

## The Potentials and Challenges of Zazaki Translation for Language Revitalisation\*

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### Abstract

*Turkey's policy of linguistic vis-à-vis minority languages has seen the use of Zazaki deteriorate to the point that it has been designated 'vulnerable' in one of UNESCO's reports on languages worldwide that was published in 2009. Despite oppression of the language, its translation activity has increased, especially by the Vate Group which was established to revitalise and standardise Zazaki. To explore the contribution of translation to the revitalisation process, samples from the translation corpora and the activity of the Vate Group are examined; special attention is paid to the translated work *Sînemaya Bêvenge*. This brief depiction of Zazaki translation shows that it has the potential to contribute to revitalising a minority language, especially by enriching and modernising its lexicon.*

**Keywords:** Zazaki; cinema; vulnerable language; linguistic; language revitalization

### Abstract in Kurmanji

#### *Potansiyel û zehmetiyên wergera zazakî ji bo vejandina zimani*

*Polîtîkaya Tirkîyeyê a qirkirina-zimani ya li hember zimani kêmbaran bû sedem bo bikaranîna zazakî ev qas kêm bibe ku ji teref yek ji raporên UNESCOyê ya li ser hemû zimani dinyayê ya 2009an de çapbûyî, weke zimaneke "besas" were diqaynkirin. Li hember zordariya li ser zimani, çalakîyên wergera wê xêde bûn; bi taybetî ji teref Koma Vateyê ku ji bo vejandin û standardîzekirina zazakî hatiye avakirin. Ji bo kîşkirina beşdariya wergerê ya proseya vejandinê, hin nimûneyên ji berhevoka wergeran û çalakîyên Koma Vateyê hatin lêkolîn; baldariyeke taybet hat dayîn bo xebata wergerê ya Sînemaya Bêvenge. Ev ravekirineke kurt a wergerên zazakî nîşan dide ku potansiyeleke wê heye bo beşdariya vejandina zimaneke kêmbaran bike; bi taybetî ji bi devlemendkirin û modernîkirina leksîk/ferhengê.*

### Abstract in Sorani

#### گرنگی و ناستهنگهکانی وەرگیرانی زازاکێ بۆ بوژاندنەوەی زمان

سیاسەتی زمانکوژی تورکیا دەربارەی زمانە کەمیارەکان، لە بەرامبەر بەکارهێنانی زمانی زازاکێ دا تا رادەیەکێ زۆر خراپتر بوو، هەتا لە یەکێک لە راپۆرتەکانی یونسکودا سەبارەت بە زمانەکان لە سەرanserی جیهاندا کە لە ساڵی ۲۰۰۹دا بلاکراوەتەوە، بە زمانێکی 'لاواز' دەستنیشان کراوە. سەرەرای ئەو ستمە کە لەم زمانە کراوە، چالاکی وەرگیرانی زمانە کە پەرەى سەندووە، بەتایبەت لەلایەن گروپی قەت، کە دامەزرێوە لە پێناو زیندوکردنەو و بە ستانداردکردنی زمانی زازاکێ.

بۆلەوێکێ لێنەو لە کاربەرێ وەرگیران لە پڕۆسەی زیندوکردنەوێ زماندا، کۆمەڵێک نموونە لە کۆکراوە و چالاکیەکانی گروپی قەت هەڵسەنگێندرێ. گرنگی تایبەت دراوە بە بەرھەمی وەرگیردرای سێنەمایە بێقێنگ. ئەم وێناکردنە پوختە وەرگیرانی

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زمانی زازاکى ئومومان نیشان ئعدات که توانای هاوکاریکردنی ههیه له زیندووکردنوهی زمانه کمینهکان دا له ڕینگهی دهلسمندکردن و به مۆدیرنکردنی فهر ههنگهکهی.

### **Abstract in Zazaki**

#### ***Neweraganikerdişê zıwanî de potansîyel û zehmetîyê çarnayîşê zazakî***

*Şîyasetê Tirkîya yo zıwankıştox hemverê zıwananê kêmneteweyan bî sebeb ke xebernayîşê zazakî bende apey şiro ke serra 2009î de raporê UNESCO yê zıwananê dinya de sey “zıwano birinbar” name bî. Herçiqas ke zıwan binê teda de yo, fealîyetê çarnayîşê ci bîyê zêde, bitaybetî hetê Grûba Xebate ya Vateyî ra ke seba neweraganikerdiş û standardîzekerdişê zazakî ameya awankerdene. Seba ke testîrê çarnayîşan prosesê neweraganikerdişî ser o bêro analîzkerdene, nîmûneyanê korporaya çarnayîşan û fealîyetanê Grûba Vateyî ser o cigêrayîş yeno kerdene. Ney de giranî dîyena bi eserê çarnayeyî “Sînemaya Bêvenge”. No teswîrê çarnayîşanê zazakî yo kilm musneno ke potansîyalê çarnayîşan est o ke zıwanêko kêmneteweyî newe ra ganî bikero, bitaybetî zî bi zengînêr û modernîzekerdişê xeznaya çekuyanê ci.*

### **Introduction**

Having been subjected to severe assimilation policies by the Turkish state for decades, the Kurds continue to struggle strenuously to protect their own distinct cultural and linguistic heritage. Compared to the widespread Kurmanji Kurdish community, the Zaza community is arguably lesser known and facing fragile linguistic sustainability, faced with the threat of Turkish dominance. The Zaza population mainly inhabits the eastern part of Turkey and most speakers of Zazaki call themselves Kurd.<sup>2</sup> The group has three other names apart from Zaza: Kirmanc, Dimili or Kird. Accordingly, the names Zazaki, Kirmancki, Dimilki or Kirdki are used to refer to the language.<sup>3</sup> The Zazas in the *Dêrsim* (Tunceli in Turkish) region call their language Kirmancki, those in the *Çewlîg* (Bingöl) region call it Kirdki, in the town of *Sênregî* (Siverek) people use Dimili and in *Elezîz* (Elazığ) and some parts of *Amed* (Diyarbakır) province people call their own language Zazaki. Mehmed S. Kaya, who studied the community's social structure extensively, reminds us that there are no official statistics on the Zaza people, because Kurds are a taboo. It is estimated that around three million Zaza-speaking Kurds live in the southeast of Turkey.<sup>4</sup> Since the early 1920s the strict assimilation of both Kurmanji and Zazaki implemented by the Turkish state has vastly hampered the development of Zazaki and literary activities such as translation. Following the establishment of the Republic, the Kurdish language and identity, along with the geographical area of Kurdistan were gradually denied, and official state rhetoric claimed that there were no Kurds in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> The Republic of Turkey pursued a policy and practice of deliberate killing of the Kurdish language;<sup>6</sup> as a result, Zazaki was categorised as vulnerable in the UNESCO 2009 language report, which was published in the *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* in 2010.<sup>7</sup> In that report, a vulnerable language is described as one where most children or families of a particular community speak their parental language as their first language, but it is restricted to specific social domains, such as home.<sup>8</sup> Revitalisation is applied to languages that are not in the ‘safe’ category, such as those classified as vulnerable, endangered or extinct, and its

<sup>2</sup> Sebastian Maisel, ed. *The Kurds: An Encyclopedia of Life, Culture, and Society* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 142.

