



Digital Evolution: Exploring the Impact of Social Media on Local Dialects and Lexicon; An Examination of Central Kurdish Language

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Abstract

This study suggests a digital linguistic approach to multi-mediated communication (MMC), drawing on a case study of language variation on social media. In the early 21st century, social media (SM) has significantly impacted various aspects of human life, including language, as articulated within the theoretical framework of digital linguistics and language variation. This study explores the influence of SM on Kurdish local dialects in Iraqi Kurdistan, with a focus on vocabulary evolution and the ongoing challenge of dialect standardization. Given the high unemployment rates in Iraq, which have led to increased SM engagement, this research examines how these platforms affect dialect usage across diverse demographic groups. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates qualitative content analysis and quantitative surveys to assess SM's role in shaping linguistic practices. Findings reveal that older generations are more likely to maintain traditional dialects, while younger users increasingly adopt standardized Kurdish forms. The study highlights SM's dual impact: promoting linguistic convergence while posing risks to dialectal diversity. It emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that supports regional dialects alongside the benefits of standardization, advocating for strategic initiatives to preserve linguistic heritage while adapting to digital influences.

Keywords: Language and Social Media, vocabularies, central Kurdish dialect, language development.

1. Introduction

The continual influence of SM remains a significant factor in shaping our everyday experiences (Pitkhat and Botezat, 2021). The changing nature of language is greatly influenced by the widespread utilization of these platforms. The unceasing evolution is transforming language as a social phenomenon, where fresh expressions are emerging, and obsolete ones are cast aside. Certain terms undergo semantic and morphological modifications to align with the ever-

changing dynamics of the world (Zanzotto and Pennacchiotti, 2012). According to Cuskley (2020), the biological foundations of language evolve on a comparatively slow genetic timescale, spanning thousands of years at the least. Furthermore, she highlights that glosso-genetic or cultural language undergoes rapid changes, with certain words fading away within a few years while new ones emerge. This article concentrates on the cultural impact of the second wave of evolution, particularly how it influences changes in vocabulary. The realm of SM provides researchers with ample opportunities to explore both the favourable and adverse impacts on our lives, encompassing cultural and biological dimensions.

According to Zainal and Rahmat (2020), individuals engaging with SM not only acquire new words but also frequently encounter and adopt novel vocabularies through these platforms.

Despite the current status of English as a global language, Ghosh (2023) argues that it is crucial to safeguard the language from the influences of social media pollution. Abbas, Gulzar, and Hussain (2018) assert that interaction with new individuals on social media contributes to the improvement of vocabulary among students.

The Kurdish language has not remained unaffected by the technological surge of the past two decades. Evidently, in the recent technological revolution, a significant number of young individuals have embraced and incorporated it into their language. Pasikowska-Schnass (2020) research for the European Parliament emphasises that Digital Technology poses a substantial threat to lesser-used languages within the union. The study warns of potential concerns that local dialects, such as Kurdish local dialects in the central Kurdish dialect, are susceptible to deterioration and potential extinction.

1.1 Review of previous studies

In reviewing the literature of studies related to the field of digital linguistics and language variation social media and language evolution within the frame of digital linguistics and language variations, several interesting studies can be found where linguists are actively investigating how these platforms contribute to the transformation of linguistic aspects. Starting with Holmes (2013), where analyzes how social media affects language use among youth in his article entitled *"Young People and Social Media: Language Use and Identity Construction"*. Holmes' analysis emphasizes the role of social media in shaping language practices and identity among youth, highlighting both the opportunities for creative expression and the potential challenges for maintaining traditional language skills. Williams' (2014) findings in "Social Media as a Tool for Language Maintenance: The Case of the Welsh Language" demonstrate how social media can be a powerful tool for supporting and maintaining minority languages like Welsh. Munro (2015) wrote an article about *"The Impact of Social Media on Language Standardization: A Comparative Analysis"*. The writer tries to discuss the tension between standardization and variation in social media contexts. Munro's analysis underscores the dual role of social media in both challenging and shaping language standardization. The article illustrates how digital platforms create a dynamic environment where language norms are constantly evolving and being negotiated by users. In 2020, Pugh and O'Hara investigated the impact of social media on minority languages in a study entitled "Impact of Social Media on the Use of Indigenous Languages in Australia". This study examines the role of social media in the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous Australian languages. It highlights how platforms like Facebook and YouTube have been used to share cultural content and engage with language learners, as well as the challenges related to digital access and representation. Then, Johns and Williams (2021) in their study entitled "Social Media and Minority Language Use: A Case Study of the Welsh Language" try to investigate how social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have influenced the use

