



## **Linguistic Transformation in Mardin in Historical Travellers' Narratives: Multilingualism, Linguistic Observations and Educational Reflections**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aims to examine the linguistic transformation of Mardin within the framework of multilingualism, based on the narratives of travellers who visited the city throughout history. Mardin has hosted various ethnic, religious, and cultural communities over the centuries. This historical and social diversity has endowed the city's linguistic fabric with a rich, layered, and dynamic multilingual character. In northern Mesopotamia, Mardin has long served as a crossroads of civilizations, including Assyrians, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, and Turks. This multicultural composition is clearly reflected in the city's linguistic landscape, and in the historical travellers' accounts. The travelogues of prominent figures such as Evliya Çelebi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Jubayr, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, and William Francis Ainsworth provide invaluable linguistic observations testifying to Mardin's multilingual environment. In this context, the study analyses the languages spoken in different periods, sociocultural and functional contexts, and how the multilingual setting was perceived and represented by travellers. Furthermore, considering UNESCO's multilingual education policies, the research explores educational implications of Mardin's linguistic diversity and investigates historical foundations of mother-tongue-based education. The findings shed light on Mardin's historical and sociolinguistic structure and offer significant insights into cultural and pedagogical roots of a multilingual educational approach. Thus, the study provides an original contribution to understanding of relationship between language, culture, and identity in a historical context.

**Keywords:** Mardin, Travellers' Narratives, Multilingualism, Linguistic Transformation, Linguistic Observations.

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## Tarihî Seyyah Anlatılarında Mardin'de Dilsel Dönüşüm: Çokdillilik, Dilbilimsel Gözlemler ve Eğitsel Yansımalar

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### Öz

Bu çalışma, tarihsel süreçte Mardin'i ziyaret eden seyyahların anlatılarına dayanarak kentin dilsel dönüşümünü çokdillilik bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Mardin, tarih boyunca farklı etnik, dini ve kültürel gruplara ev sahipliği yapmış; bu durum, kentin sosyal yapısıyla birlikte dilsel dokusuna da çok katmanlı ve dinamik bir çokdillilik kazandırmıştır. Özellikle konumu itibarıyla Mezopotamya'nın kuzeyindeki kent, birçok medeniyetin kavşak noktası olmuş, Süryanilerden Araplara, Kürülerden Ermenilere, Yahudilerden Türklerle kadar birçok halk bu coğrafyada varlık göstermiştir. Bu çokkültürlü yapı, doğal olarak bölgedeki dilsel çeşitliliğe de yansımış ve bu durum tarihî belgeler kadar seyyah anlatılarına da yansımıştır. Evliya Çelebi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Jubayr, Jean Baptiste Tavernier ve William Francis Ainsworth gibi önemli seyyahların gözlemleri, bu çokdilli yapıının tanıklığını yapmakta ve dönemin dilsel ortamına dair değerli bilgiler sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma kapsamında, söz konusu anlatılar üzerinden konuşulan diller, bu dillerin kullanım bağamları ve seyyahların çokdilli yapıyı nasıl tanımladıkları analiz edilmiştir. Ayrıca, UNESCO'nun çokdilliliğe dayalı eğitim politikaları çerçevesinde, Mardin'deki dilsel çeşitliliğin eğitsel yansımaları ele alınmış; ana dil temelli eğitimin tarihsel dayanakları irdelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, Mardin'in tarihsel ve sosyolinguistik yapısına ışık tutmaktadır; çokdillilikte dayalı bir eğitim anlayışının kültürel ve pedagojik temellerine dair önemli ipuçları sunmaktadır. Böylece çalışma, dil, kültür ve kimlik etkileşiminin tarihsel bağlamda ele alan özgün bir katkı sunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mardin, Seyyah Anlatıları, Çokdillilik, Dilsel Dönüşüm, Dilbilimsel Gözlemler.

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## Introduction

Mardin is one of the oldest settlements in the northern part of Mesopotamia. It is located on a high rocky hill, and its walls provide an excellent protection. Because of its geographical location suitable to be protected against attacks, it has attracted many different nations (Picture 1.). Mardin possesses a rich and diverse cultural heritage, shaped by its long history as a significant settlement. The city is home to numerous historical ruins, reflecting the influence of various civilizations that have inhabited the region over time. From the Babylonians and Assyrians to the Hittites, Urartians, Persians, and successive ruling powers such as the Seljuks, Umayyads, Abbasids, Anatolian Seljuks, Artuqids, and the Ottoman Empire, Mardin has served as a crucial centre of civilization throughout history (Yılmaz, 2009, p. 51). In other words, Mardin has functioned as the road junction for diverse ethnic groups such as Assyrians, Babylonians, Hittites, Persians, Urartians, Kurds, Arabs, Jews, Armenians, Mongolians and Turks. These groups of people have had their own languages, which have left their traces in the region.

To the present day, the region has maintained its rich multicultural heritage. With Turks, Arabs, Kurds, and Assyrians coexisting harmoniously, it evokes memories of cities from the imperial era (Yılmaz, 2009, p. 51) to present. Though the number of the languages is not as many as the ethnic groups having lived in Mardin so far, the linguistics features of the languages have left their marks in the languages spoken today.



**Picture 1.** Old Mardin Castle and Modern City on the Skirts (SARA Distribution, n.d.)

The picture above highlights that the historical Mardin Castle, standing on a rocky hill, overlooks the modern city that stretches along its slopes. This spatial juxtaposition symbolizes the city's unique blend of ancient heritage and contemporary urban life. Indeed, throughout history, Mardin has been a settlement centre where different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities have lived together. This multi-layered structure has also been reflected in the linguistic landscape of Mardin, and languages such as

Arabic, Syriac, Armenian, Ottoman Turkish, Turkish and Kurdish have been used intertwined in this geography in different periods (Sari, 2010, p. 45). This linguistic richness is also reflected in historical texts and recorded in detail in the narratives of travellers who visited Mardin. Based on the observations of some important travellers who visited Mardin between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, this study aims to analyse linguistic changes, multilingualism and the linguistic and educational implications of these observations throughout history.

The present study aims to investigate the linguistic transformation of Mardin through the lens of historical travellers' narratives, with a particular focus on multilingualism. By examining texts written by travellers who visited the region between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the research attempts to uncover how linguistic diversity manifested in daily life and how different languages functioned within Mardin's social, cultural, and religious structures. Specifically, the study explores which languages were spoken, in what contexts they were used, and how linguistic hierarchies and interactions were perceived by the travellers. Additionally, the research evaluates the educational reflections of this multilingual environment, aiming to identify the historical roots of multilingual education in the region. By integrating theories of multilingualism and critical discourse analysis, the study not only contributes to the sociolinguistic understanding of Mardin but also offers insights into the interplay between language, identity, and education in a historically complex and multicultural context.

