



Full Length Research Paper

The Language situation among the Circassians of Jordan

Doa'a F. Al-Momani^{*1} and Siham M. Al-Momani

^{*1}Al Balqa' Applied University (Jordan)

²Department of Allied Medical Sciences, Al Balqa' Applied University (Jordan)

^{*}Corresponding Author's E-mail: doa_8080591@yahoo.com

Abstract

In this paper, we examine the language situation among the Circassians of Jordan within the framework of previous theories on language maintenance and shift as proposed by Fishman. The study investigates factors influencing the sample responses toward importance and usefulness of the Arabic and Circassian languages. Convenience sample include 100 subject selected by five in group persons. Data collected by means of a questionnaire developed and used by previous investigators. Results indicate that Arabic is used by the respondents for various functions and Circassian is used in very restricted social domains. Evidence is represented that the overwhelming majority of the Circassians agree that it is important for them to speak in both Arabic as a means of communication, and Circassian as an important symbol of their identity. These results indicate that the Circassians of Jordan are experiencing a process of language shift which appears to be in its initial position, as most of them appear to be less proficient in their language. They also indicate that the younger generation (forty years or below) of Circassians show a stronger tendency toward shifting their speech than the older generation (forty years or above).

Keywords: Language shift, language maintenance, language domains, immigration.

INTRODUCTION

The study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change or stability in habitual language, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social or cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with each other.

That languages (or language variance) sometimes replace each other, among some speakers, particularly in certain types or domains of language behavior, under some conditions of intergroup contact, has long aroused curiosity and comment. Fishman (1966) suggested three major subdivisions of the study of language maintenance and language shift. The first one deals with habitual language use under a condition of intergroup contact. The second one deals with psychological, social and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use, and the third one focuses on behavior toward language.

The languages spoken in a bilingual community often exhibit features not found in the respective languages in a monolingual environment. If speakers must switch

frequently from one language to the other or if the languages fulfill overlapping functions, speakers may integrate linguistic forms and functions of one language into the other to meet the communicative demands that confront them.

According to Strubell (2001), a set of factors influence the process of language maintenance. This may include religious and social insulation, time of immigration, existence of language islands where the minority language is the principle tongue used in daily conversation by at least for to fifth of the inhabitants, affiliation with denominations fostering parochial schools, formal used as the only official tongue, and preimmigration experience with language maintenance efforts (Kloss 1966; Dweik 2000).

Literature Review

If any language is to be maintained and strengthened, it very likely needs public commitment and rational organi-

zation support. First the schools, the mass media, specialist voluntary organizations and public funds which is the most necessary for any social objective (Glazer 1966; Garcia 2003)

Language maintenance among immigrants in the United States is strongest because they have maintained greatest psychological, social and cultural distance from institutions and values of American society. And the differences in language maintenance inside each group reflect "emigrational period, settlement concentration, numerical size, and social mobility" more than the difference in maintenance efforts. Fishman (1966:396-397)

Schmidt (1966); Garcia (2003) point out that if we are going to study language maintenance and language shift among any group of people, we require a highly complex sort of evidence on habitual language use. They claim that there are nine domains of language: the family, the play ground, the school, subject of instruction, language of entertainment, the church, literature, the press, the military, the courts and the governmental language.

Fishman (1966) suggested other three major subdivisions of the study of language maintenance and language shifts. The first one deals with habitual language use under a condition of intergroup contact. The second one deals with psychological, social and cultural process and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use, and the third one focuses on behavior toward language. In the present study we will investigate and study all of these three aspects to examine the language situation among Circassians of Jordan.

Language maintenance may be affected by different variables such as age and education. Fishman (1966) claims that older generation (without conventional grade-school education) are felt to be distinct from the younger educated generation in the matter of linguistic usage. The older generation is perceived as linguistically conservative by the younger generation who are more exposed to Arabic influence through the education system and the media. And we will see later if we can prove this claim or not in the case of Circassians.

In fact, there are many systematic studies of minority groups in Jordan that have been carried out on the last two decades. Among these studies are those works that were carried out on the other minorities in Jordan. Dweik (2000) who observed that Chechens have maintained their language, and he argues that they maintained their language because they live in a tightly knit community. Al-Khatib (2005) found that Gypsies also maintained their language and culture for the same reason. By contrast, Al-Khatib (2001) observed that the Armenian language suffers from language shift, and it is restricted to a very narrow domain. He accounted this shift in terms of the size of speech community, demographic concentration and socioeconomic position of Armenian on the Jordan society.