and revitalization of Welsh. In their study, they also try to highlight both positive impacts, such as increased visibility and engagement among younger speakers, and challenges like the informal nature of language use online, which sometimes affects standardization efforts. In a more recent study by Zabaleta and Ruiz (2023) with the title “ "The Role of Social Media in the Preservation of the Basque Language". This study assesses how Basque speakers use social media to maintain and promote their language. It analyzes the creation of Basque-language content and the formation of online communities dedicated to the language, as well as the impact on language usage patterns.

The studies tackle the relationship between social media and language from different perspectives, but none has been carried out on the topic under study. In addition to that, what has not been addressed in the reviewed studies is that no study found focusing on examining the influence of SM on Kurdish local dialects, investigating its impact on vocabulary evolution and the ongoing endeavour to standardize a central dialect—a persistent challenge that has intrigued scholars for decades. The research employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, incorporating experimental approaches and questionnaires. However, the Kurdish data used in this study is from the variety of CK, but it fills the gap of not having any previous studies dealing with the local dialects of the two tackled areas in the field of Digital linguistics.

1.2 Objectives

This research aims to thoroughly examine how social media (SM) affects Kurdish local dialects in Iraqi Kurdistan, specifically focusing on how vocabulary changes and efforts to standardise a common dialect. This study seeks to understand how SM influences linguistic shifts in Kurdish dialects, especially regarding the adoption of new words and the trend towards a standardised language. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including experiments and analysis, we aim to uncover patterns of language change linked to SM usage. Additionally, this study aims to investigate how demographic and geographical factors contribute to these linguistic shifts, ensuring a deep understanding of the underlying dynamics. Ultimately, this research aims to offer insights into how Kurdish dialects are changing in the digital era, illuminating the processes of standardisation and linguistic convergence driven by SM platforms.

1.3 Methodology

To achieve the study's objectives, a blend of qualitative and quantitative methodologies is utilized, offering a comprehensive analysis of how Garmyani and Koyean dialects are used by native speakers on social media. Where researchers focus on those speakers who use social media frequently and use the Kurdish language in most of their posts since many social media users, nowadays, prefer using other languages such as English when using or posting on their social media platforms. Qualitatively, the research involves content analysis to identify linguistic features and new vocabulary in social media posts, discourse analysis to explore how language reflects social identity and cultural context, and focus groups to discuss collective views on the impact of social media on dialect usage. Quantitatively, the study employs survey research to quantify patterns of language change and new vocabulary adoption, corpus analysis to track the frequency and distribution of new lexical items and dialectal variations, also experimental methods to assess the effects of different types of social media content on language use. To do so, researchers analysed the word frequency through Tokenization (splitting text into words), removing stop words (common words like "the", and "and"), and then counting the occurrences of each unique word. To come up with the vocabulary size measurement, researchers calculate the number of original words in the text. This can be done

using simple coding scripts or software tools. in which the technique of use of lexical diversity measures such as Type-Token Ratio (TTR), which is the ratio of unique words (types) to the total number of words (tokens). This integrated approach provides a subtle understanding of how social media influences the evolution and standardization of Central Kurdish dialects.

2. Digital linguistics

According to Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015), no single linguistic variety dominates online communication. Instead, a diverse array of linguistic styles and varieties can be observed on social media platforms, even within a single site. The inherently informal nature of these platforms results in language that often resembles everyday spoken communication more closely than the language found in traditional media sources, such as newspapers. Consequently, social media serves as a valuable resource for examining regional and social language variation. The extensive scale of social media data facilitates the investigation of rare linguistic phenomena, including specific syntactic structures and lexical variants. This study specifically investigates geographical dialect variation on social media from the perspective of Digital Linguistics.

