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8 Problems in Zazakî nomenclature

Abstract: This chapter investigates the complex issue of Zazakî nomenclature within Kurdish linguistics, critiquing the ambiguous use of 'Kurdish' and advocating for a more accurate and sensitive approach to language naming and classification. It combines an analysis of Zazakî speakers' emic perspectives, historical and external viewpoints, and the scientific community's understanding, highlighting the tendency of linguists to adopt established names without fully considering their sociocultural and historical implications. As a solution, the chapter proposes integrating indigenous insights and ethical research practices to redefine linguistic labels. This approach aims to recognize the historical, cultural, and emotional significance of these labels to speaker communities, thereby promoting a more inclusive methodology in the categorization and identification of languages like Zazakî.

Keywords: Zazaki, Kurdish, Endonyms, Language Naming, Classification

1 Introduction

Linguists who study Kurdish languages encounter a common conundrum: to which specific language are they actually referring when they utilize the term Kurdish? The reason for this confusion lies, of course, in the fact that multiple related, yet distinct varieties and speaker communities exist under the designation Kurdish. Additionally, another obstacle pertains to the inconsistent and ambiguous usage of the term itself, particularly in the case of Zazakî and Hawramî. Various actors of different time periods have adopted differing positions regarding the Kurdishness of these languages. Although there have been several attempts to define Kurdish, both linguistically and extralinguistically, e.g., Haig & Öpengin (2014), Scalbert-Yücel (2006), or Fattah (2000) to name a few, there is still no widely accepted consensus among scholars and the Kurdish people. While it has become conventional in Western literature to employ Kurdish linguistically to denote merely the three varieties of Northern Kurdish (Kurmancî), Central Kurdish (Soranî), and Southern

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Kurdish, the term is additionally used to refer to speakers of Zazakî and Hawramî (Goranî)[1] both by native speakers and in sources outside of linguistics. Given the heterogeneous and multilayered complexity of the matter, not only does this paper abstain from seeking a universal definition of 'Kurdish' and 'Kurds,' but it also acknowledges that the prerogative to delineate glossonyms and ethnonyms ultimately resides with the respective indigenous populations. One might think that it is a futile endeavor to begin with since discussions about names and definitions have long since left the academic domain. However, it is precisely because of the ambiguous and inconsistent usage of the term 'Kurdish' that today's nomenclature needs improvement. Consequently, this study aims to promote a more sensitive and accurate approach to language naming, aspiring to impart a more nuanced understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Kurdish people through an examination of the naming traditions of Zazakî and its speakers.

Disputes concerning names are not a new phenomenon, nor limited to the Kurdish people. There are prominent examples around the world in which multiple stakeholders claim a name or where a designation is dependent on the interpretation of any party involved – one just has to follow the discussions about definitions and identity politics concerning the designations Macedonian, Arab, Iranian, Turk, and many more. The term Kurd has had its fair share of dissection in academic research as well, a circumstance partly attributable to the heterogeneous nature of the Kurdish people, foremost in religion, customs, and language. Early scholars did not pay much attention to naming conventions and emic sentiments during linguistic documentation, contributing to the present-day ambiguity. However, naming practices are more than a mere scientific exercise in taxonomy. Naming does not happen in a vacuum, nor does it stay contained within the scientific community. On the contrary, it is often scientific research that shapes naming processes and solidifies power structures (Vaughan, Singer & Garde 2023: 84–86), mostly without consulting the local population, thus – knowingly or unknowingly – making academics anything but a neutral descriptive force.

While there has been considerable debate on language revitalization, language rights, and language identity, language naming practices, albeit crucial, have only recently come into the focus of linguistics, with notable contributions by Léglise & Migge (2006) and Vaughan, Singer & Garde (2023) to the growing body of literature.[2] The same is true for Kurdish Studies. Understandably, academic focus has

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1 The term *Goranî* has notably been used ambiguously, as it has been applied to both Southern Kurdish and Hawramî, thereby sparking ongoing debates, see Gholami (this volume).
2 For instance, language naming has been explored within the context of language mapping and perceptional dialectology (Iannàccaro & Dell'Aquila 2001), folk linguistics (Albury 2017), and minority languages (Bradley 2019).

largely been on language policy (Zeydanlıoğlu 2012, Haig 2004) and language shift (Leinonen 2022, Çağlayan 2014), whereas language naming practices were often treated in passing. The main point in linguistic discussion has revolved around categorization, i.e., whether Zazakî or Hawramî should be classified as Kurdish dialects or separate languages (Haig & Öpengin 2014, Paul 2002 among others). However, this debate overlooks a crucial aspect: even if all these varieties were to be categorized as separate languages by any criteria or list of isoglosses, who ultimately has the authority over the terminological ownership of the designation 'Kurdish'? If the term Kurdish, a broad sociocultural term by nature, is being used by linguists to exclusively refer to a few select varieties without consulting the native population, it risks denying the other varieties their status as being a legitimate part of the broader Kurdish nation and undermines the recognition of Kurds as a diverse ethnic group with linguistic and cultural heterogeneity, which is an essential part of their group-identity.

Inevitably, the question of who owns Kurdish must be analyzed within the framework of decolonization[3] and indigenous rights. Throughout history, colonialist ideologies have played a significant role in shaping how non-Kurds perceive and describe the various tribes, regions, and languages of Kurdistan. The impact of Western Orientalism cannot be overlooked in this process, as it largely influenced research methods utilized to conduct various linguistic and anthropological studies (cf. Houston 2009 and Blommaert & Verschueren 1998). The heterogeneous nature of Kurdish languages was often incommensurate with the established ideas of clearly defined ethnic groups. As such, labels were assigned with scant regard for how speakers identify themselves or construct their individual identities vis-à-vis others around them. This arbitrary classification system inevitably resulted in the exclusion of certain languages spoken by Kurds – such as Zazakî – from recognition due solely to external observers' preconceived notions about what constitutes 'Kurdish' or an ethnic group per se.

In order to examine and reevaluate the existing nomenclature, this chapter will first introduce the emic perspective of Zazakî speakers, exploring how Zazas name their language, the social dynamics that shape various endonyms, and the factors determining the identity of the speakers. Subsequently, an overview of Zazakî from external sources will be provided, elucidating how the language and its people have been described throughout history, especially in linguistic sources.

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3 It was İsmail Beşikçi who forcefully coined the term "international colony" with regards to Kurdistan (Beşikçi 1991). Beşikçi argues that, despite never attaining full independence or autonomy, the Kurdish people – and by extension their culture, customs, and language – were subject to colonial treatment. Since then, a remarkable body of literature about colonialism in Kurdistan has been published.

Lastly, a discussion is offered to reconcile the divergent views of the speakers and the scientific community.

