



# Negotiating Monolingual Official Language Policy at the Nexus of Locally Situated Language Practices and Dominant Language Ideologies in a Language Minority Context

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## Abstract

This paper examines how children and teachers negotiate the official Turkish only language policy as they manage their linguistic resources (Turkish and Kurmanji) in one Turkish preschool serving predominantly emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children. Using a critical ethnographic lens to language-in-education policy making (Martin-Jones and Da Costa Gabral, in: Tollefson, Pérez-Milans (eds) *The Oxford handbook of language policy and planning*, Oxford University Press, 2018), the study investigates how children and teachers navigate locally situated language practices and language ideologies that accord legitimacy and authority to standard Turkish and officially invisibilise Kurmanji in the preschool. Findings indicate that acting as agentive social actors teachers and children do not merely comply to the Turkish only language policy but they also adapt, recast, and contest it in social interaction. They stress the need to rethink the language-in-education policy in the Turkish educational system in ways that recognise and leverage teachers and children's entire linguistic repertoires and experiences for teaching and learning.

**Keywords** Official language policy · Situated language practices · Language ideologies · Kurdish minority children · Turkish preschool

## Résumé

Cet article examine comment les enfants et les enseignants négocient la politique linguistique officielle monolingue turque lorsqu'ils gèrent leurs ressources linguistiques (turc et kurmandji) dans une école maternelle turque accueillant principalement des

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enfants bilingues émergents de la minorité kurde. Adoptant une orientation ethnographique critique à l'élaboration des politiques linguistiques éducatives (Martin-Jones et Da Costa Gabral, dans : Tollefson, Pérez-Milans (éds) *The Oxford handbook of language policy and planning*, Oxford University Press, 2018), cette recherche présente la manière dont ces enfants et ces enseignantes fluctuent entre les pratiques linguistiques locales et les idéologies linguistiques qui accordent légitimité et autorité au turc standard et invisibilisent officiellement le kurmandji à l'école maternelle. Les résultats indiquent qu'en agissant en tant qu'acteurs sociaux actifs, les enseignantes et les enfants ne se contentent pas de se conformer à la politique linguistique monolingue turque, mais l'adaptent, la réélaborent et la contestent dans l'interaction sociale. Ils soulignent la nécessité de repenser les politiques linguistiques éducatives dans le système éducatif turc afin de reconnaître et d'exploiter l'ensemble des répertoires et expériences linguistiques des enseignants et des enfants pour enseigner et apprendre.

### Resumen

Este artículo examina cómo alumnado y profesorado negocian la política oficial monolingüe del uso exclusivo de la lengua turca al gestionar sus recursos lingüísticos (turco y kurmanji) en una escuela infantil turca que atiende principalmente a niños y niñas bilingües emergentes de la minoría kurda. Adoptando una perspectiva etnográfica crítica para el desarrollo de políticas lingüísticas educativas (Martin-Jones y Da Costa Gabral, en: Tollefson, Pérez-Milans (eds) *The Oxford handbook of language Policy and Planning*, Oxford University Press, 2018), esta investigación presenta la forma en que estos niños y niñas y profesorado navegan entre las prácticas lingüísticas locales y las ideologías lingüísticas que otorgan legitimidad y autoridad al turco estándar y hacen invisible oficialmente a la lengua Kurmanji en el preescolar. Los resultados indican que, al actuar como actores sociales activos, el profesorado y los niños y niñas no sólo se limitan a acatar la política lingüística monolingüe turca, sino que la adaptan, la reelaboran y la cuestionan en la interacción social. Así mismo, destacan la necesidad de repensar las políticas lingüísticas educativas en el sistema educativo turco para reconocer y aprovechar todos los repertorios lingüísticos y las experiencias de profesorado y alumnado para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje.

### Introduction

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) protects children against all forms of discrimination including language and ethnic origin (article 2.1). It ensures children's access to education as a fundamental human right that respects "his or her own cultural identity, language and values" (article 29c). Seen through a children's rights lens, fostering multilingualism in education where children can communicate and feel valued using the full range of their linguistic repertoires can enable the creation of inclusive and democratic societies. Yet, the pervasive nation state ideology usually sanctions one national standard or a very limited number of standard languages to be officially used in formal educational settings