Digital Linguistics, the scholarly examination of language and communication within digital environments, has gained prominence with the rise of online platforms. This field recognizes that digital communication differs fundamentally from face-to-face interactions, necessitating its own set of rules, norms, and conventions (Crystal, 2001). It encompasses the study of language use in digital contexts such as online chats, social media, and text messaging. Although relatively new, Digital Linguistics has rapidly evolved alongside the growth of digital communication. The field involves the analysis, preservation, and dissemination of digital language artefacts, including news articles, social media posts, and digitized historical texts. Digital spaces frequently host communities where dialect-specific language use thrives, helping to reinforce and expand dialectal features and enhance their visibility and influence within particular online contexts. Digital Linguistics thus provides crucial insights into how dialects are preserved, adapted, and transformed in the digital era, illuminating the intersection of technology and linguistic diversity. This study utilizes Digital Linguistics to explore the impact of digital evolution on the use and dissemination of Kurdish dialects and lexical variants.

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Key Concepts and Theories in Digital Linguistics and Language Variation

The study of Digital Linguistics centers on understanding language within digital contexts, emphasizing how online communication reshapes linguistic practices. This field investigates the unique characteristics of digital language, including its multimodal nature and the significant impact of technology on communication styles (Herring & Androutsopoulos, 2015). Within this framework, language variation, defined as the differences in language use across regions, social groups, and contexts (Labov, 2001), becomes particularly salient. Dialectology further explores these variations by considering geography, socio-economic status, and cultural identity, which influence how Central Kurdish dialects manifest in social media environments. The informal nature of social media encourages spontaneous and conversational language use that mirrors everyday spoken discourse (Crystal, 2001), allowing for the emergence of dialect-specific features and new lexical items. This dynamic facilitates a deeper examination of how Central Kurdish speakers express regional identity and cultural nuances online. Furthermore, language serves as a crucial marker of social identity (Gee, 2014), enabling speakers to assert their cultural affiliations and navigate their identities through dialectal variations that signal

group membership or social affiliation. Social media also acts as a vital space for the preservation and transformation of dialects, where online communities can reinforce specific linguistic features while facilitating language change through exposure to diverse linguistic influences (Androutsopoulos, 2014). The vast amount of data generated on social media platforms allows researchers to conduct analyses of linguistic phenomena at an unprecedented scale (Biber, 2012), employing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including corpus analysis and discourse analysis. Additionally, the rapid evolution of technology profoundly impacts language practices, influencing the development of new lexical items, syntactic changes, and the blending of dialects within Central Kurdish (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011). By integrating these key concepts and theories, this research aims to illuminate how local dialects and lexicons evolve in response to digital communication, thereby enhancing our understanding of the intersection between technology and linguistic diversity.

3. Kurdish Language and Standardising

The Kurdish language is still in the process of attempting to standardise one of its dialects, known as Central Kurdish (CK). Within this dialect, there are numerous local variations that people use daily to express themselves. Due to the absence of a legislated constitution in the region, political issues, and ideologies, the government does not officially recognize any dialect in IKR. The absence of an officially recognized language has enabled both traditional and digital media to facilitate the gradual and effective standardization of the common Kurdish dialects.

3.1 Kurdish dialects

Kurdish language is spoken in Kurdistan, a large geographical area spanning the intersections of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. It is one of the two official languages of Iraq and has a regional status in Iran. Kurdish is a dialect-rich language, sometimes referred to as a dialect continuum (Matras and Akin, 2012; Shahsavari, 2010). There are four main Kurdish dialects; Northern Kurdish', Central Kurdish, Southern Kurdish, and Zazaki-Gorani (Hama Khurshid, 2008; Khalid, 2015). This study is based on data from Central Kurdish (CK). It is a Kurdish dialect spoken in Iraqi Kurdistan. The number of CK speakers is not accurately available, but it is estimated to be 6.750.000 speakers (Hamid, 2015).