Historical background

Who are Circassians? Where did they come from? "The name Circassians is a term derived from the Turkic Cherkess (Çerkes) and is not the self-designation of any people. It has sometimes been applied indiscriminately to all the peoples of the North Caucasus, including the Mamluks. Most specifically, the term can apply only to the Adyghe people. Today a significant number of "Circassians" live in diaspora". (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2001)

Circassians began arriving in the 1860s and 1870s through resettlement by the Ottoman Empire. today, various communities of Caucasian origin living in the Middle East, Jordan, Syria and small communities in Israel, are known as Circassians, and a suburb of Damascus settled by these people is called Al-charkassiyya.

Circassians first arrived en masse in Jordan in 1878, the first wave of Circassian settled Amman was from the Shapsug-Shapsigh tribe, where they settled in Amman, Wadi Seer and Na'ur. Today, Circassian populations can be found also in Jerash, Sweileh, Zarqa, Azraq and other parts of northern Jordan. Estimates of the Circassian population vary from 20,000 to 80,000 (The office of King Hussein 1 of Jordan, 2001).

Study Objectives

Due to the change in communication media, and the electronic advancement, in addition to the Al-Bosnia and Al-Herzegovina war which increased the number of newly arrival Circassians to the country, this study is conducted to provide a clear picture of the new linguistic situation of the Circassian community in Jordan.

Study Hypotheses

The study presents four hypotheses concerning the language situation among the Circassians of Jordan. These are:

1. The Circassians will display language maintenance, though the use of Circassian will be confined to very narrow domains.
2. The younger generation (forty years or below) group of Circassians will show a stronger tendency toward shifting their speech than the older generation (forty years or above).
3. The Circassians will show both integrative and instrumental attitudes toward Arabic, but the instrumental will be stronger.
4. As the Circassians feel that their language is of less important to them as a mean through which they may earn their living, they will evaluate Arabic as much better than Circassian.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by sex

Sex	No. of respondents
Males	45
Females	55
Total number of respondents	100

Table 2. Distribution of the sample by age

Age	No. of respondents
10-20	17
21-30	19
31-40	18
41-50	29
50-	17
Total number of respondents	100

Table 3. Distribution of the sample by education

Educational background	No. of respondents
Illiterate	11
Basic education	26
Undergraduate	47
Postgraduate	16
Total number of respondents	100

METHODOLOGY

Circassian people in Jordan live in tightly knit communities; other Jordanians would have no access to them. Therefore, gathering data was a hard task for the researcher. However, I was able to overcome this difficulty by employing 5 of in-group people who have easy to access to the community. Thus the data we examine here is collected with the assistance of five in-group members by means of a questionnaire.

One hundred persons were conveniently selected for the purpose of investigation. Tables 1-3 show the distribution of the sample according to age, sex and education.

Data collection

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire. The importance of this method of data gathering is underlined by the fact that it gave us the chance to ask the questions and get answers to them immediately. The questionnaire employed in this study was designed and used by Al-Khatib (2001) in his study on the Armenians of Jordan, Dweik (2000) on his work on the Jordanian-Chechen speech community, and Al-Khatib and Al-Ali (2005) in their study on Gypsies of Jordan. The

questionnaire was tailored to serve the purpose of investigation. The questionnaire consists of three main sections; for the purpose of this study they were modified to gather data on language use, attitude and fluency in both Arabic and Circassian.

RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 demonstrates that only 27% -36% of all respondents who could understand Arabic could understand the Circassian language. Comparing the scores of the two groups of Circassian the 40 years and above age group and the below 40 age group. Table 4 shows that the above forty years of age group of Circassians appears to be more faithful to their language almost in all social domains, whereas, the below forty age group expresses a stronger tendency toward using Arabic in most social domains. This proves that the Circassians are experiencing a process of language shift, as most of them appear to be less proficient in their language.