and reinforces language separation pedagogic practices (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Minority languages and non-standard varieties tend to be excluded in many formal educational models hindering the nurturing of children's multilingual abilities and multiple identities and relationships indexed through them (Ioannidou et al., 2020). These conditions raise questions concerning how teachers might best serve children from ethnic minority communities who are new to the school's national standard. Concomitantly, how ethnic minority children might learn to navigate the linguistic norms and practices of officially monolingual and monocultural educational settings. This paper examines the negotiation of official Turkish only language policy, and the enactment of locally situated language practices in a Turkish preschool located in a predominantly Kurdish majority city in the southeast of Turkey. Underpinning these negotiations are dominant ideological orientations concerning what language practices are valued, and whose linguistic resources are considered legitimate when, where and with whom in educational contexts and in broader society (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2004). With the exception of some elite private preschools that implement forms of English–Turkish bilingual education, preschools in Turkey are officially Turkish monolingual and monocultural institutional spaces. The Turkish Preschool Education Programme (2013) implemented nationally further stipulates the importance of standard Turkish. In particular, the first two goals of the Programme emphasise and perpetuate dominant prescriptivist language ideologies that associate speaking Turkish “accurately and clearly” with school-readiness, i.e. preparing children for their successful transition and social and educational integration in primary school:

1. To ensure that children speak Turkish accurately and clearly;
2. To prepare children for primary school (Preschool Education Programme, 2013, p.8).

Such prescriptivist language ideologies link language to the nation and strengthen the construction of national identities through “the *one language/one culture/one nation paradigm*” (italics in the original; Pujolar, 2007). In an earlier study examining the Turkish Preschool Education Programme from an inclusive perspective, Gelir (2021) identified elements of inclusivity, such as flexibility and fostering universal values (understood as values promoted by the United Nations). For instance, the Programme postulates the design and implementation of learning activities that “can be adapted and structured according to the school's location, family and children's changing needs” (Preschool Education Programme, 2013, p.13). However, it neither explicitly states nor suggests an understanding of inclusive multilingualism in pedagogic practice that acknowledges and leverage the languages and cultures of ethnic minority, immigrant, and refugee children for teaching and learning. Rather in the Turkish education system, the implementation of inclusive pedagogies has been understood to target mainly children with disabilities (Kesik & Beycioglu, 2022). Author 2 has argued for the need to expand the understanding of inclusive education in the Turkish educational

system “to include all children who have hitherto experienced different forms of exclusion, including coming from an immigrant or minority family” (Gelir, 2021, p.56). The influx of refugee children predominantly from Syria in 2015 and 2016 have propelled linguistic diversity to the forefront of educational debates. It has increased awareness of the significance of language barriers in educational achievement and social integration due to the lack of Arabic-speaking teachers in primary schools serving a high percentage of Syrian refugee children (Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Çetin & İçduygu, 2019). This paper proposes to extend further the understanding of inclusive education in the Turkish educational system to encompass a translanguaging and transcultural orientation (Lytra et al., 2022). This orientation raises awareness about the normalcy of multilingualism in teaching and learning and the need to support the languages and cultures of all children in the Turkish educational system. In so doing, it takes as an illustrative case emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children in a Turkish preschool.

To date, there is a dearth of educational research that examines how very young children (age 5) from ethnic minority, immigrant and refugee backgrounds who are new to Turkish, and their teachers might negotiate linguistic norms and practices that regulate, and regiment language use expected to occur monolingually in Turkish preschools. Moreover, very limited attention has been given specifically to emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children within the Turkish educational system (but see Gelir, 2018 for a notable exception). Despite demands to receive education in Kurdish and teach in Kurdish, there is still no Kurdish-medium education in preschools, primary or secondary schools in predominantly Kurdish majority areas in Turkey. The use of Kurmanji, the Kurdish language spoken by the children in the preschool reported in this paper, is not officially allowed in preschools. In accordance with article 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey (1982) that “no language other than Turkish shall be taught as mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education” (<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b5be0.html>), the Turkish Preschool Education Programme neither stipulates the use of languages other than Turkish as medium of instruction nor does it recognise them as a transition language to facilitate Turkish language learning. Educational policy in Turkey regarding minority, immigrant and refugee languages is primarily assimilative and supports very limited forms of bilingual education.

With the exception of the teaching of prestigious foreign languages and the provisions of international treaties that safeguard the language rights of a handful of officially recognised non-Muslim minorities (Armenians, Jews and Greeks), teachers find themselves coping with dilemmas and constraints: on the one hand, they must construct a positive learning environment attentive to “the school’s location, family and children’s changing needs”, which may be interpreted as opening an implicit curricular space for multilingualism and linguistic resources other than Turkish. On the other hand, they must maximise children’s opportunities for school access and progression mediated exclusively through the acquisition and performance of “clear and accurate” Turkish. Against these seemingly contradictory curricular demands, the paper uses a critical ethnographic lens to language-in-education policy making (Martin-Jones & Da Costa Gabral, 2018) to investigate how the official Turkish only language policy “is translated into day-to-day educational practice” (: 72).