2 Emic perspectives

2.1 Indigenous naming practices

Since Zazakî has a late written tradition, or at least very little of it survived, historical sources of emic names written in Zazakî are rare. Purportedly, the earliest existing Zazakî material dates back to the 18th century; it is a manuscript from 1798 that has been described by Dehqan (2010) but has yet to be publicly disclosed. Besides the aforementioned manuscript, the first written materials are religious works from the beginning of the 20th century by Ehmedê Xasî in 1903, Osman Esad Efendîyo Babij in 1933 (Malmîsanij 2021: 676), and Şêx Ensarî (written in 1947 and 1948, but unpublished until Zîlan 2017). Among these, a glossonym appears only in Xasî's work, namely *Kirdî* 'Kurdish' (Xasî 2013), whereas the works of Babij and Ensarî lack any self-description. There was a considerable gap in publication until the 1960s, with significant consistent publishing commencing in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, when discussing traditional endonyms or glossonyms, these labels are mostly not written in Zazakî. We know of these designations because either they were orally transmitted and recorded in various non-Zazakî sources of the time, such as archives, official reports, or scientific (and occasionally pseudoscientific) studies, or they were described by Zaza natives in a foreign language (e.g., Ewnî 1933).

Bearing this in mind, the speakers of Zazakî have traditionally known and utilized a substantial number of glossonyms and ethnonyms, the use of which varies depending on regional and sociocultural factors, often independently of each other. Fig. 1 shows a rough geographical distribution of emic glossonyms. Generally speaking, five major language names are known to the natives. The following list summarizes detailed discussions found in Dogan (2022: 17–25) and Malmîsanij (2021: 664–669; 1996); for historical records, see also Çağlayan (2016).

– Zazakî
  This designation is the most known name both internationally and in Western scholarship, as is also evident from the title of this chapter. Among the Zazas themselves, it is mainly used in the regions of Xarpêt (Elazığ), Pali (Palu),
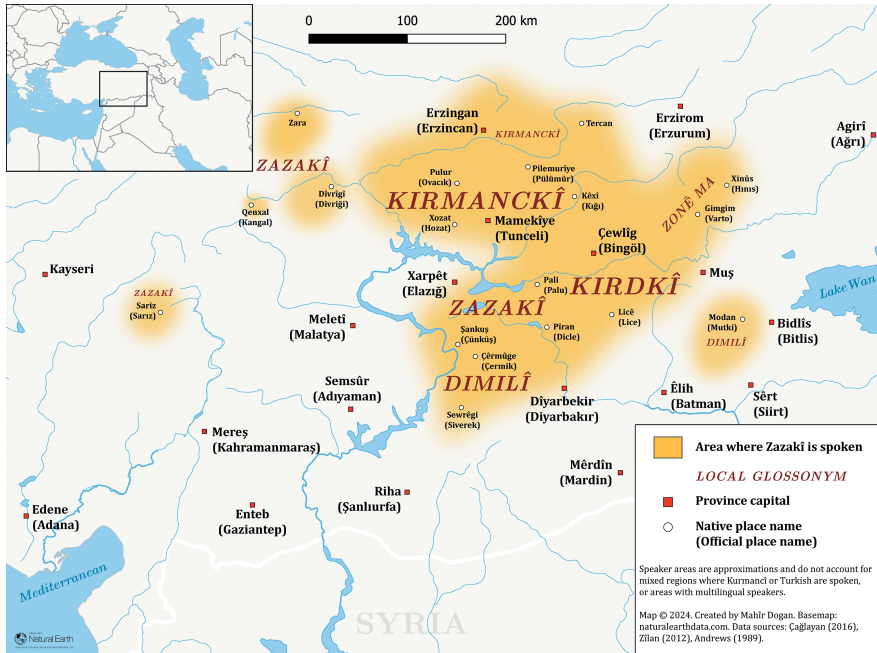
Figure 1: An approximate distribution of emic glossonyms of Zazakî.

Sariz, and parts of Koçgîrî (near today's Sivas). Historically, Zaza[4] used to be the name of a tribe and is attested as such in various reports and documents (see section 3.1 below). The popularity of usage in today's literature most likely stems from its exonymic application by Turkish speakers (Malmîsanij 2021: 668). Additionally, the name's phonological distinctiveness from other Kurdish varieties may have contributed to its widespread adoption.

– Dimilî / Dimlî

Like Zazakî, the glossonym *Dimilî*, or alternatively *Dimlî*, is of tribal origin. Dimilî traces back to the Kurdish tribe Dunbulî resp. Dumbulî, which is attested in various historical sources since the 12th century. At the beginning of the 20th century, scholars believed that the name stemmed from the Daylam region along the Caspian Sea (as per Christensen 1921 and Mann & Hadank 1932). However, substantial evidence in historical and social descriptions strongly disagrees with that hypothesis. Nonetheless, the claim that the designation represents a

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4 In some descriptions, the name Zaza has been used for both the speakers and the language. However, strictly speaking, *Zaza* is the name of the people whereas *Zazakî* (with the suffix *-kî*) denotes the language.

metathesized form of Daylam still persists, especially within Zaza nationalist circles (see Dogan 2022: 19–20 for a discussion).[5] Presently, Zazakî speakers in Çêrmûge (Çermik), Şankuş (Çünküş), Aldûş (Gerger), Motkan (Mutki), and Sêwregi (Siverek) call themselves Dimilî. Speakers in Hewêl (Baykan) in the Siirt province still employ the emic designation *Dimbilî* (Eroğlu 2019: 9; 87).

– Kirdkî / Kirdî

Outside of the speaker community, the least well-known designation for Zazakî is probably the glossonym *Kirdkî* resp. *Kirdî*, which translates to 'Kurdish'. Although speakers in the regions of Çewlîg (Bingöl), Xarpêt (Elazığ), and in the north of Dîyarbakır (Diyarbakır) still call themselves *Kird* 'Kurd,' their language *Kirdkî* or *Kirdî* 'Kurdish,' and their inhabited area *Kirdane* 'land of the Kurds' (Çağlayan 2016: 39), and given that the name is both the oldest documented self-designation written in Zazakî (Xasî 2013) as well as in linguistic research (Lerch 1857: 78), it is hardly mentioned in modern linguistic literature.

– Kirmanckî

Kirmanc as an ethnonym and *Kirmanckî* as a glossonym is mainly used in the Dêrsim region, which comprises today's Tunceli and its surrounding areas. The terms typically translate to 'Kurd' resp. 'Kurdish' (van Bruinessen 1997: 20, Sermîyan 2020: 80–81), although the ethnonym can also connote a narrow meaning in the sense of 'Alevi Kurd,' thus excluding Sunni Zazas (Firat 1997: 143)[6]. One can also find the expression *Kirmancîye,* which can both mean 'land of the Kirmanc' or 'Kurdish-dom'. It is safe to assume that *Kirmanckî* is the same word as *Kurmancî,* which is one of the emic names for the Northern Kurdish language (Haig & Öpengin 2014: 104).

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5 The primary argument hinges on the observation that some languages around the Caspian Sea exhibit phonological and morphological parallels with Zazakî, leading to speculations of a shared origin with the Daylam region. However, this hypothesis lacks substantial extralinguistic backing. Notwithstanding the debate's validity, evidence indicates that the *designation's* etymology is rooted in the name of the ancient Dumbulî tribe.

