

Conference 18.12.2015 Vienna

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Zazaki – yesterday, today and  
tomorrow.

Survival and standardization of a  
threatened language.

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Letter of Thanks
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## **What is Zazaki?**

Zazaki is an Indo-European language of the Northwestern branch of Iranian languages. Throughout recent years the designation Zazaki has been widely accepted. Other names for this language, which developed in the historical region of Dersim in Eastern Anatolia, are *Kirmancki*, *Dimilki* and *Kirdki*.

Until now, there are several studies on Zazaki carried out by various linguists and Kurdologists. Jost Gippert, Ludwig Paul, Mesut Keskin, Agnes Korn and Heiner Eichner are some of the linguists who have engaged themselves with Zazaki on an academic level.

Originally, Zazaki was taught in Kurdish or Alevi migrant associations. However, today Zazaki is offered to students and adults in public adult learning schools (Volkshochschulen) in Austria. In these institutions in Vienna Zazaki is also taught to school children, if there is enough interest. There is a Zazaki radio show in Vienna named SOBE, broadcasted for two hours a week on Radio Orange. Furthermore there are now several children's books written in Zazaki.

## **The importance of the European Diaspora in the Rediscovery of Zazaki**

The original attention to the language was generated by some musicians and songwriters from Dersim. They were forced to leave Turkey and went into exile in Germany after the military coup d'état in 1980. In exile, they found their way back to their roots, seeking of the possibility to freely live their cultural, linguistic and religious identities. They also became acquainted with the political dynamics of the emerging Kurdish movement. The preliminary works for the engagement with their own roots were written in German. When these songwriters and musicians were allowed back to their home country, they started to archive their work in Dersim. All the songs hitherto had been only passed down orally so they recomposed them and presented them to the public. From the mid-90s, a wave of publication and dissemination of Zaza folk songs began, by musicians from Dersim such as Mikail and Ahmet Aslan, Nilüfer Akbal, amongst others. The rediscovery of Zazaki via music generated great interest also among the younger generations.

## **A deep relationship between the language and the belief system has been uncovered**

Over the course of the last years, it has been noted, that this has to be carried further and that Zazaki has to gain ground on the academic level. The majority of the Zazaki speakers belong to the Alevi faith. The Alevi faith from Dersim is tightly connected with Zazaki. Religious rituals and practices were originally carried out in Zazaki. As a consequence of various assimilationist policies by the Turkish state, it is only now possible to fully rediscover the living practice of this faith. Alevism in Dersim differs from Alevism in the Western part of the country. Metin and Kemal Kahraman are engaged in this area and they seek to share the questions of identity that the people of Dersim have with the wider public, e.g. by producing documentaries like „Gola Chetu“.

## **The Relevance of Zazaki in Our Time**

There are an estimated five to six million Zaza speakers worldwide. Its stronghold is the Dersim region in Eastern Anatolia/Northern Kurdistan (Tunceli, Erzincan, Bingöl, partly Diyarbakır and Elazığ). Many have had to flee the region due to the assimilationist policies of the Turkish state. They fled to the large cities in Turkey and to Europe. One can find people from Dersim scattered all over the globe today. The majority of the Alevis living in the European diaspora are Zaza speakers.

There have been by now several attempts to rescue the Zaza language in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and Turkey. This has been through various means, such as education and research at some universities, teaching at some primary schools and adult education institutions, artistic performances (music, theater), magazines, children's books, radio shows, internet portals, and the like.

## The first Zaza magazine in Austria "Raa Ma"



For one year now, a group of people named "Raa Ma" (Our path) has been publishing a magazine of the same name in Austria; the first ever written in Zazaki in Austria.

Through publication of Raa Ma, the team tries to keep the Zazaki language alive. Moreover, speakers of Zazaki get more and more used to writing and reading in Zazaki, which is more or less just orally communicated at present. In Austria the team writes many reports and makes video among the elder speakers of Zazaki.