It asks: how do children and teachers negotiate the official Turkish only language policy as they manage their linguistic resources (Turkish and Kurmanji) in one Turkish preschool serving predominantly emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children and their families? Situated within critical, poststructuralist perspectives, this focus allows us to link the interactional accomplishment of language-in-education policies in the classroom with wider social and ideological processes (Martin-Jones & Da Costa Gabral, 2018). The analysis sheds light on how children and teachers in minority language contexts negotiate locally situated language practices and language ideologies that accord legitimacy and authority to national standards in schools and classrooms. It foregrounds the agentive role of very young emergent bilingual children and their teachers as they interpret and implement the official Turkish only language policy at the nexus of specific participant and spatiotemporal configurations in daily life at school. Acknowledging the agency of very young emergent bilingual children and their teachers, findings indicate that they do not merely accept or comply with the language-in-education policy but they also adapt, recast, question, or contest it in social interaction.

### **A Critical Ethnographic Lens to Language-In-Education Policy**

The critical ethnographic lens to language-in-education policy adopted in this paper is situated within a broader epistemological shift in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics from viewing languages as unitary and essentialist social categories tied to a particular inheritance (e.g. of ethnicity, nationality, religion) to rethinking language as social and ideological construction (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006). Heller (2007) proposes an understanding of language “as a set of resources which circulate in unequal ways in social networks and discursive spaces, and whose meanings and social values are socially constructed within the constraints of social organisational processes, under specific historical conditions” (: 2). This conceptualisation of language allows an analytical focus on very young emergent bilingual children and their teachers as social actors and conceptualises their linguistic repertoires embedded in specific biographies and located in specific socio-cultural and historical contexts (Busch, 2012). This focus aligns with a translingual and transcultural orientation to language and language pedagogy (Lytra et al., 2022) that interrogates dominant monolingual policies, practices, and ideologies and valorises and leverages pedagogically all social actors’ linguistic repertoires for teaching and learning. Schools and classrooms are key sites for the (re)production of language-in-education policies. A robust body of empirical research to which the present paper seeks to contribute has demonstrated how within state schools and classrooms, specific linguistic resources (national standards or official languages) come to be imbued with authority and legitimacy over others that are categorised as marginal (minority/immigrant/home languages, non-standard varieties) (e.g. Heller, 1999; Cushing, 2021; Gundarina & Simpson, 2021; Quehl, 2022). Critical ethnography, as May (1997) argues, foregrounds “the role of ideology in sustaining and perpetuating inequality within particular settings” (: 197). Hornberger and Johnson (2007) call for

the need to focus on the political and ideological processes underpinning language-in-education policies.

Linking the linguistic with the social, Kroskirty (2010) defines language ideologies as the “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and nation-states” (: 192). State policy in Turkish preschools prescribes standard Turkish as the only official language of instruction. Underpinning the Turkish monolingual policy is the notion that language signifies peoplehood. Lewis (1999) discusses how the identification of the use of Turkish with the Turkish people has been a constituent component of Turkish nation building since the early 1930s, constructing what Gogolin (2021) has referred to as a “monolingual habitus” that views monolingualism as “representing the nature of things” (: 300). The standardisation and purification of Turkish from Arabic and Persian were the outcome of the *dil devrimi* (language reform). The language reform was an integral part of a broader ideological and political project to sever the ties of the newly established state with its multilingual, multiethnic and multifaith Ottoman past and consolidate a modern “westernised” monolingual and monocultural Turkish national identity. Through enregisterment processes understood as “processes through which a linguistic repertoire becomes differentiable within a language as a socially recognised register of forms” (Agha, 2003, p.231) the sociolect of Istanbul’s élites was elevated to the national standard. Agha (2003) identifies teachers as “exemplary speakers” tasked with spreading the national standard and shaping the language practices of the children in their classrooms. Acting as “exemplary speakers”, teachers may reproduce the dominant discourse of the national standard as the only legitimate language in the classroom. Focussing analytically exclusively on the hegemonic power of the national standard may obscure the multiplicity of and contradictions inherent in language ideologies and language practices that teachers and students may negotiate in a specific school context. As Kroskirty reminds us, “language ideologies are thus grounded in social experience which is never uniformly distributed throughout polities of any scale” (Kroskirty, 2010: 197). Lytra (2015) illustrated, for instance, “the web of language ideologies” articulated by Turkish-speaking young people in two different Turkish-speaking communities and instructional settings in London and Athens: on the one hand the young people accepted and reproduced the prestige of standard Turkish, albeit in different ways, and on the other hand they contested it.

