



Kurdish Language and Identity in the UK

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Overview

- **Background**

- (i) Kurds: geography, politics, religion, education and language policy
- (ii) Assumptions & Theoretical Paradigms

Part 1: Qualitative Study

Part 2: Attitude Study (MGT)

Kurds: geography, politics and religion



Religion

- Along with variation in language, religion is an important aspect of Kurdish identity as it enhances the multilingual situation of the Kurds. The multi-religiosity of Kurds has been seen as one of the obstacles for their unification as there are various different religious groups such as Sunni Muslims, Yezidis, Alevi, Christians and Jews who also differ in their political affiliations.
- Alevi are the second largest belief community and most Kurds in the UK are Alevi
- No official statistics about the number of Alevi. However it is estimated there are 20 million (?) Alevi in Turkey.
- Alevi are often multilingual due to state policies in Turkey

What is Alevism?

- An Alevi is a person who follows the faith of Alevism.
- God in Alevism is “Hak”, which means the truth.
- If God has created everything, the human beings are sacred in the world.
- Alevi consider everything is sacred and as the carrier of an essence from God.
- Alevi consider God, the cosmos and humanity in a state of total unity.
- Alevi do not consider God as fixed into a place of worship, iconography or written books but he is placeless and the human heart is his only domicile.

http://www.alevinet.org/MAP.aspx?pid=AleviNewsEventsArticles_en-GB&aid=nn_150209782_92832609

(Accessed 10 February 2016)

Alevi in the UK

- Britain Alevi Federation estimates that there are approximately 300.000 (?) Alevi living in the UK
- There are 12 Alevi Cultural Centres and Cemevis in the UK: London, Glasgow, Coventry, South London, Croydon, Harrow, Bournemouth, Nottingham, Doncaster, Hull, Sheffield and Edinburgh.


Controversies around Alevism

- In a nutshell: “Being the master of one’s hand, tongue, and loins”. However
- Alevism as a separate religion (?)
- Alevism is a spiritual path “yol” (?)
- Alevism is a sect within Middle Eastern beliefs(?)
- Alevism is a code for living, with no need for a personal “God”(?)
- Mixture of all these (!)

http://www.alevinet.org/AjaxRequestHandler.ashx?Function=GetSecuredDOC&DOCUrl=App_Data/alevinet_org/AleviNewsEventsArticles_en-GB/Documents_2015-16/Alevisim%20Booklet.pdf (Accessed 10 February 2016)

Language Policy

- The linguistic policy in Iran on Kurdish is described as “a case of restricted and controlled tolerance” (Sheyholislami, 2012:19) as the use of Kurdish is not totally banned but restricted in publications and education.
- Kurdish is an official language in Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.
- In Syria, Kurdish media is available, but the language is not used in public schools (however, after the uprisings Kurds are establishing language schools)
- In Turkey, after the nationalist founding of the Turkish Republic, the status of Kurdish deteriorated and was officially accepted as a “nonexistent” language. This is changing...

- 
- Alevis differ from Sunnis in many respects:
 - their religious gathering is called *cem* and the place they worship is called *cemevi* (as opposed to the *mosque*);
 - they have the tradition of *semah* which involves music and dance;
 - their religious leaders are called *dede*.
 - They do not fast during *Ramadan* instead they fast during *Muharrem ayı* for twelve days(if they wish).
 - Women and men along with children can participate in religious ceremonies together.

Ritual Languages

- “The existence of Kurdish- ([Kurmanji]–my emphasis) and Zaza- speaking Alevi tribes, who almost exclusively use Turkish as their ritual language, and many of which even have Turkish tribal names is a fact that has exercised the explanatory imagination of many authors. Both Turkish and Kurdish nationalists have had some difficulty in coming to terms with the ambiguous identity of these groups, and have attempted to explain embarrassing details away” (Van Bruinessen 1997:1).

Kurds have been protesting against the bans on these letters.

Kurdish political prisoners went on a 68 day Hunger strike for Education in mother-tongue in 2012.



Sound correspondences

<i>Standard Kurmanji</i>			<i>Maraş Kürtçesi</i>	
a [a:]	agir	<i>'fire'</i>	[ɔ:]	ɔ:gir
e [ɛ]/ [æ]	dev	<i>'mouth'</i>	[a:]	(æv/æw) da:v
ū [u:]	gūz	<i>'walnut'</i>	[u:]	gu:z
o [o:]	īro	<i>'today'</i>	[o:]	huro:
VbV [-b-]	hebū	<i>'there was'</i>	[-w-]	hawu
v	av	<i>'water'</i>	[v]	o:v
xw	xwē	<i>'salt'</i>	[xw/xw]	xwe

(Öpengin and Haig 2014)

What is “good” and “bad”?

good

“standard”

“Southeast”

“Bohtan”

“academic”

“clean”

“correct”

bad

“nonstandard”

“Northwest”

“Maraş”

“broken”

“contaminated”

“rough/ tough”

Alphabet

1. Latin (mainly used in Turkey and Syria);
 2. Cyrillic (in the former Soviet Union);
 3. Arabic (in Iraq and Iran).
- Kurdish appeared in writing in a version of the Persian alphabet during the 7th century AD.
 - The first well-known Kurdish poet was Ali Hariri (1425-1495). Between 1920 and 1929 Kurdish was written with a version of the Armenian alphabet in Soviet Armenia (Hassanpour, 1992).

The study

1. *Linguistic Ethnography*

- 1,5 years of attending adult language classes in two schools in London (2011-13)
- 2 months in Diyarbakir: participant observations in Kurdish language classes (2011)
- Interviews
- Court hearings in Turkey (KCK) and observed the language situation (eg. political prisoners demanded interpreters and rejected to speak in Turkish)
- Protests and cultural events in London

2. *Quantitative Study*

- Matched Guise Test (MGT): England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Assumptions

1) that everybody has individual and collective identities which are generally theorised together with concepts such as 'multiplicity' and 'constructedness' (Joseph, 2004) and that language and identity are inseparable: "identity is socially and linguistically constructed" (Joseph, 2004:8). The notion of "inseparable" suggests that today we cannot think of an identity theory without its linguistic components.