6 While some argue that the term *Kirmanc* is exclusively used to refer to Alevis or peasants (Keskin 2010), emic sources show that despite often excluding Sunnis and carrying additional connotations related to status, the term has a clear meaning in the sense of Kurdish (Sermîyan 2020 and Firat 1997). It is not uncommon for ethnic labels to have secondary, socio-status related meanings. Within Kurdistan, regional nuances exist as well. For instance, in Dêrsim, *Kirmanc* might have traditionally excluded the clergy, even though folklore frequently describes religious figures with this term. A parallel can be drawn to Gêl (Eğil) where the endonym *Kird* generally refers to Kurdish-speaking peasants but excludes the local aristocracy (Malmîsanij 1996: 3). Similarly, the term *Kurmanc*, depending on its usage in Northern and Central Kurdish areas, can represent a non-tribal Kurdish peasant (cf. van Bruinessen 1992: 107–122).

– Zonê Ma

Zonê Ma, or local variants of it, like Janê Ma, simply translates to 'our language'. The name can be found in Dêrsim alongside Kirmanckî or in the Gimgim (Varto) region, where it is traditionally used as the sole self-designation. There, people refer to themselves as Şarê Ma, 'our people'. Interestingly, Şarê Ma does include Alevi Kurmancî speakers, although their language is called Kurmancî. Kurmanc, as an ethnonym, however, is only used for Sunni Kurmancî speakers.

In addition, there are a number of exoglossonyms given to the language of the Zazas by their Kurmanc neighbors, mostly derived from tribal names, such as Ginî, Lolî or Çarekî (from the tribes Ginîyan, Lolan, and Çarekan respectively, cf. Zîlan 2012: 390). Another term, particularly utilized in Dêrsim, is So-Bê, literally 'Go-Come' (Blau 1989: 338, Firat 1997: 28).

It is important to note that ethnonyms like Kirmanc or Şarê Ma can also encompass speakers of Kurmancî Kurdish sharing the same religious affiliation and socio-cultural status. Yet, the corresponding glossonyms, such as Kirmanckî, are exclusively associated with the Zazakî language, presenting a glossonymic specificity in comparison to their ethnonymic counterparts. However, to distinctly refer to Kurmancî speakers, many Zazakî-speaking regions alternatively utilize the exonym Kirdas and the exoglossonym Kirdaskî, which derive from the core kird 'Kurd'. Consequently, although speakers of Zazakî and Kurmancî (of the same denomination) do collectively form an ethnic unit, distinct terminologies are employed to demarcate their respective languages (Firat 1997: 28; 143–144; Ishakoglu 2018: 195).

With increased education and interchange, the above-mentioned designations start to lose their old connotations. While one can assume that each local grouping still knows and utilizes its own glossonym, the influence of identity politics, media, and the ubiquity of the Turkish language has led to either the inclusion or exclusion of certain parts of the Zazakî speaking population. For example, older generations of Alevi Zazas refused to be called Zaza since this name is associated with Sunni Muslims (Andrews 2002: 28)[7]. However, in contemporary times, it's not uncommon to encounter a Zazakî speaker from Dêrsim or Gimgim referring to their language as Zazakî, especially when conversing in Turkish or another foreign language. Likewise, increased inter-regional interactions and heightened awareness are pushing self-designations beyond their traditional confines, leading to their synonymous use irrespective of religious or geographic connotations. This especially holds true among the media and the intelligentsia. Those advocating for the distinctiveness of

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7 Taşcı (2006) similarly observed that some speakers of both Zazakî and Kurmancî associate the term 'Kurd' with Sunni Islam.

Zazas from Kurds almost exclusively use the term *Zazakî*, whereas the expressions *Kirmanckî* or *Kirdkî* are more frequent in Kurdish-oriented sources. The leading institution for standardizing Zazakî, the Vate Group, prefers the use of *Kirmanckî*, followed by *Zazakî* in parentheses (cf. Grûba Xebate ya Vateyî 2012).

2.2 On identity

When linguists speak of speech communities, they refer to the people who actively speak the language, including heritage speakers.[8] However, at the same time, they often ascribe ethnic names to said communities, like German, Arab, or Kurd. This is not completely unwarranted since language and identity are intertwined concepts (cf. Arslan 2019). At the same time, one has to acknowledge that identity is a multilayered and complex issue that can shift not only over generations but within one individual.[9] It is often based on subjective interpretations rather than objective factors, constantly negotiating the boundaries of the Self and the Other. For Kurds, the relevant factors have been their respective homeland, tribal association (if existent), religion, and language. Naturally, there is a spectrum of different weightings and variances to each and every one of these dimensions, making the whole concept of ethnic group identity rather fluid. Over the years, the social sciences have delved deeply into the dynamics of ethnicity and identity formation, yielding rich discussions and diverse perspectives. One of the most influential works in anthropology in that regard is the introductory chapter of Barth (1969),[10] which establishes that ethnicity is determined by ethnic boundaries, i.e., as long as an ethnic group is capable of maintaining a clear boundary between itself and its environment, the ethnic identity of a group remains intact, even if the group's culture exhibits internal variation or undergoes substantial transformations over time (van Bruinessen 2006: 29–30). Barth (1969: 13–14) argues that the critical features are self-ascription and ascription by others and that "the features that are taken

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[8] As pointed out by Vaughan, Singer & Garde (2023: 87), one can claim ownership of a language and express belonging to it without actually being able to speak the language. I have encountered many young Kurds who do not speak the mother tongue of their parents but nevertheless identify as speakers of a certain Kurdish variety. Similar observations can be found in Taşcı (2010).

[9] In addition, multilingualism resp. translingualism blurs the boarders of self-perception (cf. Canagarajah 2022), which will not be addressed here.

[10] While Barth's work, now classified under social constructivism, remains one of the most cited anthropological texts, its widespread impact has led to a diverse range of (sometimes even contradictory) interpretations. See Jakoubek (2019a; 2019b) for an overview and critique.

into account are not the sum 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant".

Most foreign ascriptions describe the Zazas as Kurds (see section 3). Regarding self-ascription, we have seen that a considerable part of the Zazakî population calls themselves *Kirmanc* and *Kird*, i.e., 'Kurdish'. The other designations, namely *Dimilî* and *Zaza*, are remnants of Kurdish tribes. Since Zazas are no monolith, there are natural semantic variations in identity. For instance, a Zazakî speaker from Dêrsim may define and call himself Kurdish but at the same time may choose to differentiate himself from a speaker outside of Dêrsim. This underscores the polysemous nature of the term Kurdish: it can be subjectively interpreted by various subgroups of the population, yet it maintains a concrete boundary that does not exclusively follow linguistic demarcations.