Historically, within the Ottoman Empire, ethnic minority communities were permitted to use their mother tongue or foreign languages as medium of instruction in the educational institutions they administered. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the implementation of the Turkish only official language policy in all state schools, minority languages faced severe restrictions (Ozfidan et al., 2018). Kurdish identity in particular was denied, and Kurdish language and culture was repressed in private and public spaces with the aim of linguistic and cultural assimilation (Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994). The ban on the use of Kurdish in private everyday life was officially lifted in the early 1990s and Kurdish identity was supposed to be recognised (Skutnabb-Kangas & Bucak, 1994). Despite demands to receive education in Kurdish and teach in Kurdish, it

was as recently as 2012 that Kurmanji was offered as a language elective in selected Turkish state secondary schools. Apart from this limited provision, there is still no Kurdish-medium education in preschools, primary or secondary schools in predominantly Kurdish majority areas in Turkey and literacy in Kurdish remains extremely low (2018). Significant challenges, such as lack of appropriate teaching materials and resources, qualified Kurdish language teachers, and teacher training opportunities for Kurdish, remain and further hinder the development of Kurdish language and literacy (Ozfidan et al., 2018). Against this history of injustices and oppression of the Kurdish language, culture and identity, this paper examines how teachers and emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children put into practice the Turkish only official language policy as they manage their linguistic resources in the daily cycle of classroom life.

## Methodology

This study draws on the ethnographic doctoral research of author 2 investigating how minority Kurdish children come to learn Turkish as they enter preschool. The fieldwork was conducted between September 2014 and January 2015 (Gelir, 2018). During fieldwork, extensive classroom observations were conducted three days a week, and each session lasted for two hours. In total, 80 hours of participant observations were collected spanning a wide range of classroom interactions and activities (e.g. teacher-led whole class instruction, teacher–pupil talk, private peer talk). Participant observations were supplemented by 5 interviews and informal conversations with class teachers, conversations with children during the school day and with their carers during drop off and pick up and home visits. In addition, approximately 15 hours of audio-recorded interactional data, photographs and documentary data were collected. This paper draws on teacher interviews, participant observations and fieldnotes and audio-recorded interactions. The excerpts selected emerged iteratively from multiple readings of the data with the purpose of exemplifying the teachers' ideological constructions of the values assigned to Turkish and Kurmanji in the local setting and the children and teachers' language practices produced interactionally. Adopting a critical ethnographic lens to language-in-education policy making (Martin-Jones & Da Costa Gabral, 2018), the analysis focuses on interactional moments in the teachers' interviews where their language ideological orientations are thematised and when children and teachers' language choices become particularly salient in the management of their linguistic resources.

## The Preschool

The state funded preschool featured in this paper was located in a large city in Southeast Turkey with a majority Kurdish population. It served local Kurdish families with predominantly low socio-economic status who had migrated to the city from the surrounding rural areas or had been internally displaced due to the armed conflict between Turkish government forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party

(PKK) and to secure better work and living conditions. The preschool was situated in a neighbourhood with high deprivation, and it was under resourced due to chronic limited government funding. Similar to other preschools around the country, it implemented the Preschool Education Programme, which is the standard national curriculum set by the Turkish Ministry of Education and accepted children from the age of four. At the time of the fieldwork, there were 100 children attending the preschool during the first term (from September 2014 to the end of January 2015). All children were Kurdish except for one child, who was of mixed ethnicity (Turkish and Kurdish).

## Participants

The key participants in the doctoral study were four five-year old children and their two preschool teachers. All four children (twins Ahmet and Mehmet, Gül and Yasmin) were emergent bilinguals, speaking Kurmanji at home and in their local community and had started to learn Turkish formally in the preschool. Participant observations indicated that they tended to talk to their parents and other family members in Kurmanji during drop off and pick up and at home. At home, children were regularly exposed to TV and cartoons in Turkish and sometimes communicated in Turkish with family members who had competence in the majority language. Both teachers were dedicated qualified educators having studied at undergraduate level in Turkish Universities. Ms Selma was Turkish and did not speak Kurmanji. She had been working in the preschool for four years at the time of the fieldwork. Ms Mehtap was Kurdish and proficient in Kurmanji and had two years of teaching experience. All names are pseudonyms.