**The most important question now is where will these efforts lead? Zazaki has, at the moment, neither political nor economic importance in the world**

People engaged with the language estimate the number of Zazaki speakers in Austria to be about three to five thousand people. Yet, it has to be said that the language is not spoken fluently, even among the elderly, as it is not constantly used in everyday life. Speakers lack the necessary practice and very often have to make considerable effort not to mix in Turkish words and idioms when speaking. In this context, Zazaki speakers welcome the work of the Raa Ma team and are very eager to recollect themselves and transmit the language to their children. The interest in upholding and fostering the language is alive and increasing all the time.

**This symposium shall provide a space to openly discuss the future of Zazaki**

We shall discuss the possibilities and the framework for the endurance of the language and formulate feasible options. The question of the standardization of the language is still heavily disputed among linguists. Since Zazaki has several dialects and the speakers have not yet thought about the political dimension, the question of standardization and the question of how this standardization can be carried out remains open.

In this context, the discussion often diverges from the question of ethnicity and belonging of Zazaki speakers. Until now, they have generally been seen as Kurds. However, over the course of the last years, the position that Zazaki is a language of its own has become dominant. The question of ethnic belonging has become pertinent as well. Concerning this question, it is interesting if language alone is a sufficient indicator of ethnic belonging, or if other factors play a role as well.

## Program

17.30	Admission
18.00	Opening addresses
18.15	First Panel Part A
18.30	<b>Heiner Eichner</b> <i>Zaza – History and Present of a Northwestern Iranian Language from a Linguistic Perspective</i>
18.45	<b>Mesut Keskin</b> <i>On the Standardization Efforts for a Comprehensive Literary Language in Zazaki</i>
19.00	<b>Jaffer Sheyholislami</b> <i>Linguistic Landscapes and Competing Language Ideologies in Iraqi Kurdistan</i>
	First Panel Part B
19.15	<b>Mehmet Emir</b> <i>Multimediashow - „My Journey Back Home“</i>
19.30	<b>Ursula Hemetek</b> <i>Music as a Factor of Identity Formation among Minorities – Starting Points for an Applied Ethnomusicology</i>
19.45	Discussion
20.15	Break
20.30	Second Panel
20.45	<b>Dieter Halwachs</b> <i>Vitality and Functionality of Dominated Languages</i>
21.00	<b>Katharina Brizic</b> <i>Zaza in Viennese Educational and Linguistic Biographies – A Sociolinguistic Contribution to Diaspora, Conflict and Belonging</i>
21.15	<b>Inci Dirim</b> <i>Models of Linguistic Education</i>
21.30	Discussion
22.00	End

***Abstracts of the reports of the consultants***

***First Panel Part A***

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Heiner Eichner

**Zaza History and Present of a Northwestern Iranian language from a linguistic perspective**

For this North-western Iranian language, only discovered in the middle of the 19th century, the name „Zaza“ or „Zazaki“ has begun to become a common place. In my presentation I will deal with its research history, hypotheses on the genetic affinity, demarcation against other Kurdish dialects, the process of scriptualization and the problems with establishing a new supra-dialect as a standard. „Zaza“ proves to be a current challenge for linguistics.

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Mesut Keskin

**On the standardization efforts for a comprehensive literary language in Zazaki**

Despite a scriptualization through culture magazines and books containing mostly folkloristic texts since the 1980's in the diaspora and since the mid 1990's in Turkey, Zazaki has not been able to develop a standardized literary language. Only isolated dialectics of the three main dialects have been written down, many of which have already been characterized (Paul 1998a, Keskin 2009) however, some have hardly been scriptualized.

Understanding among the various dialects is better in spoken than in written language because the alphabetization in the mother language is not widespread and mostly confined to its own environment and dialect.

UNESCO has labelled Zazaki as an endangered language because it is only spoken in Turkey and to some extent also in the diaspora. In this subject to the repressive language policy of the state that seeks to replace it with Turkish. By now, as a consequence of compulsory education and the dissemination of the media even in secluded villages, most Zaza are bilingual and even multilingual in the diaspora.