2) we assume that languages belong to people and that they are the most salient markers of their ethnic or national identities. However, there is a contradictory and paradoxical issue in connection to the relationship between language and identity namely, an "essence" is presupposed.

3) identity is an "essential", cognitive, socialised, phenomenological or psychological phenomenon that governs human actions" (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006:3)

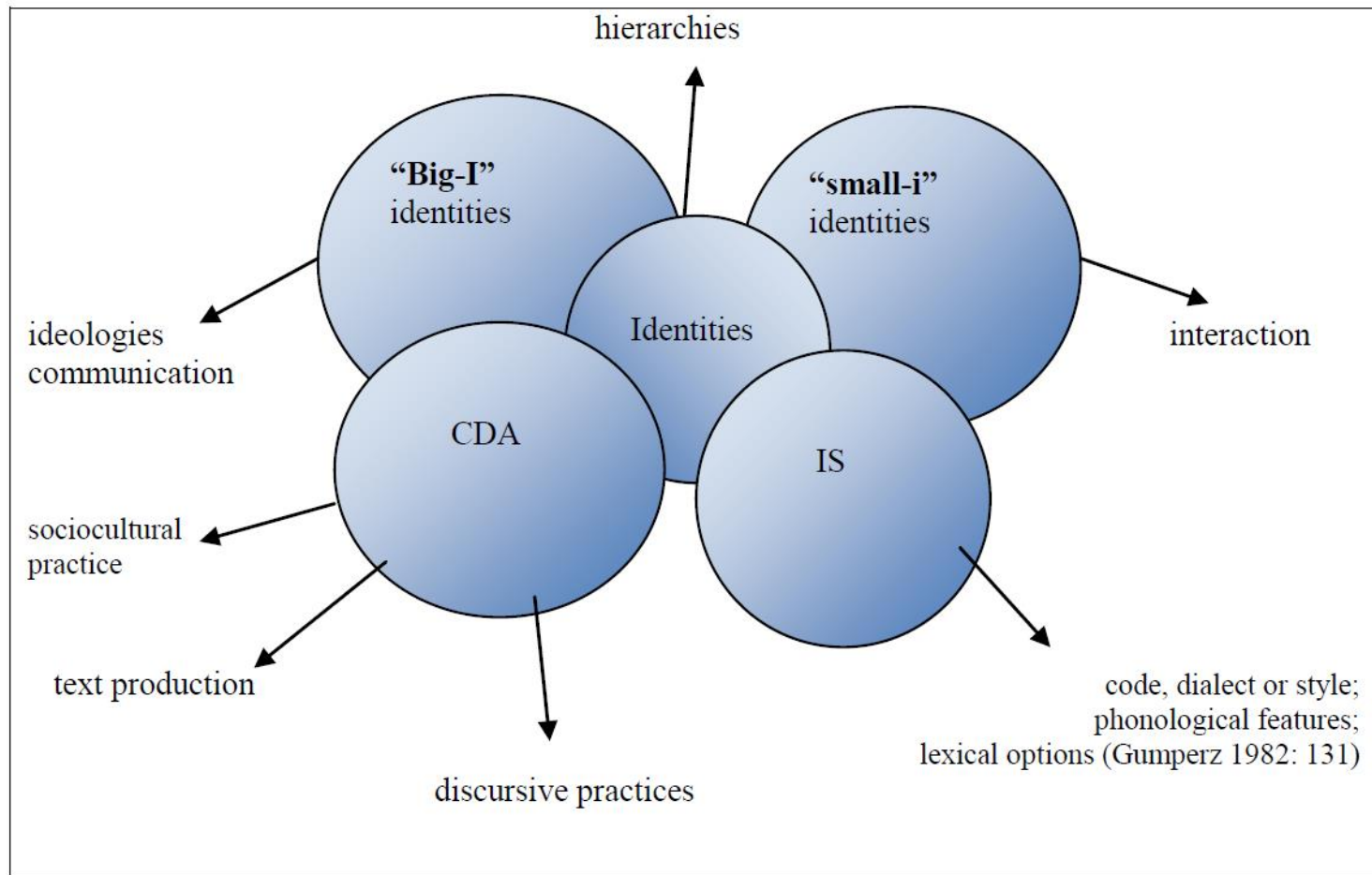
Theoretical Paradigms

- Two competing approaches in the theorization of language and identity: essentialist (variationists Labov 1966 and Trudgill 1974) vs postmodern or constructivist theories
- Post- modern theoreticians often concentrate on in-situ or often what is described as “real language” situations.
- The terms “real language” and “authenticity” are criticised by Bucholtz (2003); Coupland (2010) and Eckert (2003) in that they argue that some kind of labelling or essentialism is attributed to groups and their languages.

“A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based Foucault (2000:456)”.

- 
- both conceptualizations of language and identity need problematisation and should not be taken for granted;
 - the problem of essentialism vs. anti-essentialism needs justification, acknowledging that both are biased positions and that there is some kind of inherent essentialism in the research phenomena with which we are dealing;
 - neither identity nor language are fixed and constructed; rather they change over time. However, the essentialisms that are associated with these concepts need reconsideration, especially within the realm of postmodern paradigms;
 - contexts such as institutions are important in the process and production of identities;
 - multiplicity of identities cannot be reduced to “performativeness”: the historical and ideological underpinnings need tackling.