## Ethics

Ethical approval for the doctoral study was granted by the Chair of the Research Ethics Committee at the Department of Educational Studies, at Goldsmiths University of London where Author 2 conducted his PhD. Author 2 was given access to the preschool by the local education authorities. Between 2009 and 2011, he had worked as a teacher and deputy headteacher in the preschool. Due to longstanding professional ties with the preschool, he had maintained contact with his former colleagues who welcomed him warmly back to the school. Researching with minority ethnic families that have experienced hardship, exclusion and discrimination reinforces the need to establish and sustain humanising relationships based on trust and respect between the researcher and the research participants and develop ethically sensitive and responsive research practices. Before starting the fieldwork, author 2 organised an information session for parents to share the aims of the project. He ensured parents that they could withdraw their children from the study at any time and that their children's identity would remain anonymous by using pseudonyms and purposefully omitting any politically sensitive or other confidential information. Because of the careful construction of mutual trust, he was invited to the children's homes several times during fieldwork. Written informed consent was gained from



the children's parents and their teachers. Mindful of ongoing "ethics in practice" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p.262), children's oral consent was sought at the beginning and continually throughout the research process thereby respecting children's wishes and opinions (UN 1989, Article 12).

## Findings

### The Ideological Construction of the Turkish Only Language Policy in The Preschool

Aligning with the goals of the Turkish Preschool Education Programme (2013), in their interviews, teachers voiced the importance and prestige accorded to Turkish in the preschool setting and in broader society. Ms Selma deemed the learning of Turkish "necessary" for the children to support their successful integration in the preschool as "everything is in Turkish". In response to Author 2's probing whether the lack of societal value of Kurmanji might accelerate children's Turkish language learning in the preschool, Ms Selma foregrounded the contrasting values accorded to Kurmanji in the children's home and local Kurdish community and in the preschool:

Interview excerpt 1

Kesinlikle. Dediğim gibi ailede kürçe prestijli çocuk ailede her türlü işini öle görüyor; ama buraya gelince her şey Türkçe. O zaman bi dakika diyor "burda farklı bir şey var". Öğretmenleri ve arkadaşları ile konuşmak ve de arkadaş edinmek istiyorlar. Bu yüzden de Türkçe öğrenmek istiyorlar.

Of course, [it affects learning Turkish]. The children may not need Turkish at home as they speak Kurmanji, which is valued there. But when they come here [the preschool], the children notice that everything is in Turkish. The children realise "hold on, there is something different here." They want to make friends and communicate with their teacher. The children see that these things all need to be in Turkish. This encourages them to learn Turkish (interview with Ms Selma, 16/01/2015).

Ms Selma recognised the divergent values assigned to Kurmanji by juxtaposing the spatial deictic markers "there" – "here" that were associated in her response with mutually exclusive language practices. At home, "there", Kurmanji, the minority language was constructed as highly valued. Against the grain of the history of suppression of Kurdish language, culture and identity, participant observations in homes and in the local Kurdish community indicated ample interactional opportunities for children to practice Kurmanji with adults and peers. In fact, given the dominance of Kurmanji in these settings Ms Selma queried whether children would need Turkish for communication at home. In the nursery, "here", the significance and value of Kurmanji in communication and learning was rendered invisible. As the teacher stressed, the children quickly came to understand that the preschool was a Turkish only discursive space where interactions with the teacher and peers must be conducted exclusively in Turkish despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of the children were Kurmanji speakers and were new to Turkish. In her reflection,

Ms Selma constructed the children as agentive meaning makers and successful communicators who learned to assess and internalise the institutional linguistic norms and purposefully shift their language practices to acceptable ways of speaking in the classroom.

Echoing Ms Selma's metalinguistic comments regarding the unequal position of the two languages in Turkish education, Ms Mehtap discussed the necessity of (standard) Turkish for educational advancement, future employment opportunities and social integration:

Interview excerpt 2

Kesnikile etkili. Çünkü Kürtçe prestiji olsaydı Türkçe öğrenmek zorunda kalmazlardı yada okullarda Kürtçe eğitim olsaydı zorunlu olmazdı onlar için Türkçe. Ya Türkçe'yi öğrenmeleri sadece zorunlulukta. Sonuçta bir meslek sahibi olmaları, bir yere gelebilmeleri ve de prestij sahibi olmaları için çocuğun bir okulda geçmesi gerekiyor. Okulu da okuyabilmeleri için Türkçe öğrenmeleri gerekiyor.

Yes, because if Kurdish had prestige, they wouldn't have to learn Turkish. Or, if lessons were taught in Kurdish in schools, it wouldn't be compulsory for them [to learn Turkish]. But learning Turkish is necessary for them. After all, the child needs to go to school, to get a job, have a career and be valued by society. They need to learn Turkish to study at school (interview with Ms Mehtap, 16/01/2015).