From Table 4, we can recognize also that older generation (without conventional grade-school education) is felt to be distinct from the younger educated generation in the matter of linguistic usage. The older generation is perceived as linguistically conservative by the younger

Table 4. Demographical Factors and its effect on the language competence in Arabic and Circassian

Items		Total No.	Competence Circassian%		P value	Competence Arabic%		P value
			E	W		E	W	
Age	40+	47	25	22	0.026*	45	2	0.557
	40-	53	17	36		50	3	
Gender	M	45	19	26	0.564	45	0	0.046*
	F	55	23	32		50	5	
Education	HE	63	28	35	0.332	63	0	0.006*
	LE	37	14	23		32	5	
Neighborhood	Y	62	31	31	0.030*	57	5	0.086*
	N	38	11	27		38	0	
With grandparents	Y	22	9	13	0.553	17	5	0.000*
	N	78	33	45		78	0	

* **P≤0.05 Significant**

E= excellent

W=weak

HE= highly educated

LE= low educated

Y= yes

N= no

generation who are more exposed to Arabic influence through the education system and the media. This result improve hypothesis number 2 that the younger generation (forty years or below) group of Circassians will show a stronger tendency toward shifting their speech than the older generation (forty years or above).

Another factor of distinction is gender, as shown in Table 4 there is a significant difference between males and females in their competency in Arabic. The male group appears to be much more competent in using Arabic than the female. The male group of Circassians appears to be much more aware of the importance of Arabic as a means of communication than the female group. By contrast, no significant difference between males and females was observed in their competency in the Circassian language.

Another factor of distinction is living circumstances. Those people who live in a tightly knit community with Circassian neighbors demonstrate more competence in Circassian, whereas those who live with Arab neighbors demonstrate more competence in Arabic.

Living with grandparents also influences the language maintenance 22 subjects where living with their grandparents. 22.7% of them demonstrate weakness in their Arabic competency. By contrast, this factor doesn't appear to affect their competency in Circassian.

Language Use

From Table 5, we can observe that the Circassians of Jordan tend to use their language in all ethnic, social, and cultural domains for varying degrees. The use of Arabic is more common in religious meeting, praying and work. These results indicate that the Circassian language is still functioning in certain personal and social situations.

Therefore, these findings do validate Hypothesis (1) that the Circassians will display some degrees of language maintenance, though the use of Circassian will be confined to very narrow domains and contexts like home, neighborhood or other private social domains shared by speakers from the same ethnic group.

Language Attitudes

The data presented in Table 6 suggest that Jordanian Circassians have positive attitudes toward Arabic language. All of the respondents agree that Arabic is important to them, and that they view it as a valuable means of communication. Reactions to item one indicate that the overwhelming majority of them (99%) are aware of the fact that it is important to them to speak Arabic. This could be attributed, in part, to the fact that the Circassians are aware of the importance of Arabic as a means through which they can ease their living. However, 87% of them still believe that it is also important to them to speak Circassian.

All of the respondents agree that Arabic is useful to them. Reactions to item two indicate that all of them are aware of the fact that it is useful to them to speak Arabic. However, 84% of them still believe that it is also beneficial to them to speak Circassian. In this way, most of the respondents display two contradicting type of attitudes. That is a positive attitude toward both languages, Arabic and Circassian.

The implications of the forgoing discussion are that the Circassian speech community members appear to be drawn by two forces, viz. A desire on there part to become part of the Arabic speech community, and a desire to maintain there language and identity. Thus the results of this section validate Hypotheses (3) and (4),

Table 5. Response Numbers: Language use by Circassian in different domains

Items	Language	Total No. %	P value
Preferable Language with parents	A	36%	0.000*
	C	64%	
Preferable Language with Siblings	A	39%	0.000*
	C	61%	
Preferable Language in Mosque	A	99%	0.056
	C	1%	
Preferable Language in Market	A	68%	0.000*
	C	32%	
Preferable Language in Work	A	90%	0.036*
	C	10%	
Preferable Language with Children	A	43%	0.000*
	C	57%	
Preferable Language with Friends	A	83%	0.000*
	C	17%	

P≤0.05 Significant

A= use Arabic language

C= use Circassian language

Table 6. Response numbers: Demographical factors and its effect on the subjects Attitudes toward the Arabic and Circassian languages

Items		Total No. %	Arabic Importance		Circassian Importance		Benefit Arabic		Benefit Circassian	
			N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Age	40+	47	1	46	4	43	0	47	6	41
	40-	53	0	53	6	47	0	53	10	43
Gender	M	45	0	45	9	36	0	45	12	33
	F	55	1	54	1	54	0	55	4	51
Education	H	63	0	63	8	55	0	63	13	50
	L	37	1	36	2	35	0	37	3	34
Living with grandparents	Y	22	0	22	3	19	0	22	7	15
	N	78	1	77	7	71	0	78	9	69

* No statistics are computed because benefit of Arabic language as evaluated by the sample is constant (100%).

that the Circassians will show both integrative and instrumental attitudes toward Arabic, but the instrumental will be stronger, and as the Circassians feel that their language is of less importance to them as a means through which they may ease their living, they will evaluate Arabic as much useful than Circassians.

