

## HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF KURDISH LANGUAGE DEMANDS IN TURKEY

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the evolution of Kurdish language demands including education, publicity, and publishing in Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Modern Turkish Republic. It is claimed that although the content, scope, way of expression, and discourse of the demands have changed in time, the demand itself has remained the same and has preserved its existence in the historical process. In this context, the study begins with the efforts of building a Kurdish identity, which was influenced by other nationalisms that emerged during the last period of the Ottoman Empire, to preserve and shape its own existence through language and education; It continues with an effort to adapt itself according to the changing political, economic and social conditions in modern Turkey, and it is concluded with a concrete demand and transformation into a social movement for the first time in the early 2000s. In this study, besides the newspapers and magazines of the period, the books and articles written on this subject were examined, with a historical-chronological and descriptive method.

**Keywords:** Kurdish, Language demands, Identity, Nation Building, Language Policy.

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## Türkiye’de Kürtçe Dil Taleplerinin Tarihsel Gelişimi

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmada eğitimde, kamusal alanda ve yayıncılık faaliyetlerinde Kürtçenin kullanımına yönelik dilsel taleplerin Türkiye’de Osmanlı’dan Cumhuriyet’e gelişimi incelenmektedir. Taleplerin içeriği, kapsamı, ifade biçimi ve söylemi değişse de talebin kendisinin değişmeden kaldığı ve tarihsel süreç içerisinde varlığını koruduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bu kapsamda çalışma Osmanlı Devleti’nin son dönemlerinde başlayan etnik bilincin gelişimi ve uluslaşmaya dönüşümü sürecinde ortaya çıkan diğer milliyetçiliklerden etkilenen Kürt kimliğinin kendi varlığını dil ve eğitim üzerinden muhafaza ve inşa etmeye çalışmasıyla başlamakta; modern Türkiye’de değişen siyasi, ekonomik ve toplumsal koşullara göre kendini uyarılma çabası ile devam etmekte 2000’lerin başında ilk defa somut bir talep ve toplumsal harekete dönüşmesiyle sonuçlandırılmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, dönemin gazete ve dergilerinin yanı sıra bu konuyla ilgili yazılmış kitap ve makaleler incelenmiş, betimleyici bir yöntemle tarihsel-kronolojik ve yorumlayıcı bir anlatım tercih edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kürtçe, Dilsel talepler, Kimlik, Ulus inşası, Dil Politikası.

### Geşedana Dîrokî ya Daxwazên Zimanî yên Kurdî

#### KURTE

Di vê xebatê de geşedana daxwazên zimanê yên ji bo bikaranîna Kurdî li qadên wekî perwerde, qada civakî û weşangerî yên ji serdema Osmanî û Komarê têne vekolîn. Naveroka daxwazan, qewareya wan, awayê îfadekirina wan û vegotina wan biguhere jî tê angaştîkirin ku daxwaz bi xwe her wekî xwe maye û di pêvajoya dîrokê de hebûna xwe parastîyê. Di vê çarçoweyê de xebat di destpêkê de berê xwe dide nasnameya Kurdî, ya ku di bin bandora wan neteweperîyan de bûye yên ku di serdema dawî ya Osmanî de di pêvajoya geşedana neteweperwerîya etnik û veguherîna netewebûnê peyda bûne, ka çawa hebûna xwe li ser ziman û perwerdeyê diparêze û xwe ava dike; paşê berê xwe dide hewldanên xweguncandin di Tirkîyeya modern de li gor mercên guherbar ên siyasî, aborî û civakî; û herî dawî jî ka çawa di destpêka salên 2000î de cara ewil bûye daxwazê şênber û veguherîye tevgereke civakî. Di vê xebatê de li kêleka kovar û rojnameyên wê serdemê, pirtûk û gotarên li ser mijarê jî hatine vekolîn, bi rêbazeke teswîrî ve vegotîneke dîrokî-kronolojîk û şîrovevî hatiye tercîhkirin.

**Peyvên Sereke:** Kurdî, Daxwazên zimanî, Nasname, Netewesazî, Politîkaya zimanî

## **Introduction**

In the early 2000s, Kurdish education demands were brought to the public debate with petition actions. The actions that took place in the national media also opened the concept of “language activism” to the discussion. Intellectuals, academics, and politicians from various political views participated in this discussion. Although these discussions and the arguments are presented as new, Kurdish education and related linguistic demands are not new. This study examines the historical background of these demands.

In this context, the study consists of two parts: In the first part, it is aimed to create a short conceptual framework to understand the historical process. It is claimed that language demands are the product of a nationalist project that was initiated by intellectuals for creating a modern nation and then spreading the idea to the masses, through language, culture, history, and folklore. Hence the modernist approach can be useful to understand the relationship between language, nationalism, and modernization as discussed by Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson. In this study, it is argued that the historical development of the demands for the Kurdish language should be analyzed within the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process and seen as a result of centralization, urbanization, secularization, and nationalization as a part of modernization policy.

In the second part, the historical development of language demands is discussed from the Ottoman Empire to the present. It examines the early efforts of the Kurds, who were dissatisfied with the reform policies that were started by II. Mahmud. Then the cooperation of Kurdish intellectuals and Young Turks was to regain local autonomy by proving their national existence through language and history by still being a part of the Ottoman collective identity. However, with the collapse of the empire, some of the Kurdish intellectuals fought for national independence but failed. After the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, Turkish nationalism gained power, and assimilation policies limited the Kurdish language and identity which caused several local rebellions among Kurds provoked by Kurdish nationalists. With the failure of the Dersim uprising, there was a period of silence that ended with the 1961 Constitution. A new Kurdish intellectual generation worked for cultural awareness and language. They generally cooperated with Turkish socialist groups in this period. By using socialist concepts and approaches, these intellectuals tried to publicize the importance of language, culture, and history. But the cooperation did not take long, and Kurds took a different path, after the 1971 Memorandum. With the 1980 Military coup, all socialist organizations were disbanded by the junta. Some of them were sent to prison or exile. In Europe, the exiles built up several Kurdish institutes for preparing linguistic materials, books, music, and art in Kurdish. Meanwhile in Turkey with Turgut Özal’s liberal reforms the limitations and bans on Kurdish diminished relatively. Due to fighting against PKK, these reforms had limited effect on daily life. But after capturing PKK’s leader in 1999 and the European Union membership process, a new era began at the beginning of the 2000s.

