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Attitude Towards the First Language and Its Effects on First Language Lexical Attrition

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Abstract

This paper presents an investigation into the relationship between individuals' attitudes towards their mother tongue and lexical attrition. The paper is based on data from a study wherein 10 Kurdish-Turkish bilinguals were asked to narrate a well-known story in their mother tongue of Kurdish. These individuals were selected from among 104 participants according to their score on the Mother Tongue Attitude Scale (MTAS), a scale used to determine attitude towards mother tongue.

In this study, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used together. The participants were asked to tell a story in Kurdish to assess their use of Turkish words while doing so. Additionally, the participants were also asked to evaluate their Kurdish speaking ability after telling the story.

The results of the study showed participants with a low MTAS score resorted to borrowing more Turkish words and were able to access a smaller number of Kurdish words than the participants with higher MTAS scores and they suffered more from lexical attrition than their counterparts. Those with high MTAS scores, with a positive attitude towards their mother tongue, used smaller numbers of words borrowed from Turkish and had access to a richer lexicon with which to narrate the story.

Keywords: Lexical attrition, attitude, mother tongue, bilingualism

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Introduction

Linguistic attrition is an intra-generational phenomenon involving the non-pathological loss of a language found in bilingual societies (Köpke, 2004: 3). It is a phenomenon that has been studied from a variety of perspectives, such as psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and neuro-linguistic perspectives. It is usually defined as a first language (L1) that is lost through being in a second language (L2) dominant environment.

Language attrition often manifests in bilinguals who have achieved high levels of L2 proficiency (Schmid 2010: 1). Owing to this knowledge of both languages, lexical traffic from one language to the other is a common phenomenon (Schmid 2011: 19). Moreover, Ferrari (2010: 45) notes that a strong L2 can cause the loss of some linguistic aspects of L1, resulting in the alternation of codes or ‘code-switching’ in individuals, a strategy that allows them to make the communicative act easier and more fluent. This alternation of code may be caused by the bilingual’s difficulty in retrieving the appropriate expression throughout a conversation.

Contrary to this, some scholars, such as Pavlenko (2004: 48), consider that the presence of L2 elements in L1 should not be considered a case of attrition. For the author, this phenomenon shows the ability of the bilingual to assimilate and control both languages, choosing between the most appropriate elements of each. The author adds that it may be a case of language attrition only when there is a corresponding lexical element in L1 and the person cannot recall it.

Alternatively, authors like Seliger and Vago (1991: 6) interpret code-switching as a precursor of language attrition. The fact that the bilingual cannot recover a certain element of L1, replacing it with an element of L2, demonstrates a loss of lexical wealth. This loss also manifests through difficulties in the use of specific terms or rare usage of them, which characterises the process of language attrition (Flores 2010).

Köpke and Schmid (2004: 12) consider that the attitude demonstrated by an individual towards their mother tongue plays an important role in the process of L1 attrition. One unique example was shown by Schmid (2002) in a study on Germans of Jewish origin who fled the Nazi regime and settled in the United States. The study showed that the main cause of attrition was not the absence of contact with L1, but the desire of these individuals to forget the events of which they had been victims. They had a negative attitude towards the German language owing to the horrible events they had undergone within its use and forewent the use of the

language because of this. They associated this language with these events and wanted to forget everything related to their lives in Germany.

Alternatively, instead of deliberately allowing a language to be forgotten, you may choose not to make any efforts to preserve it because it seems to be of little use. If your first language cannot provide a good future for you, you might prefer to use a 'stronger' language. This might be the choice to use the official language of a country, whereby you could pursue your education or find a gainful job, inadvertently or perhaps purposely forgetting the other.

This study focuses on language attrition in eastern Turkey, where the Kurdish population is the majority. In Turkey, the language used in education and official life is Turkish, and a person must learn Turkish to live well in the country. As a result of this, Kurdish people living here have naturally started to lose their language to some extent. Furthermore, because the maintenance of L1 requires contact with other individuals who also speak it (Bot, 2004: 221), some are not able to maintain their Kurdish as they do not have the opportunity to use it. Thus, the Kurdish population here are gradually losing their ability to use their first language.