From Table 6, we can recognize that almost all respondents of the sample believe that Arabic is more important and useful to them than Circassian. the age factor appears to have no significant effect in their language attitude toward Circassian, this might be due to the fact that the larger number of 40 years and above age group are less than 60 years old, so they thought that the Arabic language eases their daily living and interaction with the larger community more, taking care that this age group is still interacting with the larger community (Arab community).

Gender as influencing factor, Table 6 shows that females appear to have more positive attitude in evaluating the importance of the Circassian language from their point of view, (98.2%) of them agree on the importance of Circassian language to them, while (80%) of the male participants evaluate that the Circassian language is important to them. This also improves our previous guessing that males perceive the importance of the Arabic language due to their more interaction with the larger community.

Educational level as an influencing factor on the sample point of view regarding the importance and usefulness of the Circassian language shows no significant statistical differences.

Living with grandparents as an influencing factor on evaluating the usefulness of Circassian language shows significant differences among the sample positively to the

group who are living with their grandparents this could be related to their interaction with their grandparents who tend to speak in Circassian language during their direct social contact (family contact).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study suggests that factors such as living with grandparents and in a tightly knit community is necessary for language maintenance. However, the result seems to be congruent with the assumption raised by Al-Khatib (2001) who observed that the Armenian language suffers from language shift, and that it is restricted to a very narrow social domain. Thus, the results show that the Circassians are experiencing a process of language shift as most of Circassians appear to be less proficient in their language.

Our sample results indicate an initial stage of language shift which could be recognized from the age-related significant results where the above forty years old group evaluates the Circassian language importance and usefulness positively more than the younger generation. And also, the differences observed between females and males that could be interpreted as a language shift forced by interacting with the larger community.

On the other hand, Circassians display some degree of language maintenance, though the use of Circassian language is confined to very narrow domains and contexts like home, neighborhood and other private social domains shared by speakers from the same ethnic group.

RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that further studies be carried out on the Circassians in Jordan which takes care of a larger number of subjects, random selection, equality, and representative of the sample.

REFERENCES

- Al-Khatib MA (2001). Language shift among the Armenians of Jordan. *Int. J. Sociol. Lang.* 154, 153-177.
- Al-Khatib MA, AL-Ali M (2005). Language and cultural maintenance among the Gypsies of Jordan. *J. Multiling. Multicult. Dev.* 26(3) 187-215
- Dweik B (2000). Linguistic and cultural maintenance among Chechens of Jordan. *Language, Culture and Curriculum* 13 (2), 186-195.
- Fishman JA (1966). Language maintenance and Language shift as a field of Inquiry. In: Fishman JA (ed.), *Language loyalty in The United States*. London: Mouton &Co.
- Fishman JA (1966). Language maintenance in Supra-Ethnic age. In: J.A Fishman(ed.), *Language loyalty in The United States*. London: Mouton &Co.
- Fishman JA (1966). Planned reinforcement of Language maintenance in the United States". In: J.A Fishman(ed.), *Language loyalty in The United States*. London: Mouton &Co.
- Glazer N (1966). The process and problems of Language-Maintenance. In: J.A Fishman(ed.), *Language loyalty in The United States*. London: Mouton &Co.
- Garcia ME (2003). Recent research on Language maintenance, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 23, 22-43.
- Stubell M (2001). Catalan a decade later. In Fishman(ed.) *Can Threatened Languages Be Saved? Reversing Language Shift, Revisited: A 21st Century Perspective* (pp. 260-283). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- The office of King Hussein 1 of Jordan. (2001). The People of Jordan. Retrieved June 25, 2009, from <http://www.kinghussein.gov.jo/people1.html>
- Wikipedia Encyclopedia. (2001). Nupedia: Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. Retrieved June 25, 2009, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geography_of_Canada.