This study deals with the period up to the 2000s. The reason for this specific periodization can be rationalized as follows: in the 2000s a new Kurdish generation emerged in metropolitan cities because of massive immigration which put into danger the existence of language. They felt the same “alienation” as the previous generation felt in exile. Also, liberal reforms and the EU membership process created

a legitimate sphere for democratic language activism with the help of rising identity politics around the world. This created a non-violent, language activism by diverse actors and organizations that have ongoing effects today. So that this new era, actors and rhetoric deserve another study.

The main claim of this study is that language and related demands are a product of the modernization process and aim to build the nation as a political body; For this reason, despite the existence of different discourses such as liberalism, socialism, and radical democracy, and concepts such as autonomy, independence, federation, and confederation in different historical periods, language demands have preserved their existence continuously.

### **1. Language, Identity, and Modernization**

Ethnicity is generally defined by linguistic-cultural common features while the nation is mostly associated with political affiliation related to a political body. Although there is a distinction between cultural nationalism or German-type nationalism, which emphasizes elements such as language, culture, ethnicity, and French-type civil nationalism, which emphasizes citizenship, constitution, and nation-state, in both, the nation is associated with a political organization called nation-state (Hobsbawm, 1993: 23-24).

The literature on nationalism has three basic approaches: The first is primordialism, this one argues that nations are as old as mankind. The second is modernism which argues that nations are not eternal, but a new and modern phenomenon. The third one is ethno-symbolism which basically is a third way between primordialism and modernism. According to the ethno-symbolist approach, although the concept of nation is new, its origins go back to ancient times through ethnicity, and ethnic belonging has transformed into a modern national identity over time (Özkırımlı, 2013). In this study, the modernist approach represented in the literature by Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson will be used as a conceptual framework.

According to modernists, nationalism is a new and modern phenomenon as the result of modern political, economic, and social developments such as centralization, urbanization, secularization, rationalization, and capitalization. The nation is a social fiction or engineering to combine a political body with a social one to create a new version of legitimacy. So, nationalisms create nations; not vice versa (Gellner, 1992: 93-94). While traditional political power lay on divinity, modern political power replaced it with earthly one as a result of the Reform, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and French Revolution. The nation derived from ethnicity and became a new political identity through the efforts of nationalist intellectuals, politicians, and revolutionists through a common language, compulsory education, and military service. For this reason, this culture, as Gellner puts “high culture”, should be supported, disseminated, adopted, and developed in linguistic, historical, literary, and folkloric terms, just like creating a neat garden from bushes. To prove the existence of a certain nation, and advocate or justify its right to rule an independent nation-state; intellectuals try to discover, purify, develop, and even invent a national/nationalist language, history, and tradition (Gellner, 1992: 46).

Nationalism historically emerged in the downfall period of multi-ethnic empires. Nationalists struggled for national independence and self-determination right for building their own nation-states. So, it proposes a break from traditional and religious values by replacing them with modern, secular, and rational ones. To legitimize this, nationalists emphasize the nation's uniqueness, purity, and historicity through language, culture, history, literature, and folklore (Hobsbawm, 2006: 312).

For this reason, the intellectuals who are the pioneers of nationalism in many countries aimed to create awareness and consciousness among the people to mobilize the masses for further action to build a national struggle. In this respect, the role of a common language is quite essential. Henceforth, the intellectuals try to unify the masses by creating a standard, written language to bring them together and spread nationalist ideas. That's why the standardization of the spoken and written language with a modern, preferably a new alphabet is extremely important for them. The formation of a standard written language is spread through publications such as newspapers, magazines, and books. Thus, a community is created that speaks, reads, writes, thinks, and feels, in the same way (Anderson, 1995: 20-21). But the success rate is not that high; those who can accomplish creating an "imagined community" will have the opportunity to become a nation and establish their own nation-states so that they can preserve, develop and promote their social, political, and cultural existence. But those who fail; fall under captivity; lose their language, identity, and culture by being destroyed or assimilated by others (Gellner, 1992: 96).

## **2. Early Demands for the Kurdish Language in the Last Period of the Ottoman Empire**

Since the 16th century, the Kurds, as one of the oldest ethnic groups of Anatolia, have lived in the region autonomously as a buffer zone between Shiite Iran and the Sunni Ottomans (Arfa, 1991: 28). However, the de facto autonomy failed in the 19th century when the Ottoman Empire put centralization policies into practice via railway, telegram, post offices, and schools (Hassanpour, 2005: 130).

During the reign of Mahmud II, the landlords (mir), who were the de facto rulers of the region, were abolished and replaced by officers sent from the capital (Kutlay, 2012: 7). And the Empire established the Hamidiye Regiments (Bozarslan, 2003: 845), and the Tribal Schools (Aşiret Mektepleri) for the children of Kurdish nobles in Istanbul in 1892 and educated them, in Turkish and French. By sending these children to the military and civil service after graduation, the empire aimed to bound Kurds to the center (Kutlay, 2012: 131).

Notwithstanding, the Kurdish generation who grew up in these schools; became the pioneer of the ethnic awakening and took the first steps to preserve the Kurdish language and culture. In this sense, Kurdistan newspaper, the first publication of the Kurds began to be published in 1898 by Mikdat Mithat Bedirhan in Cairo Egypt (Bozarslan, 1991: 59-60), The newspaper's first four issues were in Kurdish and the next issues were in both Kurdish and Turkish (Issi, 2013: 133).

Like the Turkish language, Kurdish was also under the heavy influence of Arabic and Persian, and because of widespread oral culture among the Kurds, Kurdish was lack of written tradition. So, the first Arabic newspaper was published in 1828, the Turkish newspaper in 1832, the Persian newspaper

in 1848, and the first Kurdish newspaper was published in 1898. Although the printing press was previously available in the Kurdish region (1865-66 Bitlis, 1868-Diyarbakır, 1889-90-Van), the works printed there were mainly in Ottoman Turkish (Kutlay, 2012: 55-59).

