

# One Minority, One Language?

Evaluating Linguistic Justice for the Kurdish Minority in  
Iran and Iraq

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## Abstract

The case of the Kurdish minority in Iran and Iraq highlights the importance of monitoring linguistic justice to assess a country's inclusiveness and political stability. The Kurdish language is significant for the Kurdish people in the Middle East as it represents their identity. However, it is not a uniform language and has different dialects or varieties, which are spoken in different regions of Kurdistan. The main dialects are Kurmanji and Sorani, with Kurmanji being spoken in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, and Sorani being spoken mainly in Iraq and Iran, where it is also the language of education in the Kurdistan region. This paper compares the strategies of language policy and planning in Iraq and in Iran to evaluate which one grants the higher level of linguistic justice to the Kurdish minority.

While Iraq's federal approach has provided some linguistic rights based on a territoriality principle, it does not expand to all Kurdish varieties spoken in the region. In contrast, Iran's liberal laissez-faire diglossia policy appears more inclusive on paper, but it results in a much lower level of linguistic justice in practice. Policymakers need effective tools to address multilingualism and evaluate the effectiveness of language policies, which can create disadvantages for different linguistic groups and lead to social unease and discrimination.

Linguistic justice is an important variable in language policy and planning, and its evaluation provides useful measures of a country's level of political stability and inclusion of minorities. Monitoring the degree of linguistic justice in a society can help policymakers reduce tensions inherent to multicultural states and promote policies that reduce discriminatory situations between different ethnolinguistic groups.

## Author

Cecilia Gialdini is a Research Assistant at Ulster University. Her PhD thesis develops a multidimensional index to evaluate the level of linguistic justice of public policy applying the principles of the capability approach. Her area of interests covers minority rights, linguistic diversity and social justice.

## Keywords

Kurdish Language, Language Policy, Language Planning, Linguistic Justice, Iran, Iraq.

# One Minority, One Language?

## Evaluating Linguistic Justice for the Kurdish Minority in Iran and Iraq

The case of the Kurdish minority in Iran and Iraq highlights the importance of monitoring linguistic justice to assess a country's inclusiveness and political stability. Policymakers need effective tools to address multilingualism and evaluate the effectiveness of language policies, which can create disadvantages for different linguistic groups and lead to social unease and discrimination. Linguistic justice is an important variable in language policy and planning, and its evaluation provides useful measures of a country's level of political stability and inclusion of minorities. This paper compares the strategies of language policy and planning in Iraq and in Iran to evaluate which one grants the higher level of linguistic justice to the Kurdish minority.

### 1 Evaluating Linguistic Justice in Divided Societies

Linguistic justice is a concept that strives for the equal treatment of all languages, dialects, and linguistic communities (Shorten, 2018). It aims to protect and promote linguistic diversity and the rights of speakers of marginalized or minority languages. More practically, linguistic justice is an interdisciplinary model that observes and analyses linguistic diversity in a given area (Van Parijs, 2002; Gazzola, 2022). Justice in language policies has a double meaning: on the one side, it refers to the evaluation of the distributive effects of language policies of alternative language choices (Grin and Vaillancourt, 2015); on the other side, it encompasses a broader understanding of ensuring the establishment of background conditions that allow individuals to use their preferred language to thrive (Lewis, 2017). The idea of linguistic justice goes hand-in-hand with recognising linguistic rights, especially for national historical minorities (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1995). Liberal theorists might be tempted to leave the choice of which language to use to the people, with no intervention on the side of the state. Although language policies are a deliberate intervention of the state in the linguistic context, under this framework, the liberal concept of *laissez-faire* is defined as a deliberate abstention of the state from directing and interfering with people's linguistic choices and behaviour (Gazzola, 2014). Although, every choice that the state makes in terms of language is deliberate, even avoiding choosing a national language or deciding not to regulate the use of a minority language. Hence, every decision will eventually influence people's behaviour (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003) since language policies are ultimately coercive (Carey and Shorten, 2022), meaning that individuals must adapt to the state's decisions. Hence, even abstention from regulation in language issues rarely has a neutral meaning, but it might foster a hierarchy between languages and unbalanced use of the dominant language. Acknowledging that non-intervention is already an intervention (Cardinal and Denault, 2007), the question to be addressed is which choices the state should pursue to promote linguistic rights. Different approaches have been used in literature to assess the linguistic inclusion of minorities. Patten defines toleration rights as a set of actions to protect minority groups against the government's interference with their language choices, while accommodation rights enable the enjoyment of other rights; they are designed for minorities who lack sufficient proficiency in the dominant language of the state to access the essential services (Patten, 2015). Toniatti (1995) identifies four patterns with which the states interact with linguistic minorities: 1) *Repressive or Nationalist State*: driven by a strong nationalistic spirit, states think that the different linguistic groups should be assimilated; 2) *Agnostic or Liberal State*: a colour-blind constitution, no explicit discrimination for speaking a different language; 3) *Promotional State*: linguistic minorities are recognised, and the state takes some affirmative actions for the protection of cultural and linguistic identity; 4) *Multi-national State*: no distinctions between the majority and the minoritarian groups.