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Jaffer Sheyholislami

### **Linguistic Landscape and Competing Language Ideologies in Iraqi Kurdistan**

This talk is an overview of the current linguistic landscape of Iraqi Kurdistan defined by diverse language ideologies representing socio-political forces that compete for legitimacy in the process of nation building. The ideologies range from regional nationalism, pan-Kurdish nationalism, linguistic rights, and language internationalization/English. The Iraqi Kurdistan context offers an opportunity to consider how the complex interrelationships amongst linguistic, political, historical, and socio-cultural factors that crossnational borders impinge on language management. The talk attempts to illustrate how in the late-modernity era language management in general and officialization in particular is intertwined with issues of nation building, language diversity, language rights, party politics, discourse of cross-border and interstate ethnonational identities, voices of diasporas, and new communication technologies.

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#### ***Abstracts about the reports of the consultants***

##### ***First Panel Part B***

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Mehmet Emir

#### **Multimediashow - „My Journey Back Home“**

Mehmet Emir lives in Vienna since 1981. His father was one of the first guest workers of the 'recruitment agreement' between Turkey and Austria in 1963. Since 1983 Mehmet Emir has been taking photographs every year at the same time in his small Kurdish village in Dersim. By now he has assembled over 20.000 photographs in his archive. Most photographs are black and white slides. Over the course of the last 10 years he has switched to digital photography. This slide show is a combination of black/white and slides and digital photographs. „Kurdish bards“. 1991 Emir began ethnographic research in the area of Dersim in association with the Institute for Folk Music of the University of Vienna. A selection of the musical pieces was released in 1998 with the record label „Extraplatte“. The main focus is on music sung in Zazaki. It contains talks with musicians whose songs deal with the genocide in Dersim. The multimedia show contains a selection from 30 years of photography, examples from Zaza-language and pieces of Zazaki music. Length: ca. 20 minutes.

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Ursula Hemetek

### **Music as a factor of identity formation among minorities Starting points for an applied ethnomusicology**

Music can play a fundamental role among minorities regarding the identification with their 'own' community. Active production of music and singing as well as passive consumption of music can be an encouragement to learn anew the already forgotten minority language. Images of the own and the other, mediated via music, can play a role in that process. In any case the political framework exerts a great influence. I have been engaged in such processes in Austria for years and thus I would like to present examples taken from various minority communities, particularly from the Roma community. These shall serve as comparative material for similar processes in which applied ethnomusicology could be fruitful regarding Zazaki.

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#### ***Abstracts of the reports of the consultants***

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#### ***Second Panel***

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Dieter W. Halwachs

#### **Models of linguistic education**

Of the ca. 7.000 languages existing today only 5% (around 350) have an official status. Only 1% (70) are dominant languages, resulting from their exclusive or primary functionality in public-formal spheres at the state level. All other languages used on the territory of a state – whether without status, semi-official or those of officially recognized minorities – are dominated languages. To be competent in dominant languages is a precondition for participation in political and economic power, as well as the unrestricted access to the education system. This entails that communities of speakers of dominated languages are multilingual and under assimilationist pressure. A possible scenario is that they are forced to drop the dominated language in favor of the dominant one. The price minorities 'have to pay' for socioeconomic integration is very often sociocultural assimilation. The threat of the loss of language is a symptom of social change within a community of speakers, which is perceived as a loss of identity. This, in turn, generally leads to activities that seek to preserve cultural autonomy by means of the symbol of language. In the relevant literature such endeavors are labeled *Reversing Language Shift* and *Language Revitalisation*. The presentation deals with strategies of preventing language change, as well as revitalisation measure on the basis of the vitality and functionality of dominated languages.

Katharina Brizic

### **Zaza in Viennese Educational and Linguistic Biographies A Sociolinguistic Contribution to Diaspora, Conflict and Belonging**

One of the topics broadly discussed in recent social research is the belonging to a social, linguistic historically grown community: does such a belonging constitute a resource or rather pose an obstacle for education and social advancement, or even for transethnical and transnational dialogue?

What are particularly under examined, are questions regarding many of those groups that are smaller and more oppressed and prosecuted than others, or simply lesser known. Belonging to such a group often takes places in relative secrecy. Belonging and its refutation, as an obstacle or as a resource, are the topics of my talk. I will relate to linguistic and educational biographies having Middle and Eastern Anatolia as their starting point and whose life now centers around Vienna. Particular focus will be given to language and its transmission across generations on the one hand; on the other hand a central concern of mine is the importance of individual biographies for collective developments in Central Europe and the Middle East.