For this reason, the Kurdistan newspaper had great symbolic importance for the Kurds. The newspaper had a perspective that defends freedom and other liberal values against Abdulhamid's tyranny. Also claimed that the Kurds were uneducated and deliberately left ignorant by the Turks; hence Kurds were called to send their children to educational institutions (Bozarlan, 1991: 115-116). In this sense, it can be said that both Young Turk thinkers- two of the founders İshak Sükuti and Abdullah Cevdet originally were Kurd- and Kurdish intellectuals had a similar worldview that advocates liberty, equality, constitutionalism, and modernization via education related to the modernization process in the Empire due to the latest developments around Europe.

There was not much about Kurdish education in the newspaper. There were several reasons for that. One of them was that the writers had close relations with the Young Turks and some of them were involved in the activities of the Committee of Union and Progress. For instance, one of the leading figures of Kurdish intellectuals, Abdurrahman Bedirhan attended to 1902 Congress of the CUP [Committee of Union and Progress]. Besides organizational ties, there were also ideological ties between the two groups. Kurdish intellectuals saw themselves as part of the Ottoman identity. They were focused on the modernization and enlightenment of Kurds via education to save the Empire together with the Turks (Bajalan, 2010: 98). Also, there was no obligation to speak Turkish except for civil servants, and Kurdish education was practically given in religious schools (medrese) so there was no official limitation for Kurdish yet (Önen, 2012: 48-49).

The Russian (1905), Iranian (1906-11), and Turkish (1908) revolutions inspired Kurdish nationalists. Thus 1908 Revolution was seen as a pleasing and promising event for Kurdish intellectuals (Hassanpour, 2005: 131), which can be clearly seen in articles in the Kurdistan newspaper. During this period, the Kurds saw their fate tied to the survival of the Ottoman Empire with Turks, and therefore the CUP was seen as a political ally to support the new constitutional monarchy (Ramsaur, 2011: 34). For example, Abdurrahman Bedirhan attended the CUP's Paris Congress in 1902 and objected to Armenian delegates' speeches in French instead of Turkish (Uçarlar, 2012: 268).

In the post-revolutionary period, for a short time, good relations were established between Kurdish and Turkish associations, even Turkish nationalists offered Kurdish associations to share the same place together (Malmisanij, 2002: 14). Kurdish intellectuals supported the CUP, and CUP promised autonomy on certain issues such as language and education in return (Malmisanij, 2002: 25). In this regard, during the release ceremony of the detainees from Diyarbakır Prison, the following statements were made by military officer Mazhar Efendi in Turkish, and Peyman newspaper's journalist Şükrü Efendi in Kurdish:

*"The Constitutional Monarchy abolished the lordship and nobility. From now on, the gentleman and the peasant are the same and equal. There is no landlord, no tribe anymore... Abdulhamid was a traitor, he was cruel... We are a big tribe now. Being Muslim or Christian does not make any difference anymore. if they feel attached to Ottoman with their heart and soul... The Kurds have only one problem, which is*



*ignorance. The cure for this problem is to read, write and learn about the world. From now on, Kurdish books will be written, and Kurdish newspapers will be published. Science and ingenuity will be learned in the Kurdish language in schools. Then the Kurds will also be rich and happy...*” (Malmisanij, 2002: 26-28).

Kürt Teavün ve Terakki Cemiyeti [The Kurdish Solidarity and Progress Society] was one of the associations established in 1908. It was supporting the constitutional monarchy and advocated autonomy for the Kurds under the reign of the Ottoman Empire. KTTC aimed to “improve the education of the Kurds”, and found a school called “Meşrutiyet” in Istanbul (Tunaya, 1988: 411). It also had a newspaper with the same name between 1908-1909, and only nine issues have left today. There were articles on the language, history, and culture of the Kurds (Kasap, 2021). It had a pro-Ottoman and modern vision, by demanding cultural autonomy. One of the writers Babanzade İsmail Hakkı was emphasizing that Kurdish, Muslim, and Ottoman identities were interrelated:

*“Kurds are true Ottomans without any hesitation, secret calculations, or hidden agenda... Ottoman identity includes Kurdish and vice versa, and the contents of these two words are absolutely intertwined. God forbid, if Ottomans were to disappear, there would be no trace of Kurdishness as well; God forbid if Kurdishness disappears and... Ottoman identity will also be weak and miserable...”* (Babanzade, 1908/1: 7-8)

In the newspaper, there was a discussion about whether the education of the Kurds should be in Turkish or Kurdish. At this point, the debate was mainly about whether Kurdish has the necessary qualifications to be the language of education. Babanzade was aware that the CUP intended to assimilate the Kurds via the education system:

*“Education... depends on the language. If the Kurdish people, who constitute the most important pillar of Ottoman identity, remain rusty and rotten like this, God forbid the Ottoman identity will likely collapse. Although the idea and need to Turkify or Arabize Kurds, Laz, and Albanians may come to mind, there is no method to be discovered that would eradicate the language of a people no matter how cruel and devastating yet... such an attempt is meaningless and absurd that cannot get any benefit. None of the nations in the Ottoman Empire lost their existence and identity. The Kurdish language has been going on like this for thousands of years. This language was alienated neither by the Persians, nor by the Romans, nor by the Arabs, nor by the Tatars, nor by the Turks; on the contrary, the speakers of this language spread out day by day with a greater effort like that of the invaders. I mean, a language still can exist even if it does not have grammar books and dictionaries”* (Babanzade, 1908/3: 2).

On the other hand, Babanzade drew attention to the benefits of education in Kurdish and emphasizes that Kurdish was an advanced and complex language in which education could be realized, but there was a lack of trained people and materials, and this could be solved with Kurdish education:

*“Now, let’s take a Kurdish child. In this boy’s village, nothing but his mother tongue is spoken. If we open a Turkish School in that village and then take the child and teach Turkish step by step, in fact, that child will eventually become an educated man again, and if he has intelligence, he will rise to a higher level. However, he loses a few precious years of his life for the sake of language learning, which is the means of reaching the sciences. If this Kurd finds works on various sciences and techniques in his own language and attends a school where teaching in Kurdish is taught, there is no doubt that he will grow up faster, his education will be more complete, and he will become a more valuable part of the Ottoman family. That’s why I highly recommend my Kurdish fellows, first, to have a decent language. First, a grammar book and a dictionary of this language should be prepared. After that, let’s write the history of the Kurdish people. Then, whatever scattered and unwritten poems and literary works there are, let them be compiled and written...”* (Babanzade, 1908/3: 2).