### **1.1. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This study is based on theories of multilingualism, language representation, historical discourse analysis, and language education. It aims to understand the functions of different languages in society with the help of multilingualism theories put forward by Weinreich (1953) and Fishman (1972). Weinreich emphasized that a thorough analysis of language contact should consider both linguistic factors and the characteristics of the communities where multiple languages coexist. Drawing on numerous case studies from Europe, North America, and beyond, he explained in *Languages in Contact* that the linguistic effects of language contact, or "interference," are largely influenced by sociocultural variables. These include factors such as the level and extent of bilingualism, duration of contact, geographical and demographic patterns, as well as social dimensions like religion, race, gender, and age. Additionally, the roles that languages play in different societal contexts such as education, governance, media, and literature, and political or ideological influences, including prestige and "language loyalty," also shape these outcomes (Weinreich, 1953, p. 113). Also, Elvira Glaser (2013), in her book review of *Languages in Contact*, states that the book is rich in data and observations and offers profound considerations about the nature of bilingualism, although its linguistic descriptions of Switzerland are rooted in historical rather than contemporary contexts (Glaser, 2013, p. 454).

Alongside these sociolinguistic foundations, the study also employs tools from critical discourse analysis (CDA), particularly the historical discourse perspective developed by Fairclough (1995) and Wodak (2001). Fairclough views discourse as comprising three interconnected dimensions: social practice, discursive practice (including production, distribution, and consumption), and the text itself. A meaningful discourse analysis, therefore, requires a systematic examination of each of these elements and their interrelations (Fairclough, 1992, p. 194). The discourse-historical approach, as formulated by Reisigl and Wodak (2017), focuses on the links between utterances, texts,

genres, and discourses, and examines how these are shaped by broader social and institutional contexts. It traces how discourses evolve in response to socio-political transformations. Critical discourse analysis, in general, explores how meaning is constructed and contested across different social domains, often uncovering inequalities embedded in language. Wodak's work, in particular, demonstrates how discourse can reflect and reinforce discriminatory ideologies, including racism, exclusion, and social injustice (Elmacıoğlu, 2024, p. 3). This makes CDA a relevant tool for analysing historical texts in which implicit ideologies regarding language and ethnicity may be embedded. Furthermore, UNESCO's (2003) guidelines on preserving local languages and promoting multilingualism in education provide the educational dimension of this study. UNESCO advocates for mother-tongue-based instruction and multilingual education at all levels to promote social cohesion, cultural preservation, and educational equity, especially in linguistically diverse communities (UNESCO, 2003, p. 16).

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative historical discourse analysis approach. Discourse analysis is a technique used to examine how language functions within its social context, moving beyond literal meanings to investigate how texts convey and shape meaning in real-world environments (McLeod, 2024, p. 13). Since CDA is inherently interdisciplinary and layered, it requires comprehensive knowledge of sociology, history, linguistics, and political science, which can make its application demanding and time-consuming (Topuz & Aslan, 2024, p. 315). The primary data consist of the narratives of historical travellers such as Evliya Çelebi, Carsten Niebuhr, and William Ainsworth, who documented their observations of Mardin. These sources were obtained from original or reliable translated materials. The selected texts were subjected to thematic coding based on concepts such as multilingualism, language hierarchy, social function, and linguistic interaction. Through this analytical framework, the study examines how these travellers represented linguistic diversity in Mardin and how their narratives reflect deeper ideological, educational, and social dimensions tied to language use. Building on this foundation, the narratives were systematically analysed through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), following Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model. This approach allows for a structured examination of the texts across three interrelated levels, textual, discursive, and social, thereby guiding the subsequent analysis presented in the following sections.

### 1.1. Textual Analysis

In examining the travellers' narratives, CDA reveals several key analytical categories:

- *Lexical choices and naming*: Specific words or labels are used for languages, groups, or dialects, often carrying meanings beyond the purely descriptive. Inclusion criteria involve naming and labelling, including adjectives (e.g., *pure Syriac*), while exclusion criteria involve general statements without explicit naming (e.g., *languages are spoken here without naming them*). Example: *The ancient tongue of the Syrians lingers in the monasteries*.
- *Grammatical structures*: Focuses on how grammatical choices are assigned or removed in the context of language change. Inclusion criteria include active or passive voice, and nominalisation affecting meaning. Exclusion criteria include statements where agency is irrelevant. Example: *Active – Kurdish replaced Arabic; Passive – Arabic was replaced by Kurdish*.

- *Metaphors and imagery*: Figurative language describing linguistic phenomena. Inclusion criteria include metaphors framing language change (e.g., growth, death, contamination, purity, and invasion). Exclusion criteria include literal statements without figurative meaning. Example: *The Kurdish speech has crept into every alley of Mardin*.
- *Evaluative adjectives*: Explicitly evaluate a language or its speakers. Inclusion criteria include adjectives attached to language/group description, while unrelated attributes such as weather are excluded. Example: *Since it is modern, Turkish dominates the public life in Mardin*.
- *Intertextuality*: References to other texts, travellers, or oral accounts. Inclusion criteria include direct quotations, paraphrasing, or attributions to earlier works. Exclusion criteria involve generic statements without sources. Example: *As Marco Polo once noted, the city thrives on its diversity*.

## 1.2. Discursive Practice

CDA analysis of discursive practice in historical travellers' narratives highlights:

- *Source of information*: Narratives based on personal observation, hearsay, or previous literature. Inclusion criteria involve explicit references to the source; exclusion criteria omit descriptive statements without a source. Example: *My guide told me Christians here speak Syriac*.
- *Audience orientation*: Signals intended readership. Inclusion criteria involve references to reader background or tone; exclusion criteria omit internal reflections. Example: *For a European, this mixture of tongues is bewildering*.
- *Framing of linguistic contact*: Multilingualism presented as conflict, coexistence, or assimilation. Inclusion criteria include statements characterising interaction; exclusion criteria involve mere listing of languages. Example: *Languages jostle for dominance in the market square*.

## 1.3. Social Practice

CDA analysis of social practice identifies:

- *Historical contextualisation*: Links language use to wider historical and political events. Inclusion criteria include mention of reforms, conquests, migrations, missionary activities. Exclusion criteria omit historical context. Example: *Since the Tanzimat reforms, Turkish has gained prestige in the Ottoman state, naturally in Mardin*.
- *Power relations and ideology*: Language reflects power, class, religion, or ethnic hierarchy. Inclusion criteria show one language/group dominating another; exclusion criteria are neutral depictions. Example: *Turkish is the tongue of authority, whereas Syriac is the language of prayer*.
- *Identity construction*: How group identities are shaped through language. Inclusion criteria involve descriptions of language as authentic, hybrid, or degenerated; exclusion criteria involve unrelated identity references. Example: *The Arabs here speak a dialect unlike any true Arabic*.