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Inci Dirim

### **Models of linguistic education**

In my presentation I want to give an overview of various school models of dealing with minority languages. Some US studies have elaborated on the advantages and disadvantages of the various models and in my presentation I will discuss those models regarding the linguistic situation of Zazaki speakers in Austria and Turkey.

## Biographies of the consultants



**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Heiner Eichner**, is an emeritus at the Department of Linguistics at the University of Vienna. In 1974 he completed his PhD in Indo-European studies, Indo-Iranian studies and Assyriology at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany). He completed his postdoctoral thesis (Habilitation) at the University of Regensburg. From 1995 to 2002 he was the chair of the commission on Iranian studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Heiner Eichner is the first professor at the University of Vienna who offered Zaza working groups and assumed various agenda regarding Kurdish (in cooperation with Prof. Celîlê Celîl) and for the Zaza-language.



**Mesut Keskin, M.A.**, is a PhD student at the Goethe-University Frankfurt/M. In the Department of Comparative Indo-European linguistics. Keskin engaged in diverse research on the Zaza-language. His M.A. thesis was on the dialect classification of Zazaki and his PhD topic is the standardization of the Zaza-language. In 2009 he translated the classic „The Little Prince“ into Zazaki as „Şazadeo Qickek“. 2012 he published the text book “Zonê Ma Zanena? – Zazaki für Anfängerinnen und Anfänger” (Zazaki for beginners). He is a founding member of the Association for the Advancement of the Zaza-language– Enstitüyê Zazakie.V. (2004) and the Zaza-community in Germany – Cemâtê Zazayanê Almanyae.V. (2015). Keskin teaches Zazaki at the University of Frankfurt.



**Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jaffer Sheyholislami**, is a professor at the University of Carleton in Canada. His main fields of research are systemic functional linguistics, language and identity, language policy and planning. Professor Sheyholislami undertook diverse studies on Kurdish languages. In 2011 he published a book with the title „Kurdish identity, discourse, and new media“.



**Mehmet Emir, M.A.**, absolvent of the Academy of fine Arts in Vienna, works as a social worker, columnist and photographer. He began with photography some 30 years ago and by now he has assembled more than 25.000 photographs of Dersim, his original home. Mehmet Emir migrated to Vienna in 1981. He began his career as a guest worker in a road construction company. Alongside many experiences with various groups in music and theatre, Mehmet Emir authored the book „Ich bin immer noch in Wien“ („I am still in Vienna“).



**Ao.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ursula Hemetek** is the director of the Institute for Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Her main areas of research are traditional music of minorities in Austria, particularly of the Roma, Croats in Burgenland, and Bosniacs. Ursula Hemetek has published several works on the topic „Ethnomusicology and Minorities“.



**Ass.-Prof. Dr. Dieter W. Halwachs**, is a specialist of sociolinguistics at the University of Graz; he is the director of the plurilingualism research unit at the „meeting point languages / center for language, plurilingualism and technical didactics; member of the expert committee of the European Charter for regional and minority languages at the Council of Europe; coordinator of various projects on minority languages, particularly the Romani; his main fields of research: language policy, minority linguistics, endangered languages, language contact...



**Prof. Dr. Katharina Brizić** is sociolinguist and works on her professorship at the unit of 'Multilingualism' at the Albert-Ludwigs-University in Freiburg (Germany). Prof. Brizić has worked as research scholar due to a project about acquisition of language, multilingualism and social inequality at the Berkeley Language Center at the University of California.



**Univ.-Prof. Dr. İnci Dirim** grew up in Turkey. She is an educationalist and a specialist in German studies and a professor for German as a second language at the University of Vienna. Her main areas of research are the use and acquisition of language in minority societies, language support and linguistic education in German, and approaches to German as a second language from perspectives of migrant pedagogy and a critique of power.

## Projectmanagement and Organization

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**MMag. Dr. Zeynep Arslan**

Social Scientist, Trainer, Author, Projectmanager

Co-President of the Zaza Sprachakademie Österreich

Organization, Management and Moderation of the Symposium



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