Blake (2003) and Barry (2001) argue in favour of state monolingualism and personal diglossia. They claim that language choices depend on a multitude of factors which state entities cannot consider while elaborating a public policy. Hence, since a genuinely inclusive language policy cannot be pursued, monolingualism is justified to ensure equal communication opportunities. In practice, this means providing the right to speak one's preferred language in the private sphere but using a *lingua franca* (usually the dominant language) in interactions with the state. Although this does not necessarily mean that the minority language is merely tolerated: activities to promote such languages are welcomed, especially in education and media (Haddadian-Moghaddam and Meylaerts, 2014).

Nonetheless, the interactions with the state entities to access public goods and services (namely healthcare, public administration, etc.) must be carried out in the dominant language – or with the support of an interpreter (Meylaerts and González Núñez, 2018). Hence, toleration rights are granted in this framework, but accommodation rights are limited. The state's language policy is not a monolithic, top-down series of provisions but a mosaic of different rules depending on the demo-sociolinguistic characteristics of a specific area. Kymlicka, Patten and Van Parijs advocate for the promotion of languages on a regional basis (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003; Van Parijs, 2011). This approach also endorses decentralising power and the creation of autonomous regions in areas with national minorities. As pointed out by Vaillancourt, “territorial autonomy gives a stronger foundation for the recognition of minority languages” (Vaillancourt, 2018, p.234). Decentralisation and federalism models have been applied in many areas in Europe and North America where there is a strong presence of historical linguistic minorities: it is the case of South Tyrol in Italy (Palermo, 2007), the Basque country and Catalonia in Spain (Morales-Gálvez and Cetrà, 2021) and Québec in Canada (Grin and Vaillancourt, 1999; Cardinal and Denault, 2007).

Looking at the sociolinguistic panorama of the world, with 193 countries party to the UN and more than 6,000 languages spoken in said countries, it is clear that linguistic diversity is the rule and monolingualism the exception. Given the role of language in ensuring equal access to opportunities (pragmatical function) and preserving one's heritage and identity (symbolic function), it also has a strong connection with political stability. Language is a vital element that helps maintain the cohesiveness of communities, especially when they are in a hostile language environment. However, language can also be a source of conflict, as it can promote internal cohesion and strengthen ethnic or national identity. Yet, it can also lead to sectarianism in areas with linguistic diversity. In post-conflict societies, the recognition of the language of minority groups can provoke adverse reactions from dominant groups (Suleiman, 2004). Language can become part of a political debate and lose its neutral social institution status: examples of such are prevalent in contested or conflict-ridden societies, such as Northern Ireland (McMonagle and McDermott, 2014; McDermott and Craith, 2018), Cyprus (Karyolemou, 2003) and Israel (Amara, 2017; Pinto, 2020; Gialdini, 2022). However, this phenomenon is not limited to war zones or trapped minorities. It can occur in any situation where the state discriminates against a community to assimilate them: state choices that discriminate against linguistic minorities ultimately generate broader social inequalities that can pave the way for unrest (Piller, 2018). Moreover, this approach could also be applied to areas with a strong presence of new minorities, such as asylum seekers and migrants (De Schutter, 2022; Shorten, 2022). Hence, the lack of recognition of linguistic rights in multi-ethnic states has exacerbated internal conflicts and turmoils (Rannut, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 2010).