- *Drivers of linguistic change:* Factors causing language transformation, including migration, schooling, religion, trade, and urbanisation. Exclusion criteria are language changes without stated causes. Example: *Missionary schools have spread the Turkish language.*

## 2. Mardin's Enduring Appeal: A Chronological Glimpse Through Travelers' Accounts

Due to its critical geopolitical location and multi-ethnic population, Mardin has attracted many travellers throughout history. To underscore the city's rich historical and sociolinguistic tapestry, this section provides a chronological account of key travellers who visited Mardin and its surrounding towns, along with their observations on ethnic composition, language use, and cultural life.

Mardin's name and significance stretch back to antiquity. Due to its strategic position at the crossroads of Mesopotamia and Northern Syria, the city has been continuously inhabited since very early periods. Assyrian inscriptions from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE mention a place named "Mardinu" or "Mardina," which scholars widely associate with the modern-day Mardin, indicating its early existence as a fortified settlement (Saggs, 1984, p. 71). During the Roman Empire, Mardin remained a critical part of the region, appearing in the works of historians like Ammianus Marcellinus as "Maride" or "Marde," where its strategic fortress is particularly highlighted (Palmer, 1993, p. 195). Syriac sources also commonly refer to the city as "Marde," documenting the history of Christian communities in the area (Sinclair, 1990). These early records clearly demonstrate that Mardin's name and its fortified nature predate the Common Era by centuries. Maintaining its importance throughout the Byzantine Empire, Mardin later became part of the Islamic world with the Arab conquests. Early Islamic geographers and historians provided information about the city, though they often focused on its military and administrative aspects.

The travelogues, which began to be written in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, shed light on Mardin's multifaceted identity, uniquely revealing the city's ethnic and linguistic fabric, commercial life, and cultural richness. Benjamin de Tudela, a Spanish Jew, visited several cities including Mardin and Nusaybin, where he encountered communities of his faith. Following him, R. Petachia of Ratisbon, a Jewish traveller from Prague, also toured Mardin, Nusaybin, and Hasankeyf. Marco Polo, during his journey to China, passed through Mardin region and reported on its commercial and industrial life. The German traveller Johannes Schiltberger, who was captured in the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396 and later in the Battle of Ankara, passed through Mardin during his captivity and referred to it as "Merdin" (Akbulut, M.R. 2022, p. 78; Nasıroğlu, 2010, p. 132; Roder, 2024, p. 161; Tarduş, 2022, p.198-217). This reference was not used for the first time by these aforementioned travellers, as many earlier civilizations had utilized "Merdin" in different periods throughout history; therefore, it is possible to claim that Historical accounts suggest that the name "Mardin" (or similar forms like "Marde" or "Maride") dates back to ancient times, with mentions in Roman-era sources and local Syriac chronicles, often related to its fortified nature or strategic location.

To start with, Muslim travellers such as Ibn Jubayr (Picture 2.) from Andalusia and Ibn Battuta (Picture 3.) from Tangier also included Mardin in their itineraries. Ibn Jubayr offered a detailed account of Nusaybin, though he gave only a brief description of Mardin. Ibn Battuta confirmed and expanded upon the earlier reports of Marco Polo and Ibn Jubayr (Nasıroğlu, 2010, p. 27-43). In the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Josaphat Barbaro, a

Venetian tradesman and ambassador, visited Mardin a route to Tabriz to meet the Akkoyunlu Sultan Uzun Hasan. Barbaro's writings include detailed descriptions of Mardin, Hasankeyf, and their industrial activities. Other notable travellers of the period include Joos van Ghiste, a Flemish adventurer, and an anonymous Venetian tradesman referred to as the "Anonymous Salesman" (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 38). These accounts, although diverse in origin and scope, collectively enriched the historical and sociocultural understanding of Mardin. They also contributed significantly to the broader travel literature on the multicultural and multilingual landscape of the region.



**Picture 2.** Ibn Jubayr (FUNCI, n.d.)

Additionally, Ibn Jubayr, a 12<sup>th</sup>-century Andalusian traveller, provides sustainable knowledge as being one of the earliest Muslim perspectives on the cultural, religious, and political dynamics of the Islamic world. His detailed travelogues, written during his pilgrimage to Mecca, assert the intellectual and substantial curiosity and critical observations of his time. While he provided an elaborate account of Nusaybin and its surroundings, his direct mention of Mardin itself seemed to be rather brief, often acknowledging its ruler in connection to nearby towns rather than coming up with extensive direct observations of the city's internal dynamics or specific religious diversity (aljazaribook.com, n.d.). Besides, his narratives are regarded as crucial for comprehending the sociocultural landscape of Upper Mesopotamia during the Crusader era, providing valuable insights into the conditions of both Muslim and Christian populations under various local rulers (Britannica, n.d.; Broadhurst, 1952), and it is known that people were living and praying in peace even during those times. Particularly, his mention of Qutb al-Din Ilghazi II, the Artuqid ruler of the region, highlights Mardin's peripheral but symbolic presence in the broader political framework of the time (aljazaribook.com, n.d.). Ibn Jubayr's observations, though limited in scope concerning Mardin, serve as indirect confirmation of the city's integration into transregional networks of power and religious life; thus, his text is frequently referenced in modern historiography due to its depth, clarity, and the rare Muslim perspective it provides on contemporaneous Christian polities in the Near East (Broadhurst, 1952; Britannica, n.d.). Still, his references and masterpieces are regarded as sample historical travel documents.



**Picture 3.** Ibn Battuta and His Travel Route (El-Bayadh, 2018)

Furthermore, the highlighted map above illustrates the extensive travel route of Ibn Battuta, a 14<sup>th</sup>-century Moroccan explorer whose journeys spanned over 120,000 kilometres across the Islamic world and beyond. Born in Tangier in 1304, Ibn Battuta began his extensive travels in 1325 with a pilgrimage to Mecca, ultimately embarking on a series of journeys having lasted nearly 30 years and covered most of the known world from West Africa to China (Dunn, 2005, p. 102; Gibb and Beckingham, 1958). His inclusion of Mardin in his itinerary, though relatively brief in description, demonstrates the city's strategic importance as a cultural and political waypoint during the medieval period. Ibn Battuta's observations often complemented and expanded upon earlier travel accounts, such as those of Ibn Jubayr and Marco Polo, offering a broader Muslim perspective on intercultural dynamics, urban structures, and governance throughout his travels (El-Bayadh, 2018). His *Rihla* (travelogue), dictated to Ibn Juzayy upon his return, is renowned for its rich detail on the social, economic, and religious life of the places he visited, offering an invaluable primary source for medieval history and geography. Also, though his stay in Mardin was not as extensively documented as some other major cities, his passage through the region underscores its consistent role as a vital junction in the broader Eurasian trade and cultural networks.

