Great Expectations, Trivialised Gains: A Critical Enquiry into Kurdish Heritage Language Teaching in Berlin

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Abstract

Multilingualism is being embraced more and more rhetorically in Germany, yet the language policy approach put into practice in schools shows a hierarchical order within which languages are treated unequally. While some are viewed favourably, some others are either marginalised or largely ignored. Analysing the newly introduced Kurdish heritage language teaching in Berlin, this article seeks to explore how language hierarchies function in schools and how teaching Kurdish is confined by such hierarchies. Drawing on field notes and observations collected as part of a larger project, the article pinpoints the structural limitations and challenges faced by Kurdish heritage language instruction in Berlin and why it might contribute to the reproduction of hierarchical attitudes towards multilingualism rather than challenge them.

Keywords: *Language Policy; Linguistic Hierarchy; Kurdish Language Teaching; Multilingualism; Migration*

Abstract in Kurmanji

Hêviyên mezin, qezencên biçûk: lêkolîneke rexneyî ya li Berlînê hînkirina zimanê mîrasê kurdî

Pirzimanî bi awayekî retorîk li Almanyayê her ku diçe bêhtir tê pejirandin lê nêrîna polîtîkaya zimanî ya li dibistanan tê bicihkirin rêzeke hiyerarşîk nişan dide ku tê de ziman miameleyeke newekhev dibînin. Digel ku hin ziman bêhtir tên pejirandin, hinekên din yan tên marjînalîzekirin an jî tên tune-hesibandin. Bi tehlîlkirina li Berlînê hînkirina zimanê mîrasê kurdî ya nû destpêkirî, ev gotar hewl dide kişf bike ka hiyerarşiyên zimanî li dibistanan çawa dixebitin û çawa hînkirina kurdî bi van hiyerarşiyan tê bisînorkirin. Li ser bingeha notên qadê û çavdêriyên wekî beşa projeyeke mezintir hatine berhevkirin, ev gotar sînorkirinên binyadî û zehmetiyên perwerdehiya hînkirina zimanê mîrasê kurdî ya li Berlînê nîşan dide û çima ev dikare beşdariya ji nû ve hilberîna helwestên hiyerarşîk li hember pirzimaniyê bike, di dewsa ku dijîtiyê li hember wê bike.

Abstract in Sorani

چاوەڕوانیە مەزنەکان، دەستکەوتە بێ بایەخەکان: لێکۆڵینەوەیەکی ڕەخنەگرانە دەربارەی فێرکاری زمانی کەڵەپووری کوردی لە بەرلین.

لە ئەڵمانیادا، فرە زمانزانی زیاتر و زیاتر بەشێوەیەکی بەرچاو بایەخی پێ دەدرێت . بەڵام لەگەڵ ئەوەشدا یاسای جێبەجێکردنی شێوەیەک لە پلەبەندی پشان دەدات، کە تیایدا زمانەکان بە شێوەیەکی نایەکسان تەماشا دەکرێن.

لە کاتێکدا هەندێکیان بایەخیان پێ دەدرێت، هەندێکیتریان جیاکاریان بەرامبەر دەکرێت ، یاخود تا ڕادەیەکی زۆر فەرامۆش دەکرێن. لە ڕێی شیکردنەوەی فێرکاری زمانی کەڵەپووری کوردی، کە تازە لە بەرلین ناسێنراوە ، ئەم وتارە هەوڵدەدات لە چۆنیەتی کارکردنی پلەبەندی زمان لە قوتابخانەکان و فێرکردنی زمانی کوردی بکۆڵێتەوە، کە بەم پلەبەندیانە سنووردارکراوە .

بە پشتبەستن بە تێبینییە مەیدانییەکان و ئەو سەرنجانەی کە کۆ کراونەتەوە وەک بەشێک لە پرۆژەیەکی گەورەتر ، ئەم وتارە سنوورداری پێکهاتە و ئەو ئاڵنگاریانە دەست نیشان دەکات کە ڕووبەرووی فێرکردنی زمانی کەڵەپووری کوردی بوونەتەوە

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له بەرلین؛ وه بۆچی رەنگه ببێته هۆکاری دووباره بەرهەمهێنانەوەی تێروانینی پلەبەندیانه بەرامبەر فەرەزمانی، له جیاتی
رووبەڕووبوونەوەیان.

Abstract in Zazaki

Hêvîyê girsî, qezencê qijkekî: derheqê musnayîşê ziwanê mîrasî yê kurdkî yê Berlînî de cigêrayîşo rexnegir

Almanya de zafziwanîye hêdî-hêdî hîna zaf yena ra ziwan. Labelê polîtîkaya pratîke ke mekteban de ca gêna, tede hîyerarşîyêka têduştnêbîyayîşê ziwanan vejîyena orte. Herçiqas ke tayê ziwanî tercîh benê, tayê bînî yan marjînalîze benê yan zî zafane yenê peygoşkerdene. Bi analîzkerdişê musnayîşê ziwanê mîrasî yê kurdkî ke Berlîn de newe dest pêkerd, na meqale kena ke kifş bikero ke mekteban de hîyerarşîyê ziwanan senî qewimîyenê û musnayîşê kurdkî senî nê hîyerarşîyan mîyan de sînorkerde maneno. Pê notanê warî û obzervasyonanê ke çarçewaya projeyêka girse de ameyî arêdayene, no nuşte asteng û zehmetîyanê awankîyan ke musnayoxê ziwanê mîrasî yê kurdkî Berlîn de vînenê, înan tesbît keno û ser o zî nawneno ke herinda ke duştê înan de vejîyo, no beno ke neweravîraştişê tewranê hîyerarşîyanê zafziwanîye havile bikero.

1. Introduction

Berlin is one of the prominent urban contexts where many languages can be heard on the streets; public institutions use several languages in publications such as informative flyers or on the website of the city administration; publicly funded civil society organizations provide services in multiple languages; the vast majority of the city's classrooms host multilingual students; several languages are taught in schools; and a number of cultural and literary activities are carried out through many languages in the city. In other words, multilingualism is widely acknowledged both in practice and rhetorically in Berlin. However, not all the languages enjoy the same status and are approached equally by the public administration and in the wider society. Like in many other urban contexts in Europe, the language policy approach prescribed in Berlin favours certain languages over the others and thus leads to linguistic hierarchies, forcing the speakers of less favoured languages to shift towards the dominant language(s) of the society. In fact, Berlin is not the only city in Germany where languages are treated hierarchically. In the case of Hamburg, Gogolin argues that "the linguistic situation we live in is composed of languages with more or less legitimacy, higher or lower status, larger or smaller numbers of users, and other aspects of difference".[2]

Education context is one of the primary domains where the operation of linguistic hierarchies can be clearly observed. The status of languages used in schools reflects the status of the languages within the wider language policy adopted by the authorities.[3] This holds especially true for the so-called "family languages" or "heritage languages" (henceforth HL) brought into the classrooms by students. Recognizing and welcoming those languages as educational resources[4] bears the potential to challenge oppressive language ideologies through multilingualism in schools and thereby to contribute to social cohesion.[5] Maintaining linguistic hierarchies, on the other hand, may lead to the reproduction of further inequalities and shape

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[2] Ingrid Gogolin, "Linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe: a challenge for educational research and practice", *European Educational Research Journal* 1 (2002): 124.