The Model: “big-I” and “small-I”



The model: the “big-I” and the “small-i”

- The step-by-step procedure that I have employed, based on (Gumperz, 2001), in my qualitative analysis could be summarized as follows:
- ethnographic immersion where I gained insights regarding the communicative context;
- determining the recurrent patterns in relation to language and identity;
- interviewing the participants in order to find out about their interpretations of my observations;
- transcription of the recorded material paying particular attention to code, prosody, lexical choice, paralinguistic cues so on.

Identity in my research

- “sameness” and “difference”
- “self” and the “other/s”
- multiple: national, regional, religious, gender, class
- “constructed” (but postmodern vs. essentialist)

#Extract

East London School

Discursive construction of national identities

1	Mikail	what do you say for "walking"?
2	Berkin	"diharrim"
3	Mikail	"darrim"
4	Mikail	we say "meşin"
5	Berkin	"meş" is Arabic
6	Perihan	"meş" is totally Arabic absolutely Arabic [frustrated]
7	Behram	I have a feeling.. feel like.. some words going to Turkish then
8		came back to Kurmanji like... ((gives examples)) [speech overlaps]
9		so many words...
10	Mikail	You know I have got like one [hesitates] (a)
11		dictionary with Kurdish,Turkish, English, Farsi and
12		Arabic .. like same word in five language and
13		when you look at them [words] like sixty percent of (are) very
14		similar.. are very similar [...] there are a lot of words very similar.. so 15
		we can't get out if we say this is Arabic this is blah blah...
16	Berkin	No no as long as it is in our dictionary
17	Perihan	It's just so interesting for us... We are using
18		everything strictly Kurdish (Sorani) whereas in Kurmanji
19		so much Arabic there is a lot of Arabic ...
20	Mikail	We can't say maybe they are Arabic [laughs] because
21	Perihan	yeah yeah yeah
22	Mikail	We can't really decide if it come(s) from Farsi,
23		Arabic or Kurmanji
24		Hemu ji heman malbatene {KR}
25		<They are all from the same family>
26		((Mikail suddenly starts speaking in Kurmanji, and Perihan listens to 27 him))
28		Yani tekili ce bu ye wan ji men standiye me ji wan {KR}
29		<There is a relationship. They took words from us and we took words 30 from them>
31		Her zimanake sistema xwe heye {KR}
32		<Each language has its own system>
33	Behram	like sixul.. sixul ji Arabiye {KR}
34		<like sixul.. sixul is Arabic>
35	Tülay	there is even a lot of Turkish words in Turkish. They say "hafta"
36		(week)/ it's "hefte" (week)
37		there is quite a lot...
38	Mikail	Yes yes/ a lot of
39	Perihan	[frustrated] aha aha it's OK!...

Extract# South London School

Discursive construction of regional identities

- 1 Yıldız Niye “ji dayik bun” **{KR}** diyoruz **{TR}**? Yani niye dünyaya geldi demiyoruz?**{TR}**
2 <Why do we say “ji dayik bun”? Why don’t we say “dünyaya geldi” came to
3 this world/was born?>
4 Mikail Diğer dillerdede öyle **{TR}**... Öyle kullanılıyor..
5 Yani Türkçededede diğer dillerdede ... öyledir ... **{TR}**
7 <It is same as other languages.. That’s how it’s used.. In Turkish, as well as
8 in other languages.. it’s the same.. it’s a pattern>
9 Mikail Yani qalıptır **{TR}**
10 Axaftin, peyivin, qisa kirin, qazin **{KR}**
11 <synonyms of “to talk”>
12 Deniz Xeber dayin **{KR}**
13 <to talk>
14 Mikail Xeber dan **{KR}**
15 <to talk>
16 Deniz Deyn kirin, li aliye Mereşe **{KR}** [resists]
17 <in Maraş we say “deyn kirin”> (cf “dayn kirin”)
18 Mikail Ştaxilin **{KR}**
19 <to talk (used in Mardin region)>
20 Birgul Merdine **{KR}** [laughs]
21 <in Merdin>
22 Mikail [Pointing at a student from Syria]
23 Cem we ji dibejin. Li aliye Afrin na? **{KR}**
24 <You also use (ştaxilin) in Afrin (isn’t it?)>
25 Nagehan Deyn kirin am kar tinin **{KR}**
26 <we use “deyn kirin”>
27 Sabiha Mina Maraş [laughs] **{KR}**

Extract# Discursive construction of religious identities

Dayika min qet peyvek Tirki nizane, bave min işte çend kelime dizane, nikane xwa bine zimon. Zaroke wi ew ji Tirki pir zede nizanin. Tirki bas nine. İlkokul tene xwendi bu. Ewdibe ez Tirkim dibe [...] ew na hemu Kurdi diaxivin diben ki em ne Kurd in em Tirkin. Kurdi diben haaa!!! Em ne Kurdin em Tirkin digotin [...] min ji digot qey hemu Alewi Kurd in ye di ji Tirkin u Sunni ne {KR} *(Interview with Fırat)*

My mother doesn't know a word of Turkish, my father (well) knows few words but cannot express himself (in Turkish). His children also don't know much Turkish. (Their) Kurdish is not good... Just went to primary school... He says I am Turkish [...] they all speak Kurdish and say they are Turks ... They say this in Kurdish, right!!! We are not Kurds.. we are Turks- they were saying [...] and I was thinking all Alevis were Kurds and the rest were Turkish and Sunni *(Interview with Fırat)*

Extract# Discursive construction of gender identities

“A mother is 30 years old but although her mother language is Turkish **she can’t** even talk Turkish. I know a lady. Ben cox acidim o qadina <I felt sorry for her>. I swear her Turkish is **rubbish**, her Kurdish is **rubbish**. **She can’t** even talk proper Turkish you know... forget Kurdish. **She doesn’t** even know her mother language Turkish, **she doesn’t** know a word of English. What is she going to teach her children?” (*Interview with Sabiha-female- 31.01.13*)



Part 2

Region

Religion

Gender

Social class

Attitudes & MGT

- “a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution or event” (Azjen 1988:4)
- “any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions toward different language varieties or their speakers” (Ryan et al. 1982:7)
- “The feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others” (Crystal 1997: 215)
- Attitudes are often evaluated on two levels: solidarity and status
- Attitudes are closely related to group identity (Appel and Muysken, 1987; McNamara, 1988) which entails the notion of “self” and the “other”.
- These identifications, both in intra and inter-group relations, affect power relations among individuals and groups.