As mentioned above, regarding language, government neutrality is not a possibility. Unlike with religion, where they can take the laicism route, or race and ethnicity, where they can choose a colour-blind approach when it comes to language, states must make choices because they need at least one language to enact legislation, to communicate with citizens, to provide services, to educate. Alcalde (2014) states that being “liberal neutrality” impossible; every choice of the state will necessarily be partisan. And since, as stated before, linguistic diversity is the rule, not the exception, failure to address diversity when designing a language policy will result in discrimination (Carey and Shorten, 2018; Shorten, 2018). Hence, evaluating linguistic justice in complex societies is particularly important to “make objective, systematic and conclusive comparisons arising from each language policy, as well as

detect the most flagrant grievances, thereby allowing preventive actions within identity conflict to be taken” (Alcalde, 2014, p. 27). Comparing the practice of Iran and Iraq with respect to the inclusion of the Kurdish language gives us a measure of that country's attempts to promote inclusion and unity.

## 2 The Kurdish People: A Divided Minority

Language is a fundamental aspect of the daily life of each individual. It serves a double purpose, both pragmatic and symbolic: as an instrument, it is defined as a system of sounds, words, and grammar that enables the communication between humans. In its symbolic nature, it represents one of the primary constituents of identity since the fact of speaking one or another language marks belonging to a particular group (Edwards, 2009).

Linguistic diversity is a common characteristic of modern states: from new immigrants to historical minorities, finding a truly and entirely linguistically homogeneous country is complex. The Middle Eastern region is no exception: Asia's demolinguistics and the Levant are highly variegated. According to Ethnologue<sup>1</sup>, Asia counts 2,306 living languages. The question that policymakers face in this respect is how to deal with multilingualism. And one of the largest and most well-known minorities in the Middle Eastern region is the Kurds. Which strategy is the most effective to ensure everyone can participate in public life? To address such questions, we might look at the principles of linguistic justice.

The Kurds are the largest group without a state (Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes, 2008). Although their presence in the region can be traced back to the ancient Medes, the Kurdish aspiration for statehood has never been fully fulfilled<sup>2</sup>. The Kurdish people have been living scattered in different countries for years, although the national spirit and an intense struggle for self-determination have been kept alive. The Kurdish minority is settled within the territory of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

The use of Kurdish within the region has suffered from the disgregation fo Kurdistan into four different countries. Indeed, Arabic and Persian, both of which are associated with Islam, cast a shadow over the language of the region (Hassanpour, 2012a; Hassani and Medjedovic, 2016). At the same time, the process of “Turkification” of Mostafa Kemal Atatürk and the following nationalist discourse left little space for linguistic minorities in Turkey (Cemiloglu, 2009; Öpengin, 2012; Zeydanlioğlu, 2012). Yezidism used Kurmanji, the dialect of Kurdish, while Ahl-e Haqq used various texts in Hewrami. However, even within Kurdish dialects, there are some differences in the distribution. The divisions among Kurdish dialects have significantly impacted their political influence and developmental trajectory. Most Kurds in all countries where Kurdish is spoken now use Kurmanji, also known as Northern Kurmanji or Northern Kurdish. Sorani, also called Southern Kurmanji or Central Kurdish, is primarily spoken in Iran and Iraq. The third group of dialects, identified as Southern Kurdish or Kermashani, is primarily spoken in Iran, although some of its sub-dialects are also present in Iraq. The fourth group consists of Hewrami or Gorani in European philology, spoken in Iran and Iraq, and Zaza or Dimilki in Turkey. Each dialect group comprises several sub-dialects (Hassanpour, Sheyholislami and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012).