[3] James W. Tollefson, ed. *Language Policies in Education* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[4] Almut Küppers and Christoph Schroeder, "Warum der türkische Herkunftssprachenunterricht ein Auslaufmodell ist und warum es sinnvoll wäre, Türkisch zu einer modernen Fremdsprache auszubauen: Eine sprachenpolitische Streitschrift", *Fremdsprachen Lehren und Lernen* 46 no. 1 (2017): 56-71.

[5] Jim Cummins, *Negotiating Identities: Education for Empowerment in a Diverse Society* (Los Angeles: California Association for Bilingual Education, 2001).

social relations accordingly. Consequently, a seemingly progressive practice of teaching HL in schools might prove counterproductive in the absence of a socially responsible, language-affirmative and critical language policy aiming at social cohesion within the wider society.

A critical enquiry into the recently introduced Kurdish heritage language (henceforth KHL) teaching in Berlin can reveal how hierarchical language policies operate in Berlin. Being a "stateless language", Kurdish[6] – as a group of languages/dialects – is one of the frequently spoken community languages in Berlin; yet, it is faintly recognized by the authorities and public offices.[7] Despite a relatively long tradition of HL in Germany, Kurdish was only introduced in few schools of Berlin as late as 2019 after long years of campaigning, community efforts and against the backdrop of various challenges and limitations. Yet, little is known about the status of Kurdish in Berlin and, more specifically, the KHL teaching in schools, since there is no comprehensive research on this issue.

Departing from this background, the article aims at deconstructing the hierarchical language policy implemented in the Berlin educational context in the case of KHL teaching through theoretical discussions of multilingualism, language policy as well as heritage language teaching. To do so, an eclectic research methodology is employed that is based on an ongoing larger research project (for more details on the methodology employed, see section 5.1). In order to situate KHL teaching within the wider literature, first a general overview of the theoretical framework informing this article is presented below. Then, the language policy both at national level in Germany and in Berlin is introduced with a specific focus on languages in education context and the status of HL teaching. The next two sections contextualize the situation of the Kurdish language in Germany, and explore the structural challenges, difficulties, and limitations experienced in the case of KHL teaching in Berlin. The article concludes with a discussion section seeking to establish a critical dialogue between KHL teaching, the teaching of other HLs, and the language policy concerning multilingualism, in an attempt to challenge language hierarchies in education.

2. Theoretical Considerations

Multilingualism has become a *hot topic* in the field of language and education research as well as in policy documents and public discourses over the last decades.[8] Conteh and Meier describe this interest as the "multilingual turn" and present a thorough analysis of how multilingualism is conceptualised and experienced differently in various contexts.[9] While multilingualism, both at the individual and societal level, is highly celebrated and various benefits of multilingualism are being advocated,[10] such topics as visible and invisible hierarchies among languages and the connection of language, discrimination, and inequity are less salient in the literature. However, the reality is that in many contexts, multilingualism is

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[6] For a detailed discussion and useful categorisation regarding the Kurdish language and its dialects, see Ergin Öpengin and Geoffrey Haig "Regional variation in Kurmanji: A preliminary classification of dialects", *Kurdish Studies* 2 no. 2 (2014): 143-176.

[7] Şerif Derince, *Kurdisches Leben in Berlin: Ergebnisse einer Quantitativen Umfrage* (Berlin: Yekmal Akademie, 2020).

[8] Durk Gorter, "Multilingual inequality in public spaces: Towards an inclusive model of Linguistic Landscapes" in *Multilingualism in Public Spaces: Empowering and Transforming Communities*, ed. Robert Blackwood and Deirdre A. Dunlevy, (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), 13-30.

[9] Jean Conteh and Gabriela Meier, *The Multilingual Turn in Languages Education: Opportunities and Challenges* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2014).

[10] Robert Blackwood and Deirdre A Dunlevy, eds. *Multilingualism in Public Spaces* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.)

often accompanied by injustice, inequality, and violence.[11] To this end, scholars suggest that geopolitical, ideological, and historical contexts must be taken into consideration while discussing multilingualism.[12] Following such an orientation to multilingualism, scholars have documented how different languages are treated hierarchically in education contexts,[13] and how the competencies of multilingual students are ignored while their "voices" go "unheard" in schools in the migration context.[14] Therefore, studying language hierarchies in multilingual settings is crucial since the ramifications of such relations are huge for language communities speaking different languages.[15]

On another level, scholars have criticised focusing too much on languages as abstractions and suggested a closer examination of what multilinguals do with their languages.[16] Consequently, the term *translanguaging* has emerged in the literature to refer to the dynamic multilingual characteristic of individuals. On this basis, the strict separation of languages of multilinguals, as is the case in heritage language teaching, is criticised since the full range of their linguistic and communicative repertoires is ignored. Therefore, scholars promoting these concepts suggest that learning and teaching activities as well as materials must reflect the dynamic characteristics of multilinguals.[17]

How multilingualism of individuals and communities is perceived in a society is directly related to the type of language policy approach operating both officially and discursively in that society. In one of the earlier accounts, Ruiz identified three language policy orientations towards languages other than a national language.[18] Accordingly, when languages are seen *as a problem*, multilingualism is taken as a complication and it needs to be overcome through such ways as assimilation or restriction. Where languages are approached *as a right,* learning and teaching of non-dominant languages is considered to be a human right which has to be exercised under the protection of laws, usually in the form of minority rights. On the other hand, languages can be seen *as a resource* as well, as a result of which multilingualism is taken as an asset. However, other scholars have criticised such an approach on several grounds. Going beyond mere categorisations and non-contextualised analyses, scholars have shown that all activities related to language policy are determined by ideological or structural considerations, which result in coercive power relations that have to do with dominance and hegemony.[19] Also, there is not always a true congruence between the *overt language policy* of a country and its actual implementation, because even if a government or administration officially endorses multilingualism, the steps towards realisation of an equitable multilingual society usually lag behind.[20] Moreover, the allocation of resources is not equal for all non-

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[11] Joseph Lo Bianco, "A meeting of concepts and praxis: Multilingualism, language policy and the dominant language constellation", in *Dominant Language Constellations*, ed. Joseph Lo Bianco and Larissa Aronin (Cham: Springer, 2020), 35-56.

[12] Li Wei, "Foreword: Multilingualism and Dominant Language Constellation", in *Dominant Language Constellations*, ed. Joseph Lo Bianco and Larissa Aronin (Cham: Springer, 2020), vii.

[13] Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Robert Phillipson, Ajit K. Mohanty, Minati Panda, eds. *Social Justice Through Multilingual Education* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2009).

[14] Katharina Brizić, Yazgül Şimşek, Necle Bulut, "Ah, our village was beautiful: Towards a social linguistics in times of war and migration", *The Mouth—Critical Journal of Language, Culture and Society* 8 (2021): 29-63.

[15] Gorter, "Multilingual inequality in public spaces".

[16] Ofelia García and Li Wei, eds. *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[17] García and Li Wei, *Translanguaging*.

[18] Richard Ruiz, "Orientations in language planning", *NABE journal* 8 no. 2 (1984): 15-34.