Solidarity

A variety that is evaluated highly on the solidarity dimension, is one that ‘elicits feelings of attraction, appreciation and belongingness’ which is typically the case for the language/variety of one’s family life and intimate friendships, as this “acquires vital social meaning and comes to represent the social group with which one identifies” (Ryan et al., 1982:9). Such varieties are argued to have covert prestige: varieties that are evaluated positively on the solidarity dimension such as regional varieties (Trudgill, 1972).

Status

Positive evaluations of traits such as intelligence, education and success (e.g. standard languages). Often associated with power and have overt prestige.

Lawson and Sachdev (2004:1347) argue that varieties associated with the dominant groups are ranked higher on the status dimensions, and regional varieties tend to be ranked higher on the solidarity dimensions.

Extract


They speak with few words... Many many Turkish words.. **They** talk about simple things. *Ez xwarin bixwim...* **Very primitive**... People from Maraş, Malatya and some parts of Adiyaman are assimilated. [...] Good Kurdish is spoken in villages. Celadet Bedirxan said 'Speak Kurdish or never say we are Kurds'. (*Musa, Southeast region*)

Extract

My child is aware of this... She says “mother your Kurdish is different because it’s different. They also say they speak Kurdish and you also say I am Kurdish. But why are the languages different, she says” [...] and I say... because we spoke Turkish a lot we forgot it. We learned a different Kurdish. But they speak “real” Kurdish. This is the truth I tell her.
(*Hacer, Northwest region*)

Extract

Your question was what do I mean by “good Kurdish”. What I mean by good Kurdish is especially when I talk about people from Mardin, people from Diyarbakır, Bingöl, Muş – they are able to have full conversation in Kurdish. They speak fluently and they understand. They make full sentences; they make long sentences, short sentences – full conversation only in Kurdish. Right! Compared to people from my area Meleti or Kahraman Maraş or Pazarcix or Kayseri. So... [...] I mean we do use many Turkish words while talking in Kurdish. Basically their vocabulary is quite poor (meaning people from her region) I think, that’s what we can say. And grammatically it’s not right. That’s ... I found out after learning obviously after attending Kurdish classes, yeah. [...] actually we say /a/ /a/ /a/ you know what I mean by good Kurdish areas because they say /e/ it’s like it’s softer. You know we say Az hatim for example. It’s not grammar it’s pronunciation. Az hatim ex na diben Ez hatim which is softer (*Elif, Northwest region*)



“Beliefs about what is or is not a real language, and underlying these beliefs, the notion that there are distinctly identifiable languages that can be isolated, named, and counted, enter into strategies of social domination. Such beliefs, and related schemata for ranking languages as more or less evolved, have contributed to profound decisions about, for example, the civility or even the humanity of subjects of colonial domination. They also qualify or disqualify speech varieties from certain institutional uses and their speakers from access to domains of privilege” (Woolard and Schieffelin 1994:63).

Demek istediğim, bizim bölgede farklı bir kelime dile girince hemen dikkatlerini çekiyor, hemen eleştiri konusu oluyor. Halbuki Kürdistan'ın diğer bölgelerinde konuşulan dillerin içerisine diğer dillerden bir sürü kelime giriyor. O, onun Kürtçe olduğunu sanıyor. Böyle bir yanılgıya düşmemek ve kendi bölgemizin Kürtçesinden korkmamak, kendi bölgemizin Kürtçesini konuşmaktan korkmamak, klamlarını söylemekten korkmamak, müziğini icra etmekten korkmamak lâzım. Ancak böyle ayakta tutulur, geliştirilir ve yaşatılabilir bu kültür.

What I mean is when a different word enters into our language it immediately takes their (other Kurds') attention and gets criticism. However, in other parts of Kurdistan many different words enter into their language. But s/he thinks it's Kurdish. We shouldn't be mistaken by this and should not fear to use our region's Kurdish, should not fear to sing the 'klams' (songs), and should not fear to perform our music. This is how our culture will stay alive and improve. (Mehmet Bayrak)

Matched Guise Tests

84 female and male participants

- 20: female
- 62: male (*2= other/ missing)