The Kurdish language is a symbol of identity for Kurds in the Middle East. Although Kurdish is not a unique and uniform language: it consists of different dialects or varieties with varying degrees of demographic distribution in other regions of the divided Kurdistan (Hassani and Medjedovic, 2016). The main dialects are Kurmanji and Sorani, with Kurmanji spoken mainly in Turkey, Syria, and parts of Iraq and Iran. Sorani is spoken in Iraq and Iran and is the language of education in the Kurdistan Region of

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnologue is a periodical publication that provides statistics and other informations (including history and vitality) on the living languages of the world. The data included in this paper reference the 2022 edition.

<sup>2</sup> A complete historical overview of the evolution of the Kurdish struggle for a nation goes beyond the scope of this paper. There is although a rich literature on the subject (Gurses, 2014; Izady, 2015; Gunes, 2018).

Iraq (Tavadze, 2019). To that, we should add the Kurds of the diaspora who settled in Europe and North America but kept a strong connection with their roots to create a sort of “virtual state” through new media. Romano (2010) has analysed the role of the internet in the Kurds living in the diaspora to pursue a political agenda, organise a demonstration and circulate publications that have been banned in Turkey. Candan and Hunger (2008) discuss a “cyber-nation” created among the Kurdish community in Germany, which uses the internet to maintain the Kurdish language and political discourse. In fact, except for Iraqi Kurdistan since 1991, the state of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran have held a monopoly on broadcasting to promote their own official language, nationalism and political agenda, most of the times to the detriment of linguistic minorities such as Kurds (Sheyholislami, 2010). The Kurdish population throughout the four countries and the Kurds of the diaspora have challenged this hegemony since 1995 with the launch of MED-TV, the first Kurdish satellite television channel, which in the late 90s followed a proliferation of Kurdish-speaking stations (Eriksen, 2007).

The dominant majority of the country has repressed chiefly Kurdish statehood and language. Turkey has followed a strong nationalistic “one language, one nation” principle, making even the use of Kurdish illegal until 1991<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, in Syria, the Kurdish population has been repressed, especially since the 1960s with the surge of Arab nationalism: despite Rojava having declared independence, Damascus has not recognised the status of an autonomous region and the Kurdish people and Kurdish language still suffer from discrimination. Because of their shortcomings in the matter of protection of linguistic and minority rights, Turkey and Syria will not be taken into consideration within the present article. Instead, the analysis will focus on the practices that Iran and Iraq have elaborated to preserve the Kurdish minority's identity. The two countries have chosen two opposite approaches to the inclusion of linguistic minorities. Iraq has decided to opt for a territoriality-based approach (Van Parijs, 2015), namely, to provide linguistic rights according to the demographic and administrative structure of the different regions, resulting in a multi-ethnic and multilingual federalist state. Iran, on the contrary, decided to refrain from intervening in matters regarding language, pursuing a *laissez-faire* approach focused on diglossia: Farsi as the *lingua franca* and freedom to use any language in private interactions.

The following paragraphs will analyse the choices taken by Iran and Iraq concerning the Kurdish minority to examine which of those provide the highest level of linguistic justice – and hence, which ones are more likely to lead to minority inclusion and political stability (Alcalde, 2014).

### 3 Regional Bilingualism in Iraq

Kurdish is mainly spoken in the north of Iraq, in the region known as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). The area became *de facto* autonomous in 1970 and was formally established in 1991. In the aftermath of the invasion by the US of the country and the fall of Saddam Hussein's government, the new Constitution ratified the official recognition of the autonomous region: The KRG is a Parliamentary Democracy within the federated Republic of Iraq. The KRG has legal jurisdiction over three provinces, Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah.

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution granted autonomy to the Kurds under the perspective of creating an ethnic federation (Danilovich, 2016). Iraqi legislators sought a “liberal” federalist solution to accommodate Iraq's mobilised communities and provide fertile soil to create a united public identity which encompassed different ethnicities (McGarry and O'Leary, 2007). Federalism, indeed, is deemed to be a valid option to maintain the unity of multi-ethnic states; however, it can also foster segregation (Danilovich, 2016) and ultimately lead to secession, especially in cases like the Iraqi one, where the federal state did not result from devolutionary bargain such as the one happened in Canada and

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<sup>3</sup> In 1991, the Law No. 2932 (enforced in November 1983) was lifted. The law prohibited the use of any language other than Turkish in publications and broadcast.