However, there were also others who stated that there was no necessary infrastructure for the education in Kurdish, which was practically a waste of time so it would seem fair to train kids in Turkish, which was the common language, instead. Kurdish was not seen as functional and useful in practice in the eyes of those intellectuals with the rise of political fears of separation as well as the desire to build a modern nation-state. Suleyman Hamdi, one of them, said:

*“Since we do not have any tool for teaching Kurdish in schools and it is very difficult to find them, in my opinion, lessons should be started in Turkish ... Of course, the continuation of Turkish education can provide many benefits. First, the general language of the Ottoman Empire was Turkish, and ... all transactions were made in Turkish. What kind of difficulties a person who does not speak Turkish will face...? He will need a translator. Thus, he will have someone else do his job, which is often not what is desired. Secondly, in enrollment for the noble military profession, which is probably obligatory as a requirement of his homeland duty, he will again need the Turkish language and will face many difficulties. Third, apart from the fact that we have neither grammar and dictionary nor any other book in Kurdish, the great difficulties here are worth considering. Do not think that I see the Kurdish language as an insult. However, my soul is deeply affected by the possibility that the effort to be spent on this subject will be a waste of time. This is what I can't deny. Now let's assume that the teaching starts in Kurdish. I don't know if this is as easy as it seems. Because the beginning of teaching a language that is deprived of every teaching tool is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible; the preparation of teaching tools requires a lot of time and sacrifices. However, will the benefits we gain be worth it? ... As a matter of fact, being a civil servant or a college student depends on knowing Turkish. In that case, there cannot be a healthier way of enlightenment and advancement for the Kurds than learning Turkish.” (Erzincanlı, 1909/8: 2-3).*

During this period, the Kurds expressed their demands for preserving their cultural identity and autonomy by remaining loyal to Ottoman Empire. However, this period did not last long and ended a year later in 1909 with the closure of all Kurdish associations and educational institutions in Istanbul. The Kurdistan newspaper was also shut down after the incident of March 31, 1909. The rise of the despotic and nationalist tendencies of the CUP since 1913 caused the Kurdish intellectuals to move away from the Ottomanist perspective (Kutlay, 2014b: 134).

The first step of this transition was Kürt Talebe Hevi Cemiyeti [Kurdish Student's Hope Society], which was founded in 1912. Although the society generally had a Kurdish nationalist discourse, not separatist yet. Their publications *Rojî Kurd* [Kurdish Fasting] and *Hetawî Kurd* [Kurdish Sun] reflect the perception of the society. Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, among leading authors of these publications, emphasized that the Kurds' demand for education in Kurdish did not mean political separatism, on the contrary, it would strengthen the Ottoman identity by eliminating the ignorance of the Kurds:

*“It becomes a necessity, a religious obligation for a Turk to help a Kurd, a Kurd to a Turk, an Arab to a Kurd, rather than opposing them on language. Because with the rise of the Kurds in terms of language, social and civilizational, it would be good for all of Islam, and therefore for Turks, Arabs, and others... Compiling the sources of a language is never to reveal the foreigner's idea of nationalism... Pursuing the idea of nationalism is already prohibited by the sharia law.” (Babanzade, 1913/2: 5-6).*

In the journals, there were articles that try to prove the existence of Kurds and their unique language and culture as well as the need for writing a national history of the Kurds. Thus, Kurdish intellectuals should prepare an alphabet, grammar books, dictionaries, and schools. Mevlanazade Rifat emphasized this as follows:



*“First, language is necessary to awaken the Kurds, to introduce them to their existence and right to life, and to put them on the path of progress. Improving the language is possible by generalizing the language and making it useful for the purpose (in accordance with the rules) of writing. It is necessary to revive and improve our old alphabet ... in order to write Kurdish properly and memorize it easily. If we can prepare a dictionary, it means that the way to reach our goal has been opened...” (Mevlanazade, 1913/2: 2-3).*

### **3. The First World War and the Independence Effort**

With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, conditions changed dramatically for the Kurds. Britain’s plan for an Armenian nation-state in the region led the Kurds to fight for their independence during the armistice period. Like Ottoman, Austria-Hungary, and Russian Empires were on the verge of collapse (Brubaker, 1995: 105). Already the subjects such as Czechs, Poles, and Serbs of the Austro-Hungarian Empire under the rule of the Habsburg dynasty developed a pro-nationalist consciousness and struggled for their national independence (Roshwald, 2001: 15-16).

Nationalist ideas and claims were mostly justified through language and by creating a political identity based on cultural and linguistic differences to prove their uniqueness and maturity in being political actors (Inglehart and Woodward, 1967: 28). Kurds began to reorganize in 1913. Due to the lack of authority, the Kurdish intellectuals no longer showed interest in Ottomanist ideas, and instead fought for national independence and self-determination as part of Wilson’s principles (Tunaya, 1986: 189).

Kürt Teali Cemiyeti [the Kurdish Ascendance Society] was the center for pro-nationalist and pro-independence Kurds. But there were differentiations among KTC members to achieve the autonomy or independence of Kurds. The first group, led by Sayyid Abdulkadir, supported autonomy while the second group, which was represented by the Bedirhan and Cemilpaşazade families, supported independency (Önen, 2012: 59).