Recognising the absence of Kurmanji medium education, Ms Mehtap took a pragmatic approach to children's Turkish language learning, for the purpose of ensuring children's educational and professional futures, and ultimately for children "to be valued by society". Participant observations indicated that to support children's Turkish language learning and succeed in school, both teachers initiated and maintained monolingual practices where the children's linguistic resources (Kurmanji and Turkish) were kept apart and Turkish was privileged and promoted over Kurmanji. As exemplary speakers of standard Turkish they used strategies such as modelling and repetition in teacher fronted whole group teaching and learning activities. They responded to the children's use of Kurmanji by repeating their utterances in Turkish and as the school year progressed in explicitly asking children to also repeat after them.

### **Children and Teachers Negotiating The Official Turkish Only Language Policy**

Despite the ideological construction of the preschool classroom as a Turkish only space buttressed by the prescriptivist Turkish Preschool Education Programme, teachers and children adapted, recast, and contested the official Turkish only language policy. Teachers scaffolded children's Turkish language learning in teacher fronted whole group instruction by allowing children to use Kurmanji as a transition language to demonstrate and consolidate understanding of new vocabulary and new concepts. The following fieldnotes were recorded at the beginning of the school year during a whole group classroom activity during which Ms Mehtap introduced the

names of the different colours. Sitting on children's chairs in a semi-circle facing the teacher, Mehmet and his peers were observing Ms Mehtap who was giving each child a chunky crayon from a large pastel colour box. Mehmet was waiting for his turn, watching the teacher introduce each colour. Turkish is in italics and Kurmanji is in bold.

Fieldnotes 1: Learning new vocabulary

1. Ms Mehtap: (she takes a blue crayon out of the box and shows it to the children) *Bakin bu mavidir* (Look, this is blue colour)
2. Mehmet: (to the teacher) **Ewa mavi ye** (This is blue colour)
3. Ms Mehtap: (to Mehmet) *Evet bu mavidir.* (Yes, this is blue colour)
4. Ms Mehtap: (to the whole class) *Hadi maviye boyayalum* (Let's paint with blue colour) (Fieldnotes, 30/09/2014)

Repeating after the teacher, Mehmet modelled the newly introduced lexical item in Turkish (*mavi/blue*) by embedding it in an utterance in Kurmanji (turn 2). Ms Mehtap did not correct the use of Kurmanji nor did she discipline Mehmet for deviating from the institutionally sanctioned linguistic norm. Rather she acknowledged the accurate use of the new lexical item and reformulated the utterance in Turkish. In so doing, Ms Mehtap skilfully supported Mehmet's learning of new vocabulary, and in his building confidence in experimenting with the new language. Indeed, participant observations revealed that with the implicit support of his teacher Mehmet relied on Kurmanji to demonstrate and consolidate his understanding of Turkish during first term. As the school year progressed and Mehmet continued to build his Turkish language abilities his reliance on Kurmanji during whole class instruction subsided. Flexible language performances that drew on his entire linguistic repertoire as reported in the fieldnotes above became rare occurrences. In her interview, Ms Mehtap elaborated that despite the official Turkish only language policy pre-school teachers allowed children to use Kurmanji alongside Turkish to reduce frustration and build their confidence with the new language (16/01/2015). Sharing the same linguistic and ethnic background with the children in her class, she further explained that when addressed by children in Kurmanji she occasionally responded back to them in Kurmanji. Ms Mehtap's flexible language practices revealed a recognition of the children's entire linguistic repertoire and leveraging of the scaffolding potential of both languages to complete the task at hand. However, as the school year progressed and children's language abilities in Turkish and confidence increased, Ms Mehtap reported that her use of Kurmanji with the children also decreased (16/01/2015).

While the strategic use of both languages to scaffold children's Turkish language learning in whole group instruction subsided as the school year progressed, children continued to routinely use Kurmanji alongside Turkish in their private peer talk. Unlike the public use of Kurmanji in teacher-pupil talk, its use in private peer talk tended to emerge out of the earshot of the teacher or in instances when the teacher had momentarily stepped out of the classroom. Children's interactions in Kurmanji supported engagement with different structures of classroom participation, such as

free play, and small group structured activities (early literacy and numeracy activities, learning of new songs, and arts and crafts activities). They also supported children in developing relationships with their peers and a common peer group culture that drew on their linguistic and cultural “funds of knowledge” (González et al., 2006) and lived experience beyond the school walls. The next two examples were collected in the middle of the first term and illustrate how children may flout the Turkish only classroom interactional rule and re-align with it to build shared cultural understandings and negotiate roles and resources. The twin brothers, Ahmet and Mehmet, formed a tightly knit peer group with Gül and Yasemin. They routinely clustered around the same plastic children’s table during whole class and small group activities and favoured playing together in the home corner. The first audio-recorded interaction emerged during a structured teacher-led painting activity. The theme of the activity was the changing seasons. Ms Mehtap had momentarily stepped out of the classroom and the painting activity had been suspended. Ahmet, Mehmet, Gül and Yasemin were quietly chatting in Kurmanji as they waited for the activity to resume. The exchange was initiated by Yasmin’s revelation that she had “a real water pistol” (line 1) which triggered a conversation about guns and their lethal potential.