One reason the phenomenon occurs here, then, is the lack of opportunity to use the L1. Kopke (2004:20) furthers this, noting that an L1 speaker may reside in a community of immigrants and thus be able to maintain a high level of contact with their mother tongue, but this doesn't necessarily mean that they will. They can *choose* which language to use. A speaker can choose to use the opportunity to maintain their L1 or they can choose to use L2 instead. Many things can influence this choice, but one of them can be said to be the speakers' attitude towards their mother tongue. In some instances, the L2 is a dominant language owing to its status and prestige, meaning that the L1 is of less value, not only in daily life but on a socio-evaluative basis. This might influence the decision to choose to use it outside of official life even in a place where it can be readily used, lessening the use of the language in all areas of life and considerably furthering attrition.

Though it might be practically impossible to establish the amount of contact required for individuals to maintain L1, it *is* possible to maintain it with effort (Schmid and Bot, 2004). Schmid (2011: 83) puts forward three types of L1 use that can maintain it: "interactive language use - spoken and written communication with others," which can provide L1 input and output; "non-interactive exposure - reading, media," wherein L1 is used only as input;

and, "inner language - thinking, dreams, diary writing, etc.," which can function as output. The study also claims, though, that performing these actions and their success depends on the attitude of individuals towards their mother tongue. If they have a negative attitude towards their L1, they will most likely not tend to retain it, whereas if they have a positive attitude towards their L1, they will do their best to maintain it.

Processes in the Interaction Between the Lexicon of Two Languages

Pavlenko (2004) has put forward four processes describing the interaction between the lexicon of two languages, which are also later described by Schmid (2011: 20). The first one is called *borrowing* or *lexical borrowing*, which can be defined as the use of L2 elements while speaking L1. These are typically morphologically and phonologically integrated into the L1 system (Schmid and Köpke 2009: 213). Schmid (2011: 20) defines this process as being the most overt type of cross-linguistic influence because the entire lexical form is used by the speaker. Pavlenko (2004: 48) reports that this process is more visible in the lexicon and says that it is often pointed to as a signal of first language attrition. In some cases, there is an equivalent word or element in L1, but the speaker can no longer reproduce or understand it.

The second process is called *restructuring*, in which existing L1 elements are reanalysed according to the semantic scope of the corresponding L2 item. In other words, while the item itself remains a part of the language, its meaning is changed (Schmid and Köpke 2009: 213). Unlike the loan words described before, Schmid (2011: 27) states that in this process we do not see the integration of new elements into the system, rather, these elements already exist and change in meaning. The author adds that it is possible to note this phenomenon in the lexicon of bilinguals, the meaning of some words are extended (semantic extension) or narrowed (semantic narrowing) until they coincide with the scope of meaning in the other language. Restructuring occurs when the terms in L1 and L2 are similar.

The third process is called *convergence*, and this is the merging of L1 and L2 concepts to create one single form different from both the original L1 and L2 (Schmid and Köpke 2009: 213). For this process, both languages must have similar elements. Restructuring differs from convergence, because in the latter case the elements are formally the same but have different content. An example of this phenomenon are the so-called 'false friends,' words from one language that despite their seeming to be morphologically and phonologically similar to those of another, have different meanings.

The final process is *switching*, which can be defined as the changing of L1 elements or structures to norms specified by L2 (Schmid and Köpke 2009: 213). According to Schmid (2011: 35), the exchange affects several lexical fields, whereas, in the case of borrowing, restructuring and convergence, only one lexical item is affected. The mental lexicon of bilingualism is not only affected by the contact between linguistic systems but also by a lack of stimuli, limiting access to information (Paradis 2004: 28). According to Pavlenko (2004: 47), Schmid and Köpke (2009: 213) and Schmid (2011: 38), in the case of first language attrition, the L1 system is not merely changed in the ways described above but is also simplified or 'shrunk' to some degree. This occurrence may imply an internal restructuring of the system by way of processes such as the analogical levelling of grammatical features, loss of vocabulary and an overall reduction of complexity (Schmid and Köpke 2009: 213-214). Following Schmid's words (2011: 38-39), there is a degradation of the information stored in the bilingual's memory, with the consequential internal simplification of the mental lexicon (Schmid 2011: 39).