[19] James W. Tollefson, *Planning Language, Planning Inequality* (London: Longman, 1991); Judith Irvine and Susan Gal, "Language ideology and linguistic differentiation", in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Polities and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Oxford: James Currey Publishers, 2000), 34-84; Bernard Spolsky, *Language Management* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[20] Elana Shohamy, Language Policy: *Hidden Agendas and New Approaches* (London: Routledge, 2006).

dominant languages, which results in significant differences regarding the promotion of multilingualism. Similarly, there is usually a sizeable gap between official language policies and the community perceptions regarding use of these languages.[21] As Hymes explains, languages may be equal, but they hold different values and power in society.[22] Therefore, even when multilingualism is promoted in a society, not all of the languages may enjoy the same level of prestige and appreciation despite the same official language policies in place. Lastly, the traditional analyses of language policy orientations focused solely on governmental measures and excluded community efforts and the struggle for social justice and an end to linguistic injustices led by grassroots movements.[23] Therefore, it is crucial to analyse language policy measures taking into account the social, political, and economic factors influencing language use and teaching and differentiating between *macro* and *micro* language policies in order to better understand how language policy is perceived and implemented or resisted in a given context.[24]

Discussions around Heritage Language Teaching (henceforth HLT) in various contexts often appear in conjunction with bilingualism and multilingualism, as heritage language speakers and learners are almost always multilingual.[25] Although the term "heritage language" was originally used in multilingualism and second language acquisition research in Canadian context,[26] it has now been largely established as an autonomous discipline within applied linguistics,[27] not only in North American academia, but also in Europe.[28] Scholars have defined the term in relation to an incompletely learned home language in migration contexts, connected with a shift to a dominant local language.[29] In any case, "definitions of 'heritage language' remain dynamic rather than static, reflecting the contested cultural and political terrain to which the term refers",[30] and the term is used in reference to immigrant or minority languages with different status in various country contexts.[31]

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[21] Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

[22] Dell Hymes, "Inequality in language: Taking for granted", *Penn Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* 8 (1992): 1-30.

[23] Thomas Ricento, "Historical and theoretical perspectives in language policy and planning", *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4 no. 2 (2000): 196-213.

[24] Anthony J. Liddicoat and Richard B. Baldauf, "Language planning in local contexts: Agents, contexts and interactions", in *Language Planning in Local Contexts*, ed. Anthony J. Liddicoat and Richard B. Baldauf (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2008), 1-12.

[25] Panayota Gounari, "Rethinking heritage language in a critical pedagogy framework", in *Rethinking Heritage Language Education*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 254-269; Jennifer Leeman, "Heritage language education and identity in the United States", *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 35 (2015): 100-119.

[26] Jim Cummins, "Mainstreaming plurilingualism: Restructuring heritage language provision in schools", in *Rethinking Heritage Language Education*, ed. Peter Pericles Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-19.

[27] Silvina Montrul, "How similar are adult second language learners and Spanish heritage speakers? Spanish clitics and word order", *Applied Psycholinguistics* 31 no. 1 (2010): 167-207.

[28] Tanja Kupisch, "A new term for a better distinction? A view from the higher end of the proficiency scale", *Theoretical Linguistics* 39 no. 3-4 (2013): 203-214.

[29] Silvina Montrul, *The Acquisition of Heritage Languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[30] Cummins, "Mainstreaming plurilingualism", 3.

[31] Peter P. Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas, eds. *Handbook of Research and Practice in Heritage Language Education* (Cham: Springer: 2018).

Since HLT has emerged as an autonomous discipline, such issues as learner identity and motivation,[32] teaching methodologies in HLT,[33] teacher training and professionalisation,[34] and language policy towards HLT[35] have been frequently researched and explored in various contexts. Therefore, it is safe to claim that the field of HLT is concerned with both theoretical issues (regarding primarily the characterization of HL learners and speakers and policies) and instructional issues regarding what and how to teach.

3.1. Hierarchical Operation of Language Policy in Germany and in Berlin

Germany is home to hundreds of languages with different statuses, composing an uneven ecology of languages.[36] What differentiates the status of these languages is in some cases official legislation, and in some other cases the practices and perceptions towards these languages in many domains of life. Drawing on and expanding the discussions by Gogolin and Adler and Beyer, it is possible to categorize the status and situation of languages in Germany as: i) German as the dominant language; ii) prestigious Western languages; iii) officially-recognized regional minority languages; iv) immigrant languages that are state languages elsewhere; and finally v) immigrant languages without the position of a state language elsewhere.[37] The status of which languages are taught in schools and how is closely related to this categorisation into *layers of legitimacy*.[38]

German is understandably the sole medium of instruction in the majority of schools. However, a number of other languages are also being used as languages of instruction or taught in language classes. Like many other European Union countries, Germany follows the m+2 policy, in reference to the broad goal of the European Commission which encourages teaching of at least two languages in addition to one's mother tongue.[39] In order to better understand to which languages the policy particularly refers to, one can look at the statistics of languages taught in German schools. The table below compares the statistics of language courses taken by students in all types of schools at all levels across Germany and in Berlin in 2018-2019.[40]

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[32] Arianna Berardi-Wiltshire, "Reframing the foreign language classroom to accommodate the heritage language learner: A study of heritage identity and language learning motivation", *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* 18 no. 2 (2012): 21-34.

[33] Sara Beaudrie, Cynthia Ducar, Kim Potowski, *Heritage Language Teaching: Research and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014).

[34] Jim Anderson, "Pre-and in-service professional development of teachers of community/heritage languages in the UK: Insider perspectives", *Language and Education* 22 no. 4 (2008): 283-297; Manel Lacorte, "Teacher development in heritage language education", in *Innovative Strategies for Heritage Language Teaching: A Practical Guide for the Classroom*, ed. Marta Fairclough and Sara M. Beaudrie (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2016), 99-119.

[35] Jeff Bale, "International comparative perspectives on heritage language education policy research", *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 30 (2010): 42-65.

[36] Astrid Adler and Rahel Beyer, "Languages and language politics in Germany", in *National Language Institutions and National Languages: Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2017 in Mannheim,* ed. Gerhard Stickel (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Science, 2018), 221-242.

[37] Gogolin, "Linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe"; Adler and Beyer, "Languages and language politics in Germany".

[38] Gogolin, "Linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe", 124-126.

[39] European Union, "Languages". Online at https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/languages_en (last accessed 24-9-2022).

[40] Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bildung und Kultur. Allgemeinbildende Schulen. Schuljahr 2018/2019* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2019).