Also, French traveller Jean Baptiste Tavernier (Picture 4.) passed through Mardin and Nusaybin but provided minimal information on these towns. Evliya Çelebi, one of the most significant Ottoman travellers, provided an extensive description of Mardin, particularly its fortifications, demographics, and urban life (Çelebi, 2010, p.78-83; Akbulut, M.R. 2022, p. 79). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Monsieur de Thevenot visited Mardin, Nusaybin, and Mosul. He noted the presence of Kurdish and Arab tribes, Christian communities, and speakers of the Syriac language. La Boullaye le-Gouz also expressed admiration for Mardin's ramparts (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 42). Additionally, Carsten Niebuhr, a German traveller of Danish origin commissioned by his government to explore the Middle East and India, visited Mardin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He reported that

the Kurdish tribes of Cihanbeyli, Milli, and Shakaki had thousands of tents set up in the area. He noted that most of the population were Muslims, followed by Christians and ten Jewish families. He described Mardin's industrial activities and fertile orchards (Niebuhr, 1792; Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 88). Furthermore, Domenico Sestini, an Italian traveller and abbot, journeyed from Istanbul to Mosul between 1781 and 1782. He recorded that Mardin's population consisted of Turks, Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Chaldeans, and Jacobites. He also noted the existence of multiple languages spoken in the city, including Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, Chaldean, and Syriac (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p.49; Akbulut, M.R. 2024, p. 85-86). Another traveller, French doctor, Guillaume Antoine Olivier, visited Mardin in 1799 and estimated that there were around 3,000 Kurds, 5,000 to 6,000 Turks or Arabs, 1,500 Jacobite Armenians, many Nestorians, and 20 Jewish families in the city. He also mentioned the presence of Yazidis (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 53-54). These accounts, though often filtered through orientalist and Eurocentric lenses, offer valuable yet partial snapshots of Mardin's multiethnic and multilingual character in the early modern period. However, the degree of accuracy in population estimates and ethnic-religious classifications should be approached with caution, as these travellers often relied on local informants and personal impressions rather than systematic demographic methods.



**Picture 4.** Jean Baptiste Tavernier (Alchetron, n.d.)

The picture above belongs to Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), who was a prominent 17<sup>th</sup>-century French gem merchant and traveller, renowned for his extensive journeys across the Ottoman Empire, Persia, and India. Unlike many contemporaries having travelled for religious or diplomatic reasons, Tavernier's primary motivation was commerce, specifically the highly lucrative trade in precious gems, which granted him unique access to various royal courts and elite circles in the East (Williamson, n.d.). Therefore, between 1630 and 1668, he undertook six major voyages, meticulously documenting his observations in his magnum opus, *Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier* (Tavernier, 1676/1925). His accounts are particularly valued for their detailed economic and commercial insights into trade routes, currencies, and market operations,

offering a rare quantitative perspective on the early modern Eastern economic landscape (Tavernier, 1676/1925; Williamson, n.d.). It is indicated that he followed up different paths in the East world. Furthermore, while his narratives were often limited in cultural or demographic detail, they remained a vital primary source for understanding the global trade networks and European perceptions of the East during this pivotal era. Although his direct observations of Mardin are brief, his passages through the city underscore its continuous role as a critical node in the extensive overland trade routes connecting the Ottoman west with Persia and beyond.

Next, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, travellers such as M.J. Saint Martin and Adrien Dupre continued to document Mardin's ethnic composition. Dupre reported a population of 27,240, including 20,000 Turks, 3,200 Jacobites, 2,000 Catholic Armenians, 40 Orthodox Armenians, 400 Chaldeans, 800 Jews, and 800 Shamsi (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 60). John Macdonald Kinneir observed a similarly diverse population, including Turks, Arabs, Syrians, Nestorians, Catholics, Armenians, Jews, Jacobites, Yazidis, and fire-worshippers. William Francis Ainsworth (Picture 5.), who travelled through Anatolia between 1835 and 1837, described Mardin as cosmopolitan, particularly among Christian groups. American traveller Asahel Grant visited Mardin to study Nestorian populations in the region. James Silk Buckingham, who visited Mardin via Urfa in 1827, observed that two-thirds of the population were Muslim, and the rest included Christians, Jews, Catholic Armenians, Chaldeans, Nestorians, and Sun Worshippers (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 60; Akbulut, M.R. 2024, p. 86). Horatio Southgate, another American traveller, visited Mardin in 1837 and identified 3,000 families, including 500 Armenians, 400 Jacobites, 250 Syrian Catholics, 100 Chaldeans, 10 Jews, and 1,740 Muslims. He noted that the Muslim population was composed of Turks and Kurds, with Kurds being the majority. He also reported that Arabic was the dominant language in the city, though Turkish was spoken by a few (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 70). In 1850, J.P. Fletcher described Mardin and Nusaybin from geographical and architectural perspectives. Later travellers such as Vital Cuinet (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) and J.G. Taylor (1861) documented the region's demographic and ethnic features. British archaeologist Gertrude Bell visited Mardin in 1911 for excavations and left a vast photographic archive. French architect Albert Gabriel also toured the region, recording and drawing historical structures (Nasiroğlu, 2010, p. 113-115). This wealth of observations from a wide range of 19<sup>th</sup>-century travellers provides valuable comparative insight into the city's multi-ethnic and multilingual character across decades. Collectively, these accounts not only reflect Mardin's demographic complexity but also illustrate how foreign observers interpreted and recorded the coexistence of diverse religious and linguistic communities in the region.



**Picture 5.** William Francis Ainsworth (Alamy, n.d.)

Picture 5 belongs to William Francis Ainsworth (1807–1896), who was a prominent British geologist, physician, and traveller and significantly contributed to 19<sup>th</sup>-century explorations across the Ottoman Empire. Since he held a great interdisciplinary background, he was able to meticulously document the regions he visited and their diverse landscapes. Furthermore, during his 1835–1837 travels through Anatolia and Mesopotamia, including an expedition in 1839–1840 under the Royal Geographical Society, Ainsworth visited Mardin, offering detailed observations on the city's ethnographic and religious diversity (Ainsworth, 1842, p. 107). His two-volume work, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea, and Armenia* (1842), is particularly valuable for its insights into Christian communities, depicting Mardin as a remarkably cosmopolitan city (Ainsworth, 1842, p. 107; Rome Art Lover, n.d.). His descriptions are regarded as crucial primary source for understanding the social and physical landscape of the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and his detailed surveys were influential in shaping contemporary British understanding of the Near East.