Kurdish-speaking people living under a dominant second language, in this case Turkish, are expected to have a degraded level of mother tongue unless they have a positive attitude towards their L1. Therefore, this study undertakes to further investigate the impact of attitude on retaining L1.

Method

In this study, quantitative and qualitative research methods were used together. The use of quantitative and qualitative data to support each other increases the validity and reliability of the research (Creswell, 2003), because the combined use of different methods is important in determining the accuracy and validity of the collected data and explanations based on this data.

In the quantitative dimension of the study, the Mother Tongue Attitude Scale (MTAS), developed by Kasap and Tanhan (2018), was used to determine the attitudes of participants towards their mother tongue of Kurdish. The scale is composed of 12 items and the response options are a five-point Likert type. The Cronbach Alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.87 by researchers. The scale is considered to be highly reliable, depending on the alpha coefficient (Kayış, 2009).

The qualitative dimension of the study was based on the findings obtained from the quantitative data. The participants were asked to relate the well-known short story *Little Red Riding Hood* in Kurdish in order to observe their tendency to use Turkish words while telling the story. The storytelling of the participants was recorded and deciphered. Over and above the scale and the story, the participants own evaluation of their Kurdish speaking performance was recorded. An open-ended interview question was used as a qualitative tool, as open-ended questions provide the researcher with significant flexibility in obtaining more detailed information on the subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek; 2005).

The Participants

The sample of the study was derived through a purposive snowball sampling method. The study group consisted of 104 Kurdish-Turkish bilingual participants aged between 20 and 26 (M=22,4), who attend a university in eastern Turkey where the majority population in the region are Kurdish. There were 44 female participants and 60 males. After applying the MTAS, 10 of them (5 male and 5 female) were chosen for storytelling according to their scores in the MTAS. Five of the participants were chosen among the ones having high attitude scores and five of them were chosen among those having low attitude scores towards their L1. All participants had lived in a Turkish-speaking environment since they were born. The participants agreed to take part in this study voluntarily. For anonymity and confidentiality, each participant is coded by a number, such as P1, P2, etc.

Table 1. The details of the participants

| Participants | Age | Gender | MTAS Score |
|---------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------|
| P1 | 21 | Female | Low |
| P2 | 23 | Male | High |
| P3 | 22 | Male | High |
| P4 | 23 | Female | Low |
| P5 | 20 | Male | Low |
| P6 | 27 | Female | High |

| | | | |
|-----|----|--------|------|
| P7 | 22 | Male | High |
| P8 | 21 | Female | Low |
| P9 | 23 | Male | High |
| P10 | 22 | Female | Low |

Procedure

For this study, 104 participants identifying as Kurdish-Turkish bilinguals were initially selected. The criteria for participants were determined as having Kurdish parents and acquiring Kurdish as their first language and Turkish as their second. The MTAS was applied to all participants, and according to their scores, 10 were then selected for storytelling and interviews. Of these 10 participants, 5 had the highest scores on the MTAS scale (50-60 points), 3 of which were male and 2 female; and 5 had the lowest scores on the scale (20-30 points), 2 of which were male and 3 female. A high score on the scale indicates a positive attitude towards the mother tongue and a low score indicates a negative attitude towards the mother tongue.