Table 1. Attendance to Language Lessons in Germany and in Berlin

Language	Number of Students		in Percentage (%)	
	Germany	Berlin	Germany	Berlin
English	7.025.004	287.891	84.36	79.97
French	1.401.189	51.614	16.82	14.33
Latin	597.279	17.863	7.17	4.97
Spanish	463.968	30.230	5.57	8.40
Russian	101.862	5.115	1.22	1.42
Italian	47.670	1.935	0.57	0.54
Turkish	42.435	1.962	0.51	0.54
Old Greek	10.815	1.837	0.13	0.51
Other Languages	78.483	5.949	0.94	1.65
Total	8.330.457	360.031	100	100

The table clearly shows that English is the most taught language in the German school system, since out of 8.330.457 students in Germany, 84.36% take English classes. The primary reason for the dominance of English in schools is that it is introduced as the first foreign language, which is compulsory for all students. Other prestigious European languages such as French, Latin and Spanish also have their established place in the curricula albeit to a much lesser extent. These languages are usually elected by students as second foreign languages. The table also shows that there is a peripheral place for Russian, Turkish, and Italian, which are taught either as heritage languages or second and third foreign languages in schools, whereas languages such as Arabic, Polish, or Kurdish are out of the picture. In other words, a selective type of multilingualism is promoted in schools, which is similarly the case in many other European countries.[41] As for Berlin, out of 360.031 students in Berlin, 79.97% take English, a little less than the country average. French is again the second most taken language course, attended by 51.614 students (14.33%). These two languages are taught as first foreign languages. Spanish, Latin, and Russian are respectively listed as what we may assume are second foreign languages taken by students in secondary schools. Heritage language courses, once again, are taken by a marginal number of students.

3.2. Heritage Language Teaching in Germany

The introduction of HLT[42] in German schools is the consequence of large immigration movements between 1960 and 1970 as part of the agreements between Western Germany and several Southern European and North African countries for the recruitment of "guest workers". Reich argues that the initial aim of the lessons was to prepare the pupils for the continuation of their education in their home country after their anticipated return.[43] However, when many of the workers stayed in Germany even after the termination of the labour agreements, the focus of the lessons had to change to support the continued communication between the pupils and their relatives and grandparents in the countries of

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[41] Eurydice/Eurostat, *Key Data on Education in Europe* (Brussels: Eurydice, 2012).

[42] The common terminology used to refer to "heritage language" in the German educational context is *Herkunftssprache*, which can be translated as "language of origin", in reference to the teaching of "immigrant languages" as elective courses or voluntary afterschool activities. However, this article sticks to the term "heritage language" as it is the common term in the literature produced in English and it refers to the historical implications of migration.

[43] Hans H. Reich, "Institutionelle Entwicklungen des Herkunftssprachenunterrichts in Deutschland (mit einem Seitenblick auf Österreich und die Schweiz)", in *Die Zukunft der Mehrsprachigkeit im deutschen Bildungssystem: Russisch und Türkisch im Fokus*, eds. Cemal Yıldız, Nathalie Topaj, Reyhan Thomas, Insa Gülzow (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 81-97.

origin. The final transformation regarding HLT took place as part of the pedagogical shift suggesting the development of interdependence between the languages of the pupils. Accordingly, it was suggested that when the pupils were encouraged to gain language proficiency and literacy skills in their mother tongues, they would then be able to learn new languages more efficiently, as the knowledge attained in one language could be transferred to their other languages.

In total, there are 30 different languages offered with the status of HL lessons in schools in Germany.[44] Some of the most frequently taught languages with this status are Turkish, Russian, and Arabic. The participants in these courses are mostly pupils who come from families where one of these languages is used.[45] Participation in HL lessons is on a voluntary basis and offering these lessons depends on parents' demand and attendance of a minimum number of students, which might differ across contexts.[46] Nonetheless, there is a steady decline in the number of students attending HL lessons across languages over the years, to the extent that it is anticipated that HL lessons might soon come to an end in primary schools in Germany.[47]

Almost three quarters of all HL lessons take place in primary schools,[48] because pupils are required to take foreign language lessons at the upper levels. Officially, most HLs can be taken as a second foreign language at the lower and upper secondary levels. However, in practice, this option has so far been mostly limited to the teaching of Turkish and Russian, and it is practised in schools where there is a high concentration of students from these language backgrounds.[49] Furthermore, there is no available data on whether the participants to these courses are exclusively speakers of the respective HLs, or whether students from other language backgrounds opt for these courses, too.

A review of the relevant literature reveals that two core areas of discussion emerge regarding HLT in Germany. The first area covers studies of the language policy regulating HLT in schools and the official terminology accompanying the policy, whereas problems and limitations confronted during the implementation of HLT constitute the second area.

Küppers, Schroeder, and Gülbeyaz categorise the language policy on teaching Turkish in Germany into two distinct types: *exclusive teaching of Turkish*, which is based on the traditional HLT model, and *inclusive teaching of Turkish*, in which Turkish is being taught as a foreign language at the secondary school level.[50] The authors argue that the traditional model adhering to the common labels of "HL instruction" or "mother tongue teaching" are problematic, because these terms contribute to further ethnicisation of students having migration

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[44] Mediendienst, "Wie verbreitet ist herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht?", April 2019. Online at https://mediendienst-integration.de/fileadmin/Herkunftssprachlicher_Unterricht_2019.pdf (last accessed on 24-9-2022).

[45] Till Woerfel, Almut Küppers, Christoph Schroeder, "Herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht", in *Handbuch Mehrsprachigkeit und Bildung*, eds. Ingrid Gogolin, Antje Hansen, Sarah McMonagle, Dominique Rauch (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020), 207-212.

[46] Almut Küppers, Christoph Schroeder, Esin Işıl Gülbeyaz, "Languages in transition. Turkish in formal education in Germany. Analysis & perspectives. IPC-Mercator Policy Brief" (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2014).

[47] Almut Küppers and Kutlay Yağmur, "Why Multilingual Matters. Alternative Change Agents in Language Education Policy. IPC Focus-Report" (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, 2014).

[48] Ingrid Gogolin and Stefan Oeter, "Sprachenrechte und Sprachminderheiten–Übertragbarkeit des internationalen Sprachenregimes auf Migrant (inn) en", *Recht der Jugend und des Bildungswesens* 59 no. 1 (2011): 30-45.

[49] Helena Olfert and Anke Schmitz, "Heritage language education in Germany: A focus on Turkish and Russian from primary to higher education", in *Handbook of Research and Practice in Heritage Language Education*, ed. Peter P. Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Cham: Springer: 2018), 397-416.

[50] Küppers, Schroeder, Gülbeyaz, "Languages in transition".

backgrounds. Furthermore, Schroeder and Küppers contextualise the Turkish HL lessons within the wider school system in Germany and suggest that immigrant languages are not protected nor treated equally compared to the common conception of multilingualism and linguistic diversity usually associated with certain European languages.[51] It has also been highlighted that not only the use of the term "Herkunftssprache/heritage language", but also the language policy behind HLT is flawed, since it confines the language to an origin country and not to any meaningful place in Germany, where the students taking the HL lessons are actually living.[52] As a remedy, they recommend "upgrading" the status of HLT in a way that would integrate them into formal school curricula as modern foreign languages. Research on teaching Arabic as HL in Germany also corroborates this suggestion and claims that such a move would be pedagogically sounder, in addition to being a politically more just position.[53] However, drawing on the specific case of teaching Russian in Germany, Olfert and Schmitz claim that changing the status of HL lessons alone may not suffice unless the instruction and literacy acquisition in the respective HL is also claimed by the language community bottom-up.[54]