From these accounts, it is evident that most travellers were of Western origin, and few were Muslims. While early travellers focused on geography and trade, later ones, especially from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward, increasingly emphasized religious and ethnic compositions, likely influenced by the rise of nationalism. The records show that Mardin has long hosted diverse communities who spoke Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, and other languages. This created a multilingual environment where individuals commonly spoke more than one language. These languages influenced one another through borrowing, pronunciation changes, and code-switching. However, some minority languages have become endangered due to migration and demographic shifts. Although many studies focus on the cultural or architectural dimensions of these travel narratives, few explore their linguistic implications. Analysing multilingualism and linguistic

transformation in Mardin, along with its educational reflections, through the lens of historical traveller accounts provides immense data. This rich archive not only illuminates Mardin's past but also serves as an indispensable resource for understanding its future linguistic and cultural dynamics.



**Picture 6.** Muslims in Mesopotamia

Picture 6 likely illustrates a scene depicting Muslim life or culture in historical Mesopotamia, a region encompassing parts of modern-day Iraq, Syria, and southeastern Turkey, and a significant cradle of early Islamic civilization where vital centres of learning, trade, and governance flourished (Lapidus, 2014). However, Muslim life is just not peculiar to those aforementioned regions, it is possible to come across all over world both culturally and intellectually. This image could portray elements of daily routines, religious practices, architectural landmarks like mosques, or influential figures from the Islamic past of the area, serving as a powerful visual reminder of its deep-rooted history and cultural contributions. It is also possible to conclude that many civilizations such as Kurds, Turks and Arabs in the southeast part of Turkey, namely Mardin, are able to live in peace and conduct all their daily tasks.

In sum, when examined through the examples and illustrations provided by historical travellers' narratives through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Mardin emerges as a multilingual and multiethnic city whose linguistic landscape reflects complex social, political, and historical dynamics. Across centuries, travellers documented how languages interacted and coexisted, shaped by power relations, identity constructions, and socio-cultural transformations. The sources of information, audience orientation, and framing strategies reveal the reliance on personal observation, hearsay, and prior literature in representing Mardin's linguistic diversity. Moreover, migration, trade, religion, schooling, and urbanization appear as key drivers of language change, while depictions of dominance, marginalization, and hybrid identities illustrate broader

ideological and historical contexts. Collectively, these narratives provide a chronological and nuanced understanding of Mardin's enduring linguistic and cultural significance.

### **3. Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism in Mardin: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

Travellers such as Buckingham, Ainsworth, Oswald H. Parry, Kinneir, Maunsell, and Rawlinson denote that many Kurdish tribes reside in Mardin and in the area between Mardin and Diyarbakır (Tarduş, 2022, p. 69). In his travelogue, Niebuhr (1792) states that Christians still speak the Chaldean language, although the Christians born in the city centre of Mardin spoke Arabic; however, Syriac was not a dead language, while they wrote in Chaldean characters. He adds that many people living under the dominion of Arabs and Turks lost the usage of their mother tongue. Christians always used Greek in their religious prayers. The Kurds living in Mardin spoke their ancient language, Kurdish, and the Turks used Turkish.

Throughout history, many languages have merged and interacted with each other in Mardin. Turkish, Kurdish and Arabic are the languages spoken most in the region. The districts where Arabic is spoken most in Mardin are Artuklu, Yeşilli and Savur and Midyat. The Kültü dialect of Arabic is widely spoken (Ataş, 2021, p. 82). Like other residents of Mardin, Assyrians are rich in terms of their mother tongue. In addition to Assyrian, people can also speak Turkish, Arabic and Kurdish like their mother tongue. In other words, as a richness of religious and ethnic diversity, the residents of this region can easily learn many languages and live their lives more alternatively. For example, Assyrians can read the Bible in three languages: Latin, Assyrian and Aramaic, and they can pray in these three languages (Yılmaz, 2009, p. 62). This is an indication of holding multilingual context.

In Mardin, Yazidis speak Arabic and Kurdish, it is known that they are of Kurdish origin. Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, Syriac, and Chaldean are spoken throughout the city (Yeşilkaya, 2023, p. 180). According to Erkinay (2012), the settlement of different nations in Mardin at different times and the interaction of these nations with each other have led to the emergence of multilingualism in the region. According to data from 1992, 400 thousand people, mainly in Mardin and Siirt, speak Arabic. The Turoyo dialect of Syriac is the mother tongue of around 3 thousand people in Mardin region. Kurdish is also one of the major languages spoken in Mardin. The existence of different ethnic groups has enabled different languages to live together in Mardin, in addition to those whose mother tongue is Turkish. Besides, it is well-known that Mardin's vibrant cultural tapestry is significantly enriched by its long-standing Chaldean community. Adhering to the Chaldean Catholic Church, an ancient Christian denomination deeply rooted in the region, this community has historically preserved and spoken Eastern Aramaic, a dialect of Syriac. Their presence has, for centuries, profoundly contributed to the city's remarkable multilingualism and diverse cultural heritage. The Picture below indicates the Chaldeans in Mardin (Picture 8).



**Picture 7.** The Chaldeans in Mardin (Alamy, n.d.)

The Picture above indicates members of the Chaldean community in Mardin, an ethno-religious group having historically contributed to the city's rich cultural mosaic. Also, the Chaldeans, affiliated with the Eastern Catholic Church, trace their liturgical heritage to the ancient Church of the East, preserving a distinct identity through their Aramaic liturgical language and unique traditions, and their roots in Mesopotamia are linked to early Christianity, with their Church having entered into union with Rome through various historical processes while retaining its Eastern rites (Hadrovic, 2024, p. 883). Thus, it may be claimed that their enduring presence in Mardin is considered in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and by numerous 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century travellers and highlighted the city's historical role as religiously diverse. Although the Chaldean Diocese of Mardin eventually lapsed, the community's continued, albeit smaller, presence pinpoints a valuable reference term for grasping the continuity of minority groups in southeastern Anatolia within the broader narrative of Middle Eastern pluralism.

In his article, Akbaş (2015) states that Evliya Çelebi visited the settlement places where Kurds intensively lived and that some of the Kurds living in Mardin are Ashdi and Shakakî Kurds. In the translated travelogue of Evliya Çelebi, a detailed description of Mardin Castle is made. In depiction of the Mardin Castle, he says that thousands of Arabs, Persian, Greek, and other nations' historians wrote a lot about the castle according to their opinions. While describing the castle, Evliya Çelebi gives account of the city where different nations such as Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Armenians, Muslim Arabs, Seljuk Turkmans, Kurdish Ayyubids, Mongols and Ottomans ruled. He also states that Yazidi Kurds lived in only one area of Mardin, while in the other side Ashdi and Shakakî tribe Kurds lived. In the plains, Turkmans were residing (Çelebi, 2010, p. 78-83). It is mentioned in Evliya Çelebi's masterpiece that Migdisi is one of seven dialectal groups, characterized by its resemblance to Persian in some words and phrases, and described as

the most refined of the dialects. He identifies it as the dialect spoken in Sivas, where he claims the most elegant and polished form can be heard. Additionally, he refers to the Jacobite dialect spoken by Armenians in Arab regions, the Anushirvani dialect that resembles Georgian, and other dialects influenced by Kurdish and Arabic. Finally, he notes a unique dialect spoken by “the gypsies of the Armenians,” which he describes as entirely distinct from other languages. However, much of this appears to be Evliya's invention, reflecting his tendency to categorize languages into groups like seven or twelve dialects (Dankoff, 1986, p. 76). Thus, it is possible to come up with various languages and their dialects in the context of Mardin.