<sup>3</sup> M. Malmisanij, *Kurmanca ile Karşılaştırmalı Kirmanca Zazaca Dilbilgisi* (Istanbul: Vate Publishing House, 2015), 17.

<sup>4</sup> Mehmed S. Kaya, *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey: A Middle Eastern Minority in a Globalised Society* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Welat Zeydanlıoğlu, “Turkey’s Kurdish Language Policy,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 217, (2012): 100.

<sup>6</sup> Amir Hassanspour, Jaffer Sheyholislami and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, “Kurdish: Linguicide, resistance and hope,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 217, (2012): 6.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Moseley, ed. *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* (France: UNESCO Publishing, 2010), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Moseley, *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, 11, 12.

ultimate aim is their use once again by a wide range of community members, from young to old.<sup>9</sup> The implementation of a revitalisation process depends on the support of the state that governs the minority groups within its borders, as stressed by Sue Wright:

A number of the strategies for revitalization will need the approval of the state and may require changes in state law. Their implementation will need extensive financial support from general taxation. Revitalisation of a minority language is language policymaking and language planning at a local level and the activities encompassed by it are the status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning usually undertaken by the state: that is designating the language as a medium in certain institutions (status planning); making the language fit for that purpose, by codifying and standardising it (corpus planning); educating speakers to use it in both written and spoken forms (acquisition planning).<sup>10</sup>

The role of translation in language revitalisation has been emphasised by many scholars. Eithne O'Connell suggests that 'translation is likely to be a significant linguistic activity and sometimes even a vital survival strategy for the minority language culture'.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, Michael Cronin stresses the urgent need for exploration of the effects of translation activity on minority languages,<sup>12</sup> and draws attention to the significance of the sustainability of the activity for minority languages:

Minority languages have a fundamentally paradoxical relationship with translation. As languages operating in a multilingual world with vastly accelerated information flows from dominant languages, they must translate continually in order to retain their viability and relevance as living languages. Yet, translation itself may in fact endanger the very specificity of those languages that practice it, particularly in situations of diglossia.<sup>13</sup> The situation of translation in the culture of a minority language is therefore highly ambiguous.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, as part of language documentation, translation can play a significant role in the revitalisation process, as seen in the experiences of a few minority languages. For instance, in the case of the Basque language, translation has been closely linked to revitalisation and has also become the symbol of its modernisation, inspiring numerous works of lexical re-structuration and developing new registers and discourses.<sup>15</sup> It can be stated that in the case of Zazaki translation there are signs of a development similar to the Basque example. Following on the experiences and initiatives of a number of Zaza translators, which are shared

<sup>9</sup> Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank, eds. *Revitalizing Endangered Languages: A Practical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 37.

<sup>10</sup> Sue Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning: From Nationalism to Globalisation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 287.

<sup>11</sup> Eithne O'Connell, "Translation and Minority Language Media: Potential and Problems: An Irish Perspective", in *Minority Language Media: Concepts, Critiques and Case Studies*, eds. Mike Cormack and Niamh Hourigan (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2007), 213.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation and Globalisation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 141.

<sup>13</sup> Diglossia refers to a situation when two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a community and each one is used for different purposes. Usually, one is a more standard variety, the other a non-prestige variety.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Cronin, "Altered States", *Translation and Minority Languages. TTR (Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction)* 8 no. 1 (1995): 89.

<sup>15</sup> Guillem Belmar Viernes, "The Role of Translation in the Revitalization Process of Minority Languages: The Case of Basque", *Sustainable Multilingualism* 10 no. 1 (2017): 45.

in the rest of this study, it is seen that Zazaki vocabulary has widened, and the modernisation of the language has become one of their main agendas.

In this paper, I argue that despite the lack of state support for minority languages in Turkey, the translation activity of language activists has contributed to the development and revitalisation of Zazaki. The objective of this paper is to investigate some aspects of translation into the studied language and its potential to effect revitalisation. Special attention is given to the translation of a book on cinema, entitled *Sinemaya Bêvenge* (The Silent Cinema), translated by the author of this article. In the first section of this paper, the background to the vulnerable situation of Zazaki is presented. First, I discuss the history of the assimilation process in Turkey and, secondly, I provide an account of the Zazaki translation corpora and deal with the challenging conditions of the translation activity. The third section of the paper introduces the Vate Group, its emergence and contribution to the standardisation and revitalisation of Zazaki. The last section is devoted to the translation of the aforementioned work on cinema in which the Vate Group's neologisms and adopted standardisation were applied. It is important to remind readers that, despite the translation efforts of that group or other Zazaki revivalists, the translation works in that language remain scant. Also, the topics of translation into Kurdish and the links between the Kurdish language and cinema seem to have been little studied, presenting one of the main challenges to the present study.

## **Zazaki – a Vulnerable Language**

### **1. Assimilation Policy in Turkey**

It is no exaggeration to say that one of the harshest policies toward minority languages has been practiced in Turkey, where the entire state machinery was mobilised to eliminate Kurdish, both spoken and written.<sup>16</sup> Shortly after being founded, the Turkish Republic implemented linguicide policies.<sup>17</sup> The abolition in 1924 of Kurdish schools, religious foundations, and publications<sup>18</sup> was one of the early indicators of this policy. There were many campaigns launched by state-funded organisations which promoted speaking Turkish instead of the mother tongue. 'Citizen, Speak Turkish!' (*Vatandaş, Türkçe konuş!*) was a well-known campaign that aimed to eradicate the public visibility and audibility of languages other than Turkish. It was considered one of the most important Turkification attempts in the early years of the Republic.<sup>19</sup> Mehmed S. Kaya describes the forced assimilation as comprehensive and mentions policies such as replacing the names of Kurdish villages, streets, mountains, and rivers with Turkish equivalents, prohibiting Kurdish names for newborns and removing Kurdish content from history books.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Kurds retained Kurdish names for both people and regional places outside official use and today it is not uncommon for people and places to have two names, one Kurdish and one Turkish. On the other hand, it is important to stress that military power remained the most effective means and mechanism of integration in the hands of the Turkish state, which insisted on assimilation and the denial of Kurdish

<sup>16</sup> Amir Hassanpour, *Essays on Kurds: Historiography, Orality, and Nationalism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), 74.