Religious affiliation was and is another criterion of the Kurdish group identity. The Zazas are divided along religious lines, where half identify as Alevi and the other half are affiliated with Sunni Islam. (Çağlayan 2016: 108–109). Since the 1990s, there has been extensive research on Alevism and Alevi identity.[11] Numerous scholars have pointed out that among Kurdish Alevis, religious identity takes precedence over language; thus, they feel ethnically closer to Turcophone Alevis rather than Sunni Kurds (Çelik 2003, Kehl-Bodrogi 1999). Indeed, intermarriage between Alevis and Sunnis was very rare until recently. However, Kurdish Alevis, i.e., both speakers of Zazakî and Kurmancî, show cultural differences when compared to Turkish Alevis, particularly concerning their religious hierarchy, sacred rituals, and belief systems (van Bruinessen 1997, Deniz 2019). With urbanization and displacement, especially in the diaspora, these differences started to diminish, and a new separate Alevi identity emerged for some (cf. Taşcı 2006). It is worth noting that Kurdish Alevis have historically been involved in Kurdish nationalist movements, as seen in the Koçgîrî Rebellion of 1920 (Kieser 1998, Olson 1989: 28–39). However, despite a shared sense of Kurdish identity, substantial interaction between Kurdish Alevis and Sunnis remained limited until the advent of leftist nationalist movements.[12]

Starting in the 1980s, some Zaza intellectuals in the diaspora started to drift away from religious and tribal features and emphasized a new group identity

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11 Some examples worth mentioning are van Bruinessen (1997), Taşcı (2006), Massicard (2013), Aydın (2018), Gültekin (2019), Gezik & Gültekin (2019).

12 The Zaza-dominant Şêx Saîd Rebellion, which was organized by the clandestine Kurdish nationalist organization Azadî, famously failed to amend existing tribal and religious rivalries between Alevi and Sunni Zazas (Olson 1989: 94–96). A small but mentionable exception is the story of Şêx Saîd's brother Şêx Evdirehîm and his small group of followers who tried to come to the aid of the Dêrsim Kurds during the Dêrsim revolts of 1937, but were ambushed and killed by Turkish forces near Dîyarbekir before they could reach their destination (Dersimi 1952: 318, Espar 2017: 9–41).

based on linguistic differences. This Zaza nationalist movement, sometimes dubbed Zazaism, is based on the idea that Zazas, regardless of religious denomination, are a distinct people from the Kurds. Like Kurdish nationalism, Zaza nationalism mirrored its Turkish counterpart[13] in that it made use of some revisionist narratives, such as claiming a distinct Zaza history, postulating an origin in the Daylam region, and propagating the idea of "one language, one people" (Kehl-Bodrogi 1999: 449–452). Zaza nationalism's pioneer was Ebubekir Pamukçu, a Sunni Zaza who started publications in Sweden. Since then, there have been a number of prominent proponents of a distinct Zaza ethnicity, e.g., the linguists Selcan (1998) and Keskin (2010) or the writer and politician Seyfi Cengiz.[14] Recently, a Zaza-exclusive party has been founded in Turkey, albeit with a marginal following (Alan 2019).[15] The main line of argument in Zazaist circles is that since Zazakî is not a Kurdish dialect, as classified by linguists, the Zaza people consequently cannot be Kurds. This view, of course, ignores many other factors, like self-designations and shared ethnic boundaries. It is not by accident that authors like Selcan (1998) or Werner (2017) give a lengthy review of Zaza sources and identity but conveniently miss out on the self-designation *Kird,* which was documented in both Lerch (1857) and Xasî (2013). Furthermore, neither historical evidence nor sociological studies show a sociocultural split between Kurmancî speakers and Zazakî speakers along linguistic lines. As described above, historically, religious denomination served as a more significant criterion for separation. If not for language, it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish Alevi Zazas from their neighboring Alevi Kurmanc or Sunni Zazas from their adjacent Sunni Kurmanc. In essence, these communities share a great deal in terms of cultural identity and ethnic boundaries and are inherently intertwined with one another (cf. van Bruinessen 2006).

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13 Which in turn is inspired by the Western ideals of Orientalism and nationalism, cf. Houston (2009) and Leezenberg (1993: 13).

14 Zaza nationalism is no monolith either. Cengiz, for example, promotes two Zaza nations: one Alevi, one Sunni (Kehl-Bodrogi 1999: 453). Nowadays, Cengiz seems to be in favor of a distinct Dêrsim identity.

15 There seems to be a common pattern with some early Zazaist figures, namely that they were involved in Kurdish or even Turkish movements before developing a distinct Zaza identity. Pamukçu himself had written poems commemorating his Turkishness before advocating his new ideology (van Bruinessen 1997: 19, Pamukçu 1970: 32–33). Cengiz was initially an active member and fighter of the leftist Kurdish movement (White 1995). Selcan used to subsume the Zazas under a Kurdish identity before changing his view on the matter, and subsequently the titles of his old publications (Haig & Öpengin 2014: 104). This development was partially fostered by non-pluralistic attitudes within Kurdish nationalist movements and individually experienced discrimination that alienated some Zazas (Uçarlar 2009: 219–224; Kehl-Bodrogi 1999: 452).

Another argument from some of the proponents of a distinct Zaza identity posits that Kurdish nationalists incorporate Zazas merely to enlarge the prospective borders of a proposed Kurdish homeland. This line of thought presumes that the Zazas lack the agency to create their own political will and thus have been co-opted by Kurmancî speakers for a presumably foreign cause. However, this narrative ignores the integral role Zazakî speakers have played in the evolution of modern Kurdish nationalism. From the Koçgîrî rebellion and the revolts of Şêx Saîd to the establishment of Kurdish nationalistic parties in the 20th century – with the most recent example being the imprisoned co-chair of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş – many Kurdish nationalist movements in Turkey did and do have a significant amount of active Zaza participants.[16] It would be fallacious to portray these Zazas as mere anomalies or manipulated participants, as doing so oversimplifies a complex history. Given that Zaza nationalism did not occur before the 1980s and is primarily based on linguistic grounds, it is reasonable to assume that Zazakî speakers have consistently identified with and contributed to Kurdish nationalist movements out of a genuine sense of belonging to the broader Kurdish narrative and not out of coercion or confusion.[17] As it stands, Zaza nationalism currently remains a minority perspective among Zazas, whose proponents mostly agree on not being Kurdish but otherwise show a variety of competing sub-identities.

There are no definitive statistics about the Zazakî speaking population that specifically consider ethnic identity. In the first census of the Republic of Turkey in 1927, Zazakî was not distinguished as a separate category but rather included under "Kurdish" (TCBDİE 1929: 31–32). This approach changed in subsequent censuses conducted between 1950 and 1965. In these, Kurdish was divided into three subcategories: "Kurdish and Kirmanc," "Kirdash," and "Zaza" (cf. TCBİGM 1961: VIII; 142–144). This division reflects a lack of understanding of emic endonyms on the part of the surveyors, given that 'Kirdash' (*Kirdaş*) is the exonym that Zazakî speakers use for Kurmancî speakers. The 1965 census was the last to list the Zazas and their language separately. However, these censuses present inconsistencies;

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16 Certainly, there have been Zazas who have engaged in pro-Turkish movements and parties, often in tandem with an adoption of a (pan-)Turkish identity, as will be seen in the subsequent section.