Though the story *Little Red Riding Hood* was known by most of the participants, the researcher gave the story to them in picture form as a prompt, without supplying any text. It took the participants around 5 minutes to tell the story in Kurdish. The recording of each participant was deciphered by a Kurdish language expert working in the Kurdish Language department of a university. An expert aided the researcher in finding problems related to language use. After the storytelling task, the participants were asked to evaluate their performance in narrating the story in Kurdish. For the sake of brevity, only the first 4 participants' narrations have been used to show the relationship between attitude and lexical attrition.

Results and Discussion

The stories narrated by the 10 participants were recorded and analysed. Four of the participants' narrations are shown and analysed below, lexical borrowings are shown in bold

letters, and the underlined expressions represent the borrowed elements from L2 (Turkish). The correct Kurdish form and English translations are also given in parentheses in the discussion of the results.

Table 2. The number of Kurdish words and lexical borrowing used by participants

| Participants | Total Kurdish word usage | Number of Lexical borrowings | MTAS Score |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| P1 | 138 | 29 | Low |
| P2 | 252 | 4 | High |
| P3 | 297 | 7 | High |
| P4 | 135 | 22 | Low |
| P5 | 128 | 14 | Low |
| P6 | 261 | 6 | High |
| P7 | 270 | 12 | High |
| P8 | 145 | 16 | Low |
| P9 | 288 | 11 | High |
| P10 | 129 | 21 | Low |

As can be seen from Table 2, five participants have high attitude scores towards their mother tongue and five participants have low scores. The ones having low scores have borrowed more Turkish words and they could recall fewer Kurdish words; however, the participants having high scores in attitude scale borrowed fewer Turkish words and could recall more Kurdish words.

The Narration of Participant 1

Keçeke **küçük** rojekî pîrka vî hastalanmişbû. Diya keckê, got keça min ka here mala pîrka xe, here **ormanî ama dikkat** bike ji bo gurî nava **ormanî** heye. Keçik çû çû **sonra** gur hat gotî ve got:

- Keçka ser sor tu kî derî diçî?
- Keçikî got ez diçima mala pîrka xe. Ev **hastalanmişbûye**.

Gur zû zû çû mala pîrkê ve pîrkê **yutmuşkir**. **Sonra** çû nav cihê pîrkê **çünkü** gur dê keçika ser sor jî **yutmuşkira**.

Kecik çû mal. Gur nav cihê pîrka ve bû.

Got: Pîrkê, çima cave te mazin e?

- **Çünkü** ez te **gormuşkem** keça mi
- Cima guhê te mezin e **bu kadar?**
- **Çünkü** ez te **duymuşkem** keça mi
- Çima, dêvî te mazin e **peki?**
- **Çünkü** ez te **ham yapmışkim**.
- **Sonra oduncu** hat gur **kesmişkir**. Keçik **ve** pîrika vê **kurtarmışkir**.

The participant coded as P1 was able to tell the story using 138 words; however, he borrowed 28 words from Turkish to do so. As can be seen in Table 1, the participant has a negative attitude towards his mother tongue.

According to the Kurdish language expert, the participant has forgotten some basic Kurdish words such as “biçûk (small)”, “nexweş ketibû (getting sick)”, “daristan (forest)”, and so on. In place of these words, he utilised Turkish words. The participant also tended to use verbs borrowed from the Turkish language by way of the format: *Turkish verb + Turkish suffix (-miş) + Kurdish verb* (“kirin”- to make or “bûn”- to be). This is a common method of borrowing among those experiencing Kurdish attrition in a Turkish environment (Author, 2015). The verbs such as “Kesmişkir”, “Kurtarmışkir” and “Yapmışkir” were used by the participant in this case (see Table 3).