The publishing organ of KTC was Jin [Woman]. In the article “Edebiyatı Kürdiyeden Bazı Numuneler” [Some Samples from Literature of Kurds], there was a hidden effort to prove that the Kurds have a deep historical background, with a rich language and unique culture for establishing a political body (M.M., 1918/2: 236). And the magazine produced a certain amount of evidence against the CUP’s official view, which claims that Kurds and Turks were sharing the same ancestors. The publication of Ahmed Hani’s Kurdish work Mem-u Zin, which is one of the classical literature texts of Kurds as well as the Kurdish alphabet and grammar book, was an effort to prove that Kurds have their own culture, literature, and history. The society also provided an education program in Kurdish. In addition to these, in Jin, the lack of consciousness of Kurds about preserving their language and identity as well as the need for a common dialect to create a linguistic unity among the Kurds was underlined and claimed that only the language could close the cultural and educational gap and generate the political collaboration between the elite and the ordinary people of Kurds (Özcan, 2013: 51, 84, 86).

Jin’s tendency for political independence required establishing a national community first, through creating a unity of language, culture, and history, which could be done only with a modern, national

education system. The new vision unraveled in Jin was also supported by some external developments. A Kurdish man called Simko Ağa took control of a region between Iran and Turkey on October 22, 1913, and declared independence. He got the support of Russia and founded a Kurdish School in the city of Hoy. Also, he sent Kurdish students to Moscow for higher education both in Russian and Kurdish (Celil, 2007: 85-88).

#### **4. Modern Turkey and the Kurdish Revolts**

The vision of political independence has failed because of some historical developments such as the Bolshevik Revolution, the change in the foreign regional policy of Britain, and the lack of political unity among the Kurdish groups, etc. (Yeğen, 2012:17-18). Some Kurds supported Kemalists, hoping for “cultural and administrative autonomy” (Beşikçi, 1990: 17). However, the Kemalists took a different direction to build Turkish nationalism after the 1924 Constitution by assimilating the different ethnic groups. Some Kurdish nationalists were arrested or exiled. Thus, they had to move abroad and established organizations such as Azadi (1922-24) and Hoybun (1927) as the Koçgiri (1920), Sheikh Said (1925), Ağrı (1930), and Dersim (1938) which remained unsuccessful attempts to resist to the Turkish Republic and its ongoing Kurdish policy (White, 2012: 126).

The years between 1939-1959 were a “period of silence” for the Kurdish nationalists (Bozarslan, 2003: 850) that Kurds have been exposed to the “discipline, banishment and assimilation” [tedip, tenkil ve temsil] policy by the Kemalist regime (Yeğen, 2011: 27-33). “Turkification” of the Kurds enabled the formation of a new intellectual generation via Kemalist modernization through education (Kirişçi and Winrow, 2011:104).

#### **5. Kurdish Demands in the Post-1960 Period and Socialist Discourse**

The revival of Kurdish began with the end of the single-party term. The pressure on the Kurdish language was softened during the DP rule to get more votes. Kurdish magazines such as “İleri Yurt” [Forward Fatherland] and “Şarkın Sesi” [Voice of East] began to be published in 1950 led by educated, middle-class professional intellectuals under these circumstances. (Kutlay, 2012: 28-29). They evaluated the Kurdish issue through the “Eastern Question” “underdevelopment” and “colonization”. concepts under the influence of the Turkish left’s political rhetoric. They generally discussed the ethnic and linguistic problems in the context of “economic and cultural development” with a socialist and nationalist discourse (Kutlay, 2014b: 315). According to Beşikçi, Kurdish intellectuals of the 1960s-70s attached great importance to being international under the influence of socialism. Because socialism was labeling language, culture, and tradition issues as “nationalist-right-wing themes” (1991: 24).

The case of the “49s Incident” was significant. Kurdish intellectual Musa Anter was arrested and jailed for publishing a poem in Kurdish by accusing of separatism (Kutlay, 2014a; 49’lar Dava tutanağı, 1963: 17).

The 1960 Coup continued the Turkification policy towards the Kurdish by establishing Regional Boarding Schools (Yatılı Bölge Okulları-YİBO). However, the junta prepared a liberal constitution

that allowed the Kurdish nationalists' reorganization under the roof of socialist organizations like TİP [Turkish Workers Party] (Akkaya, 2013: 90-91) because of socialists' sympathy for the Kurdish language and identity. Anter expresses this pragmatic preference as follows:

*"[There was] always a difference of opinion between me and these friends. Of course, this separation of ours was over the Kurdish issue... But one might say, "Well, why did you maintain relations with these men who did not adopt your ideas?" What could I do? All other political wings of Turkey were in hostile attitudes like Turanists and Kemalists. At least true or false these guys said, "If we win in the future, we will give you your rights". In other words, at least they accepted the existence of our usurped rights." (Anter, 2013: 220).*

Not all Kurdish nationalists were socialists; there were liberal, conservative, and religious ones, who had different perspectives as seen in the second issue of the liberal magazine "Barış Dünyası" [Peace World], published by Ahmet Hamdi Başar, one of Mustafa Kemal's close fellow man, Anter defended the USA proposals for a Kurdish dictionary, grammar book, Kurdish radio, and education in Turkish Army which were rejected by Turkey (Anter, 2013:187):

*"Why shouldn't we open schools to teach our mother tongue to our children whose mother tongue is Kurdish and who don't speak any other language? Why shouldn't the university of the region research the literature and philology of this language? Why... Why not teach in Kurdish? Why shouldn't a Kurdish newspaper be published and a local radio station broadcasting in Kurdish?" (Anter, 2014b: 83)*

On the contrary, Sait Kırmızıtoprak, writing for the Yön [Direction] Magazine, one of the leading journals of the Turkish left; accused Anter of serving imperialism and assimilation policies of imperialist countries by pretending to support "Kurdish" over cultural rights (Anter, 2014a: 87-89).

The alliance of the Kurdish and Turkish left had certain consequences: First, the independence vision was no longer an option. Second, the socialist jargon prioritized class affiliations rather than ethnic identities. For instance, Eastern Question (Doğu Sorunu) and Easterner (doğulu) were used instead of the Kurdish issue and Kurd by using Marxist underdevelopment, imperialism, and exploitation concepts. The third was assuming both economic and cultural problems will be resolved after the socialist revolution.

Dicle-Fırat [Tigris-Euphrates] Magazine, started publishing in 1962, and Deng [Equal] in 1963 lasted only for eight issues, epitomizing this approach. Anter and Karahan were the key figures. Although Easterner expression was widely accepted; somehow "Kurd" expression was encountered in the articles.