17 Although not relevant for identity structures, there have been genetic studies regarding the Kurds (Nasidze et al. 2005 to name one), which found no difference between Zazakî and Kurmancî speakers from Turkey. This result should not be surprising, since genetic relations are rather indicative about human mating habits than significant features of ethnic boundaries, yet it remains a trending topic in popular science with various DNA project groups circulating on social media platforms and news outlets reporting on allegedly shocking revelations about ethnic origins.

for instance, the 1965 census indicated only seven Zazakî speakers in the province of Tunceli, likely due to the fact the natives of Dêrsim rejected the designation Zaza, which they associate with Sunnis (Çağlayan 2016: 55–56; cf. also Andrews 1989: 53).

Apart from official censuses, the question of ethnic identity among Zazas has been the subject of several smaller studies, each offering unique perspectives influenced by their methodology and scope. In her 2019 survey of 382 Zazas in Mamekîye (Tunceli city), Güntaş Aldatmaz (2021) found that a majority (71,5%) identified as Kurds, while 19,6% responded with "Turk," and 4,5% with "Zaza". A generational divergence is evident: younger participants, predominantly under 18, showed a higher inclination (39.7%) towards a Turkish identity, as opposed to the elderly, 70–80% of whom resonated with a Kurdish affiliation. This correlates with the loss of mother tongue among the youth (Güntaş Aldatmaz 2021: 131; 151). In stark contrast, another study of 823 Alevi Zazas across diverse regions by Rençber (2013) found 70% self-identifying as Zaza Alevi, 20% as Turkish Alevi, and only 10% as Kurdish Alevi. However, Rençber's methodology is questionable. The survey's structure, embedding the term "Zaza" in the question, can be seen as leading. Coupled with reliance on dubious sources like Ziya Gökalp and Hayri Başbuğ (see below), Rençber's findings warrant critical scrutiny. Both Güntaş Aldatmaz and Rençber utilized questionnaires in Turkish with multiple-choice answers, a method that might influence the outcome. Adding further complexity is Yıldırım's (2011) study, which encompassed 64 Zazas in Lice and Hani. Employing a unique multilingual approach, his survey probed identity by asking questions in Turkish, Kurmancî, and Zazakî, revealing a strong linguistic dimension to self-designation. When respondents communicated in Turkish, 54.7% aligned with the identities "Kurd" or "Kurd who speaks Zaza," while 37.5% identified as Zaza. Interestingly, switching to Zazakî altered this distribution.[18] Furthermore, the wording in Turkish had significant influence: a mere shift from "What are your origins?" to "Are you a Kurd?" led to a surge from 54.7% to 92.2% in Kurdish self-identification. Such a stark discrepancy among the same respondents underscores the risks of drawing conclusions from a singular question.

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[18] In his findings, when respondents spoke in Turkish, 64,1% predominantly used the term *Kürt* 'Kurd' to refer to Kurmancs. Yet, when the conversation was held in Kurmancî or Zazakî, none used the equivalent term for Kurmancî speakers. Instead, they favored the native endonyms *Kurmanc* or *Kurmonc* (Yıldırım 2011: 41).

3 Zazakî in outside sources

3.1 Historical descriptions of Zazas and Zazakî

Like most Kurds, a considerable part of the Zazas is tribally organized, although nowadays, it mostly remains a relic inherited from older generations. The major tribes consist of speakers of both Kurmancî and Zazakî and often possess a rich oral history (for a list of tribes, see Sykes 1908, Dersimi 1952). Early historical records that describe the various Kurdish tribes, dynasties, and settlements do not distinguish between Zazas and other Kurds. On the contrary, up until the 19th century, the descriptions depict the Zazas as part of the Kurdish community.

   The earliest evidence associated with today's Zaza Kurds stems from medieval times. The first appearance of the name Zaza itself is a tribal designation in a genealogical tree in Dêrsim, presumably from the 14th century (Malmîsanij 2021: 668; Selcan 1998: 119). The Dunbulî or Dumbulî tribe, from which the modern ethnonym and glossonym Dimilî is derived, is well documented in various works of Arab, Persian, and Ottoman scholars. The designation appears from the 12th century onwards in various descriptions of lands and people, often connotated with the Kurds (Çağlayan 2016: 36–39). There is a debate about the semantics of Kurdishness in medieval sources and whether the designation Kurd (*Akrād*) bears any ethnological meaning. While some scholars emphasize the shifting nature of ethnic identity and thus argue that Kurd was a mere socioeconomic description (e.g., Özoğlu 2004, Jwaideh 2006), James (2014) forcefully shows that starting with the 11th century, Arabic sources utilize the attribute Kurd in a consistent ethnonymic way.[19]

   It is not uncommon for designations to change meaning over time. Dumbulî and Zaza may have been used in a much broader sense in medieval sources than their present-day connotations since early Arab and Ottoman sources rarely elaborate on the languages of the Kurdish people they describe. Although some of the documented tribes and locations match today's settlement areas, there is no inductive information about their linguistic composition. The first explicit mention of the

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19 Similarly, some authors, such as Halaçoğlu (1996) claim that in Ottoman sources, the term *Akrād* refers to a nomadic lifestyle, thus not functioning as an ethnonym This is somewhat aligned with James (2014), who acknowledges potential semantic associations with nomadism but shows that 'Kurd' is not strictly synonymous with 'nomad'. Contrarily, numerous Ottoman documents clearly deploy *Akrād* in an ethnonymic manner (cf. Çağlayan 2016: 63–77). In another instance, the term's use for mixed tribes, such as the Kara Ulus of the Qara Qoyunlu Turkomans, prompted Halaçoğlu (1996: 144) to interpret it as 'nomad' or 'mountain people'. However, it is crucial to highlight that the Kara Ulus are, in all likelihood, a tribe of Kurdish origin serving the Qara Qoyunlu (Demirtaş 1949: 30).

languages of the Kurds is found in the 16th-century chronicle *Şerefname*. There, the author Şeref Xan Bidlisî lists the Dunbulî as a Kurdish tribe, although in another geographic location (Çağlayan 2016: 66). Şeref Xan subsumes Zazas under a Kurdish umbrella and counts their dynasties as Kurdish. However, he does not mention Zazakî in his list of Kurdish languages.[20] This omission could stem from Şeref Xan's possible lack of awareness or indifference towards linguistic distinctions, or perhaps the ruling families did not self-identify with the term.[21]

Thus, the first known historical document that distinctly describes the Zazas with regard to their language is Evliya Çelebi's famous 17th-century travelogue *Seyahatname*. Çelebi explicitly includes the Zaza among the Kurds. Zazas are listed as one of the Kurdish tribes, described as *Ekrād-i Zāzā* 'Zaza Kurds' who speak *lisān-i Zāzā-i Ekrād* 'the language of the Zaza Kurds' resp. 'the language of the Kurdish Zaza tribe' (Çağlayan 2016: 67–69). One can presume that these Zaza Kurds spoke a vernacular different from their neighbors and thus are a good candidate to be the predecessors of today's Zazakî speakers since the attested regions still lie in the core of the Zazakî speaking area.