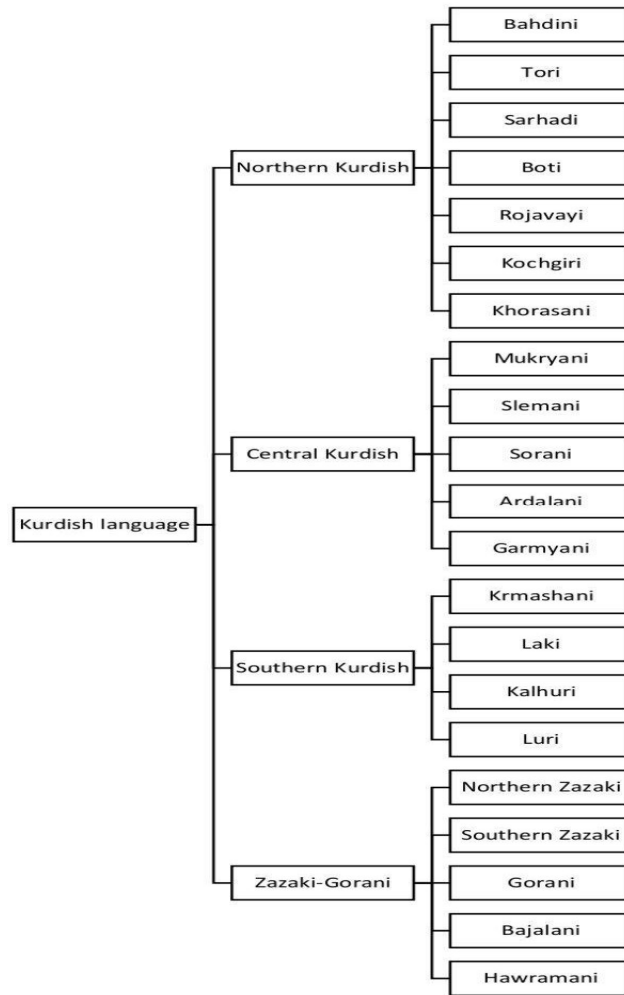


Figure (1) Kurdish dialects and sub-dialects

4. Data Analysis

The data collected to be analysed in this paper are transcribed in Latin and Arabic scripts. Still, it does not impact the findings of this research, as the content remains fundamentally Kurdish and conveys Kurdish meaning. The essence and message conveyed in the data remain consistent with Kurdish linguistic and cultural norms and do not alter the conclusions of the research. As shown in figure (1), in central Kurdish, the two dialects of Garmyani and Sorani, specifically the Sorani dialect of Koya province, are chosen to be the source of data for this study since they both have the same population and almost the same history. The data chosen to be analysed in this study are from users of social media, living in Kurdistan and they are all native Kurdish speakers. The data are chosen randomly and they are divided into two age groups, 15-30 and 30-45.

4.1 Garmyani Data

The data from Garmyani dialect are divided into two age groups. 14 active participants (social media users), who live in Garmyan district, were chosen randomly and divided into two age groups. Group one includes speakers above the age of 30. Group two includes speakers under the age of 30. In both groups, the average word number per post is 20-25. All social media users are from Garmyan and still live in Garmyan province.

4.1.1 Group One

Data 1:

This group consists of seven posts with an average of 20-25 words per post.

1A: In this data, the user is using seven original Garmyani words in his post.

1B: In this Facebook post, only one Garmyani word is detected.

1C: In this data, three pure Garmyani words are used in her Facebook post.

1D: Eight original Garmyani words are used by this user of Facebook.

1E: This Facebook user used fifteen Garmyani words in his 25-word post.

1F: Three Garmyani words are used by this social media user.

1G: This Facebook user used standard Kurdish words when sharing a post on social media.

4.1.2 Group Two

Data 2:

This group consists of seven posts with an average of 20-25 words per post.

2A: Only one Garmyani word is detected in this data.

2B: One original Garmyani word is used by this Facebook user.