Table 3. Turkish verb + Turkish suffix (-miş) + Kurdish verb (kirin or bûn) form.

| Turkish verb | Turkish suffix | Kurdish suffix | Borrowed form |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Yutmak (to swallow) | -miş | Kirin | Yutmuşkir |
| Kurtarmak (to save) | -miş | Kirin | Kurtarmışkir |
| Kesmek (to cut) | -miş | Kirin | Kesmişkir |
| Yapmak (to do) | -miş | Kirin | Yapmışkir |
| Duymak (to hear) | -muş | Kirin | Duymuşkir |
| Beklemek (to listen) | -miş | Kirin | Beklemişkir |
| Hastalanmak (to get sick) | -miş | bûn | Hastalanmışbûn |

The participant borrowed Turkish words because he could not recall the necessary Kurdish words. Here, there are clear signs of depletion in L1 competence; he has to code-switch frequently to continue with narrating the story. As stated by Pavlenko (2004: 48), "lexical borrowing is evidence of L1 attrition only in cases where an exact L1 equivalent exists but is no longer available to the speaker." That is, the loan should be considered a sign of attrition in cases where there is an equivalent in L1. The Turkish input spoken by the participant has a Kurdish equivalent, indicating that the participant is experiencing L1 language attrition.

When the researcher asked the participant to assess his Kurdish recitation, he said:

Well, I did not like my speaking because I forgot many words and used Turkish instead. We don't speak Kurdish a lot, because we don't need it very much. If you speak Turkish, it is enough for you to survive because everybody speaks Turkish and nearly all Kurdish people know Turkish. (Participant 1)

The Narration of Participant 2

Rojekê qîzake Kumsorê hebû, diya vê, wê ra got: ka here, hînge tiam ji bo dapîra bibe, ew zaf nexeş e. Lê belê, nav ormanî de neseke, dibit ku gur heye ev têt te bixu. Qîzika Kumsor kevte rê û çû çû lê belî di nav ormanî de rastî cicekin gelek xwesik hat û sekinî û ji pîrika xwe re cicek berhev kirin. Gur hat balî kecika Kumsorê û got:

- *Rojbaş, tu kû de diçî?*
- *Dapîra min nexweş e. Ez diçim mala wê.*
- *Dapîra te li kû ye?*
- *Hima, ew li paş wî girê han ye.*

Gur keyfxeş bû, zû zû çûbû mala pîrê. Gur derî vekir û xwe avêt ser pîrê. Pîr bi carekê de xar. Kincên pîrê ber kir u xe kire na cihî û kete nav pîrê da û beklemiskir ji bo Kumsorê.

- *Qizîk hat û Gur got:*
- *Tu sercava hatî keça min a delal. Ka were bal min. Keçikê kumsor vî ra got:*
- *Pîrê, guhên te çima weha mezin e?*
- *Ji bo ku te baştir bibihîzim.*
- *Ev çavên te çima hinde mezin e?*
- *Ji bo ku te baştir bibînim.*
- *Ev pozê te çima hinde mezin e?*
- *Ji bo ku te baştir bîhn bikim.*
- *Devê te çima hinde mezin e?*
- *Ji bo ku te bixum.*

Gur Kumsorê jî bixar. Piştî hîngî xewa vî hat û raza. Oduncu hate mala Pîrê û gur dit. Kur kuşt û Kumsor û Pîrê na zikî gurî da derxist. Hemû kes keyfxeşbû. Xulas.

The participant coded as P2 was able to use 252 words to narrate the story and he borrowed only 4 words from Turkish, much fewer than the first participant. The participant has a positive attitude towards his mother tongue, as can be seen in Table 1.

According to the Kurdish language expert, the participant made good use of the Kurdish language and was able to use many words to tell the story. However, the participant had forgotten a few Kurdish words, such as “kulîlk (flower)”, “êzingvan (woodchopper)” and “daristan (forest).” Such instances are frequently seen in speakers living in an L2 environment for long periods (2011: 38). The participant does not have a problem with lexical access, which is regarded as the most vulnerable component of language attrition (Köpke and Nespoulous, 2001; Köpke & Schmid, 2004; Montrul, 2008; Opitz, 2011), as he was able to use over 250 words to tell this short story. The positive attitude of this participant has led him to read Kurdish books and listen to Kurdish media to maintain his L1. In the interview, the participant stated:

Whenever I have time, I try to read and speak Kurdish, and generally, if the people around me are Kurdish, I prefer to speak Kurdish since it is my mother language. I see many of my friends who cannot speak their mother tongue fluently due to lack of practice. (Participant 2)

The Narration of Participant 3

*Hebû tunebû qîzîkek biçûk hebû. Kumekî sor li serê qîzîkê hebû. Bo vê yekê jê re digotin qîzîka kumsor. Rojekê pîrika qîzîka kumsor nexweş bû û dayka wê gote keçka xe: Ka here keça min pîrika te nexweş bûye jê ra **kurabîyan** bibe. Dayka keça kumsorê ew **uyarmiskir** û jê ra got: *sakin te nav **ormanî** nesekine, gur dê te bixu.**

*Kumsorê soz da diya xwe çû ji bo mala pîrika xe. Nav **ormanida** de rastî çiçekin gelek xwesik hat. Çiçek topkirin lê belê gur hat bale keca Kumsorê vî ra got:*

- Rojbaş keça delal, ka mi ra bêje tu ci d'kî?

- Dapîra min nexweş e. Ez diçim mala wê.

- Dapîra te li kû ye?

*- Dapîra min piştî vê **dagi ye**,*

Gur got qîzka xatire te û revî bo mala pîrê ve baz da. Çû çû û gihîşt ber mala pîrê, li derî xist. Pîrê got:

- Ev kî ye?

Gur dengê xwe benzetmise dengê Kumsorê kir û got:

- Ez im ez, pîrê. Kecika Kumsorê.

Pîrê got:

- Derî vekiri ye, were qîza min!

Gur pîrê xar û çû nav cihê wê da û keça kumsor beklemiskir. Wexta qîzik hat, guri jê ra got:

- Tu bi xêr hatî keça min a delal. Were balî min,

-Keçikê kumsur sasirmisbu û ji ra got:

- Pîrê, guhên te çima weha mezin e?

- Ji bo ku te baştir bibihîzim.

- Ev çavên te çima hinde mezin in?

- Ji bo ku te baştir bibînim.

- Ev pozê te çima hinde mezin e?

- Ji bo ku te baştir bîhn bikim.

- Devê te çima hinde mezin e?

- Ji bo ku te bixum.

Gur Kumsorê jî bixar paşe raza. Oduncu xure xura guri bîhîst û hat. Gur kuşt û Pîrê û Kumsor nav zikin gurî da derxist.

The participant coded as P3 was able to access 297 words to narrate the story and only 7 words were borrowed from his second language. As can be seen in Table 1, the participant has a positive attitude towards his first language.

The participant could not recall the Kurdish words “*nanik* (cookies),” “*ezingvan* (woodchopper),” “*daristan* (forest),” “*Gir* (hill),” and so forth. Instead, he had to use the Turkish words “*kurabiye* (cookies),” “*oduncu* (woodchopper)” and “*dag*” (hill). This participant also tended to use borrowed verbs from the Turkish language by way of the

Turkish verb + Turkish suffix (-mıŝ) + Kurdish verb (*kirin* or *bun*) format (see Table 3). Since he could not recall the Kurdish verbs “hêvîkirin (to wait),” “eceb mayîn (to be surprised)” and “şibandin (to liken to),” he borrowed Turkish verbs using the format *Turkish verb + Turkish suffix (-mıŝ) + Kurdish verb (kirin)* and was able to tell the story by means of the verbs in their borrowed form, as for example “beklemiŝkir (to wait),” “saŝirmiskir (to be surprised),” “benzetmiŝkir” (to liken to)” and “beklemiŝkir (to wait).” When the participant was asked to assess his Kurdish oral performance, he said:

Well, I think I was good at telling the story because I could relate everything I saw in the pictures. I like speaking Kurdish with everyone who can speak Kurdish and I read books and try to keep a Kurdish diary. I do not want to forget my first language because it is who I am. If I forget my mother tongue, I cannot say I am Kurdish anymore. (Participant 3)

The Narration of Participant 4

Bir gun küçük kecik navê vê kırmızı başlıklı kız bu rojekê pîrka vî hastalanmisbû. Diya keckî got keça min pîrka xe nan bibe, here ormani ama kurt heye hızlı here. Kecik çû sonra kurt hat gotî:

- Keça kırmızı başlıklı kî derî diçî?
- Keçikê got ez diçima mala pîrka xe. Ev hastalanmişbûye.