As for the studies focusing on limitations and difficulties arising during the implementation of HLT in Germany, several scholars highlight the structural problems experienced in teacher recruitment, teacher qualifications, teaching and learning materials as well as curricular issues; they argue that these limitations contribute negatively to the already downgraded status of HLT.[55] Küppers, Schroeder, and Gülbeyaz conclude that the teaching of Turkish in Germany is mostly not based on an empirically founded methodology, but rather derives from various teaching applications depending on hands-on approaches developed and practised by teachers in the absence of a guiding curriculum.[56] Furthermore, exploring the perceptions and experiences of Turkish teachers in Germany, other scholars report that both the students attending the lessons and their teachers go through motivational problems;[57] parents are usually indifferent to the lessons; the classroom settings in which the lessons take place are not appropriate in terms of both physical conditions and access to technological tools; the school administrators are not always open for cooperation; and, finally, teaching materials are not always appealing to learners.[58]

3.3. Heritage Language Teaching in Berlin

HL lessons in Berlin are being offered both by foreign consulates and the Berlin Senate. Initially, the HL lessons were only organized by official missions of the respective languages

[51] Christoph Schroeder and Almut Küppers, "Türkischunterricht im deutschen Schulsystem: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven", in *Bildung in Transnationalen Räumen*, eds. Almut Küppers, Barbara Pusch, Pınar Uyan Semerci (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 191-212.
[52] Almut Küppers and Christoph Schroeder, "Warum der türkische Herkunftssprachenunterricht ein Auslaufmodell ist und warum es sinnvoll wäre, Türkisch zu einer modernen Fremdsprache auszubauen. Eine sprachenpolitische Streitschrift", *Fremdsprachen Lehren und Lernen* 46 no. 1 (2017): 56-71.
[53] Zouheir Soukah, "Der Herkunftssprachliche Unterricht Arabisch in NRW: Lage und Perspektive", *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht* 27 no. 1 (2022): 415–436.
[54] Olfert and Schmitz, "Heritage language education in Germany".
[55] Schroeder and Küppers, "Türkischunterricht im deutschen Schulsystem"; Olfert and Schmitz, "Heritage language education in Germany".
[56] Küppers, Schroeder, Gülbeyaz, "Languages in transition".
[57] Paul Haller, *Türkischer Herkunftssprachenunterricht an Gesamtschulen in Nordrhein Westfalen. Eine qualitative Befragung von (angehenden) Lehrkräften* (Münster: Waxmann, 2021).
[58] Mustafa Çakır and Cemal Yıldız, "A study on the Turkish teachers' experiences on the Turkish language and culture course in the schools of Germany: A field research", *Journal of Foreign Languages* 4 no. 2 (2016): 43-71.

in Germany. In other words, the languages not represented by a state, e.g. Kurdish, were not eligible to be taught as HL in schools. However, the Berlin coalition government formed in 2016 adopted a new strategy concerning HLs to be offered in schools. The coalition agreement openly listed Kurdish as one of the languages to be taught. Consequently, a path was opened for the teaching of Kurdish as an elective HL in Berlin starting from the school year 2019-2020.

As part of its new approach, the Berlin Senate also published its framework concept on multilingualism in Berlin schools, which included teaching more HLs irrespective of their official status in origin countries.[59] The framework seems promising for the teaching of HLs in Berlin for several reasons. First of all, the term *Herkunftssprache* ("language of origin") is scrutinised and the term *Erstsprache* ("first language") is suggested as an alternative. Secondly, the recognition of more HLs with the status of second foreign languages in secondary schools is supported to give a more sustainable role to HLs in the school system. Thirdly, the need to incorporate assessment and degrees regarding HLs is put forward. More investment in teacher training and the reinforcement of HL teachers' qualifications are also being proposed. Lastly, the report suggests that designing a common curriculum for HLs might increase the quality and effectiveness of language teaching and attract more students to these lessons. However, the actual practical steps have yet to be seen, especially as there is a steady decline in the number of students attending HL classes over the years in Berlin,[60] a tendency also observed across HLs in other regions of Germany.[61]

4.1. Kurds and Kurdish Language in Germany and in Berlin

Kurdish immigration to Germany dates back to the end of the 19th century, when some Kurdish military elites and intellectuals came to the country.[62] Since then, the population has increased rapidly as a result of a number of political, social, and economic hardships faced in mainland Kurdistan, resulting in immigration to Berlin and other major cities in Germany since the early 1960s. These migration movements together with the growth of the community thanks to new generations born in Germany have created the largest Kurdish population in the diaspora, with around one million people.[63] However, since members of the Kurdish communities are in official and administrative (e.g. school) censuses not represented as Kurds, but only by their respective nation states of origin (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, etc.), there is no official data to cite. The same situation exists in Berlin as well, but cautious estimates range between 100.000 and 150.000 persons, a population comparable to other large communities in Berlin such as Turkish, Arab, Polish communities, as well as communities from the former Soviet Union.[64]

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[59] Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie, "Konzept zur Förderung der Mehrsprachigkeit liegt nun vor", Press release from 18-11-2021. Online at https://www.berlin.de/sen/bjf/service/presse/pressearchiv-2021/pressemitteilung.1148278.php (last accessed 24-9-2022).

[60] Mediendienst, "Wie verbreitet ist herkunftssprachlicher Unterricht?".

[61] Küppers, Schroeder, Gülbeyaz, "Languages in transition".

[62] Brigit Ammann, "Kurds in Germany", in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas*, ed. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember, Ian A Skoggard (Boston: Springer, 2005), 1011-1019; Kenan Engin, *Kurdische Migrant_innen in Deutschland: Lebenswelten, Identität, Politische Partizipation* (Kassel: Kassel University Press, 2019).

[63] Kurdische Gemeinde Deutschland, "Zahl der Kurden in Deutschland sprunghaft angestiegen", Press release 52/0809-2015. Online at https://kurdische-gemeinde.de/zahl-der-kurden-in-deutschland-sprunghaft-angestiegen (last accessed 24-9-2022).

[64] Derince, *Kurdisches Leben in Berlin*.

Directly related to the status of Kurdish as a non-state language, there is a great absence of systematic and comprehensive research on the situation of Kurdish in Germany. However, the limited data suggests that ethnolinguistic vitality is high among members of the Kurdish community. As a quantitative survey carried out in Berlin revealed, many of them use Kurdish actively in their everyday life along with German as well as Turkish, Arabic, and English; furthermore,they consider preserving the Kurdish language and teaching it in schools to be highly important.[65]

4.2. Kurdish Heritage Language Teaching in Germany

There is a relatively long history of Kurdish HLT in Germany, yet the practice is limited to only six federal states, namely Bremen, Niedersachsen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW), and recently Brandenburg and Berlin. The teaching of Kurdish as HL in Germany started in 1993 in Bremen. The lessons have been continuing uninterruptedly since. The Association of Kurdish Teachers in Europe (Yekîtiya Mamosteyên Kurd, YMK) estimates that there are 28 teachers of Kurdish working in 75 schools across 37 different cities in the said six states and the number of students attending these lessons is around 3000 as of 2020.[66] While most of the lessons are in the Kurmanji dialect, in rare cases Kirmancki/Zazaki and Sorani are also being taught, respectively in Duisburg (NRW), and in Bochum and Köln (NRW) as well as Mainz, the capital of Rheinland-Pfalz.