Age 18- 56+

Education

3.6 % No education

21.7% Primary

13.3 % Secondary

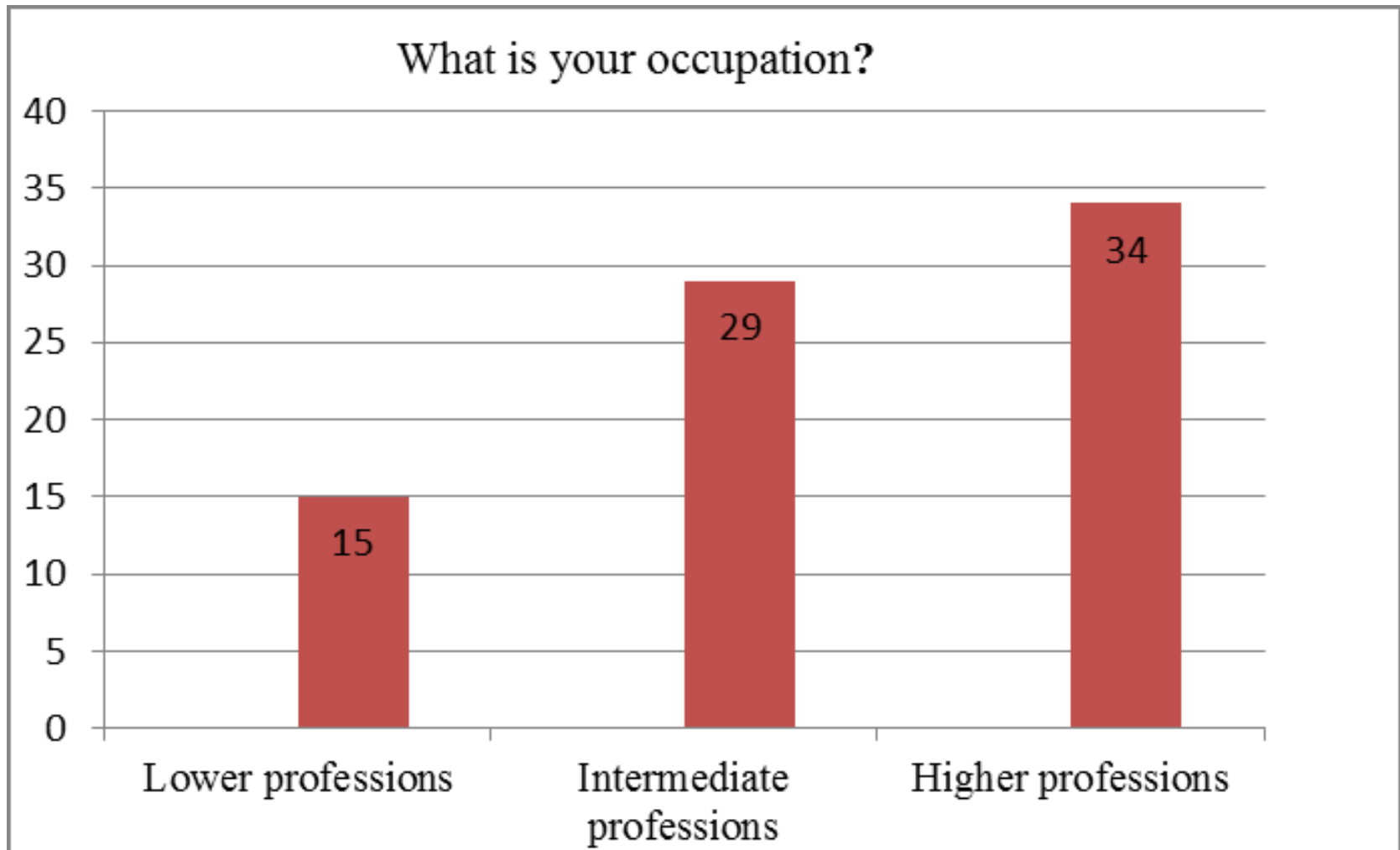
23.8 % High school

24.1 % University

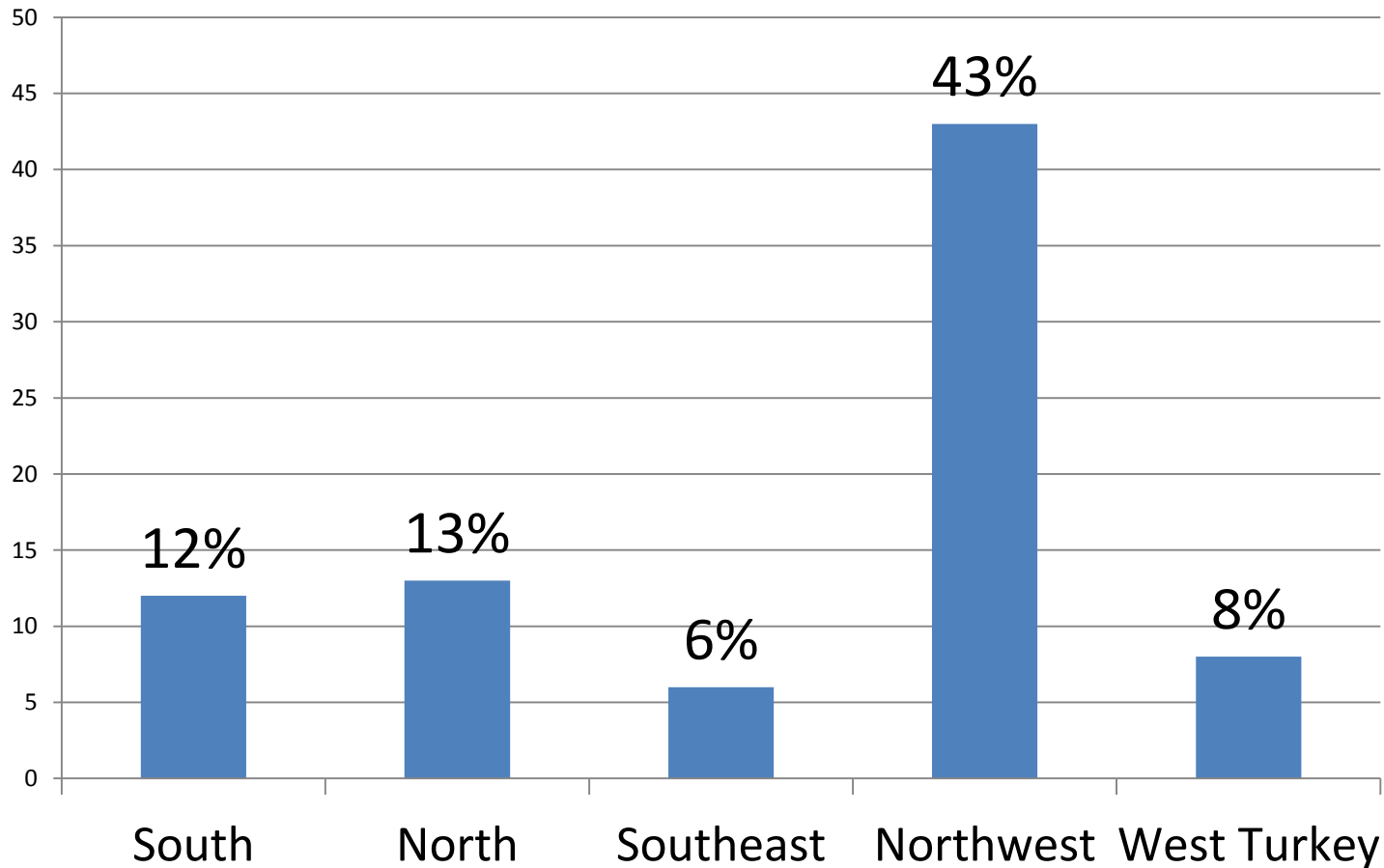
12% Masters

1.2 % PhD

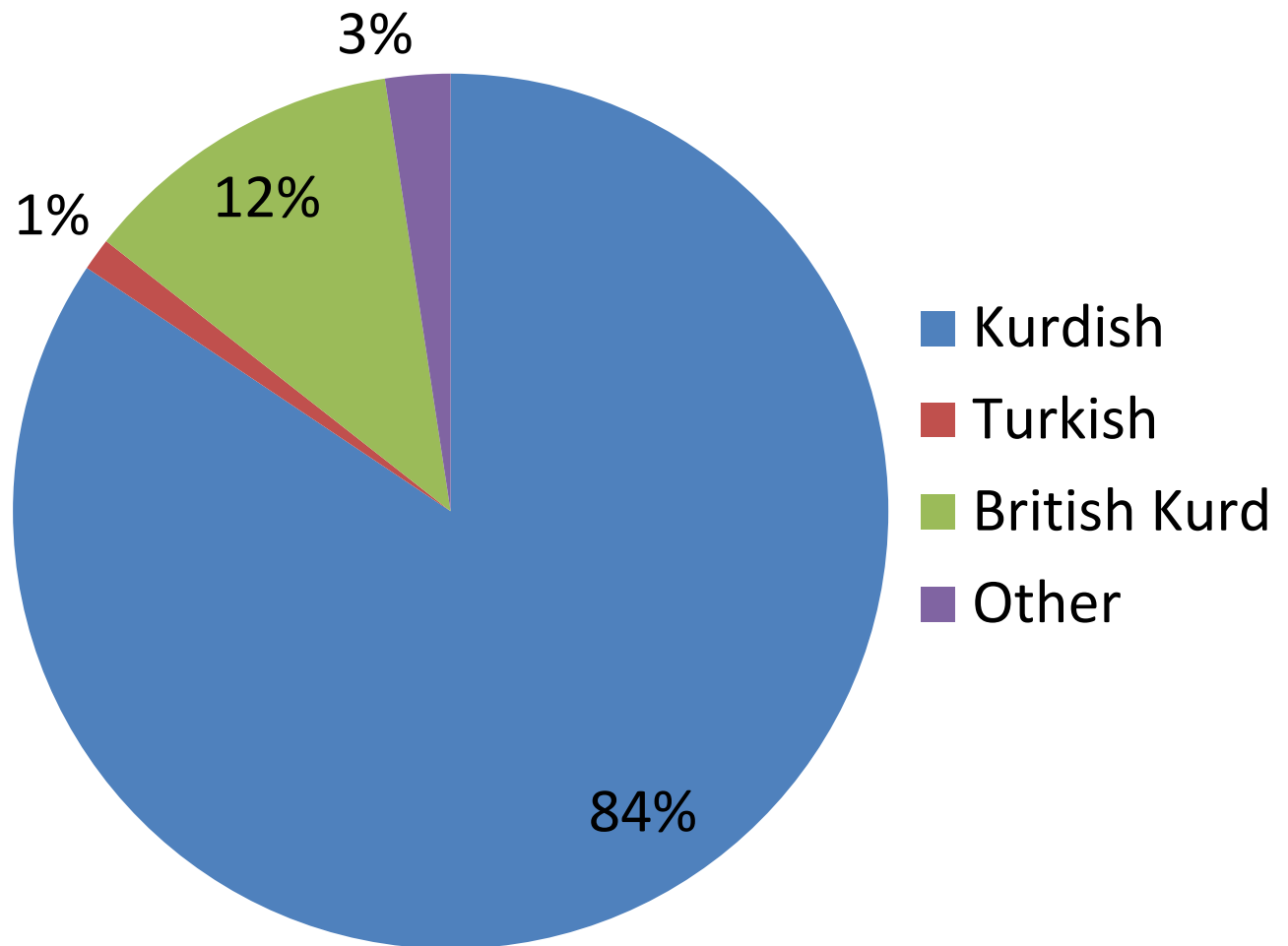