<sup>17</sup> Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Phillipson, eds. *Linguistic Human Rights: Overcoming Linguistic Discrimination* (New York: De Gruyter Mouton, 1994), 362.

<sup>18</sup> Philip G. Kreyenbroek and Stefan Sperl, eds. *The Kurds: A Contemporary Overview* (London: Routledge, 2005), 56.

<sup>19</sup> Senem Aslan, "Citizen, Speak Turkish!: A Nation in the Making", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 13 (2007): 246.

<sup>20</sup> Kaya, *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey*, 115.

identity as the only acceptable form of membership in the new state.<sup>21</sup> One well-known example of the use of military power to eliminate Kurdish identity was the Dêrsim Genocide, which was committed in 1937-38. According to Dilşa Deniz, “the military operations in Dersim (...) were primarily launched to enact policies of Turkification and Islamization”.<sup>22</sup>

Following the 1980 military coup, the 1982 constitution banned the use of Kurdish. Under article 66 of that constitution, everyone who has Turkish citizenship is defined as a Turk.<sup>23</sup> The law that banned speaking Kurdish was lifted when the late President Turgut Özal repealed Law 2932 in April 1991,<sup>24</sup> while the ban on Kurdish language publications and broadcasts was lifted when Kurdish was legalized in 2002.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, however, the restrictions intended to prevent or limit use of the language continue to this day. In 2009, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) took some steps to reform Turkey’s stance towards the Kurdish language, mainly to fulfil EU membership criteria. The government established TRT 6 as a Kurdish channel.<sup>26</sup> Thereafter, Kurdish departments at the universities of Artuklu, Munzur, Bingöl, and Dicle were established, and Kurdish was to be introduced as an elective course in primary schools. However, it can be argued that these reforms were primarily realised to gain Kurdish support for the AKP, since the party framed its policies in a technocratic way, defended them with reference to the EU accession plans, and did not show awareness that the political system in Turkey truly needed a radical overhaul.<sup>27</sup>

The electoral triumph of the People’s Democratic Party (HDP, *Halkların Demokratik Partisi*) in June 2015 posed a direct challenge to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s hegemony; in April 2015, he repealed the Dolmabahçe Agreement<sup>28</sup> which was made between the Turkish government and pro-Kurdish representatives at the Prime Minister’s office in Istanbul on 28 February 2015. The agreement included ten articles that aimed to solve the Kurdish question. After the failed military coup attempt in July 2016, a state of emergency was declared by the state and the oppression of the HDP as well as pressures on Kurdish language and culture intensified. This led to the closure of Kurdish language and culture associations, pressure on publishing houses, TV and radio channels, as well as a ban on books and internet pages. Kurdi-Der, the Association of Kurdish Writers in Diyarbakir and *Jîyan TV*, which was a bilingual Kurdish TV channel mainly broadcasting in Zazaki,<sup>29</sup> were some of the victims of

<sup>21</sup> Abbas Vali, ed. *Essays on the Origins of Kurdish Nationalism* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2003), 96.

<sup>22</sup> Dilşa Deniz, “Re-assessing the Genocide of Kurdish Alevis in Dersim, 1937-38”, *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 14 no. 2 (2020): 39.

<sup>23</sup> David MacDonald and Carole A. O’Leary, eds. *Kurdish Identity: Human Rights and Political Status* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007), 63.

<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Restrictions On The Use Of The Kurdish Language* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Jaffer Sheyholislami, *Kurdish Identity, Discourse, and New Media* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011): 84.

<sup>26</sup> In 2015, it was renamed ‘TRT Kurdi’ and it broadcasts primarily in Kurmanji Kurdish, while a few programmes are broadcast in Zazaki Kurdish as well. The news programme *Ajansa Zazaki*, the weather forecast *Wezîyetê Hewa* and the cultural programme *Bigeyr Birin* (Travel and See) can be mentioned among its Zazaki content.

<sup>27</sup> Marlies Casier, Joost Jongerden, Nic Walker, “Turkey’s Kurdish Movement and the AKP’s Kurdish Opening: A Kurdish Spring or Fall?”, in *The Kurdish Spring. Geopolitical Changes and the Kurds*, eds. Mohammed M. A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2003), 135-162.

<sup>28</sup> Nikos Christofis, “The state of the Kurds in Erdoğan’s ‘new’ Turkey”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 21 no. 3 (2019): 255.

<sup>29</sup> Veddi Erbay, “Silencing the Kurds: Shuttered media and cultural institutions”, *Index on Censorship: A Voice for the Persecuted*, 13 April 2017. Available online at <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2017/04/silencing-kurds-shuttered-media-cultural-institutions> (last accessed on 9-10-2022).

that oppressions. Many Kurdish academics were dismissed from their positions too. Among hundreds of graduates from Kurdish Language and Literature Departments, only very few have been appointed as teachers of the Kurdish language.<sup>30</sup> Such practices by the AKP government cast suspicion on the sincerity of its measures.

Revitalisation efforts, which have intensified following the release of the aforementioned UNESCO report, could not bring an end to the shift from Zazaki language use towards Turkish. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of magazines and newspapers as well as in the publication of books, including translated works, is noteworthy. For instance, newspapers such as *Newepel* (2011) and *Rojnameyê Zazakî* (2013) and magazines such as *Şewçila* (2011) and *Ma* (2013) were published. Additionally, some news agencies such as *Jin News* (Woman News Agency) and *Firat News Agency* (ANF, *Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firat* in Kurdish) and the Kurdish news website *Rûpela Nû* (The New Page) began to offer a Zazaki option among languages on their platforms. At the same time, works from Swedish, German, Persian or English have been added to the Zazaki translation corpora.<sup>31</sup> The diversification of the number of source languages and the intensification of revitalisation efforts evolved almost simultaneously; they can be interpreted as attempts to hinder language shift towards Turkish by drawing the community's attention to world literature through its own language. Until then, due to long years of assimilation, Turkish played the role of intermediary language for assimilated or bilingual Kurds, those who speak both Kurdish and Turkish, for accessing world literature. Zazaki translation activities interrupted the intermediary role of Turkish and increased the confidence of readers in their own language, as it provided a direct connection between Zazaki and the languages of world literature, such as French or English.