Belgium (Danilovich, 2016). Safran (1999, p.11) identified a series of conditions that allow an ethnic group to have federal autonomy: 1) Cultural benefits are more important than economic; 2) Legitimate grievances over past discriminatory relationships; 3) Serious threat to cultural identity under the current arrangement; 4) The grant of autonomy will preserve the freedoms and respect of other ethnic minorities. In the case of Iraq, federalism was meant from the outset to accommodate Kurdish nationalism, identity, language and culture. All attempts to do that within a unitary state by domestic actors failed (Danilovich, 2016). Indeed, according to many scholars (Anderson, 2007; McGarry and O'Leary, 2007), the introduction of federalism in Iraq was a debatable decision and had the possibility of having unintended negative effects on the country and its people. Iraq has been dealing with a long-standing issue of division based on ethnicity and religious sectarianism, resulting in many people not being loyal to the central government.

Nonetheless, despite these shortcomings, the federal model has shown some success in ensuring linguistic justice. Article 4 of the 2005 Constitution states: "The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq. The right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongues, such as Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian, shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions". In practice, the demolingistics of KRG had not been ratified in any legal document. Sorani Kurdish became the *de facto* official language of the autonomous region (see article 4 of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution); nonetheless, Kurmanji Kurdish, which was spoken in the province of Duhok, has been used in public institutions and schools in that area. Moreover, the 1996 Provisional Constitution of KRG defines Kurdish as the region's official language and Arabic, Turkmen and Syriac languages of education for these groups' minorities. Despite not being currently implemented, it is significant to note how this document framed the official languages of the region.

The model followed by the Iraqi constituents was the federal model, which falls under the definition of a *multi-national state* under Toniatti's classification (Toniatti, 1995) and provides a *combination of monolingualism and multilingualism* depending on the level of governance (Arabic is still primarily used at a central level, while Kurdish is the primary language of one region). Drawing from a study conducted by Skutnabb-Kangas and Fernandes (2008) in Turkey and Iraq, Sheyholislami (2009) states that KRG constitutes a "rare positive example" of protection of linguistic rights of minorities, quite an exception in the Middle Eastern region where minorities struggle to gain even just recognition – even though there are some claims on the practical implementations of article 4: in February 2022, the KRG long-term President Masrour Barzani reported that many employers categorise the Kurdish language as "preferred" while considering Arabic and English languages as "required" in their job description (Faidhi Dri, 2022).

Despite its autonomous status, the KRG is not exempt from criticism when it comes to linguistic inclusion: in fact, neither the Iraqi Constitution nor the KRG determines *which* Kurdish shall be official: Sorani Kurdish became the *de facto* official language of the autonomous region; nonetheless, Kurmanji Kurdish, which was spoken in the province of Duhok, has been used in public institutions and school in that area. In addition, according to the most recent estimates, there are around 50,000 Hawrami speakers: Hawrami is not standardised, but it is widely used in the public life of the people coming from Duhok, even in the diasporic communities (Sheyholislami, 2012, p.122). Until recent times, the language fragmentation of the Kurdish language did not pose any obstacles in the Kurdish nationalist movement. In particular, until 1992, all Kurdish varieties in Iraq were equally oppressed by the Baathist regime in Baghdad. The situation changed with the overturning of Saddam Hussein and the recognition of Kurdish as an official language of the state of Iraq in the 2005 Constitution. Positive and promotion rights were recognised, but without indicating which dialect of Kurdish those rights would be granted. While before, all the Kurds of the region were more or less united against the Arabic-speaking government of Baghdad, the recognition of the Kurdish *tout-court*, disrespecting the differences in varieties, created a shift in the group dynamics in KRG. Borrowing the terminology from the Intergroup Conflict Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), before 2005, Kurdish people, the *in-group*, were united in protecting their identity against the Arabic-speaking Iraqis, the *out-group*. After the Constitution was approved, the *in-*

group faced fragmentations and identity struggles among Sorani, Kurmanji and Hawrami speakers. Linguistic differences caused fragmentation in the whole Kurdish society. The absence of a common enemy has brought internal divisions between the different linguistic groups to the surface, which originated a heated debate over the officialisation and standardisation of Kurdish in KRG.