Ottoman chronicles of later periods often do not mention the Zazas explicitly; they are subsumed under a Kurdish identity. Occasionally, expressions like *Zāzā-i Ekrād* or *Dünbüli-i Ekrād* are found in Ottoman tax registers (*tahrir*). In the 1844 census, for example, Kurds are listed as an ethnic group, but there is no separate category for the Zaza identity (Çağlayan 2016: 74). This changes with the *Salname-i Vilayet*, the official annals for the provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The first province records were published in 1867, providing demographic and linguistic data on native Zaza populations. Depending on the province, Zazakî is either listed as a separate language from Kurdish and Persian, described as "aberrant" (*muharref*), or not mentioned as a separate entity at all. The sanjaks of Dîyarbekir and Maden, which hold a considerable Zaza population, for example, are reported to speak Kurdish, Turkish, or Arabic, whereas in the sanjaks of Muş and Genc, Zazakî is listed alongside Kurdish (Çağlayan 2016: 75–76). Similar to the aforementioned censuses of modern Turkey in 1950–1965, the Ottoman *Salname* records seem somewhat inconclusive at first sight. One might assume that the surveys have been conducted poorly. However, another possible explanation is that parts of the local

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20 The 19th century scholars Lerch (1857: XXI) and Justi (1880: XXV) remarked that Zazas should be incorporated as a fifth column in the *Şerefname*.

21 The *Şerefname* primarily describes ruling families and dynasties, thus possibly excluding lower tribes (van Bruinessen 2011: 17). Interestingly, in 1682 the court scribe of Yensûr Bey of Palu translated the *Şerefname* into Ottoman Turkish (Bidlīsī & Oktay 2016). This version emphasizes and extends the history of the Mirdasî principality, indicating a belongingness to other Kurdish dynasties. Presently, the Mirdasî are a Zazakî speaking tribe.

population did not use the glossonym *Zaza,* and thus, their language has been registered as Kurdish by the Ottoman surveyors, especially if the speakers of Zazakî were socioculturally indistinguishable from their Kurmanc neighbors[22]. It is also likely that the Turkish expression 'Kurdish' was already reserved for the much more widespread Kurmancî, and thus Zazakî was named differently, although the population considered itself Kurdish – a theme that continued throughout the following decades of outsiders' descriptions.

The *Salname* is one of the first records that linguistically list Zazakî separately from Kurdish, although inconsistently. The 19th century seems to be a turning point in so far as descriptions that show Zazakî as a separate language start to emerge. This development is also reflected in European, Armenian, and Russian sources. Early accounts subsume the Zaza as part of the Kurdish people, either as a tribe without any further description, such as in Carsten Niebuhr's travelogue from the 18th century (Niebuhr 1778: 417) or as a subgroup resp. Tribe, like in the 19th century reports of Rich (1836: 376), Lerch (1857: XVIII), and Chantre (1895: 92–93). Lerch's work was the first linguistic description of Zazakî (see section 3.2). However, other depictions have also attempted to document the linguistic constitution, even if only superficially. Lacking a detailed grammatical understanding until the end of the first third of the 20th century, most observers note that Zazakî is a Kurdish dialect. Which, however, differs severely from Kurmancî Kurdish to a degree of unintelligibility. There are a few remarkable British documents that deal with various aspects of Kurdish life. Albeit brief, the earliest description of the language is made by James Taylor, the consul at Dîyarbekir, who journeyed to Kurdistan in 1861–1863 and documented the use of "Zaza Kurdish" in Nerib, in today's Hani district (Taylor 1865: 39). The notorious diplomat Mark Sykes (1915) gave a detailed report on the various Kurdish tribes with the respective language they speak. Here, the term Zaza has both a tribal and a linguistic connotation. However, Sykes does not describe the language per se, and one can conclude from his remarks that he did not fully comprehend the various dialects of Zazakî, e.g., describing the Zazakî of Dêrsim as a "special dialect" which is "closely allied to Zaza" (Sykes 1915: 571). The British vice-consul Louis Molyneux-Seel (1914: 68) describes the Zaza dialect – the words language and dialect are used interchangeably – of the Dêrsim Kurds, coming to the conclusion that it differs widely from Kurmancî, "the principal Kurdish language," and that it is considered a Kurdish dialect, though he is skeptical of its philological justification.

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22 It is worth noting that the designation *Kurmanc/Kirmanc* is not present in Ottoman documents, despite the fact that it serves as the self-referential term for both Kurmancî and Zazakî speakers.

As close neighbors of the Zazas, it is not surprising to find some Armenian sources that mention linguistic features. The famous Armenian author Khatchatur Abovyan describes Zazakî as a Kurdish dialect, which is not intelligible to a Kurd who did not study it (Abovyan 1848). Antranik, who traveled the Dêrsim region at the end of the 19th century and who is supportive of the claim that most Kurds from Dêrsim are of Armenian origin, claims that the language of the Zazas is a mixture of Kurdish (Kurmancî), Persian, Arabic, Armenian, and Zaza (Dimilî), with the latter constituting three-quarters of the language (Antranik 2017: 180).

With the rise of Turkish nationalism and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, a new narrative started to emerge. While initial reports from the 1920s resemble Western accounts in listing the Zazas as Kurds, for example, in Mustafa Kemal's *Nutuk* (Kemal 1970: 100) or the often-cited revisionist report of Ziya Gökalp, the ideological forefather of Turkish nationalism (Gökalp 2011: 33)[23], later works make a twofold alteration. First, an emphasis is made on Turkification, i.e., using pseudoscientific methods in order to declare Zazas and Kurmanc as original Turks who went astray and lost their alleged roots (cf. Zeydanlıoğlu 2008, Houston 2009). To illustrate, one author, Firat (1961: 7), posited in his 1945 report on the Eastern provinces that the "old Turkish and Turkmen tribes are called Kurds today because they speak the languages Kormanci and Zaza". According to him, the "Turks" in the Eastern provinces are divided into three branches: Baba-Kurds, Kurmanco, and Zazas. The second alteration emerged gradually in the 1930s and represented a small deviation inside the same ideological frame: Kurmanc and Zazas are no longer treated as a unit but as two separate entities, both targeted for Turkification. The policy of divide and conquer was applied to seek separation among ethnic minorities in Turkey, which was famously done on religious and linguistic grounds (cf. Ishakoglu 2018: 113–136). Once a separate Zaza nationalism began to surface (as discussed in section 2.2), Turkish nationalists were quick to capitalize on it.[24] The separation of Zazas and Kurmanc picked up pace after the coup d'état in 1980, most famously with Hayri Başbuğ's[25] contributions and the establishment of the Institute for Research of the Turkish Culture (*Türk Kültürünü Araştirma Enstitüsü*)

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23 Gökalp had most likely Zaza roots himself. For a synopsis of Gökalp's theories and their pivotal role in shaping Turkish nationalism, refer to Nefes (2018).

24 The narrative in Kurdish circles often suggests that Zaza nationalism was a strategic creation of the Turkish intelligence service. Although official attempts in dividing Zaza and Kurmanc predate the emergence of Zaza nationalism, it remains ambiguous whether the movement arose organically within the Zaza community and was later co-opted by Turkish nationalists and ultimately incorporated into the state doctrine, or if it was externally orchestrated from the outset.