On the other hand, the number of scholarly research on KHL lessons in Germany is considerably limited, as is the case elsewhere.[67] In one of the rare examples of such studies, Hajo briefly describes the format and content of the then newly introduced KHL lessons in Bremen; this work can be considered as one of the early scholarly accounts of Kurdish teaching in Germany.[68] Similarly, in a descriptive report, Müller and Roxel explore the profile of the participants, the materials used, and the objectives of KHL lessons in Bremen. Some of the difficulties experienced in implementation of the lessons are also presented in the report.[69] As part of a larger research project, Skubsch explores teaching Kurdish as HL in Bremen, Niedersachsen, and Hamburg, and highlights the limitations of the language policy within which the lessons are situated. She also comes up with socio-pedagogical suggestions to improve the practice of teaching HLs in general.[70]

5. This Study: Kurdish Heritage Language Teaching in Berlin

The introduction of Kurdish heritage lessons in Berlin occurred as late as 2019 when it was officially introduced in three schools. This was considered a major achievement for the community, which came to fruition after a long process of lobbying, efforts, and community involvement,[71] as well as some larger political developments. Understanding the dynamics

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] YMK meeting, 13-3-2021.

[67] Şerif Derince, "Kurdish elective language lessons in Germany and Turkey: Limitations, gains, comparisons", in *Language Rights and Linguistic Diversity*, ed. Bülent Bilmez (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Univesity Türkiye Kültürleri Araştırma Grubu, 2021), 129-142.

[68] Zaradachet Hajo, "Kommentar zum kurdischen muttersprachlichen Unterricht (KML) in Bremen", *Lêkolîn* 6 (1996): 8-16.

[69] Yvonne Müller and Angela to Roxel, "Muttersprachlicher Unterricht Kurdisch in Bremen", in *Bericht über das Schulbegleitforschungsprojekt Muttersprachlicher Unterricht Kurdisch – Entwicklung von Unterrichtsmaterialien –*, ed. Antje-Katrin Menk (Bremen: Universität Bremen, 1997), 4-29.

[70] Sabine Skubsch, *Kurdische Migration und Deutsche (Bildungs-) politik* (Münster: Unrast, 2002).

[71] Yekîtiya Malbatên ji Kurdistanê li Almanyayê (Yekmal), Kurdischunterricht beginnt offiziell an drei Schulen in Berlin, 9 December 2019. Online at https://yekmal.com/kurdischunterricht-beginnt-offiziell-an-drei-schulen-in-berlin

behind the introduction of KHL teaching in Berlin and situating it within the context of larger language policies operating in the city is critical both for the prospects of the lessons in Berlin and for teaching Kurdish elsewhere. This is what the current paper seeks to achieve.

5.1. Methodological Remarks

The discussion below regarding the introduction of KHL teaching in public schools in Berlin is based on field notes and observations by the author, with three complementary roles during the research process. On the one hand, the author participated in the community efforts as a language activist and as the representative of one of the community organisations that formed and coordinated Kurdisch AG,[72] an initiative established in 2016 by eleven civil society organisations working closely with diverse Kurdish communities in Berlin with the aim of formally establishing Kurdish lessons in schools. Secondly, the author joined a number of meetings with different individual and institutional actors as an expert in the field. Lastly, the author is currently carrying out his doctoral research on this topic using the theoretical lenses of language policy and planning and heritage language teaching. During field work, the author attended several meetings of the Kurdish AG before and after the introduction of the lessons in schools; participated in meetings with officials responsible for planning and implementing heritage language instruction in Berlin; did participant observation in meetings of the Association of Kurdish Teachers in Europe (YMK); had informal meetings with KHL instructors, board members of YMK, as well as parents whose children attend KHL lessons; and, finally, did document analysis and utilised secondary sources.

5.2. Inauguration of the Lessons

There were three major developments behind the introduction of the KHL lessons. First of all, the Kurdish language became much more visible after thousands of Kurdish refugees from Syria were settled in Berlin and other regions of Germany following the large-scale war in 2011. Consequently, many public institutions including schools were forced to find ways of providing services to the new Kurdish-speaking inhabitants of the city. What differentiated these new inhabitants of the city from the largest Kurdish community already settled in Berlin, was their primary language of communication, as the Syrian Kurds were using predominantly Kurdish in their everyday life as opposed to those Kurds originally from Turkey, who declare that they speak German and Turkish almost as much as Kurdish.[73] In other words, Kurds from Turkey were largely considered to be Turkish speaking; an assumption with a certain truth, albeit exploited by state offices using the multilingualism of Kurds as a pretext for not providing services in Kurdish.

Secondly, the normally close relations between the governments of Germany and Turkey were destabilised due to a number of political conflicts, including the imprisonment of German journalists in Turkey, manipulation of Turkish heritage lessons in German schools for a political agenda, and free speech and human rights violations in Turkey. Therefore, the status of HLT by Turkish consulates started to be scrutinised and the Berlin Senate declared that

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(last accessed on 24-9-2022).
[72] Online at https://www.facebook.com/KurdischAG (last accessed on 24-9-2022).
[73] Derince, *Kurdisches Leben in Berlin*.

they were planning to take over all the HL lessons from consulates.[74] This change helped lift one of the critical barriers preventing the teaching of Kurdish in schools, because previous demands from the Kurdish community organizations were turned down by the Berlin Senate on the grounds that it was the responsibility of consulates, in this case those of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, or Syria.

Thirdly, the formation of Kurdish AG as a community initiative was instrumental in putting pressure on the Senate for introducing Kurdish lessons in schools.[75] The initiative started a campaign, prepared flyers, and organised meetings with parents in order to raise awareness as well as to inform the parents about HL lessons. The primary demand of Kurdish AG from the city administration was the introduction of Kurdish lessons in schools. An informative brochure including a petition was prepared in the Kurmanji and Kirmancki/Zazaki dialects of Kurdish as well as in German to collect support from parents who had children in primary schools. After a short time, more than 300 signatures were collected from Kurdish parents in favour of starting Kurdish lessons in their children's schools. In the fall semester of 2017, Kurdish AG succeeded in starting the first elective Kurdish class in a primary school thanks to the collaboration of the school administration. However, this class was not officially organized by the Berlin Senate, but rather by the coordinator of the initiative, namely the Union of Families from Kurdistan in Germany (Yekîtiya Malbatên ji Kurdistanê li Almanyayê, Yekmal). In the meantime, a number of meetings were held with the education department of the Senate, as a result of which elective Kurdish lessons were officially introduced by the Senate administration as HL in three primary schools starting from September 2019. Two of the schools were in the Kreuzberg district and one was the school in which Kurdish lessons were already being offered as an after-school activity by Yekmal. In the beginning of the school year of 2021-2022, KHL lessons were introduced in three more schools in Berlin; however, the number of students attending these lessons was not made public.

5.3. Challenges and Limitations

Considering oppressive language policies towards the Kurdish language in Turkey, Iran, and Syria, the introduction of KHL lessons in more cities and regions in Germany may especially be celebrated since there are not many examples of such a recognition. However, despite its importance, this step came along with its own limitations and challenges as to the status, teacher recruitment, materials, as well as parents' participation, most of which have been reported in the cases of other HL lessons in Germany[76] and in other European countries.[77] However, KHL teaching experiences the existing limitations and challenges even more

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[74] Susanne Vieth-Entus, "Muttersprachlicher Unterricht: Scheeres will eigene Türkischlehrer ausbilden", *Tagesspiegel*, 15 October 2019. Online at https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/muttersprachlicher-unterricht-scheeres-will-eigene-tuerkischlehrer-ausbilden/25117604.html (last accessed on 24-9-2022).