## 2. An Outline of Zazaki Translation Activity

One of the important factors in Zazaki vulnerability is the late transition from oral to written form, in Arabic script, which took place only in 1892.<sup>32</sup> Hence, Zazaki was fragile in terms of its literary history against assimilation policies by the Turkish state. Despite Mustafa Dehqan claims a Zazaki manuscript written in 1798,<sup>33</sup> the authenticity of that claim seems arguable, especially, due to lack of publication of a complete copy of the mentioned manuscript by Dehqan so far.<sup>34</sup> The earliest Zazaki texts can be found in Orientalist Peter Lerch's *Forschungen über die Kurden und die Iranischen Nordchaldäer*, which was published in 1857.<sup>35</sup> Arguably, the first book translated into the language was the Bible, in 1900.<sup>36</sup> However, no copies of that book have been discovered so far. Other than this, two translations from Kurmanji into Zazaki by Omerê Elî cited in Albert von Le Coq's *Kurdische Texte* can be considered the earliest examples of translation into Zazaki.<sup>37</sup> Those texts most probably also form the first-ever samples of

<sup>30</sup> Serkan Alan, "Kürtçe öğretmenliğe sadece üç yeni kontenjan: 76'dan 79'a çıkacak," *Gazete Duvar*, 1 May 2021. Available online at <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kurtce-ogretmenlige-sadece-uc-yeni-kontenjan-76dan-79a-cikacak-haber-1520924> (last accessed on 9-10-2022).

<sup>31</sup> Ahmet Kırkan, "Zazacaya Çevrilen Eserler ve Bunların Çeviri Bilimsel İncelemesi", *The Journal of Mesopotamian Studies* 7 no. 1 (2022): 27.

<sup>32</sup> Nurettin Beltekin and Ahmet Kırkan, eds. *Sözden Yazıya Zazaca* (Istanbul: Peywend, 2019), 69.

<sup>33</sup> Mustafa Dehqan, "A Zazaki Alevi Treatise from Diyarbekir", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20 no. 3 (2010): 2.

<sup>34</sup> Veysel Yıldızhan, "Nuştóxê Çimeyanê Tewr Verênanê Kirmanckî û Nuştêyê İnan (1798-1903)", in "Zazaca ve Zazalar; Edebiyat, Kültür ve Dil," special issue, *The Journal of Mesopotamian Studies*, no. 5 (2020): 114, 115.

<sup>35</sup> Beltekin and Kırkan, eds. *Sözden Yazıya Zazaca*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Murat Varol, ed. *I. Uluslararası Zazca Dili Sempozyumu*, (Bingöl: Bingöl Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2011), 281.

<sup>37</sup> Albert von Le Coq, "Übersetzung der Erzählungen 'Dünya güzêle' und 'Yusib aziz' aus dem Kurmanğî ins Zaza", in *Kurdische Texte* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1903), vol. 2, 63.

Kurdish inter-dialectal translations. Meanwhile, according to Ahmet Kırkan, the first ever text that was translated from the Kurmanji dialect into Zazaki is *Lwî û Kerg* (The Fox and the Hen), which was translated by Şêx Evdîrehîm and published in *Çira* magazine.<sup>38</sup> As it is beyond the scope of this study to explain the development of such translation activity among the Kurds, I wish only to mention that translations between Kurdish dialects and their historical context are one of the least investigated subjects. Given the seriously limited Zazaki translation corpora, less than one hundred works,<sup>39</sup> the detrimental effects of linguistic on the language's development is clear. As a result of that policy, both Kurmanji and Zazaki have relied mainly on oral tradition to survive. Travelling oral performers/reciters of epics, the *deyrbaz* (Kirmancki/Zazaki) and the *dengbêj* (Kurmanji) have helped the language remain alive.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Metin Yüksel points out that “dengbêj performances can also be seen as the stocks of the registers of the unarchivable elements of Kurdish culture”.<sup>41</sup>

After a long break in translation activity that lasted more than seven decades, two poems by the Kurdish poet Ahmed Arif were translated from Turkish into Zazaki by Malmîsanîj in 1978.<sup>42</sup> Later, he also translated a short story by Turkish novelist Sabahattin Ali and two poems by Nazım Hikmet which appeared in the bilingual magazine *Tirêj*.<sup>43</sup> In other bilingual Kurdish magazines, such as *Berhem* and *Hêvî*, the source languages of Zazaki translations expanded to Persian and French. *Berhem* was a bilingual Kurdish magazine published in Stockholm from 1988 to 1991 and *Hêvî* was published in Paris from 1983 to 1992. Most of the translations in the 1980s were done by secular or leftist activists who chose works by Kurdish or Turkish leftist writers, which points to the role of the ideology of translators in the revitalisation process.<sup>44</sup> The late adoption of book translation into Zazaki indicates to what extent the assimilation policy hampered the literary development of the language.

For instance, the first-ever book translated into Zazaki, *Memik Axa Wo Dêrsimij* (*The Dersimian Memik Agha*), appeared in 1994. The author, Haydar Işık, was a Zaza from Dêrsim, known for his works specialising in Kurdish history, especially the Dêrsim Genocide. The novel was published by Belge Yayınları in 1990 and its Zazaki translation was published by APEC Publishing House in Sweden in 1994. It is noteworthy that, since then, according to Mutlu Can, no other novel has been translated from Turkish into Zazaki, and the sum of book translations from Turkish into Zazaki does not exceed twenty.<sup>45</sup> Zaza readers access works in Turkish more easily and quickly than in Zazaki, which may be one of the reasons for their reluctance to seek out the translations from the dominant language of the country into their mother tongue. The scarcity of reprints of the books translated from Turkish into Zazaki seems to attest to this reluctance. An analogy of this scarcity of translations from Turkish into Zazaki can be made with the Catalan example shared by Montserrat Bacardí:

<sup>38</sup> Kırkan, “Zazacaya Çevrilen Eserler”, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Mutlu Can, *Bibliyografyaya Kirmanckî (Zazakî) 1963-2017* (Istanbul: Vate, 2018), 27-45.

<sup>40</sup> Şehnaz Tahir Gürçaglar, Saliha Paker, John Milton, eds. *Tradition, Tension and Translation in Turkey* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2015), 262.

<sup>41</sup> Metin Yüksel, “Dengbêj, Mullah, Intelligentsia: The Survival And Revival Of The Kurdish-Kurmanji Language In The Middle East, 1925-1960” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2011), 108.

<sup>42</sup> Can, *Bibliyografyaya Kirmanckî*, 429.

<sup>43</sup> Murat Varol, “Zaza Edebiyatında Tirêj Dergisinin Yeri”, *Mukaddime* 6 no. 1 (2015): 142-147.

<sup>44</sup> Román Alvarez and Maria Carmen África Vidal, eds. *Translation, Power, Subversion* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1996), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Can, *Bibliyografyaya Kirmanckî*, 27-45.