In the first issue, Karahan, expressed the goal of the magazine as "contributing to the economic and cultural development of the East" (Karahan, 1962/1: 4). The themes of national unity and integrity, because of the alliance with the Turkish left, were encountered in the articles which also show strong opposition and criticism against fascism and imperialism. As in Anter's "Uyanalım Ya!" [Let's wake up] in the fourth issue of the magazine points to the ideal of a state and society where different cultural communities live freely together (Anter, 1963/4: 7). In Mazıdağlı's "Hani Vaizler Kürtçe Veriliyordu" [Sermons were Given in Kurdish] the pressures on the Kurdish language were criticized and claimed that the Kurds should protect their language, culture, and identity fearlessly while living with Turks and other ethnic groups (Mazıdağlı, 1963 b: 1). In "Bazı Noktalar" [Some Points], he stated that "Kurds do

not refuse to speak Turkish; but refuse to speak only Turkish” (Mazıdağlı, 1963 a:1). In the eighth issue “Dicle Fırat Okuyucularına” [To the Readers of the Dicle-Fırat] supported the education in Kurdish:

*“We want Kurdish magazines and newspapers to be published, we want Kurdish schools for education. The aim of the Dicle-Fırat is the economic and cultural development of the East. It is obvious that the newspapers, magazines, and schools we mentioned are essential parts of cultural development.”* (“Dicle-Fırat”, 1963/8: 8).

Deng also emphasized the ideal of coexistence in a democratic and free country like Dicle-Fırat. In “Çıkarken” [On the way to print] in the first issue of the magazine, it was underlined that Turks and Kurds fought side by side in the independence war and that’s why the Kurds were recognized as the equal-founding elements of the Republic by Mustafa Kemal and his comrades. It was also said that the idea of national unity can be developed based on cultural rights and freedoms. (“Deng”, 1963/1: 22). In the unsigned “Sevmek için Bilmek Lazım” [to love, you must know], in the second issue, it was claimed that cultural rights and demands, like education in Kurdish, do not necessarily mean independence or separatism (“Deng”, 1963/2: 3).

The alliance with the Turkish left made TİP more sensitive about the Kurdish issue (Alış, 2012: 76). TİP officially accepted the “existence of the Kurds and the Kurdish question” in the congress in 1969, after the election success in 1965 (Aydınoğlu, 2007: 336). However, the increasing pressure on TİP and the Turkish left resulted in discrepancy and discontent directing the Kurds to build their own organization (Güneş, 2013: 128). In his memoirs, Kurdish politician Mehdi Zana claimed that those who encouraged him to join the TİP were the same people who later excluded him from the party’s governing bodies, by saying “your Turkish isn’t well enough” (Zana, 1991: 184).

Under these circumstances, in 1967, the Eastern Meetings were held in Ankara, Diyarbakır, Ağrı, Batman, and Tunceli, gathering a significant amount of people. According to Beşikçi, these meetings were the manifestation of Kurds’ demands for land reform, employment, regional plan, and economic development (Beşikçi, 2014: 145-150).

According to Bozarslan, this was a turning point for Kurds as a transition from being a nationalist-cultural rights-demanding group to being a socially opposite political movement. Before that Kurdish intellectuals’ demands were limited to demanding cultural autonomy by simply asking to accept Kurdish as a publishing, broadcasting, and education language and respect for constitutional rights, and local autonomy (Bozarslan, 2003: 854).

The popularity of the meetings encouraged Kurdish intellectuals and politicians to follow their own paths. In 1969, the Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (DDKO) [Revolutionary Eastern Culture Centre] branches were established in Ankara, Istanbul, Diyarbakır, Batman, and Siverek and closed after the 1971 Military Memorandum (Kutlay, 2012: 38). In a brochure of DDKO, their aims were expressed as follows:

*“We will stage plays in the people’s own mother tongue. We are determined to play village by village, street by street in Eastern Anatolia. This movement of ours is a war to bring art, good and beautiful... and to deliver democratic fundamental rights to the masses of the people in Eastern Anatolia, who are left behind in the dark.”* (“DDKO Yayın Bülteni”: 11).

Some DDKO members were arrested and prosecuted on charges of separatism. The prosecutor denied the existence of Kurds and Kurdish by saying “there is no race in the world that can be called Kurdish” and stated that “Kurdish consists of 30 words; the rest of them are Turkish, or similar to Turkish”. DDKO members responded by writing an elaborate defense to prove the existence of Kurds and Kurdish historically, and linguistically. The defense paper was the first example of an official and collective declaration on the Kurdish language and identity (“DDKO Savunması”, 1973: 105, 109, 131).

Besides this declaration, there was a significant amount of publishing in Kurdish during this period. In 1966, Musa Anter’s Turkish-Kurdish dictionary and the theater play Brina Reş; Kemal Badıllı’s Kurdish grammar book with Turkish explanation were published, and in 1969 Ehmede Hani’s Mem-u Zin, was published in both Kurdish-Turkish (Kırmızıtoprak, 2014: 185).

In the post-memorandum period, Kurdish and Turkish were separated; resulting in widespread disbelief in the democratic-political struggle among Kurds (Aydınoğlu, 2007: 259). The new vision was “separate organization, one revolution “ between 1971 and 1974, which gradually became “separate organization different revolutions” after 1974 (Bozarslan, 2003: 856). Özgürlük Yolu [Road to Freedom] Magazine was an example of this transition, led by Kemal Burkay. He believed that the Turkish and Kurdish socialists should struggle together for both national and socialist revolution including Kurds’ cultural rights. In the eighth issue of the journal, in “Eğitim Üzerine” [On Education] article, E. Zozan wrote these:

*“Democratic education for the people means that it is in accordance with the ... world view of the working class and national in form. Providing education, especially basic education, in each people’s own language is the most convenient and easiest way to achieve the purpose of education. Language is a means of expression, and the masses can no doubt be educated in the language they know best. Conversely, a practice cannot be democratic and is inhumane. Forcing people to study in a language other than their mother tongue is only seen in oppressive, racist, and fascist regimes” (Zozan, 1976/8: 47-48).*

As seen in the article, the demands for Kurdish were almost the same as before but this time using socialist jargon. In the eleventh issue, the socialist struggle and the national liberation were seen intertwined (“Özgürlük Yolu”, 1976/11: 3), In the thirty-third and thirty-fourth issues, in “Sömürge Ülkelerde Eğitim” [Education in Colonial Countries] Nazife Kaleli claimed that Kurds were exploited by imperialists and Turkish bourgeoisie through chauvinistic-racist education (“Özgürlük Yolu”, 1978/33-34: 8-21).