[75] Yekmal, *Veranstaltungsdokumentation: Muttersprachlicher Einfluss auf die Entwicklung der Kinder* (Berlin: Yekmal, 2018). Online at https://yekmal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/fachtagung_tagdermuttersprache_dokumentation.pdf (last accessed on 29-9-2022).

[76] Küppers, Schroeder, Gülbeyaz, "Languages in transition"; Olfert and Schmitz, "Heritage language education in Germany", among others.

[77] Peter Broeder and Guus Extra, *Language, Ethnicity, and Education: Case Studies on Immigrant Minority Groups and Immigrant Minority Languages* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998); Anne Reath Warren, "Constructions of Kurdish in mother tongue instruction in Sweden: Defining and redefining linguistic authority, authenticity and legitimacy", in *Klassrumsforskning och språk(ande): Rapport från ASLA-symposiet i Karlstad, 12-13 april, 2018*, eds. Birgitta Ljung Egeland,Tim Roberts, Erica Sandlund, Pia Sundqvist (Karlstad: Karlstad University Press, 2019), 111-135.

severely because of its status at the bottom of linguistic hierarchies in Germany. This low status has a number of ramifications for the teaching of KHL in Berlin too.

The greatest challenge faced by Kurdish instruction in Berlin arises from the disabling language policy framework in operation because there is not a meaningful role and place for HL lessons within the educational structure of Berlin schools. HL lessons are merely available as elective courses and they are offered two hours a week, mostly after regular class hours. Students have to choose between either a HL lesson (if it is available at all) or another elective activity offered at the same time. The alternatives are usually activities such as music, dance, or sports, which are chosen by the majority of the students. Another deficit of the policy in question is related to the model of HLT, which has been claimed to be "outdated" and contributing to further ethnicisation and marginalisation of the students taking these lessons.[78] Consequently, the number of students taking HL lessons across Germany as well as in Berlin is already decreasing gradually each year. This means that KHL lessons in Berlin might not attract enough students to continue for long.

Secondly, there is a discrepancy between policy and implementation when it comes to offering HL lessons. The reasons behind such discrepancy are on the one hand bureaucratic, because a tiresome and long process of communications takes place between several actors involved in starting a HL lesson, and, on the other hand, logistic, because there are not enough personnel to prepare the ground for initiating the lessons. In the case of KHL lessons in Berlin, Kurdisch AG had to mobilise parents to claim the lessons, initiate dialogues with school administrations, and put pressure on the Senate in order to ensure the lessons start without further delays. However, KHL lessons could start only in three schools despite all efforts, and none was in Neukölln, the district in which resides the largest Kurdish community.[79] Moreover, there is a structural discordance in the cooperation between the Berlin Senate and Kurdisch AG, because the latter is not a recognized interlocutor in the organization of KHL lessons. The lack of such accordance poses further hurdles in creating the necessary conditions for teaching Kurdish more effectively and in a greater number of schools. Additionally, not all the school administrations are cooperative enough for Kurdish language lessons to be started in their schools. On the contrary, in a number of cases, the school administrations, who were contacted on behalf of Kurdisch AG, refrained from giving an appointment, using as a basis the disproven claim that learning a mother tongue hinders children from excelling in the language of instruction, which in turn allegedly results in poor academic achievement.

Thirdly, there is a lack of support both policy-wise and financially for using appropriate and attractive learning materials in HL lessons. Students taking HL lessons are not usually provided coursebooks or other supporting materials, but rather teachers are supposed to prepare worksheets and bring mostly black-and-white photocopies of worksheets to distribute to the students. These worksheets are generally neither engaging nor motivating for the students, especially when they are compared with the materials in German or languages like English, French, and Spanish. The situation is even more severe for underrepresented languages like Kurdish, since teaching materials for KHL lessons are not readily available either in Berlin or in Germany.

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[78] Küppers and Schroeder, "Warum der türkische Herkunftssprachenunterricht".
[79] Derince, "Kurdish elective language lessons".

Another major challenge arises due to the bureaucratic formalities and regulations hindering committed and skilful teachers to teach Kurdish in schools. It has already been reported above that teacher qualification and recruitment is one of the major obstacles experienced in the case of other HLs. The situation is even more complex and unfavourable in the case of Kurdish, because historically it has not been a language of teacher training in Kurdistan, amid continued state oppression towards the language both historically[80] and in recent years.[81] As a result, the number of trained teachers of Kurdish is limited. Moreover, those who are experienced enough to teach the language do not usually own a state-approved certificate. They are also required to certify their proficiency level in German and sometimes in Kurdish, which becomes a further constraint, given that there are no officially recognised institutions providing such services in the case of Kurdish.

The high intra-linguistic diversity among the speakers of Kurdish languages and dialects poses another challenge to KHL teaching. There are at least five main dialectical divisions within Kurdish[82] and three of them, namely Kurmanji, Kirmancki/Zazaki, and Sorani are already spoken in Berlin.[83] Moreover, there are further variations within Kurmanji, both in oral and written forms of the language.[84] An additional factor contributing to the already existing variation might be caused by the influence of German on the type of Kurdish emerging in the migration context, yet there is to date no systematic research focusing on this issue.

Last but not least, the involvement of Kurdish parents in the KHL lessons is seriously limited. There are three main reasons hindering parents from sending their children to HL lessons. One is that most parents do not have the proper means to reach the information that they can opt to register their children for KHL lessons. Due to the negative attitudes towards HLs, they are not encouraged, and are even sometimes discouraged, by the school administrations and teachers to register their children for HL lessons. Additionally, especially those Kurdish parents who are originally from Turkey fear that they may face difficulties when they go to the Turkish embassy or if they go to Turkey for holidays.

6. Discussion and Prospects

The findings of the research detailed above illustrate that, despite all the positive attributions to multilingualism, a hierarchical language policy is at play both in Germany and in Berlin, and this is clearly reflected in languages taught in schools. The recently introduced KHL teaching in Berlin faces the constraints of the said language policy as well as difficulties concerning actual implementation of the lessons. At this point, it is indispensable to call for a discussion of the existing language policy and practices with a view to future directions for KHL teaching.

First of all, it must be highlighted that the difficulties and limitations reported in this article disclose the hierarchical order in which languages are regulated in the country and how this creates a structural disequilibrium, which favours certain languages over others in education context. Building on the critical research on multilingualism, language policy, and heritage

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[80] Geoffrey Haig, "The invisibilisation of Kurdish: The other side of language planning in Turkey" in *Die Kurden: Studein zu ihrer Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur*, eds. Stephan Conermann and Geoffrey Haig (Schenefeld: EB-Verlag, 2004), 121-150.
[81] Şehmus Kurt and Nurettin Beltekin, "Türkiye'de Kürtçe öğretmeni: Yetiş(tir)me ve Kürtçe öğretim deneyimine ilişkin bir çözümleme", Şarkiyat 12 no. 3 (2020): 819-839.
[82] Öpengin and Haig, "Regional variation in Kurmanji".
[83] Derince, *Kurdisches Leben in Berlin*.
[84] Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin, "Introduction to Special Issue – Kurdish: A critical research overview", *Kurdish studies* 2 no. 2 (2014): 99-122.

language teaching as well as previous research on HLT in Germany referred to above, it can be claimed that the traditional model of teaching immigrant languages as elective heritage lessons in schools remains ineffective and counterproductive in promoting a more comprehensive and egalitarian multilingualism and challenging the hierarchical language policy in operation.