Occupation



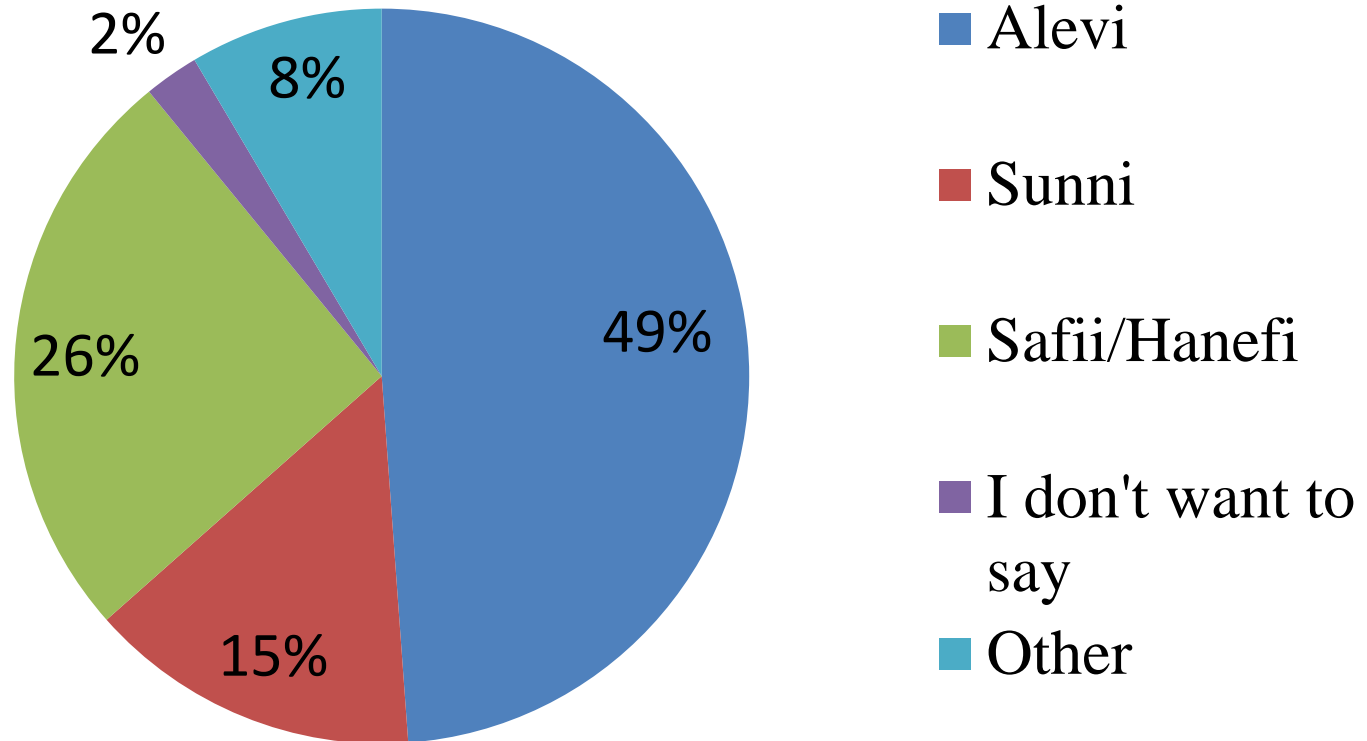
Where were you born?



Ethnicity



Religious Affiliation



Solidarity

Table 5.7 Paired samples t-tests of the evaluations of the female and male guise in ST and NS Kurmanji on the solidarity dimension.

	<u>Female Speaker</u>		<u>Male Speaker</u>	
	<i>Bohtan</i>	<i>Maraş</i>	<i>Bohtan</i>	<i>Maraş</i>
politeness	3.67	3.78	4.02	3.77
humour	3.18	3.76*	3.61*	3.23
warmth	3.85	4.10	3.92	3.69
likeability	3.38	3.83*	3.69	3.49
sociability	3.52	3.75	3.78*	3.33