In 2006, individuals signed a petition to the KRG Parliament asking for Hawrami to be recognised as a “distinct linguistic minority” and demanding it to be a medium of education in the schools of the Hawaraman region. Sorani speakers deemed the petition to be jeopardising unity: as a response, in 2008, another petition was filed to make Sorani the standard language (Khalid, 2015). In addition to the Hawrami attempt to recognise, the Kurmanji community also took action to ratify their presence in the KRG. In 2005, five students from Soran University in Erbil were asked to write their dissertations in Kurmanji. The Dean refused, but this episode raised the issue of using the language for education. In 2008, the Duhok Governorate Assembly implemented Kurmanji as the language of instruction for grades 7-9 (with permission from Erbil). Later, Kurmanji became the official language of instruction in all public schools, colleges and universities in Duhok, as well as the working language of the governorate (Sheyholislami, 2017). Soranist replied to the claim of making Kurmanji official with a quite nationalistic point of view, saying the “adoption of two dialects as the official language will divide the Kurdish nation into two pieces” (Hassanpour, 2012, p.67). Sheyholislami (2012) notes that linguistic diversity is almost always seen as a threat to nationalism and that the nation-state ideology tends to advocate for linguistic homogeneity, even if that means repressing minority claims. Kurdistan is no exception to the rule, despite its history of being oppressed.

## 4 Diglossia by Constitution in Iran

While Iraq opted for decentralisation and a federalist approach, Iran took a different route to include the Kurdish minority. The first Constitution of Iran, adopted in 1906, declared Persian the official language of all Iranians. In addition, a supplementary fundamental law of 1907, under article 19, imposed Persian as the language of instruction, although this policy remained inactive until the government of Tehran became more centralised. This happened at the beginning of the Pahlavi reign: the first Pahlavi ruler was Reza Khan, who came to power with the British-backed *coup d'état* of 1921 (Curtis, 2018). Similarly to Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, the Pahlavi centralised the power (Fernandes, 2012). In creating a national identity, they followed the ideology of “one nation, one language” which resulted in a ban on non-Persian languages (Weisi, 2021). Persian became the only language used in government institutions, including schools.

At best, the status of minority languages during Reza Pahlavi’s rule can be defined as restricted and controlled tolerance. Things started to change under Mohammad Reza Shah’s rule (1941–1979). The new Shah started to relax the coercive assimilation of minorities, including Kurds, meaning that non-Persian minorities could speak their language at home and within their communities. Notwithstanding the assimilation policies of the Pahlavi, materials in Kurdish were still clandestinely printed and circulated to indicate that the Kurds were unwilling to let go of their identity (Gunes, 2018). Some publications and broadcasting in Kurdish were allowed, and universities were granted the possibility to teach Kurdish in their curriculum (Sheyholislami, 2012a). Despite these adjustments, Hassanpour (1992) categorises the situation of Kurdish in Iran during both monarchy regimes as “linguicide”.

Kurds took the 1979 revolution as the momentum to fight for self-determination: in fact, both progressive and conservative political organisations participated actively in the uprising to dethrone the Shah. Kurdish delegations participated in the negotiations post-revolution to determine the new state’s government. At the same time, literary and cultural organisations flourished – the University of Kurdistan was founded, and Kurdish was starting to be taught in schools in Kurdish-populated cities such as Mahabad, Bookan, and Sardasht (Sheyholislami, 2012a).