In addition, throughout Mardin's history, multilingualism and cross-linguistic interaction have manifested across diverse social domains. Archival evidence, such as a 19<sup>th</sup>-century land sale deed recorded in the *ser'iye* register, illustrates functional bilingualism wherein the seller's testimony appears in Ottoman Turkish while contractual clauses remain in Arabic (Gürhan, 2016, p. 992). Early modern accounts, notably Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme*, portray a linguistically heterogeneous milieu, identifying several local languages and even noting the prevalence of Armenian in public life, serving as a benchmark for assessing the region's historical multilingual street culture (Kim & Bashkin, 2021, p. 133). Nineteenth-century observations by Anglican scholar-missionary George Percy Badger document systematic code-switching among clergy and lay people between Classical Syriac for liturgy, Neo-Aramaic/Turoyo in domestic contexts, and regional linguae francae-Arabic, Kurdish, and Ottoman Turkish-for broader communication (Badger, 1852, p. 241). Such practices are reflected in specific micro-scenarios: liturgical readings in Classical Syriac followed by Turoyo homilies, interfaith dialogue in Arabic, and bureaucratic transactions in Ottoman Turkish; as well as marketplace interactions in which a Kurdish-speaking vendor addresses Arab customers in Arabic before finalizing accounts in Ottoman (Kim & Bashkin, 2021, p. 132). Early 20<sup>th</sup>-century traveller Gertrude Bell records trilingual and trascriptal exchanges, combining Arabic place names in Arabic script, Syriac ecclesiastical terms in Syriac script (Bell, 1911, p. 18). Ethnographic accounts further depict households employing Turoyo at home, Turkish in official settings, Kurdish in inter-village relations, and Arabic in local markets (Isaksson, 2005, p. 182). Educational reforms in Tur Abdin generated classroom-level multilingualism, with instruction alternating between vernaculars (Turoyo/Arabic), liturgical Classical Syriac, and Ottoman Turkish for administrative correspondence (Sims, 2013, p. 11). Field linguistic surveys from the Sason-Tur Abdin region confirm sustained use of Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish in Muslim communities, while Christian households additionally preserve Turoyo, yielding interactional patterns such as market bargaining in Arabic, inter-village communication in Kurdish, official dealings in Turkish, and liturgical/home use of Turoyo (Isaksson, 2005, p. 185). Comparative dialectological studies of Mardin Arabic, including Mhallami varieties, reveal further contact phenomena -lexical borrowing, calquing, and phonetic convergence with Kurdish and Turkish- permeating everyday speech in commercial, artisanal, and transport contexts (Glottolog, 2025). However, the existing literature remains limited in its ethnographic depth, often overlooking how speakers negotiate these contact phenomena in social interactions and identity constructions.

Overall, Mardin stands out as a multilingual region where diverse ethnic and religious groups have coexisted throughout history. Languages such as Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, and Chaldean have all maintained their presence, contributing to both cultural richness and social interaction. The multilingualism in Mardin reflects not only

linguistic diversity but also the historical interactions and coexistence among different communities. Thus, the linguistic diversity of the region should be recognized as a vital component of its social fabric.

#### 4. Sampling and Data Sources: Key Travellers and Their Accounts on Mardin's Linguistic Landscape

Although nearly all travellers who visited Mardin and its provincial towns were mentioned in the introduction, this section provides a more focused examination of selected travellers and their seminal works that offer detailed observations on the linguistic and demographic characteristics of the region. Particular attention was paid to identifying travellers who visited Mardin and its surrounding geography from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, whose accounts constitute primary sources for historical sociolinguistic analysis.

Among the most influential travellers are Evliya Çelebi, with his extensive travelogue called *Seyahatname*; Carsten Niebuhr, author of *Reisebeschreibung nach Arabien*; William F. Ainsworth, who wrote *Travels in the Track of the Ten Thousand*; Domenico Sestini, known for his work called *Viaggio Da Constantinopoli A Bassora* (Journey from Constantinople to Basra); M.J. Saint Martin, author of *Mémoires Historiques Et Géographiques Sur L'Arménie* (Historical and Geographical Memoirs of Armenia); Asahel Grant, the American missionary traveller, with *The Nestorians or The Lost Tribes; and Horatio Southgate*, whose work, *Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia* contributes significantly to the corpus of observations. Also, a chronological review of the travellers' journeys reveals that most visits took place during or after the 18<sup>th</sup> century, notably in the period following the French Revolution (1789), a time of heightened European interest in the Ottoman territories. It is also noteworthy that most of these travellers were of European or American origin, often motivated by a combination of scholarly curiosity, missionary endeavours, and imperial interests. Their works primarily aimed to document the demographic composition and linguistic diversity of Mardin and its environs.

According to their detailed observations, the population of Mardin is predominantly composed of Muslim Turks and Kurds, with Turkish and Kurdish serving as the principal languages of daily communication among these groups. Armenians, Syrians (Assyrians), and Chaldeans constitute significant minority communities. While these groups have maintained their native languages within family and community settings, they have demonstrated multilingual competence by using Turkish and Kurdish in broader social interactions. Moreover, Syriac and Latin were preserved as liturgical languages, actively used in religious rituals and ceremonies (Nasiroğlu, 2010). These travel narratives are invaluable for reconstructing the multilingual and multicultural landscape of Mardin during the early modern period. They underscore the complex interplay between ethnicity, religion, and language use, highlighting how linguistic boundaries were both maintained and transcended within the region. Furthermore, the travellers' accounts reveal the processes of language shift, bilingualism, and the socio-political dynamics that shaped language maintenance and loss.

Language plays a crucial role in human life, making bilingualism and multilingualism significant aspects of our daily experience. As languages interact, the phenomenon of code-switching naturally occurs. In Mardin, a region where Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, and Syriac coexist, Arabic-speaking multilingual individuals frequently incorporate Turkish nouns, adjectives, and verbs into their everyday conversations (Ataş,

2021, p. 79). In today's people interaction in Mardin, we can observe that different ethnic groups learn and speak the other citizens' language; therefore, it is possible to see that there is sound and word transfer between these languages. Therefore, Mardin's linguistic diversity, characterized by the coexistence of Arabic, Kurdish, Turkish, and Syriac, exemplifies a long-standing tradition of communal living and contributes to the city's rich cultural heritage. A significant portion of the population possesses proficiency in multiple languages, often communicating in at least two or three of them. The natural interaction among these languages facilitates lexical borrowing, thereby enhancing linguistic diversity; however, the predominance of one language over others poses a risk of language attrition. Given that Turkish serves as both the official language and the medium of instruction in Türkiye, it has emerged as the dominant language in Mardin, with universal proficiency among residents regardless of their native tongue. Societal factors such as integration, educational policies, economic imperatives, and migration trends further incentivize families to prioritize Turkish over their heritage languages. Consequently, fostering awareness of the significance of linguistic diversity is crucial to ensuring the preservation and continuity of minority languages within the region (Erkinay, 2012, p. 126).