Audio recording 1: Building shared cultural understanding

1. Yasmin: **Me temacana avî rastî heye.** (I have a real water pistol)
2. Ahmet: **Gum gum!** (Bang! Bang!)
3. Gül: **Dolavî?** (Is it in the cupboard?)
4. Ahmet: **Tu naynî meytebê.** (Will you bring it to school?)
5. Yasmin: **Naynim we nakûşim** (I will not bring it, and I will not kill you)
6. Mehmet: **Temacana hebu?** (Is there a gun?)
7. Ahmet: **Temacana wi yê, dîve gum gum** (It’s her gun. The gun shoots. Bang! Bang!) [Ms Mehtap returns to the classroom and resumes the painting activity] (Audio recording, 26/11/2014)

The children’s exchange about guns exclusively in Kurmanji illustrated their linguistic and cultural fluency in the minority language as they displayed their knowledge about a complex concept that guns shoot and kill. Upon hearing Yasmin’s declaration that she has “a real water pistol”, Ahmet demonstrated his knowledge of guns by imitating the sound a gun makes (turn 2). The topic of guns captured the other children’s interest. Gül inquired if the gun was hidden in the classroom cupboard (turn 3) and Ahmet asked whether Yasmin would bring the gun to school (turn 4). Yasmin reassured her friends that she would not bring the water pistol to school and that she would not kill them (turn 5). Ahmet imitated again the sound of the gun: “Bang! Bang!” (turn 7). Ms Mehtap returned to the classroom and resumed the painting activity. The conversation in Kurmanji ended and the children redirected their attention to the whole class painting activity in Turkish.

In the second audio-recorded interaction Ahmet and Gül were playing in the home corner. Ms Mehtap had momentarily stepped out of the classroom. The home corner featured a kids play kitchen with a sink in the middle and two single

cupboards on each side. It contained a set of plastic toy utensils, cups, glasses, and plates. The exchange captured the two children's negotiation of homeownership (what the boundaries of each child's imaginary house was and to whom each house belonged) and sharing of toy utensils, cups, glasses, and plates to equip each house.

Audio recording 2: Negotiating roles and resources

1. Ahmet: **Ewa xanî ye?** (Is this a home?)
2. Gül: **Niç** (No)
3. Ahmet: (addresses the children playing nearby) **Ewa xanî yê min ewa jê Gül eyê** (This is my home and that is Gül's home)
4. Gül: (disagrees with Ahmet) **Ewa xanî yê min e ewa xanî yê teye** (This is mine and that is yours)
5. Ahmet: (insists) **Ewa xanî yê min e** (This is mine) [Ms Mehtap re-enters the classroom] (silence)
6. Gül: (concedes to Ahmet) *Sana bunu verecem tamam dur* (OK, I will give you this, wait) [the children continue playing silently in the home corner] (Audio recording, 18/11/2014)

The negotiation of roles and resources between the two children took place entirely in Kurmanji. However, as Ms Mehtap re-entered the classroom and was within earshot of the children, Ahmet became silent (turn 5) and Gül switched to Turkish, conceding to Ahmet's demands (turn 6). Ahmet silently accepted Gül's offer and the two children continued playing in the home corner. In both examples, the children exhibited a hyper-awareness of the Turkish only institutional order bending and stretching it for their own interactional purposes while avoiding to publicly break the interactional rules. Ms Mehtap's physical absence from the classroom signalled a temporary renegotiation of the institutional linguistic norms opening a discursive space for Kurmanji in peer talk which the children seized. The teacher's return to the classroom and within earshot seemed to have the effect of bringing peer talk in Kurmanji to an end by refocusing the interaction to the task at hand meditated monolingually in Turkish (in the first example) and triggering a marked language switch back to Turkish and silence (in the second example). The children's interactional moves indicated that were cognizant of the preschool's Turkish only language policy. As Ms Selma remarked in her interview, they had learned when they must reproduce it (e.g. in the presence of the teacher) and when they can deviate from it (e.g. in the absence of the teacher).