(...) by the beginning of the 20th century, the enlightened minority that wished to read *Buscón* or *La Regenta* were in a position to do so directly in Spanish (...): translation was no longer necessary. And clearly, when unnecessary, it loses part of its underlying justification and becomes in a sense delegitimised.<sup>46</sup>

It seems that the speeding up in language shift of the Zaza audience towards Turkish negatively impacted the need for translations from the dominant language. Also, it seems that as a result of lack of access of education in their mother tongue, most Zaza readers tend to read translations from other languages into Turkish rather than translations into Zazaki. However, from the point of view of language revitalisation, translation activities are able to question the hegemony of the dominant language, and minority language activists should not avoid translating from the dominant language.<sup>47</sup> Hence, the scarcity of translations from Turkish into Zazaki appears to be a gap to be covered in the translation and revitalisation process. In addition, the strict assimilation and ongoing promotion of Turkish in almost all socio-economic spheres leave little opportunity to Kurdish in everyday life. Known for her studies on the revitalisation of endangered languages, Justyna Olko states that “economic benefits and commercialization are an often neglected dimension of language revitalization programs, despite being of key importance: many languages cease to be spoken precisely because of their perceived lack of utility and economic value”.<sup>48</sup> Turkish, which is still the only official language in the country, has become the main commercial language used in everyday life in most Kurdish cities over decades. The economic devastation of Kurdish society, which worsened following the enforced evacuations by the state between 1991 and 1997, can be regarded as one of the main reasons behind that linguistic shift in urban areas. It was estimated that 3,500 villages were evacuated and around three million people, mainly Kurds, were displaced.<sup>49</sup> Here, it is important to remember that “a key variable in assessing the possibilities for language revitalization is the existence or lack of governmental funding for language revitalization”.<sup>50</sup> The Turkish state does not provide any financial support for the revitalisation of Kurdish; in contrast, as will be shown in the following sections, it tries to hamper efforts in that direction. Today, Turkish is the main commercial language in two predominantly Zaza city centres, namely Dêrsim and Çewlîg. In towns such as Hêni, Pîran or Sêwregi, Zazaki is sometimes used in shops, restaurants or cafés. In terms of the publication market, there are four main publishing houses that publish predominantly in Zazaki: Vate, Roşna, Tîj, and Vir. Meanwhile, some Kurmanji-dominated publishers such as Peywend, J&J, Nûbihar, Dara, and Avesta have published a few books in Zazaki too. Apart from experiencing oppression from the Turkish state,<sup>51</sup> the limited readership of the Kurdish

<sup>46</sup> Montserrat Bacardí, “Translation from Spanish into Catalan during the 20th Century: Sketch of a Chequered History”, in *Less Translated Languages*, eds. Albert Branchadell and Lovell Margaret West (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005), 258.

<sup>47</sup> Oscar Díaz Fouces, “Translation Policy for Minority Languages in the European Union: Globalisation and Resistance”, in *Less Translated Languages*, eds. Albert Branchadell and Lovell Margaret West (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005), 100.

<sup>48</sup> Justyna Olko, “Economic Benefits Marketing and Commercializing Language Revitalization”, in *Revitalizing Endangered Languages: A Practical Guide*, eds. Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 141.

<sup>49</sup> Kerim Yıldız, *The Kurds in Turkey: EU Accession and Human Rights* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Lenore A. Grenoble and Lindsay J. Whaley, *Saving Languages: An Introduction to Language Revitalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 34.

<sup>51</sup> Constanze Letsch, “Kurdish publishing house struggles with bans as state repression escalates”, *The Arab Weekly*, 28 September 2019. Available online at <https://the arabweekly.com/kurdish-publishing-house-struggles-bans-state-repression-escalates> (last accessed on 11-10-2022).

language in Turkey and high printing costs due to high inflation rates in recent years are other reasons for the economic problems hampering the revitalisation process.

What is more, Kurmanji Kurdish, which also suffers from Turkish dominance, poses an additional threat to Zazaki. This is especially visible in Kurdish politics. The pro-Kurdish party HDP, which carries out its activities and makes statements overwhelmingly in Turkish, uses Kurmanji as its second language, but Zazaki is almost never used, even though it is the native tongue of the party's famous imprisoned leader, Selahattin Demirtaş. The party's Kurdish social media uses Kurmanji, while Zazaki is used only during Kurdish festivals in short celebration messages. The apathy of Kurdistan Regional Government's media, such as Rûdaw or Kurdistan24 news channels, which are very active in Turkey as well, towards Zazaki is a matter of complaint brought up by Zazaki speakers too. The number of books translated from Kurmanji into Zazaki is also very low. Some of these few works include *Dêrsim Raywanî û Cografya* written by Armenian writer Andranik and translated from Armenian into Kurmanji by Tîmûrê Xelîl in 2009 and, one year later, from Kurmanji into Zazaki by Roşan Lezgîn. *Dêrê Santa Ragnhîlî* (original name *Li Dêrê*), written by Hesênê Metê, and translated by J. Îhsan Eşpar, and Kurdish scholar Ehmedê Xanî's masterpiece *Mem û Zîn*, translated by Mûrad Canşad into Zazaki and published by Roşna publishing house in 2018, are further translated works. To our knowledge, there has so far been no book translated from two other Kurdish dialects, Sorani and Hawrami, into Zazaki or vice versa. The early translations were mainly inter-dialectal or from Turkish. However, in recent years a few books have been translated from Swedish, German, Persian, English, and Arabic.<sup>52</sup> Among Zazaki translations, the dominant genre is literature such as poems, short stories, and novels. In addition to translations of the Quran, which include *Tefsîrê Roşnayî* (2016), translated by Mela Mehemedê Hezanî and published by the Kurdish Institute in Amed, a few other religious books have been translated from Turkish into Zazaki, including Said Nursî's *Rîsaleya Îxlasî* (original name *İhlas Risalesi*) and *Rîsaleya Birariye* (original name *Kardeşlik Risalesi*) which were translated by Serdar Bedirxan and published by Zehra publishing house in 2014.<sup>53</sup> Another religious work that should be mentioned is *Mijdîyana Mesîh Îsay Çimdê Lukay Ra* ("The Gospel according to Saint Luke"), which was prepared by The Bible Society in Turkey and published in 2020. Also, there are two theoretical books that were translated from Turkish and which touch upon cinema and theatre: *Sînemaya Bêvenge* (2015) by Nîlgün Abisel, which was originally published as *Sessîz Sinema* ("The Silent Cinema") and translated into Zazaki by the author, and *Hunerê Dramî* (2015) by Özdemir Nutku, originally published as *Dram Sanatı: Tîyatroya Giriş* ("The Art of Drama: Introduction to Theatre"), which was translated by Deniz Gündüz.