The constraints start with adhering to the term "heritage language" since the term confines the language within a geographical, ethnic, and national frame that is not congruent with the context in which the students and their parents actually live, in this case Germany.[85] This model is problematic because it contributes to further ethnicisation of students and the marginalisation mechanisms associated with it.[86] The pedagogical effectiveness of the HL lessons remains yet another controversial aspect of the model, since such issues as learners' motivation, learner differences, and encouraging environments are usually lacking.[87] In the absence of a clear and consistent framework concerning HL lessons, the instructors teaching HLs, the students taking these lessons, as well as the parents opting for the lessons are in many cases left in limbo as to the method, purpose, and meaning of the activity they are engaged in.[88] Last but not least, in its current format, the practice of HLT seems closer to contributing to the reproduction of the linguistic hierarchies in effect than to transforming the structural disparities preserving them.

In an attempt to bring alternative approaches in lieu of the outdated HL instruction, Küppers and Schroeder proposed several measures at the European, the German national as well as the public level.[89] Their suggestions include developing a clear commitment in language policy to the educational value of the languages of migration in Europe; "upgrading" the status of migrant languages to "modern foreign languages"; using them as educational resources in bilingual programmes; creating wider financial opportunities both for research initiatives as well as for the development of special programmes focusing on the topic; creating sustainable spaces for teacher training, development of materials, and regulation of certifications; and, finally, supporting activities, campaigns, as well as informative materials aiming at raising awareness as to the added value of diversity and multilingualism for individuals and society. It has also been suggested that bringing critical pedagogy into HL classrooms may promote a critical understanding of the complex and multiple relationships between such issues as language hierarchies and identity development, in addition to questioning the social, economic, and political inequalities the students and their parents might go through.[90]

As for the new dimensions and aspects brought into the picture by the case of Kurdish HLT, it must be asserted that some of the structural constraints that stateless immigrant languages such as Kurdish experience in their homelands might follow them in the migration context. First of all, the *invisibilisation*[91] of the Kurdish language continues to a certain extent in Germany. This is evident not only in school regulations and educational administration

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[85] Küppers and Schroeder, "Warum der türkische Herkunftssprachenunterricht".
[86] Küppers and Yağmur, "Why Multilingual Matters".
[87] Montrul, *The Acquisition of Heritage Languages.*
[88] Hans H. Reich, "Über die Zukunft des Herkunftssprachlichen Unterrichts. Überarbeitete Fassung eines Vortrags bei der GEW Rheinland-Pfalz in Mainz am 31.01. 2012 ", proDaZ: Deutsch als Zweitsprache in allen Fächern. Online at https://www.uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/prodaz/reich_hsu_prodaz.pdf (last accessed on 24-9-2022).
[89] Küppers and Schroeder, "Warum der türkische Herkunftssprachenunterricht".
[90] Panayota Gounari, "Rethinking heritage language in a critical pedagogy framework", in *Rethinking Heritage Language Education*, eds. Peter P. Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 254-269.
[91] Haig, "The invisibilisation of Kurdish".

treating Kurdish students as Turkish or Arab simply based on their passport status or their backgrounds, even though they are second or third generations in Germany. It also becomes apparent in the absence of the Kurdish language and its speakers in academic research and public discussions. Secondly, there is a lack of officially-binding communications between educational authorities and the Kurdish community as Kurds are not represented by recognized institutions such as consulates and embassies. As a result, both initiating as well as sustaining KHL lessons remains largely on the shoulders of community organisations with limited resources, and these organisations are not usually treated as proper interlocutors by government offices. Thirdly, the Kurdish language is also deprived of external support mechanisms potentially available for the other immigrant languages represented by home countries. This support might be in the form of organising teacher training activities, providing materials, creating funding and other financial opportunities, planning activities towards elevating the prestige as well as mobilizing their communities for the promotion of their languages. To what extent these mechanisms are being effectively used by the actors in question is still controversial, as seen in the case of Turkish HLT, but the point here is that, for Kurdish, these are non-existing.

Closely related to the challenges mentioned above is the fact that there is no academic institution at tertiary level which focuses on the Kurdish language in Germany, despite Germany hosting the largest Kurdish diaspora in the world. Furthermore, the highly diverse nature of Kurdish languages and dialects, including dialectical variations and alphabetical differences, could bring additional theoretical and methodological dimensions to the emerging field of HLT in general. Reaching out to Kurdish parents in order to encourage them to ask for Kurdish language lessons in schools and to claim the existing lessons if they are available is another challenge. Difficulty arises both because there are issues to do with privacy and security of personal information, as well as the fear of being marginalised further by other parents from Turkish or Arabic backgrounds.[92] Considering the agency of parents in the continuation of HL lessons, it is vital to find ways and means of reaching out to the parents and involving them in the process.

As a result of the issues highlighted above, even a seemingly positive step taken by the Berlin administration to introduce Kurdish as HL in schools might prove to be counterproductive when other factors such as the existing linguistic hierarchies and various challenges including being a stateless language are not taken into account. One may claim that the teaching of Kurdish in Berlin is still in infancy and more time is needed in order to see its actual participation in the polyphony of public life in the city. However, considering the troubled experiences of HLT in several other languages, as well as the hierarchical language policy framework followed by the authorities, there is not much prospect for either the language or its speakers.

Still, it must be noted that the limited data and restrictions of the eclectic methodology employed for this research do not allow for conclusive analyses and absolute arguments regarding teaching of Kurdish in schools to be reached. To this end, more exploratory studies have to be carried out looking into the teaching of Kurdish not only in Berlin and other regions of Germany, but also in other countries where Kurdish HLT exists at schools. These new studies should contribute to developing more refined understandings of both the

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[92] Derince, *Kurdisches Leben in Berlin.*

theoretical aspects of the topic and pedagogical considerations concerning learners and instructors of Kurdish lessons, as well as the curricula and teaching materials utilised. Such new research may challenge hierarchical and counterproductive models of language teaching on the one hand, and help develop more effective pedagogies that respond to the needs of students, instructors, and parents on the other hand. In doing so, future research would need to explore such issues as motivation,[93] identity construction,[94] and the dynamic interplay of various languages of the learners, i.e. practices of translanguaging.[95] Likewise, it is equally important to explore how these themes are shaped by factors including diverse settings, policies, and contexts in which learning and teaching of Kurdish in institutional settings takes place. Additionally, more studies adhering to formal linguistic methodologies exploring such themes as syntactic, morphosyntactic, and lexical variations in Kurdish(s) being spoken and taught in different settings are needed in order to challenge and go beyond the idealised understandings of the kind of Kurdish being promoted in classroom instruction and teaching materials. Finally, more comparative studies linking different experiences of teaching Kurdish in various contexts should be carried out in an attempt to provide a comprehensive perspective and to contribute to developing a theoretical framework in locating Kurdish language teaching within the broader field of linguistic and educational theory.

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