German linguist Jastrow (2013), speaking at an international symposium on Arabic dialects in Türkiye, emphasized that Türkiye's spoken languages-long neglected-are now being acknowledged as integral components of the nation's cultural heritage, comparable to its archaeological and architectural monuments. He particularly highlighted Arabic spoken in Mardin as the most archaic variety in the country (Şayır, 2017, pp. 1-2). Mardin dialect exhibits numerous differences from other Arabic dialects, particularly in terms of syntactic features. This divergence is largely a result of the intense linguistic and cultural interaction characteristic of Mardin and its surrounding regions, where multilingualism and multiculturalism are widespread. However, it is also possible to observe several of these features in other Arabic dialects as well (Abdülhadioglu, 2019, p.14). Nevertheless, there are several languages not in use in the area such as Hebrew, Mongolian and somehow Latin because either the speaking communities left the region or became very few. When it comes to the Arabic dialect spoken in the region, it functions as a linguistic enclave, largely shaped by its geographic and social isolation. Although it has been influenced by Turkish and Kurdish, especially in vocabulary, it has retained much of its original phonological structure, likely because it lay outside the main routes of Bedouin migration (Şayır, 2017, p. 151). Multilingualism often emerges in contexts where linguistic communities coexist, influenced by cultural, social, and economic dynamics. It is particularly prevalent in regions where linguistic minorities share a common space due to factors such as trade, labour, or migration. Examples include the coexistence of Breton, French, and English in Wales, or Italian migrant workers adopting French or Swiss German depending on their host region. While migrants typically use the dominant language of their host society in professional settings, they tend to maintain and transmit their native language within familial and close social circles, highlighting the dual linguistic practices shaped by both integration and cultural preservation (Grosjean, 1982, pp. 2-32). Individuals whose first language is Arabic, Kurdish, or Syriac are naturally led to learn Turkish, given its status as the medium of instruction in schools and the official language of government institutions in Mardin. In seeking access to education and to carry out administrative procedures, these individuals adopt Turkish as a necessary means of participating in everyday public life. Social interactions and commercial relations have played a significant role in the emergence of multilingualism in Mardin. The coexistence of individuals from diverse

religious and ethnic backgrounds has encouraged the acquisition and active use of languages other than one's mother tongue in daily social life. Interethnic marriages such as Arabs marrying Kurds or Turks, and vice versa as well as strong neighbourly ties, have further contributed to the development of a multilingual environment (Erkinay, 2012, p. 279). This complex interplay of languages in Mardin not only reflects historical and socio-political realities but also raises critical questions about language preservation policies, the balance between cultural heritage and modernization, and the long-term sustainability of multilingualism in the region.

Also, census records indicate that Mardin historically hosted the largest populations of Yazidis, Chaldeans, Nestorians, Syriacs, and Armenians in Türkiye. In 1927, 11,181 individuals from the first four groups- out of approximately 20,000 nationwide- resided in Mardin, while the 1965 census still placed the province at the forefront with 6,500 members, despite an overall decline likely driven by migration to Europe and the United States. Similarly, the 1960 census reported 10,232 Armenians in Mardin, but the figure fell to only 11 in 1965, a discrepancy probably resulting from misreporting or classification under other non-Muslim categories, as the same census listed 17,750 Orthodox Christians and 152 Gregorians. While Syriac was explicitly listed as a language category in the 1927 census, subsequent censuses subsumed it under the broader classification of "other and unspecified languages." In the 1965 census, 8,406 individuals were recorded within this category, a figure widely understood to represent, in large part, the Syriac-speaking population (Dündar, 2000, pp. 48-136). Additionally, Census data from 1927 to 1965 reveal that Turkish speakers in Mardin constituted a small minority, largely composed of military and government personnel, while Kurdish speakers consistently represented a substantial majority. The Kurdish-speaking population increased from 112,493 (52.9%) in 1927 to 265,388 in 1965, with only a minor decline in 1945 interrupting an otherwise steady upward trend. This sustained growth reflects both the demographic vitality of the Kurdish community and its enduring linguistic dominance in the province during the mid-20th century (Dündar, 2000, pp. 100-136). These demographic shifts and inconsistencies in census reporting not only highlight the challenges of accurately documenting minority populations but also underscore the broader implications for language preservation, cultural recognition, and policy-making in historically multilingual regions such as Mardin.

In sum, it is obvious that in one settlement place, more than one language may be spoken. Therefore, the authorities should handle the case as a cultural richness and take precautions to integrate the languages spoken in Mardin in the education curriculums to sustain the continuity and unity of the ethnic groups. Hence, the integration of these primary historical sources facilitates a nuanced understanding of Mardin's sociolinguistic fabric, providing essential context for contemporary linguistic and cultural studies in the region.

### Conclusion

Mardin, strategically positioned in the heart of Mesopotamia's Fertile Crescent, has historically served as a magnet for diverse civilizations and ethnic groups due to its exceptional natural endowments and unparalleled geographical advantages. This unique placement has not only fostered its development as a pivotal cultural and commercial hub but has also sculpted a rich and complex historical tapestry. The continuous and intricate interactions between these varied peoples, including Assyrians, Persians, Byzantines, Armenians, Kurds, Arabs, and Turks, have not merely resulted in their

coexistence but have actively forged Mardin's deeply ingrained multilingual and multicultural identity (Dagtas, 2014, p. 19). Further insights from the detailed ethnographic and linguistic observations found in European, American, and Muslim travel narratives provide compelling evidence, clearly illustrating the dynamic and multifaceted demographic composition of Mardin across different historical epochs (Lees & Falcon, 1952). These accounts collectively underscore Mardin's role not merely as a historical settlement but as a vibrant, living testament to centuries of intercultural dialogue and synthesis. At present, Mardin exhibits significant linguistic diversity, where Kurdish is the most widely spoken language. Arabic, particularly its Mhallami dialect, constitutes a substantial minority, while the Assyrian community continues to speak Turoyo Syriac; however, Turkish holds a key role in official domains, though it is not the primary language used in everyday local communication.