Since Zazaki does not possess a standard form yet, following the above-mentioned translation efforts, it may be helpful to recall the role of standardization in revitalisation processes to understand the studied language's translation challenges. Grenoble and Whaley describe standardisation as a necessary part of creating local language literacy, and therefore as a critical part of language revitalisation efforts.<sup>54</sup> Standardisation plays a principal role in the revitalisation of Zazaki too, as seen in the efforts of the Vate Group. To clarify the role of

<sup>52</sup> These include Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which had been translated from English into Swedish by Maj Bylock and was translated from Swedish into Zazaki (2005) by J. Îhsan Eşpar; Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (*Bedîlyayîş*), translated from German (2015) by Jêhatî Zengelan; Sohrab Sepehri's *The Death of Color and Traveler* (*Mergê Rengî û Raywanî*), translated from Persian (2020) by Nevzat Valêrî; and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* (*Merreyî û Merdimî*), translated from English (2021) by Sezgin Fîrat.

<sup>53</sup> Kîrkan, "Zazacaya Çevrilen Eserler", 27, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Grenoble and Whaley, *Saving Languages*, 130.

possessing a standard form, Zazaki can be compared with the two major standard Kurdish dialects, Sorani and Kurmanji, in terms of translations into other standard languages. The standardisation of these two dialects is more advanced and numerous literary works have already been translated from these dialects into foreign languages including Greek, Polish, and English.<sup>55</sup> Throughout this study, however, no translated book from Zazaki into a standard, either a Kurdish one or a foreign, language could be located.

In addition to the lack of a standard form, one of the reasons behind the absence of translations into foreign languages is the lack of collocation between the Zazaki language and Kurdish identity, which in turn negatively affects its recognition by outsiders. It seems that in Turkey the term Kurd is usually collocated with the Kurmanji group, and the identity of the Zaza group is often disputed in that regard. Therefore, foreigners who explore the situation of the Kurds in Turkey become familiar with the Kurmanji majority but not the Zaza minority. Consequently, this hinders the knowledge of Zazaki among outsiders. Moreover, the dispute over the ethnic identity of the Zaza group was reinforced by a separatist idea which arose in the diaspora. In the 1980s, a number of Zaza speakers in Sweden and Germany, who had previously identified themselves as Kurds, began speaking of the Zazas as a distinct group of people with their own culture, and a history presented as distinct from that of the Kurds.<sup>56</sup> Ercan Çağlayan claims that the separatist group put the linguistic distinction at the centre of the ethnic identity debate and adds that it ignored the many common aspects that the community shares with other Kurdish groups.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, it is possible to accept both the conclusions of historical linguistics (Zazaki is not closely related to Kurmanji), and those of many native speakers (Zazaki speakers are Kurds, and their language belongs to a larger-order entity, “Kurdish”).<sup>58</sup> The minimalist approach to the identity issue not only caused deeper polarisation inside the community with regard to its politics, but also paved the way for a dichotomy in the standardisation process, which diminished the possibility of joint cultural and revitalisation efforts, including translation. For instance, the Zazaist group’s Jacobson alphabet includes letters such as *ğ*, *ı* and *ü*, which are used in Turkish as well, and it has 32 letters,<sup>59</sup> which seems to come from its reactionary attitudes towards Kurdishness, while the pro-Kurdish Vate Group uses and encourages Celadet Bedirxan’s Kurdish alphabet of 31 letters, which excludes the mentioned three letters. Since Zazaki is a non-standardised language, and translation is mostly done between languages that already possess a system of linguistic norms, the number of products translated into and from Zazaki remains limited. Thanks to increased interest in translation activity among the Kurds, there is now a Kurdish magazine called *Lewgerger* solely devoted to translation activities that started its publication in September 2022. Moreover, in magazines such as *Vate*, *Envro*, *Zarema* or *Wêje û Rexne*, some articles have already appeared dealing with various aspects of translation in the Kurdish context and translations from other languages into Kurdish, such as Nevzat Valêrî’s article “Açarnayîş û Açarnayox” (“Translation and Translator”) where he shares various translation

<sup>55</sup> Farangis Ghaderi and Clémence Scalbert-Yücel, “An Etat Présent of the Kurdish Literature in English translation”, *The Translator* 27 no. 2 (2021): 153-154.

<sup>56</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *The Kurds in Movement: Migrations, mobilisations, communications and the globalisation of the Kurdish question* (Tokyo : Islamic Area Studies Project, 1999).

<sup>57</sup> Ercan Çağlayan, *Zazalar Tarih, Kültür ve Kimlik* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2016), 161, 162.

<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin, “Kurdish: A Critical Research Overview”, *Kurdish Studies* 2 no. 2, (2014): 111.

<sup>59</sup> C. M. Jacobson, *Zazaca Okuma-Yazma El Kitabı* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1997), 9.

theories and focuses on the role of translators in literature;<sup>60</sup> Edward Said's "Intellectual Exile" article, which was translated from English into Kurmanji by Ömer Delikaya with the title "Di Wêjeyê de Sirgûnî û Rewşenbîrî";<sup>61</sup> or Jacques Prévert's poem "Barbara", which was translated from French into Zazaki by Bengin Roşn.<sup>62</sup>

### 3. The Vate Group and Its Role in Translation and the Revitalisation of Zazaki

The Vate Study Group (Grûba Xebate ye Vateyî in Zazaki), which was established by a few academics and language activists in Sweden in 1996, is regarded as a Zaza revivalist group due to its efforts devoted to the standardisation and modernisation of the language, including their members' considerable literary output. This group held 33 meetings from 1996 to 2021, and in these meetings, attempted to do the work necessary for the standardisation of written Zazaki. The most common words used in the daily language were selected and standardised, word roots and prevalence having been taken into account.<sup>63</sup> Sue Wright lists among language development strategies the production of a written form of the language, encouragement of the acquisition of the language, literacy, funding, the encouragement of literary production and translation of administrative documents.<sup>64</sup> Peter K. Austin also refers to translation activity in terms of revitalisation efforts. He points out that:

Language revitalizers can adopt the methods, practices, and tools of language documenters and make high-quality audio-visual records of learners' knowledge and use of language and cultural phenomena, and accompany them with transcriptions, translations, notes, metadata, and metadocumentation, using the documenters' software and data models where appropriate.<sup>65</sup>

As stressed by J. İhsan Espar, one of the founders of the Vate Group, the standardisation of Zazaki is the group's main aim,<sup>66</sup> including efforts focusing on vocabulary and thesaurus studies, lexicon, grammatical and orthographic rules, as well as on the creation of modern literature in Kirmancki/Zazaki.<sup>67</sup> Deniz Gündüz cited both modernisation and standardisation of the language among the fundamental aims of the group. He stressed that his participation in translating a book on drama, the previously mentioned *Hunerê Dramî*, was inspired by the idea of contributing to the modernisation of the language.<sup>68</sup> Also, according to him, "developing knowledge about the Zaza and the Kurdish national idea, especially among those who are not convinced about their Kurdish background", is among the group's

<sup>60</sup> Nevzat Valêrî, "Açarnayîş û Açarnayox", *Ewro: Teorî, huner û edebîyat* 1 (2016): 99-102.