Another example was the Roja Welat [Motherland Day]. In the first issue of the newspaper, in the unsigned “Kürtçe Yayın Yapmak Hakkımızdır ve Bu Hakkı Kullanacağız” [We Have the Right to Publish in Kurdish and We Will Use it] there were similar arguments to Babanzade’s:

*“Don’t make a fuss for nothing. When the Kurdish people publish a newspaper in their own language or provide education in their own language, neither the country nor the society will be divided. This is your haste, you racists, exploiters! ... Turkish workers and peasants are not bothered by such things. Turkish and Kurdish workers stand arm to arm shoulder to shoulder in factories and fields; When this oppression and inequality are over, the affiliation between them will grow even more.” (“Roja Welat”, 1977/2: 2).*



In the same issue, in “Kürt ve Türk Halkları Kardeşçe ve Demokrat Bir Toplumu Birlikte Kuracaklardır” [Kurdish and Turkish Peoples Will Establish a Fraternal and Democratic Society Together] Sıddık Bozarslan and Mustafa Aydın, mentioned the conditions of Kurds under USSR. They had the right to educate in Kurdish, a department on Kurdish Language and Literature at universities by emphasizing that recognition of cultural rights doesn't necessarily lead to separatism (“Roja Welat”, 1977/2: 12-13).

Rızgari [Salvation] Magazine got only the first issue, and Ala Rızgari [Liberation Flag] took its place. These two had a more radical vision than the others (Kısacık, 2010a:103) by seeking political independence instead of a federation or confederation. These two were the signs of a shift from the cultural and political struggle to violence and armed struggle methods, especially after 1978, which resulted in widespread diversification and fragmentation (Bozarslan, 2014: 44).

Tekosin [Fight] Magazine was part of this fragmentation, by repeating the same claims of Rızgari and Kawa (Kısacık, 2010b: 181), accusing other which advocate political struggle of being reformists and opportunists (“Tekoşin”, 1978/3: 3-11). According to them, independence can only be achieved through a separate organization with a strong single-party and armed force under the leadership of a charismatic commander (“Tekoşin”, 1978/1: 15-17). Pale Magazine, which had a Pan-Kurdist vision that gathers the Kurds of Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey under a single flag of a nation-state (“Pale”, 1979/4: 46).

## 6. Post-1980 Coup Period and Kurdish Diaspora

After the 1980 coup, Turkish and Kurdish socialist organizations disbanded. The PKK was the only one that fled abroad to survive. Meanwhile, some Kurds were sent to prison or exile while others migrated to Europe and the Middle East. Kurds in exile created a diaspora (Kutlay, 2012: 41). Kurdish diaspora made significant contributions to the development of Kurdish through their research and activities on the Kurdish language, culture, and art. Due to the prohibitions and limitations on Kurdish in the post-coup period in Turkey, the center of the Kurdish language became European countries (Hassanpour, 2005: 432).

The main psychological reason behind these efforts was the exiles' feelings of “rootlessness” and “alienation” about their identity and existence, which contributed to their language awareness or sensitivity. This has increased the sensitivity to speaking, reading, and writing in Kurdish. Language studies and publications began spreading from the diaspora to Turkey in the 1990s (Önen-Baykuşak, 2020: 180).

During these years, Kurdish Institutes were established in various cities in Europe. The most prominent one was in France. Paris Kurdish Institute was opened in 1983, followed by Brussels in 1989, and so in Stockholm and Berlin in the 1990s. These institutes have provided fundamental functions in terms of the development, standardization, and use of the language by organizing conferences, exhibitions, symposiums, and publishing periodicals on language studies. They also offered Kurdish language courses and provided scholarships (Uçarlar, 2009: 193-196).



In 1982 a new constitution was declared, and democratic elections were made in 1983 symbolizing the end of the junta period. In the meantime, the Turkish army's operations started against PKK attacks in Southeast Anatolia, making conditions harder for Kurdish. Speaking Kurdish in public space was strictly banned till the beginning of the 1990s. In 1991, legal barriers to making music and broadcasting in Kurdish were legally abolished by Turgut Özal (Uçarlar, 2009: 133). Due to the relief, Mesopotamia Cultural Center (MKM) was established in 1991, which works on Kurdish music, theatre, history, and language. In 1992, the Istanbul Kurdish Institute was established. Its journal on language Zend was the first entirely Kurdish journal in Turkey (Önen-Baykuşak, 2020: 196).

In addition, the Kürt-Kav association which brought Kurdish writers and their literary works together was established, while the weekly Kurdish newspaper Welat and television channel Med Tv first appeared in 1992, thus the Kurdish language gained visibility and publicity on both written and visual media (White, 2012: 256). Also, Özgür Gündem, which started broadcasting in Turkish and later Azadiya Welat in Kurdish, was significant as being the first daily newspaper in Turkey (Güneş, 2013: 213).

During this period, publishing houses such as Deng, Doz, Istanbul Kurdish Institute, and Avesta were established. They published translations and original works on Kurdish history, language, literature, and folklore by contributing both historical and contemporary knowledge of Kurdish literature and language (Önen-Baykuşak, 2020: 203). There was a new actor emerged during this period. Conservative-Islamist Kurds joined the publishing arena with the Nûbihar Magazine, which can be seen as the first Kurdish Islamic magazine (Bayram, 2017: 27-34).

All these different journals, magazines, institutes, and publishers made Kurdish more visible and popular, but the political conditions began to change in the mid-1990s. There were different Kurdish political parties that generally were closed because of close links with the PKK. The military operations in the region also escalated the tension between Turks and Kurds, resulting in the weakening of liberal reforms in favor of security policies and military methods (Marcus, 2009: 178).