## Concluding Discussion

This paper sought to examine how emergent bilingual Kurdish minority children and their teachers negotiated the official Turkish only language policy in one Turkish preschool. It focussed on the interplay between locally situated language practices and dominant language ideologies as a lens to examine how language-in-education policies were accomplished on the ground, contributing to a growing body

of empirical studies from a critical ethnographic perspective to language-in-education policy making (Martin-Jones and Da Costa Gabral, 2018). As the paper illustrated, teachers and children as social actors were called to manage dilemmas and constraints. Teachers sought to reconcile the goals of the Turkish Preschool Education Programme (2013) that consolidated the role of standard Turkish as the only legitimate language in the preschool with the language abilities and socio-emotional needs of the children in their classrooms who were new to Turkish (e.g. reduce frustration, build confidence). They articulated the importance of learning standard Turkish for pragmatic purposes, i.e. for the children's educational progression and social integration while recognising the normalcy of Kurmanji beyond the preschool walls of a predominantly Kurdish majority city. In daily school life, teachers and children performed the official Turkish only monolingual norm but also adapted, recast, and contested it. Teachers scaffolded children's Turkish language learning in teacher fronted whole group instruction by allowing children to unofficially use Kurmanji alongside Turkish as a transition language. Seen through a translingual and transcultural lens (Lytra et al., 2022), although these purposeful flexible practices appeared to be short-lived, they indicated a degree of acceptance and normalisation of the use of Kurmanji alongside Turkish for specific instructional and socio-emotional purposes in public teacher-pupil interactions. Complementing studies focussing on young children's agency (e.g. Morillo Morales & Cornips, 2023; Bergroth & Palviainen, 2017; Lakaw & Friedman, 2022), the children understood the social values ascribed to their linguistic resources and learned the expectations of the curriculum that regulated what counted as legitimate language in the classroom, when and with whom. While they learned to comply with the Turkish only language policy, they initiated and sustained flexible language practices with their teachers in teacher fronted whole group instruction and with their peers in private peer talk. The examples of children's private peer talk presented in this paper could be seen as an act of subversion that undermined - at least temporarily- dominant language ideologies and language practices that hierarchised their linguistic resources and officially invisibilised Kurmanji in the preschool classroom. At the same time, they pointed to an implicit acceptance that children could continue speaking Kurmanji informally in the periphery of classroom talk, for instance when talking off-task or during free play. These spaces seemed to operate as "hidden spaces" or "safe houses" (Canagarajah, 2004: 120). They were understood as spaces that "are relatively free from surveillance, especially by authority figures, perhaps because they are considered unofficial, off-task or extrapedagogical" (Canagarajah, 2004, p.121). The discursive construction of these spaces allowed the children to use all their linguistic resources and exert their agency in the context of specific participant and spatiotemporal configurations (Quehl, 2022).

Linking the findings of this paper with the focus of the Special Issue on inclusive and socially just pedagogies under difficult conditions, against the grain of the official Turkish only language policy and the history of injustices and language oppression the unofficial flexible language practices in teacher fronted whole group instruction could be construed as pedagogically responsive to the children's emergent language abilities and evolving socio-emotional needs. These flexible practices could not, however, support the children's bilingual development equally in

Kurmanji and Turkish and turn the tide of Turkish monolingualism in the educational system in accordance with the stated goals of the Turkish Preschool Education Programme (2013). Moreover, the child-initiated and maintained flexible language practices in private peer talk constructed in the margins of classroom talk and beyond the teacher's gaze did not extend into the official classroom talk. Indeed, participant observations indicated that as children became more confident in speaking Turkish, they appeared to comply using less Kurmanji with their teachers and peers in the preschool. In a similar vein, carers reported in informal discussions that children seemed to favour Turkish over Kurmanji in interactions with siblings and with family members with Turkish language abilities at home. In other words, without receiving any official support to develop Kurmanji as language of instruction alongside Turkish in the preschool, children's Turkish language learning seemed to evolve rapidly, while the use of Kurmanji was contracted in the classroom and possibly beyond. The empirical findings question how far teacher or child-initiated flexible language practices alone emerging oftentimes in the interstices of the institutional order can open spaces to interactionally construct inclusive, multilingual pedagogies. As proposed in the introduction to this paper and inspired by different models of bilingual education in national educational systems (e.g. García & Flores, 2012; Duarte & Günther-van der Meij, 2018; Little & Kirwan, 2019) the findings stress the need to rethink the language-in-education policy in the Turkish educational system in ways that recognise and leverage teachers and children's entire linguistic repertoires and experiences for teaching and learning.

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