 'yes' (97.1 per cent), 1 answering 'Perhaps, a little' (2.9 per cent), and none answering 'no'. The responses indicate that participants prefer learning their language verbally and in writing.

4.2 Indication of sharpness, relative weight and arrangement

Table 5: Indication and sharpness, relative weight and arrangement

Questions		Sharpness	Relative weight	Arrangement
1	Can you speak Armenian?	2.29	76.33	4
2	Could you write in Armenian?	2.32	77.45	6
3	How much do you use your native 'Armenian' language?	2.26	75.33	7
4	Do you know the Armenian letters?	2.79	93.13	3
5	Do you know reading in Armenian?	2.38	79.41	5
6	Do you think that there is no need to learn the mother tongue to read and write because it is not used in official institutions?	1.88	62.66	8
7	Do you prefer learning the Kurdish language instead of Armenian, being the official language in the region?	1.82	60.66	9
8	Do you prefer learning the English language instead of Armenian, being an international language?	1.82	60.66	9
9	Can Armenians in Iraq still preserve their language?	2.76	92.15	2
10	Is it important for you to learn the Armenian language in writing and speaking?	2.91	97.05	1
	Simple moving average (SMA)	2.32	77.4	

Source: Authors' own.

5 Findings

Through this survey we found that the younger generation of Armenians in KRI have begun to learn their language. This is evident through the participants' answers to the online questionnaire and the analysis of the data. It was found that the younger generation is keen to preserve its native language, and younger people speak it among themselves; 61.8 per cent of the 34 participants could already speak some Armenian, and 97.1 per cent said it was important to them to learn their language. This interest has arisen in part because there is no longer fear of persecution and people feel a sense of freedom to speak their language outside of the home. Also, the churches are opening their doors and making the language more accessible by offering Armenian language classes to the community.

5.1 Recommendations on how to preserve the Armenian language

- Encourage families to speak the Armenian language at home and support the church to offer courses in Armenian, helping young people to connect to their culture and maintain the language.
- Bring the language back into use in Armenian society by employing it in all aspects of life, starting at home and in church.
- Establish special centres to teach the Armenian language and letters through the support of the Kurdistan regional government and civil society organisations.
- Open language courses, in churches and other places of worship, for children, young people and older people.
- Create pride in the language with the support of those who are in a position of responsibility (for example, priests and monks could conduct mass in the Armenian language). Also, through an interest in teaching legislative sciences such as religion and church laws using the Armenian letters and language.
- Use social media and mass media to spread and teach the Armenian language.
- Publish bulletins and periodicals in the Armenian language, with the support of local communities and places of worship.
- Encourage young people to read books and magazines written in the Armenian language by making such materials available in libraries.
- Encourage parents to use their Armenian mother tongue language at home, as this is where children first learn to speak and understand their languages.
- Educate young people and encourage their role in preserving their mother tongue by holding seminars, festivals and competitions, and reward them for preserving their language by writing in the Armenian language in their correspondence with each other.
- Establish formal education centres for the teaching and study of the Armenian language. For example, an Armenian language department should be established in the college of languages in Iraq and KRI with the support of the Armenian consulate in Erbil, preparing a specialised teaching cadre to teach all aspects of the Armenian language (including language, literature and Armenian history across generations, as well as other subjects).

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- Phone call with Arif Wartkes Moses 18 March 2021.
- Sixteen young Armenian heritage collectors 18 March 2021.
- The vocabulary was compiled from a group of collectors of Armenian heritage, most notably Irvan Ishkhan Arshak.



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