25 Ironically, Başbuğ himself is most likely of Zaza origin, stemming from Hênî (Hani) in Dîyarbekir (Diyarbakir).

(Scalbert-Yücel 2006: 119; see also Anuk 2022). This assimilatory philosophy is not without a good number of contradictions and rearrangements. However, as flawed as it may appear in retrospect, it has impacted the local population, further fostering identity shifts.

In conclusion, the kinship between Zazas and Kurmanc has been described in non-linguistic descriptions of the past two centuries while simultaneously highlighting differences in speech. This is due to the ill-defined concepts of language and dialect that continue to affect Kurdish politics and academia. Over time, numerous authors have attempted to reconcile the fact that a single ethnic group speaks different vernaculars. This complexity is further compounded by the term Kurdish, which historically referred to linguistically diverse tribes and communities, but in the 19th and 20th centuries, it began to refer primarily to the Kurmancî language. Labels, once established, often persist, even when they become inaccurate or imprecise. Thus, although Zazakî speakers identified as Kurdish, external forces gradually limited the label to Kurmancî speakers only. Surprisingly, despite their Turkification efforts, Turkish pseudoscientific sources provide rather nuanced descriptions of self-designations among Kurds.

3.2 Zazakî in linguistic descriptions

Serious linguistic work on Zazakî started in the 19th century. The first linguistic research on Zazakî was done by Peter Lerch in 1857, where he gathered material in Russia from a prisoner of the Crimean War of Pali (Palu) origin. Lerch describes "Zaza" as one of the two vernaculars resp. dialects of Kurdish – the other being Kurmancî – and states that the Kurmancs do not understand Zazakî (Lerch 1857: XXII). Although Lerch acknowledges the linguistic differences between Zazakî and Kurmancî, he describes them both as Kurdish. In his writings, Lerch calls the language "Zaza". However, in one of the tales of the informant, the self-designation *Kird* 'Kurd' is being used (Lerch 1857: 78). This is the first documented case of an endonym from a native speaker. After Lerch, various linguistic publications surfaced, such as Müller (1865), Soane (1912), and Tedesco (1921). Most of these initial works say little about ethnic composition; Zazas are treated as Kurds who speak a different language.

The first impactful publication in that regard is the work of Mann & Hadank (1932). Oskar Mann collected his material in 1906 in situ, but it was left for Karl Hadank to prepare and publish Mann's work posthumously. Mann was the first linguist to advocate a separation of Zazakî from Kurdish. Linguistically speaking, the analysis is justified. Based on isoglosses in phonology and morphosyntax, it is reasonable to argue against a genealogical subgrouping of Kurmancî and Zazakî. Mann

was the first to realize that. The problematic part lies in the use of the term Kurdish. No discussion on the nature of Kurdish identity is provided; the label is assumed for the Kurmancî speaking population. It remains unclear whether this was influenced by prevailing Turkish naming practices or if these early scholars were simply uninterested in a more sensitive approach to native sentiments. Regarding nomenclature, it is noted that "dim^{i}lä" resp. "Dimlî" is an endonym of the local population, whereas Zaza is the language name chosen by the Turks (Mann & Hadank 1932: 1; Kolivand 2014: 515). It is worth noting that neither Mann nor Hadank traveled to the Northern Zazakî regions, despite Mann's initial intentions (Selcan 1998: 15–16). The source of their information was an informant from Siverek, with no explicit mention of the self-designation of the other speakers (Mann & Hadank 1932: 2).

After Mann and Hadank, a number of linguists started to adopt the new classification. Two much-referenced works are provided by David MacKenzie (1961; 1989). In his analysis, MacKenzie not only differentiates Zazakî, Goranî, and Kurdish as distinct languages but also critiques scholars for counting these speakers as Kurds. Once again, linguistic difference is being equated with ethnic affiliation. Although, over the years, many linguists and Iranologists commented on the nature and categorization of Zazakî, the next grammar to emerge was Todd's 1985 dissertation. Again Todd's informant was from Siverek; thus, he used the glossonym Dimilî. Although acknowledging the linguistic classification that Zazakî is not a Kurdish dialect, Todd (2008: 1) states that "[s]peakers of Dimili are Kurds psychologically, socially, culturally, economically, and politically. It is quite possible, especially since the term Kurd has always been ill-defined [. . .] that speakers of Dimili should be identified as Kurds today".

1998 marks the year when three grammars of Zazakî were published: Selcan (1998), Paul (1998), and Smirnova & Ejubi (1998). Following the Russian school of Kurdish linguistics, Smirnova and Ejubi classify Zazakî as Kurdish, whereas Paul and Selcan speak of separate languages. Selcan's bias regarding naming and ethnic identity has been explained above: the author explicitly uses the term "Zaza language," although his informants stem from the Northern dialect regions where this designation has a negative connotation. Paul (1998; 2002) approaches the subject with more differentiation, remarking that a big part of the Zazakî speakers identify as Kurds and perceive their language as a form of Kurdish. However, he also acknowledges the consensus among European linguists that Zazakî stands distinct from Northern, Central, or Southern Kurdish. At this point, Kurdish is a well-established linguistic category that excludes Zazakî, and Paul tries to reconcile that by differentiating language affiliation from ethnic identity. Remarkably, only Smirnova & Ejubi (1998: 6), citing Malmîsanij, reference the emic ethnonym *Kird*. This designation is absent in the grammars of Mann & Hadank (1932), Todd (2008), Paul (1998), and Selcan (1998).

Numerous contemporary linguistic works address some aspects of Zazakî. Regarding language naming, the designation *Zazakî* has established itself in English literature, whereas one finds a variety of uses in modern Zazakî literature, foremost *Kirmanckî* and *Kirdkî*. With rising awareness that emic perspectives are incongruous with the established taxonomy, several authors have tried to address this by suggesting their own classification systems (Table 1). The debate remains unsettled. Many scholars within Kurdish Studies still speak of *two Kurdishes*: the narrow linguistic designation assigned by linguists to the three varieties Northern, Central, and Southern Kurdish and the broader, sociocultural term that includes both Zazakî and Hawramî. This more inclusive classification mirrors the perspectives of the majority of speakers. Commendably, some authors, like Anonby, Hayes & Oikle (2020), have applied alternative forms of categorization that factor in ethnic identification. Nonetheless, the primary issue, namely determining who owns the term 'Kurdish,' still remains unsolved.

Table 1: Nomenclature of Kurdish varieties in modern literature.