2C: No Garmyani word is detected in this data. All the words used in his Facebook post are standard ones.

2D: Only three Garmyani words are detected in the 20 words of a Facebook post.

2E: This Facebook user used only four original Garmyani words in his post.

2F: This Facebook user uses Six Garmyani vocabulary in her post.

2G: Five Garmyani words are used by this social media user in his post.

Table (1) Garmyani Data

Data	Garmyani			
	Group 1	%	Group 2	%
A	7	35%	1	5%
B	1	5%	1	5%
C	3	15%	0	0%
D	8	40%	3	15%
E	15	75%	4	20%
F	3	15%	6	30%
G	0	0%	5	32%
Total	37	26%	20	14.28%

4.2 Koyean Data

This section analyses social media posts, an average of (20-25) words, from two distinct age users within the Koya City community, characterized by their proficiency in the Koyean dialect. The former users comprise individuals aged over 30, contributing seven posts for examination, while the subsequent users consist of individuals under 30, also providing seven posts for analysis.

4.2.1 Group One

Data 3:

3A: This Facebook user uses mainly sixteen Koyean words per post.

3B: An analysis was conducted on the Instagram post. Only eight Koyean vocabularies are detected.

- 3C: All twenty words in this data are of Koyean origin.
- 3D: This Facebook user applies seventeen Koyean words in this data.
- 3E: The Facebook user predominantly uses fifteen Koyean words in this data.
- 3F: The Facebook user typically utilises seventeen Koyean words.
- 3G: The Facebook user in this data exclusively uses nineteen Koyean words.

4.2.2 Group Two

Data 4:

- 4A: Ten original Koyean words are used by this social media user.
- 4B: This Facebook user uses twelve Koyean vocabularies.
- 4C: This Facebook user used just two Koyean words in her post.
- 4D: Zero Koyean word is noticed in this data on Facebook.
- 4E: Eight Koyean accent words are detected by this Facebook user.
- 4F: Only one Koyean word is used by this social media user in her post on Instagram.
- 4G: Eight Koyean vocabularies are mentioned in this data by the Facebook user.

Table (2) Koyean Data

Data	Koyean			
	Group 1	%	Group 2	%
A	16	80%	10	50%
B	8	40%	12	60%
C	20	100%	2	10%
D	17	85%	0	0%
E	15	75%	8	40%
F	17	85%	1	5%
G	19	95%	8	40%
Total	112	80%	41	29.28%

5. Findings and Discussions

Data analysis reveals that the Garmyani dialect is highly used by older generations i.e. data 1 group 1 compared to the younger generation i.e. data 2 group 2. As shown in the diagram below:

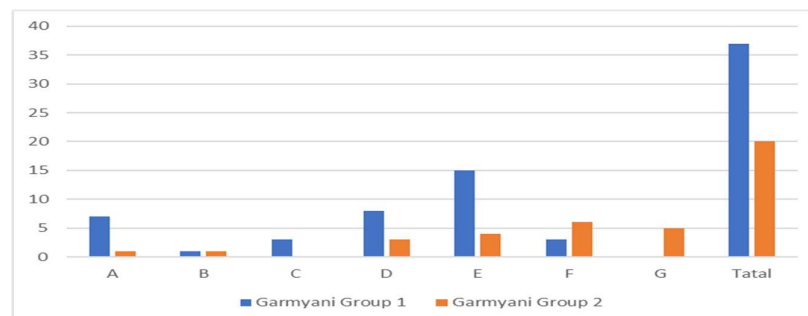


Figure (2) Garmyani Dialect Usage by groups 1 and 2

It is remarkable that despite the inclusion of CK words, the overall message and tone of the posts, in data 3 group 1, remained aligned with Koyean expression, reflecting the users' linguistic preferences and communication style. This indicates a preference for and proficiency in Koyean dialect usage in social media communications.