After the 1979 revolution, Iran declared itself a multilingual and multi-ethnic country, as recognised by the Constitution. As pointed out by Paul, “the question of border, colour, language and race doesn't exist” became a fundamental feature of the Islamic Republic’s narrative (Paul, 1999, p.209). Article 15 of the Constitution states that “[t]he official language and script of Iran, the lingua franca of its people, is Persian. Official documents, correspondence, and texts, as well as textbooks, must be in this language and script”. Following the Constitution, minority languages should be recognised and promoted, but the application of Article 15 of the Islamic Republic of Iran lacked implementation, especially in education. Independent of the school system, since the mid-1990s, there have been some informal and *ad hoc* private Kurdish teaching classes in some parts of Iranian Kurdistan. Persian is still considered the “official” language, while other languages are regarded as “local”: Cabi underlines how in modern times, the role of Farsi has transformed from a more neutral *lingua franca* to a formal national language (Cabi, 2021). This was partially the intention behind the article itself. Namely, the idea was to push the population to diglossic bilingualism, using Farsi as the language of interaction with the state entities and the minority language in in-group and informal face-to-face communications, which is indeed the case for many other minorities such as the Azeri and Armenians in Tehran (Nercissians, 2001). Although, in practice, this lack of intervention in promoting minority languages has paved the way for a “Persianisation” of language policies. Broadcasting is under a state monopoly, and even if there are some media publications in Kurdish (Naby, 2006), the content is still subject to tight control by the government: in this respect, Sheyholislami claims that “the supremacy of Persian as a venue for unifying the ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous body politic is perpetuated not only by the state apparatus but also by the majority of Iranian academics who have written on language policy and planning, the Iranian film industry, publishers and other forms of media” (Sheyholislami, 2012a, p.42). In a study on the translation policies in Iran, Haddadin-Moghaddam and Meylaerts (2015) note that most of the MPs with a minority background still use Persian on their websites and in official communications. None of the official websites is bilingual or has even translated bits. In fact, despite the narrative of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a multilingual and multi-ethnic state, Haddadin-Moghaddam and Meylaerts claim that “Persianization” of non-Persian peoples is the main element of language policy in Iran, especially when looking at the role of translation in LPP. Persian-only educational policies are the most common practice (Sheyholislami 2012), and even when it comes to linguistic landscapes, the presence of Persian is predominant (Mirvahedi, 2016). Translation policies in the media are also recorded as unbalanced and assimilating towards the Farsi-speaking majority (Haddadian-Moghaddam and Meylaerts, 2014). Overall, it seems that the ostensibly multilingual language policies are monolingual, reinforcing the dominance of Persian and disregarding minority languages (Hassanpour, 2012b).

That being said, the current turmoil in Iran might lead to some changes in the policies regarding minorities. In fact, the recent protests that have rapidly spread throughout Iran initially began in the Kurdish area after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman who was arrested by morality police in Tehran for wearing an “improper” hijab. Her death ignited protests throughout the whole country (Gritten and Slow, 2022; Kasirga, 2022), which encountered severe backlashes and repression from the central government, especially in the Kurdish region (Gol, 2022; Hawramy, 2022). Despite this strong connection to the Kurdish minority, the narrative of the riots has addressed women's rights and religious freedom, neglecting the ethnic aspect (Mustafa, 2022). The “Kurdishness” of the movement and the political claim of higher linguistic justice for the Kurds seems to have been surpassed by a more general call for human rights (Costello, 2023). In fact, even the mandate of the Fact-Finding Mission created by the OHCHR aims at investigating “alleged human rights violations in the Islamic Republic of Iran related to the protests that began on 16 September 2022, especially with respect to women and children”(OHCHR Resolution S35/1, 2022). The work of the mission has just started, and the call for submission is open: it is possible that this inquiry would provide a platform for the Kurdish minority (and other linguistic minorities living in Iran) to make their voices heard and advocate for higher linguistic justice.

Being language a fundamental element of identity, it plays a crucial role in conflict-ridden societies (Maass, Salvi, and Arcuri 1989; Nelde 1987) and in an environment with the presence of historical minorities, such as the Kurdish one in Iran and Iraq (Hassanpour, Skutnabb-Kangas and Chyet, 1996).

Iran and Iraq have pursued different strategies for managing linguistic diversity concerning the Kurdish minority.