The categorization of Zazakî (and/or Goranî/ Hawramî)	Northern, Central, and Southern Kurdish	Source
'Kurdish dialects' in a wider, ethnic sense	Kurdish proper	Leezenberg 1993
Kurdo-Caspian	Northern, Central, and Southern Kurdish	Fattah 2000
Kurdish in an ethnical/ political sense	Kurdish	Paul 2008
Kurdophone	Kurdic	Stilo 2009
Zaza (although ethnically labeled as Kurds)	Kurdish proper	van Bruinessen 2011
Labeled as "related varieties"	Kurdish	Haig & Öpengin 2014
Subsumed under "Gesamtkurdisch"	Kurdish in a narrow sense	Haig 2017
Kurdish varieties	Kurdish varieties, Kurdish proper	Maisel 2018
Kurdistani languages	Kurdish	Chyet 2019
Kurdish in a sociolinguistic sense	Kurdish in a narrow linguistic sense	Öpengin 2021
Kurdic	Kurdish	Anonby 2022
Kurdish Zone (languages)	Kurdish	Karim 2022

4 Conclusion

The debate regarding the Kurdishness of Zazakî and its speakers remains an intricate and highly politicized topic. It is understandable that linguists shy away from the hornet's nest of identity politics when documenting and describing languages. However, as highlighted in this chapter, merely adopting an established name for reasons of convenience or perceived neutrality without acknowledging its sociocultural and historical implications often inadvertently leads to the opposite outcome and thus cannot be the final solution. Iranology and Iranian linguistics must acknowledge that academic authority, even when unintentional, is a crucial factor in the naming of languages and the shaping of identities (Vaughan, Singer & Garde 2023: 84).

Leezenberg (1993: 12) and Haig & Öpengin (2014) defend early linguists' assessment by arguing that their distinction was purely of a linguistic nature and should not be extrapolated to ethnic implications.

> Mann's views were entirely based on linguistic/philological facts; they actually entail no consequences in terms of speakers' perceived identities, and initially, the discussion on the position of Zazaki was largely confined to Iranian philology (Haig & Öpengin 2014: 104)

However, a closer look into the world views of these early academics reveals that their analysis often extended beyond pure linguistic assessment. It would be remiss to ignore the fact that European colonialism has shaped scientific methodologies[26] and linguistic descriptions. Take Karl Hadank as a case in point. While he may have been a diligent and meticulous scholar, it is crucial to question the ideological paradigms that have guided his endeavors in other areas, particularly in anthropology. Hadank's staunch support for the Nazi regime during the Third Reich and his adherence to their racial ideologies[27], along with his propagation of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories (Paul 2020: 303–305), cannot be ignored. This background seemingly illuminates Hadank's underlying belief: one distinct people speaks one language.[28] This becomes evident in Hadank (1938), where he defines Kurds as those "who speak Kurdish":

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26 Consult Smith (2021) for a general view on theories in the decolonization of research methods.
27 The concept of race of course predates the Third Reich. Physiognomic descriptions of indigenous people are frequently found in works from scholars of the 19th and early 20th century, see for example Chantre (1895). In his descriptions of the Kurds, Lerch (1857: XXIII) also does attribute his interviewees' outer appearance to the "Indo-European race".
28 It is worth noting that there were diverging views and even contradictions within Nazism (even before the Third Reich) with regards to race, nation, and language. However, language and especially mother-tongue was intertwined with the concept of *Volk* and in the eyes of its proponents,

Here, I emanate from historical ethnology (*Völkerkunde*) and the linguistic concept of the Kurds as those who speak Kurdish, and hence do not count the Lur, the Guran and the Zaza towards the Kurds [Hierbei gehe ich von der historischen Völkerkunde und vom sprachlichen Begriff der Kurden als der Kurdisch Sprechenden aus und rechne danach die Luren, die Gūrān und die Zāzā nicht zu den Kurden.] (Hadank 1938: 6, footnote 4)

The appropriation of the term Kurdish is not Hadank's merit since we see similar depictions since late Ottoman times. However, it seems that, like many linguists of his time, he appears to have adopted the established nomenclature without further scrutiny because he was either disregarding or unaware of the various emic designations of the Zazas that also identify their language as Kurdish. Therefore, his logic dictated him to reach the above-quoted conclusion. Consequently, he criticizes Lerch's "ethnography of the Kurdish tribes" for including the Zazas (Mann & Hadank 1932: 9), insinuating a linguistic uniformity in tribal structures. MacKenzie (1961; 1989) does not confine his analysis to linguistics, either. He ventures into historical and geographical speculations regarding possible migrations of Zazas and Kurds, implying a historical continuum of ethnic identities in which Zazas and Kurds somehow have always been separate entities. Again, we lack any attempt to consult emic labels and perspectives.

Thankfully, there has been a heightened level of awareness among linguists, with a particular focus on conducting research ethically and recognizing the influence of power dynamics within knowledge. A quote from Jügel, referenced in Anonby, Hayes & Oikle (2020: 49), summarizes the linguist's ethics in classification as follows: "Linguists have to understand that they cannot tell people who they are, and language communities should understand that [genealogical] language affiliation is not the same as identity affiliation". While this statement pertains to genealogical taxonomy, i.e., which languages constitute meaningful entities, the aspect of naming these varieties is equally important. Should linguists wish to avoid partaking in Kurdish identity formation, they subsequently have to rethink the labels used in their classification. These labels are more than mere tags; they bear historical, cultural, and emotional significance and ultimately belong to the speakers of said communities. As we have seen in section 2.2, a huge part of the debates about a separate Zaza identity revolves around the fact that academics have decided that

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thus anthropologically determinative (cf. Hutton 1999). A similar sentiment is paralleled in the foundations of Turkish nationalism, where the notion of nationhood is bound to linguistic identity, summarized in the notorious slogan of Kemalism "one nation, one flag, one language". It is one of the reasons why pro-Kurdish publications emphasize the word dialect, since it implies a common ethnic origin.

Zazakî is not a Kurdish language.[29] Had early linguists been more considerate and judicious in their choice of terms, we might have reached the conclusion that the Kurdish people are a diverse linguistic community by allowing the Kurds to name their languages on their own terms.

There is a need to recognize the impact of historical colonialism and its legacies on Kurdish communities and how it has shaped linguistic practices. By using emic glossonyms, linguists can avoid perpetuating colonial and hegemonic attitudes towards language that have plagued the field for too long. Admittedly, as seen with the Zaza Kurds, this approach can present challenges, given the diverse spectrum of identities and names, each imbued with its own sociocultural connotations. Nevertheless, the pursuit of simplicity should not come at the expense of local realities. While definitive statistics are absent, it is reasonable to assume that a significant majority of Zazakî speakers historically identified with the Kurdish nation. A considerable portion likely still does (cf. van Bruinessen 2006), and that portion still holds the naming rights to their language. The current nomenclature does not represent this sentiment. Speakers of Zazakî might rightfully ask the scientific community on what right they exclude Zazas by appropriating a name that has traditionally belonged to them. For future research, perhaps it is best to reserve the term Kurdish for its broader sociocultural and historical meaning and, followingly, use specific emic glossonyms for linguistic studies. This approach would represent more a restoration than a redefinition of the expression Kurdish, offering a possible path forward to reconcile scientific research with indigenous systems of knowledge.

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29 Another salient, albeit anecdotal, example is provided by Hamid Nikravesh who conducted field work for Goranî in Gahvara in 2013. In an interview with a 47-year-old speaker regarding his ethnic identity, the speaker conveyed that, left to his own devices, he would identify as Kurdish. However, given that academic discourses label him as a Goran, he expressed lingering uncertainty (Nikravesh, 23.03.2023, p.c.).

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