Kurt hızlı çû mala pîrkê ve pîrkê yutmuskir. Sonra çû nav yatağa pîrkê sonra Kurt keçika jî yutmuskira.

Kecik hat mala pîrka xe. Kurt nav cihê pîrka ve bû.

Got: Pîrkê, çima çavê te mazin e?

- Ez te gormuskem keça me
- Bo çi guhê te mazin e bu kadar?
- Ez te duymuskem keca ma
- Bo çi , davê te mazen e peki?
- Çünkü ez te buxum..
- Sonra oduncu hat kurt kesmişkir. Kecik ve pîrika vê kurtarmiskir.

Participant 4 could not access many basic words in Kurdish to tell the story and had to tell it with very simple sentences. He was only able to use 135 words, and 24 of them were borrowed from the Turkish language. He also had resort to the *Turkish verb + Turkish suffix*

(-miş) + *Kurdish verb (kirin or bûn)* strategy to be able to narrate the story. His score on the MTAS scale was low, meaning he has a negative attitude towards his L1. When he was asked to assess his narration, he said:

I know I could not remember some Kurdish words as I don't speak Kurdish very often. Actually, I don't feel very confident when I speak Kurdish. When I was younger, I used to speak Kurdish a lot but because of my education, friends and environment, I am exposed to Turkish all the time so naturally, I forgot it. (Participant 4)

Most participants could not access some Kurdish words, such as “*nanik* (cookies),” “*ezingvan* (woodchopper),” “*daristan*” (forest)” and “*gir* (hill)” while trying to tell the story. For Paradis (2004: 28), each language element has thresholds that change according to the frequency and recency of their use. A lower threshold corresponds to faster and easier access to the element and a higher threshold corresponds to an element that is more difficult to access. According to this author, frequent and recent use of the elements allows the threshold to be kept low, and when an element is not used this threshold rises, and it becomes more difficult to access vocabulary.

All the participants used the *Turkish verb + Turkish suffix (-miş) + Kurdish verb (kirin or bûn)* form when they could not remember Kurdish words. According to Köpke (2004: 17), the bilingual who does not have contact with the L1 for a long time, consequently, not receiving any L1 input, will use L2 elements to fill the gaps that appear in their L1.

Conclusion

In this study, the relationship between attitude towards mother tongue and lexical attrition was investigated by looking at the attitude of Kurdish–Turkish bilinguals towards their mother tongue, and then analysing their language while telling the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*.

The results of the study showed that participants with low scores on the MTAS borrowed more Turkish words and could access a smaller number of Kurdish words, showing that they suffer more from lexical attrition than the participants with high scores on the scale. Those with higher scores on the MTAS, and thus with a positive attitude towards their mother tongue, used fewer words borrowed from Turkish and had greater access to words with which to narrate the story.

Moreover, the qualitative data shows that the participants who have a positive attitude towards their mother tongue are more willing to maintain their L1 by reading, speaking and listening in it, whereas the ones who have a negative attitude towards their L1 are not willing to strive to maintain it. The study also shows that although those with a positive attitude towards their L1 suffer less from lexical attrition, all the participants telling the story are experiencing language attrition to some extent.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

This study has investigated the relationship between the attitude towards L1 and lexical attrition among Kurdish-Turkish bilinguals; other linguistic groups remain open to study. Those with language attrition most commonly experience it at the lexical level. This conclusion represents the tip of the iceberg insofar as other linguistic aspects such as grammar, pronunciation and writing relative to L1 remain open for investigation. As our study has focused on young adults aged 20 to 26, other age groups could also be examined.

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