Despite the discrepancies in its application, Iraq's federalist approach appears to be the most successful in preserving the identity of the Kurdish minority: the bilingualism established by the Constitution gives the legal ground to provide public goods and services in the language of the minority, ensuring equal access to opportunities. Although, Iraqi Kurdistan still needs to make additional steps to recognise linguistic diversity. Indeed, at the moment, Kurmanji is the language of education in the Duhok province, and Hawrami has been used in informal communications (Sheyholislami, 2012b, 2017). However, Sorani remains the dominant Kurdish variety (Hassanpour, Sheyholislami and Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012). Indeed, Iraq has ended up with asymmetric federalism that protects only KRG autonomy and the Kurdish language by law, disregarding other linguistic minorities living in the rest of the country (Jongerden, 2019). Although the same claim can be made within Kurdish linguistic policies: the central government has failed to provide guidelines on the varieties of Kurdish protected by law, regarding them as a whole, which paved the way for the dominance of one type over the other.

On the contrary, Iran's strategies of leaving the choice of language to the individuals did not result in the expected neutral bilingual diglossia. The indication of a *lingua franca* and a lack of intervention in promoting minority languages has paved the way for a "Persianisation" of language policies. Similarly, with the case of Kurmanji and Hawrami in Iraq, the mere absence of discrimination towards a language does not guarantee its survival: together with what Kymlicka and Patten define as "toleration rights" (namely the absence of repression of a minority), there is the need for "promotion rights", a series of actions aimed at endorse and sponsor the language and the culture of a minority (Kymlicka and Patten, 2003). This shows how important it is to consider language as a matter of public policy. As such, it should require state intervention and regulation to give linguistic minorities the space to thrive.

Another important element to consider is the relationship between the governments of Iran and Iraq with respect to the Kurdish minority. Indeed, the ongoing unrest in Iran has exacerbated the already strained relations between Iran and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Tensions between the two sides began to rise following the KRG's independence referendum in 2017, and they have continued to deteriorate since the outbreak of the protests in Iran (Ahmed and Shukri, 2023). Indeed, according to Iran, foreign interference is responsible for causing the protests, and they have accused Kurdish opposition groups in Northern Iraq of being involved, which resulted in a series of missile attacks in the Iraqi region (Abdul-Zahara and Kullab Samya, 2022). While this strategy seems to be aimed at separating the Kurdish communities even more, its consequences on minority rights in the two countries are still unforeseeable.

## 5 Conclusion

Looking at the case of the Kurdish minority in Iran and Iraq clearly emerges how important monitoring the level of linguistic justice is to assess not only the inclusiveness of a country but also its political stability. Indeed, in Iraq, the federal approach has provided some linguistic rights based on a territoriality principle. However, this recognition does not expand to all the varieties of Kurdish spoken in the region. Indeed, while the level of linguistic justice in the overall country of Iraq can be considered high, the same is not true if we increase the zoom on the KRG only. While this asymmetry clearly constitutes an issue of equality within the region, the model adopted by Iraq, focused on state intervention and devolution, seems to have granted the most results. Conversely, in Iran, the diglossia animated by a liberal *laissez-faire* seems to be more inclusive on paper; it results in a much lower level of linguistic justice in practice, with little to no use of Kurdish in the public sphere. While linguistic rights are not central in the claims of the protests started in September 2022, the fact that the leading forces

in the riots are Kurdish might unveil a certain discontent with the accommodation policies of the Iranian government.

As language policies gain more attention, there is a need to measure and evaluate their effectiveness (Gazzola, Wickström and Fettes, 2023; Gialdini, 2023). Policymakers need tools to address multilingualism most effectively and fairly since the choices they make in language matters might create disadvantages among different linguistic groups (Shorten, 2017, 2018), which ultimately might lead to a broader social unease and discrimination (Piller, 2018). Linguistic justice is defined as a variable of language policy and planning (Gazzola, 2022), and its evaluation provides us with useful measures of the level of political stability of a country and inclusion of minorities. Moreover, such stability is intrinsically connected with reducing discriminatory situations between the various ethnolinguistic groups (Alcalde, 2014, p.24): hence, monitoring the degree of linguistic justice existing in a society provides a measure for the policies aimed at reducing tensions inherent to multicultural states.

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