The sustained linguistic contact among Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, and Syriac in Mardin has culminated in a remarkably high degree of inherent multilingualism among its inhabitants (Grießhaber & Rehbein, 2009; Kim & Bashkin, 2021). Although some of the dominant languages spoken in the vicinity have become extinct in historical process due to some reasons; for example, migrations, not being the official language, less usage in the community and education. In Mardin, the local Arabic dialect and Turkish vernacular have influenced each other through linguistic contact. Due to social interaction, education, and media, Turkish has become the dominant language, especially in urban areas. As a result of long-term language contact, Mardin Arabic has undergone mutual borrowing and vocabulary change, particularly since it is used primarily in speech rather than writing, and currently, most of Mardin Arabs, lacking formal training in Arabic script, rely on the Latin alphabet when writing their dialect (Tamtamış Erkinay, 2019, p. 202). However, the observable phenomenon of many Mardinians fluently navigating between two or even three languages is not merely a reflection of practical communication necessities in a diverse society but is profoundly rooted in the city's unwavering commitment to cultural pluralism. Darginavičienė (2023) emphasizes the crucial role of multilingualism in shaping cultural identity, a perspective that provides valuable theoretical insight into the linguistic diversity and cultural interactions observed in Mardin's historical context. Thus, it may be claimed that both linguistic diversity and multiculturalism are interrelated values of a certain society in the South-east part of Türkiye. This exceptional linguistic competence is intrinsically woven into the fabric of Mardin's cultural identity. It transforms the city into an invaluable laboratory for scholars interested in examining the intricate processes of language contact, the complexities of bilingualism, and the nuanced dynamics of language shift within a historically rich sociolinguistic context. Consequently, Mardin's distinctive linguistic landscape offers a fertile ground for comprehensive case studies, shedding critical light on the interdependent relationship between language, individual and collective identity formation, and educational frameworks, thereby significantly enhancing our understanding of the city's profound historical depth and unparalleled cultural diversity.

In culmination, Mardin's deeply layered and continuously evolving cultural heritage stands as an exemplary model of peaceful coexistence among disparate civilizations and ethnic groups across millennia. Considine (2024) emphasizes the significance of fostering interreligious and intercultural bonds, a perspective that resonates strongly with the historical multilingualism and multicultural coexistence in a place, where diverse religious and ethnic communities have lived side by side for centuries; thus, Mardin acts as a moderate sample to be on the meeting points. This extraordinary confluence not only elevates the city's status but also firmly positions it as

a globally recognized centre of tolerance and profound cultural exchange. Future scholarly endeavours should strategically delve deeper into Mardin's intricate socio-linguistic dynamics, with a particular focus on unravelling the precise role of language in the intricate process of identity construction and exploring innovative strategies for the robust preservation of unique cultural identities within evolving societies. The sustained vitality of Mardin's inherent multilingualism and multiculturalism holds immense significance, not only for the regional stability and cultural richness of Anatolia and Mesopotamia but, crucially, for the broader global imperative of safeguarding cultural diversity in an increasingly interconnected world. These overarching conclusions not only illuminate the fundamental elements that have historically shaped Mardin's past but also underscore their critical influence in forging its future trajectory.

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## Extended Abstract

The current study attempts to examine the linguistic transformation of Mardin within the theoretical framework of multilingualism, drawing extensively on the narratives and observations of travellers having visited the city throughout different historical periods. Situated in the northern part of Mesopotamia, Mardin has functioned for centuries as a crossroads of civilizations, a contact zone where languages, religions, and ethnic identities have intersected and coexisted. This unique geographical and cultural position has profoundly shaped the city's linguistic fabric, endowing it with a rich, layered, and dynamic multilingual character. Throughout its long history, Mardin has hosted diverse communities, such as Assyrians, Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, Jews, and Turks, each of which has contributed to the formation of the city's multifaceted linguistic and cultural identity. These also hold effects on the reflections of educational variations.

The research situates Mardin as a microcosm of historical multilingualism, where language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a marker of social hierarchy, religious belonging, and cultural exchange. The city's architectural and epigraphic heritage, as well as oral traditions, demonstrate the coexistence and interaction of multiple languages such as Arabic, Kurdish, Syriac, Armenian, Ottoman Turkish, and Persian, alongside local dialects. These layers of linguistic contact and transformation are mirrored in the travelogues of historical figures who recorded their impressions of Mardin across different centuries. They also highlight the variations and reflections in the educational phases in the history of Mardin.

In this regard, the accounts of Evliya Çelebi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Jubayr, Jean Baptiste Tavernier, and William Francis Ainsworth provide invaluable testimony to the linguistic plurality and sociocultural complexity of the region. Their narratives not only describe the spoken languages and communicative practices of the city but also reflect their own perspectives as travellers, shaped by distinct cultural and intellectual traditions. Through a historical discourse analysis of these travel writings, the study seeks to uncover how multilingual realities were perceived, represented, and sometimes idealized or problematized in different historical contexts. Particular attention is paid to the functional distribution of languages, how certain tongues were associated with religion, trade, administration, education or everyday communication, and how this distribution evolved in response to political and social transformations.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in modern sociolinguistic and anthropological perspectives on multilingualism, integrating approaches from several linguists, and Fishman's domains of language use. By combining these frameworks with historical sources, the research offers an interdisciplinary analysis bridging linguistic history, cultural studies, educational reflections and social anthropology. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how languages in Mardin have interacted not as isolated systems, but as socially embedded practices constantly negotiating identity, power, and belonging.

Furthermore, the current study extends its scope to consider the educational implications of Mardin's multilingual heritage. Considering UNESCO's multilingual education policies and recent discussions on mother-tongue-based education, the research examines how the city's historical experiences of linguistic coexistence provide a foundation for contemporary pedagogical models. By exploring historical schooling practices, missionary influences, and early Ottoman educational reforms in the region, it identifies continuities between past and present debates on linguistic rights and educational inclusion. This perspective emphasizes that Mardin's long-standing multilingualism is not merely a sociolinguistic phenomenon but also a pedagogical resource possibly informing current educational policy in multicultural societies.

The findings reveal that Mardin's multilingual landscape is deeply intertwined with processes of cultural negotiation, social mobility, and intercommunal interaction. The city's linguistic history demonstrates how multilingualism can foster resilience, intercultural understanding, and creativity, even amid periods of conflict and transformation. By tracing the historical trajectory of language contact and change, the study contributes to broader discussions on the relationship between language, culture, and identity in borderland contexts.

Ultimately, this research offers an original contribution to the study of multilingualism in the Middle East by presenting Mardin as a living archive of linguistic and cultural diversity. Through the integration of historical narratives, theoretical insights, and contemporary educational reflections, it

seeks to illuminate how the voices of past travellers continue to resonate within the linguistic landscape of present-day Mardin, shaping not only our understanding of its past, but also informing future directions for multilingual education and cultural preservation.