<sup>61</sup> Ömer Delikaya, "Di Wêjeyê de Sirgûnî û Rewşenbîrî", *Wêje û Rexne: Kovara lêkolîn, resne û teoriya wêjeyê* 2 (2014): 153-161.

<sup>62</sup> Bengin Roşn, "Barbara", *Vate: Kovara kûlturî* 28 (2007): 165-166.

<sup>63</sup> Vate Study Group, "About Us", *Vate*. Available online at <https://vate.com.tr/about-us/vate-study-group> (last accessed on 11-10-2022).

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *Language Policy and Language Planning*, 287.

<sup>65</sup> Peter K. Austin, "Language Documentation and Language Revitalization", in *Revitalizing Endangered Languages: A Practical Guide*, eds. Justyna Olko and Julia Sallabank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 211.

<sup>66</sup> J. İhsan Espar, "Kırmanccanın (Zazacanın) standart bir yazı diline kavuşması için yapılan çalışmalar: Vate Çalışma Grubu ve Vate dergisi", *Vate*, 24 November 2021. Available online at <http://vate.com.tr/kirmanccanın-zazacanın-standard-bir-yazi-diline-kavusmasi-icin-yapilan-calismalar> (last accessed on 11-10-2022).

<sup>67</sup> See also Bilal Zilan, "The Work on Standardization of the Vate Group". Available online at [https://www.academia.edu/31644969/Vate\\_%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fma\\_Grubu\\_ve\\_Zazacay%C4%B1\\_Standartla%C5%9Fma\\_%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fmalar%C4%B1\\_The\\_Work\\_on\\_Standardization\\_of\\_the\\_Vate\\_Group](https://www.academia.edu/31644969/Vate_%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fma_Grubu_ve_Zazacay%C4%B1_Standartla%C5%9Fma_%C3%87al%C4%B1%C5%9Fmalar%C4%B1_The_Work_on_Standardization_of_the_Vate_Group) (last accessed on 11-10-2022).

<sup>68</sup> Deniz Gündüz, interview by the author, 14 October 2021.

most important tasks.<sup>69</sup> So far, the Vate Publishing House, established in 2003, has published several dictionaries, as well as a considerable amount of the language's literary corpus which contributed much to Zazaki revitalisation. Moreover, the *Vate* magazine, published since 1997, has recently released its 72nd issue. It is the group's main channel to convey revivalist ideas, and grammatical and vocabulary proposals. The group's efforts in translation, including the publication of books and translated texts in *Vate* magazine,<sup>70</sup> show that translation is essential for language revitalisation and should be considered a part of minority language policy.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, translation activity is well rooted in the group. One of its founding members, Malmîsanij, is also the earliest modern Zazaki translator, who since 1978 has translated literary works from languages ranging from Kurmanji, French, and Persian to Turkish into Zazaki. At the same time, given the fact that language revitalisation often focuses on transmitting the language to children,<sup>72</sup> the group's role in translating children's literature should be mentioned too. J. İhsan Espar and Haydar Diljen are some of the earliest and most productive Zaza translators in this regard. Both group members have considerably contributed to the genre of children's literature with their translations from Swedish and Kurmanji.<sup>73</sup> As pointed out by Viernes, favorable outcomes of translation activities in a minority language can be a determining factor in its standardisation process:

Translations have often been a main component of the bases for the standardization of languages around the world, both big and small. In the case of German, for example, the translation of the Bible set the foundations upon which Standard German (or *Hochdeutsch*) was developed. However, with minority languages this role of translation becomes more relevant, especially when the original written literature has been scarce or non-existent. Then, translations are the only basis available upon which the standard model can be built.<sup>74</sup>

It can be stated that both the late transition of Zazaki to writing and the current slow standardisation process make it difficult to compare its case with the German experience. However, it is not a coincidence that the development of standardisation efforts of Zazaki and the increase in translation coincided; this suggests that translation activity assists the standardisation process. Concomitantly, as the Vate Group's efforts for standardisation of Zazaki continue, so do its contributions to the translation of works into Zazaki.

#### 4. Sînemaya Bêvenge – translating a book on cinema into Zazaki

In his book devoted to translation and its links with cinema, Cronin claims that neglecting the use of cinema in translation studies means neglecting the use of a highly engaging and effective medium for soliciting responses on a wide variety of topics directly related to the business of translation.<sup>75</sup> Cinema, as a modern phenomenon, has become one of the strongest means of expression both for individuals and for communities, including the Kurdish community.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Renata Kurpiewska-Korbut, "The Socio-Political Role of Modern Kurdish Cultural Institutions", in *Rediscovering Kurdistan's Cultures and Identities: The Call of the Cricket*, ed. Joanna Bocheńska (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 125, 126.

<sup>70</sup> Can, *Bîblîyografyaya Kirmanckî*, 147, 148.

<sup>71</sup> Viernes, "The Role of Translation", 39.

<sup>72</sup> Olko and Sallabank, eds. *Revitalizing Endangered Languages*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> Can, *Bîblîyografyaya Kirmanckî*, 28, 29.

<sup>74</sup> Viernes, "The Role of Translation", 43.

<sup>75</sup> Michael Cronin, *Translation Goes to Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2008), XI.

<sup>76</sup> Müjde Arslan, *Kürt Sinemasi: Yurtsuzluk, Sınır ve Ölümler* (Istanbul: Agora Kitaplığı, 2009), XII.

Despite the fact that the appearance of Kurdish culture in movies dates back to 1926 with *Zarê*, a silent film made by Armenian director Hamo Beknazaryan,<sup>77</sup> the encounter of the Kurds with the medium of cinema was a notably belated one, due to the social, political, and economic circumstances experienced by the Kurds. Kurdish filmmakers eventually took to the stage and invented Kurdish cinema as a concept at a time when the world was celebrating the centenary of the birth of cinema.<sup>78</sup> With the emergence of MED TV, and the Kurdish channels that were established later, Kurdish cinema took a further step and Kurdish directors, especially those who were making short films, found a platform to deliver their films to the audience.<sup>79</sup> The Zazaki adventure in filmmaking is novel as well. Despite that late participation, today there are many short films in Zazaki, such as *Sîpê* (“White”) directed by Kamer Erdoğan and released in 2012; *Vîr* (“The Memory”) by Burhan Ateş, released in 2017; *Cênîya Nêysayî* (“The Invisible Woman”) by Lütü İrdem, in 2016; as well as a few full-length films such as *Perre Dima So* (“Follow the Feather”), directed by Nuray Şen, which was released in 2004; or *Hewno Bêreng* (“The Colourless Dream”), by Mehmet Ali Konar, released in 2018.