Neither the PKK nor Kurdish politicians considered language as the primary issue. Kurdish politicians and actors seemed to prefer to think, write and speak in Turkish instead of Kurdish (Gültekin, 2012: 13, 33) which was to be believed that harmed Kurdish practicality and prestige among the Kurds. Because the politicians probably didn't see language among the Kurds' primary issues and underestimated its role in mobilizing the masses (Önen-Baykuşak, 2020: 211).

However, in the late 1990s PKK's leader was captured in Kenya and PKK declared to end the struggle for independence. The negotiations for solving the Kurdish issue accelerated. That dropped the tension and hence provided space for debating on language and cultural matters. Language demands that have been overshadowed by terrorism and political conflicts have finally found a legitimate discussion ground for bargaining (Kavak, 2012: 155) thanks to global conditions such as identity politics, pluralism, democracy, and multiculturalism debates generated by the fall of socialism and rise of the neoliberal globalization process (Bozarşlan, 2014: 49).

Furthermore, increasing immigration due to modernization and urbanization around the world as well as terrorism and military operations in the country have damaged the habitat of the Kurdish language in the region. In the 1990s, a significant Kurdish population emerged in the big cities due to forced migration and the evacuated villages related to the operations against the PKK. Related to the widespread use of Turkish in daily life, education, and mass media such as television, newspapers, and the internet, by making Kurdish useless and unnecessary in the eyes and life of metropolitan Kurds, the Kurdish-speaking population tended to decline (Yükseker, 2012: 233-238).

In 2001, Kurdish education demanding petitions were given at universities in Turkey's major cities. Petition actions heated the public debates on language issues again. Although it was seen as a tool of the PKK's new action strategy in the eyes of the state officers (Gültekin, 2012: 54) it was noteworthy as being the first non-violent action based on democratic values that focuses on solely the language issue in Turkey (Önen-Baykuşak, 2020: 262).

The petition actions can be seen as a cornerstone of a new era that effects continue today. The new era began with the process of democratization and harmonization with EU regulations with the Justice and Development Party (AKP) rule, which originally comes from the tradition of Milli Görüş but promised to implement liberal reforms for EU membership. In this process, Kurdish was started to teach first in private education institutions and then in public schools. Kurdish Language and Literature departments in universities have opened. Also, JDP brought a series of regulations to remove the obstacles to the use of Kurdish in the public sphere (Uçarlar, 2009: 144-159). As terrorism and violence decreased, Kurdish politicians and mayors gained more maneuvering space for promoting Kurdish in the region, especially in public services which were called "multilingual municipalities" (Ersanlı and Bayhan, 2012: 235).

Historically, Kurdish intellectuals had an apologetic attitude to prove Kurdish historical and linguistical existence until the 2000s, however, it can be said that this apologetic attitude has changed, and a new term has begun under the leadership of a new generation that emerged in the cities who established close relations with the diaspora and the global community by putting language and culture at the core of social activism (Uçarlar, 2009: 229-231).

### **Conclusion**

This study reviewed the historical background of Kurdish language demands including education, publication, and broadcasting. It was claimed that the emergence of the Kurdish language demands, was related to the modernization process and aimed to build a modern national identity. In this context, it was argued that the political relationship between the concepts of language, nation, and nationalism has strengthened as a result of urbanization, secularization, rationalization, and capitalization. The nationalist intellectuals used to mobilize masses to replace the traditional-religious, rural community-based socio-economic model with modern ones. And language was a founding element of national identity with history, literature, and folklore, to create an "imagined community" as Gellner, Hobsbawm, and Anderson proposed.

These intellectuals provoked various ethnic groups to create their own national identity under the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, and Russia; and to fight for autonomy or independence by emphasizing their national authenticity and historicity. One of them was the Kurds have been living autonomously in the region since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But II. Mahmud launched a centralization policy to establish stronger ties between center and periphery to prevent the collapse of the empire. The abolition of the local Kurdish chiefs' power in the region resulted in the early riots. In 1908, with the proclamation of the constitutional monarchy, a cultural awakening has begun for the Kurdish intellectuals. The first organization and publications in Kurdish appeared in this period. But the peace and collaboration between Jeune Turks and Jeune Kurds didn't take long and after 1913 Turkish nationalism became dominant which made Kurdish intellectuals search for independence. The Ottoman Empire was dismantled at the end of the war, and the Republic of Turkey took its place.

After 1924, the policy of Turkish nationalism was strengthened, causing several rebellions in the region. With the suppression of the Dersim Uprising, the years between 1938-61 were a "period of silence" for the Kurdish. After the liberal 1961 Constitution, Kurdish organizations and publications relatively increased. In this period, organizational and ideological cooperation with leftist groups aiming socialist revolution in Turkey caused a socialist approach toward the Kurdish language and related issues. The cooperation between socialist Turks and Kurds was turbulent and ended partially after 1971. Kurdish organizations were divided and fragmented. In this period, the language issue was generally seen as a secondary problem after the socialist revolution or national independence. The 1980 military coup disbanded and banned most of these organizations. Kurdish intellectuals were either sent to prison or exile. The exiled Kurds built up a Kurdish diaspora that works on language and culture around Europe.

With the liberalization steps by Turgut Özal in the 1990s, the materials produced by the Kurdish diaspora reached Turkey and made a significant contribution to the development of Kurdish. During this period, various Kurdish political parties have been found. These parties and politicians were under the influence of PKK. Neither PKK nor the politicians saw the language issue as a priority despite they occasionally used them as an instrument to be popular. This approach hindered the development and prestige of the language until the 2000s.

In the 2000s, a new era began, with mass migrations from the village to the city, from the east to the west, Turkey's EU membership process, and democratization steps. Due to social and political circumstances Kurdish intellectuals left their historically apologetic (defensive) attitude, which tried to prove its own existence, historicity, or uniqueness, and adopted an active one; that has resulted in the emergence of a language-centered social movement. As seen in this study, Kurdish language demands have relatively a long past. Despite certain changes in tone, jargon, and tools in time, the essence of the demands remained the same.

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