As for data 4 group 2, regardless of their connection to Koya city and community, also living in Koya city, the users consistently utilize CK over Koyean expressions in their online interactions. Within a figure, Data 3 and 4 is being clarified as shown below:

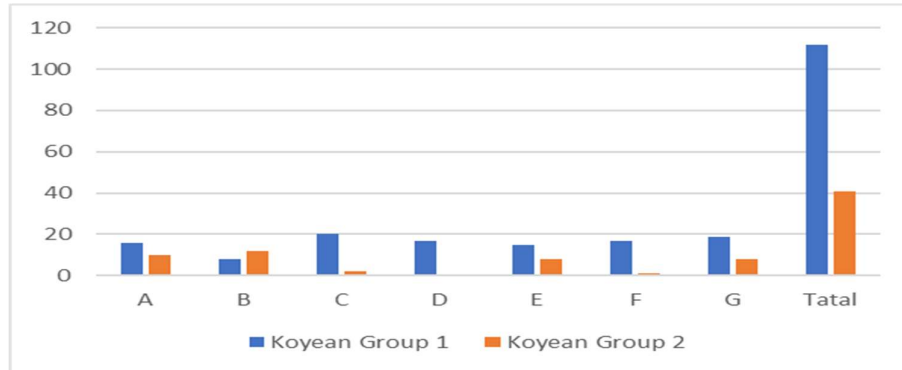


Figure (3) Koyean Dialect Usage by groups 1 and 2

The analysis reveals a notable divergence in dialect usage between older and younger generations, highlighting the significant role of age in preserving linguistic originality. Older generations, who exhibit a stronger attachment to their traditional dialects, tend to maintain and adhere to their linguistic practices more conservatively than younger generations. This generational divide underscores the impact of age on linguistic preservation, with older speakers showing a greater commitment to their dialect's traditional forms and usages. Their adherence to regional dialects reflects a broader tendency to uphold linguistic heritage amidst changing societal norms.

However, the advent of technology, particularly social media, has introduced a transformative dynamic into this linguistic landscape. The findings indicate that social media platforms play a crucial role in driving the unification and standardization of Kurdish dialects. Over time, these platforms have facilitated the emergence of a more standardized form of Kurdish, aligning diverse dialects into a cohesive linguistic system. This finding supports Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015) view, believing that social media reveals a diverse array of linguistic styles and varieties, reflecting everyday spoken communication more closely than traditional media. This shift towards a unified dialect, driven by the pervasive influence of social media, demonstrates how technological advancements can accelerate language standardization and convergence. The findings also demonstrate how Kurdish dialects adapt to digital norms, reflecting Crystal's (2001) idea that digital communication creates its own linguistic practices. The observed shift towards standardized Kurdish in social media aligns with the broader digital language evolution as Crystal describes.

Furthermore, the data suggest that younger Kurdish speakers are less familiar with the full range of vocabularies specific to their regional dialects. This lack of awareness highlights a broader issue of linguistic erosion, where the rich vocabulary of traditional dialects becomes obscured by the predominance of standardized language forms. The trend towards using a more uniform dialect, especially among younger speakers, signals a gradual loss of regional linguistic diversity. This finding reflects the broader trends observed in digital linguistics and dialect studies, where social media platforms play a role in language standardization while simultaneously posing challenges to maintaining dialectal diversity.

The regional differences between the Garmanyani and Koyean dialects provide additional context for understanding these findings. The Garmanyani dialect is notably less prevalent in social media interactions compared to the Koyean dialect. This disparity can be attributed to several factors, including geographical, ethnic, and political influences. Garmanyani's unique position as a convergence point for diverse ethnic and linguistic groups—including Kurdish, Arab, Iranian, and Turkmani communities—contributes to a more fluid and less rigid attachment to the Garmanyani dialect. The region's demographic and political complexities may encourage a more rapid shift towards a common, standardized dialect, as evidenced by the increasing prevalence of CK in Garmanyani. In contrast, Koya's relative homogeneity and its more cohesive regional identity support the continued prominence of the Koyean dialect. The slower adoption of a standardized form in Koya compared to Garmanyani reflects the region's stronger regional attachment and resistance to linguistic convergence. This regional variation in dialect use supports the notion that social media can have different impacts based on geographical and social factors. It mirrors findings from other studies where regional and social contexts influence the extent and nature of language change.