To contribute to Kurdish cinema by providing textual materials in Kurdish, in 2015 the *Komeleya Akademiya Sînemayê ya Rojhilata Navîn* (“Middle East Cinema Academy Association”) carried out a project entitled “Mother Tongue and Cultural Studies” which was funded by the European Union. This association is one of the Kurdish culture and art organisations whose activities have been restricted by the Turkish state following the failed military coup of 2016. As part of the project, nine books were translated into Kurmanji and two into Zazaki. The common feature of the books, both cinematic and theatrical, was the predominance of their descriptive aspect and educational purpose, which is why they had been chosen for the students of the Academy. From the perspective of language revitalization, it can be said that these works contributed to the corpus of Kurdish cinema lexis. One of the project’s books was *Sessîz Sinema*, translated into Zazaki as *Sînemaya Bêvege*. It is the first book on cinema translated into Zazaki. The first chapter of the book deals with the history of cinema, mainly concentrating on the stages that paved the way for the invention of the cinematograph, while the other chapters deal extensively with the silent film era by focusing on Hollywood (US), German, French, and Soviet cinema.

The book was overwhelmingly descriptive and focused on the technical aspects of filmmaking, which is why an extensive terminology of film was needed. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges of the translation was with regard to the lexical terms. For instance, before the translation of this work, there was only one short paper on film terminology published in Zazaki by the Vate Group, in the 38th issue of the *Vate* magazine. The paper promoted neologisms such as *kaybaz/e* (actor/actress) created from *kaye* meaning game or play and *baz*, a suffix which gives the meaning of doing or performing something to the noun. Another example was *serrol*, meaning main protagonist, as a combination of two nouns, *ser* meaning “head” and *rol*, seems to be borrowed from Turkish *rol*.<sup>80</sup> Apart from Zazaki, both Kurmanji Kurdish and Turkish use “rol” too, which was etymologically borrowed from French “rôle”

<sup>77</sup> Suncem Koçer, “Kurdish Cinema as a Transnational Discourse Genre: Cinematic Visibility, Cultural Resilience, and Political Agency”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 479.

<sup>78</sup> Ayça Çiftçi, “The Politics of Text and Context: Kurdish Films in Turkey in a Period of Political Transformation” (PhD dissertation, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2015).

<sup>79</sup> Arslan, *Kürt Sinemasi*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Vate Study Group, “Termê Sînemaya”, *Vate* 38 (2012): 10, 20.

and is produced by its variant “roole”.<sup>81</sup> As neologisms enter languages, minority languages need to keep up with new terminology. However, they need to do so carefully, respecting the structure of their own language and without sacrificing genuineness,<sup>82</sup> as is indeed the case in Vate Group’s paper on film terminology. The lexical questions were not limited to Zazaki but also valid for Kurmanji. In addition to existing materials such as dictionaries, books or magazines that had been reviewed carefully, three workshops with the participation of film directors and stage actors, such as Zeynel Doğan and Rüknettin Gün, were organised at Diyarbakır’s City Theatre to address this issue. The idea behind the workshops was to discuss and decide which terms to use, asking the opinions of individuals who were practitioners of theatre and cinema. This allowed for making more accurate decisions about the terms in question. In addition to lexical issues, structural or semantic discrepancies between source and target languages can also become a big challenge during the translation process. For example, it is very difficult to translate accurately into Chinese the Western, especially American, concept of identity and other related terms and phrases in a way consistent with the original connotations.<sup>83</sup> Regarding one of the semantic challenges of *Sînemaya Bêvenge*, the sentences in the source language (Turkish) were often quite long; in Zazaki, ideas are usually expressed with shorter sentences, both in speech and in writing. Therefore, when a sentence was confusing semantically because of its length, it was divided up without altering its meaning. However, this ambitious translation project failed at reaching the expected level due to the oppression of the association that intensified following the 2016 coup attempt. The books were supposed to be introduced to a wider public via conferences and symposiums, but the repression hampered the process of commercialisation. Nevertheless, I introduced the book in the *Enro* literature and art magazine with an article entitled “Kitabê Sînemaya Bêvenge Ser o” (“On the Silent Cinema Book”).<sup>84</sup> The process of translation of this book mirrors, in miniaturised form, the many challenges which the Kurdish and especially the Zazaki language face today. It demonstrates that, despite the oppression and challenges, the literary corpus of Zazaki is widening with the help of translation, and thus its revitalisation advances unwaveringly.

## Conclusion

Two years after the emergence of the first book translated into Zazaki (1994), the establishment of the Vate Group was a significant step towards enriching and diversifying Zazaki translation activities. Despite the decades-long interruption of translation activities, it was mainly thanks to the Vate Group’s efforts at standardisation that the role of translation became noticeable, notably in the enrichment of literary corpora and in diversifying the genres of the translated works. The idea of modernising the language seems to represent a common ground for the Vate Group and Zazaki language activists, both aiming at the same objective. Translators, not only from within the group but also some from outside, adopted the suggested rules of standard usage proposed by Vate and implemented them in their works. For instance, in *Sînemaya Bêvenge*, which was inspired by the idea of making Zazaki familiar with cinema as well as contributing to the modernisation of the mother tongue, some neologisms and grammatical solutions proposed by the group were applied. Therefore,

<sup>81</sup> Eric Partridge, *A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2804.

<sup>82</sup> Viernes, “The Role of Translation”, 44, 45.

<sup>83</sup> Eva Hung, ed. *Translation and Cultural Change* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2005), 107, 108.

<sup>84</sup> Esat Şanlı, “Kitabê Sînemaya Bêvenge Ser o”, *Enro: Teorî, huner û edebîyat* 1 (2016): 103-118.

language activists and academics who are concerned with Zazaki should further research the experiences of translation for ideas and strategies useful for language revitalisation. The scarcity of critical publications devoted to both Zazaki and Kurmanji translations, which became apparent in the course of this study, is certainly also an obstacle to successful revitalisation. Nevertheless, following the release of the UNESCO report on the vulnerability of Zazaki, and despite the total lack of state support, the Zaza community has made considerable efforts to defend and revitalise the language. It is, however, necessary to conclude that linguicidal policies in Turkey remain the primary reason for the endangering of minority languages. If such policies continue, the situation of the Zazaki language will likely deteriorate from vulnerable to endangered in the near future. In order to prevent this from happening, the state should democratise its language policy, end the oppression of Kurdish media, publishing houses, language and cultural institutions, and make Kurdish compulsory in education.

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