The broader implications of these findings underscore the role of social media as both a facilitator of language standardization and a potential threat to dialectal diversity. In the absence of an officially recognized language, social media emerges as a critical tool for promoting linguistic consistency and unity across Kurdish dialects. Its widespread use enables the dissemination and reinforcement of standardized language forms, which, while fostering communication and mutual understanding, may also marginalize traditional dialects. To mitigate the potential loss of dialectal richness, it is essential to balance efforts towards standardization with initiatives aimed at preserving and revitalizing regional dialects. Strategies such as incorporating regional vocabulary into digital platforms, promoting dialectal content, and encouraging community-based linguistic practices can help maintain the diverse linguistic heritage of Kurdish while adapting to the evolving digital landscape.

6. Conclusions

In summation, this research highlights how social media influences Kurdish dialects in Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly in vocabulary evolution and standardization efforts. The analysis shows clear differences in language use between age groups: older generations tend to preserve traditional dialects, while younger users lean towards standardized forms influenced by digital platforms. The findings suggest that while social media is a powerful tool for advancing linguistic unity and standardization, it also poses risks to dialectal diversity. The rapid adoption of standardized language forms may diminish the unique features of regional dialects. As these smaller languages and dialects become less visible and less used, they risk being overshadowed or even lost entirely. To address this, it is crucial to balance efforts towards standardization with initiatives that support and promote regional dialects within digital platforms. By fostering both linguistic unity and diversity, it is possible to preserve the rich tapestry of Kurdish dialects while embracing the benefits of a standardized language. It can be concluded that social media is a key driver in linguistic convergence, leading to the gradual decline of distinct local vocabularies. The study also emphasizes the importance of considering age and geography when understanding language changes, advocating for tailored strategies to preserve and revitalize languages. This research adds to the academic discussion on how social media impacts language, offering insights into the processes of standardizing Kurdish dialects. Moving forward, ongoing attention and targeted efforts are crucial to maintaining linguistic diversity in the digital age. It is also worth mentioning that the findings underscore the dual role of social media as both a facilitator of language standardization and a potential threat to

dialectal diversity. This duality reflects the broader dynamics observed in previous research and highlights the need for strategies to balance standardization with dialect preservation.

6.1 Recommendations for Further Studies

Each of the researchers has not only lived in both cities but has also directly observed and experienced the distinctions and contrasts brought about by the cultural, linguistic, and social changes over time. These firsthand experiences and insights have motivated them to undertake this study, with the aim of providing a foundational framework for other scholars to explore related research areas. By identifying and addressing the existing gaps, such as Social media serves as a final resting place for the rich mixture of community slang, where once vibrant and localized expressions are gradually lessened or homogenized into the broader digital lexicon. The impact of social media on language standardization, the role of social media in unifying local terminology and influencing translation processes, and the intersection of etymology with digital communication. It is also recommended to conduct comparative studies across various age groups to analyze shifts in dialect use and language standardization. Research should also investigate how different types of social media content impact dialect usage and extend to other Kurdish dialects. Additionally, examining user attitudes toward dialectal change and evaluating the effects of language policies on preservation are crucial. Practically, efforts should focus on promoting regional dialects through targeted social media content and educational resources. Developing programs that address both standardized and regional dialects, supporting community-based revitalization initiatives, and collaborating with digital platforms to enhance dialectal diversity are also essential. The researchers hope to pave the way for more in-depth investigations into these complex dynamics. This version elaborates on the researchers' motivations and broadens the scope of the potential areas for future research.

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Appendices:

-Data 1:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SbiTkMki1QcgWw-kaS60Hg7SIJjIK7vJ?usp=sharing>

-Data2:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/177S5rAO2UHqQcDYAnTn4rPSGI_rPBZLp?usp=sharing

-Data3:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16xdyhGy-RKSNVMUxCYQLo3CisNyFa14y?usp=sharing>

-Data 4:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gAXMuf-RRBjGRCSKqT5bBjUJc6GecS4w?usp=sharing>