*= score is higher and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

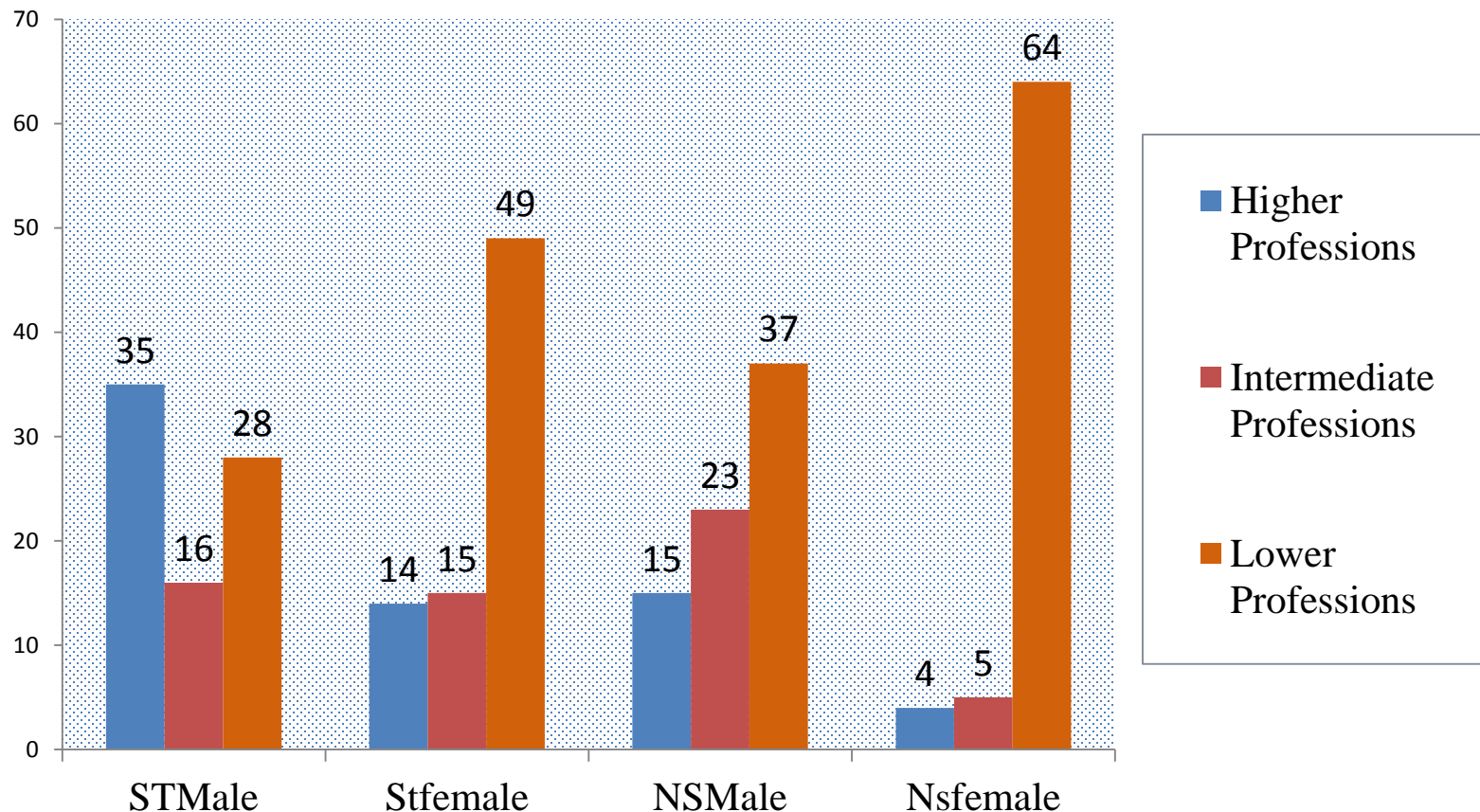
Status

Table 5.8 Paired sample t-tests of the evaluations of the female and male guise ST and NS Kurmanji on the status dimension.

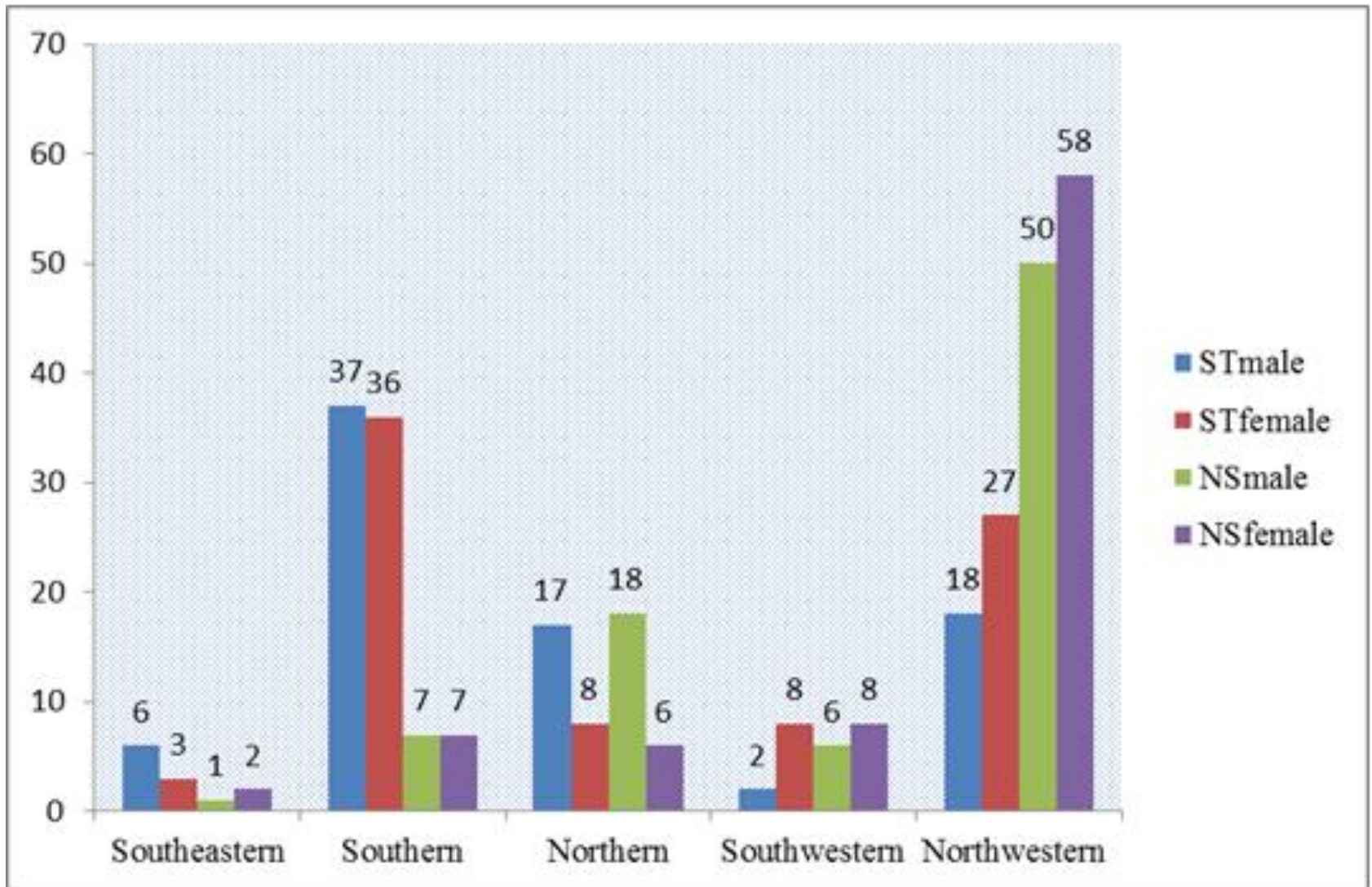
	<u>Female Speaker</u>		<u>Male Speaker</u>	
	<i>Bohtan</i>	<i>Maraş</i>	<i>Bohtan</i>	<i>Maraş</i>
intelligence	3.56	3.59	3.89*	3.44
dependability	3.76	3.71	3.53	3.55
education	3.08	2.86	3.57*	3.11
ambition	3.17	3.32	3.17*	2.81
leadership	3.10	3.28	3.36*	2.76
intelligibility	3.91	3.78	3.86	3.73

*= score is higher and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

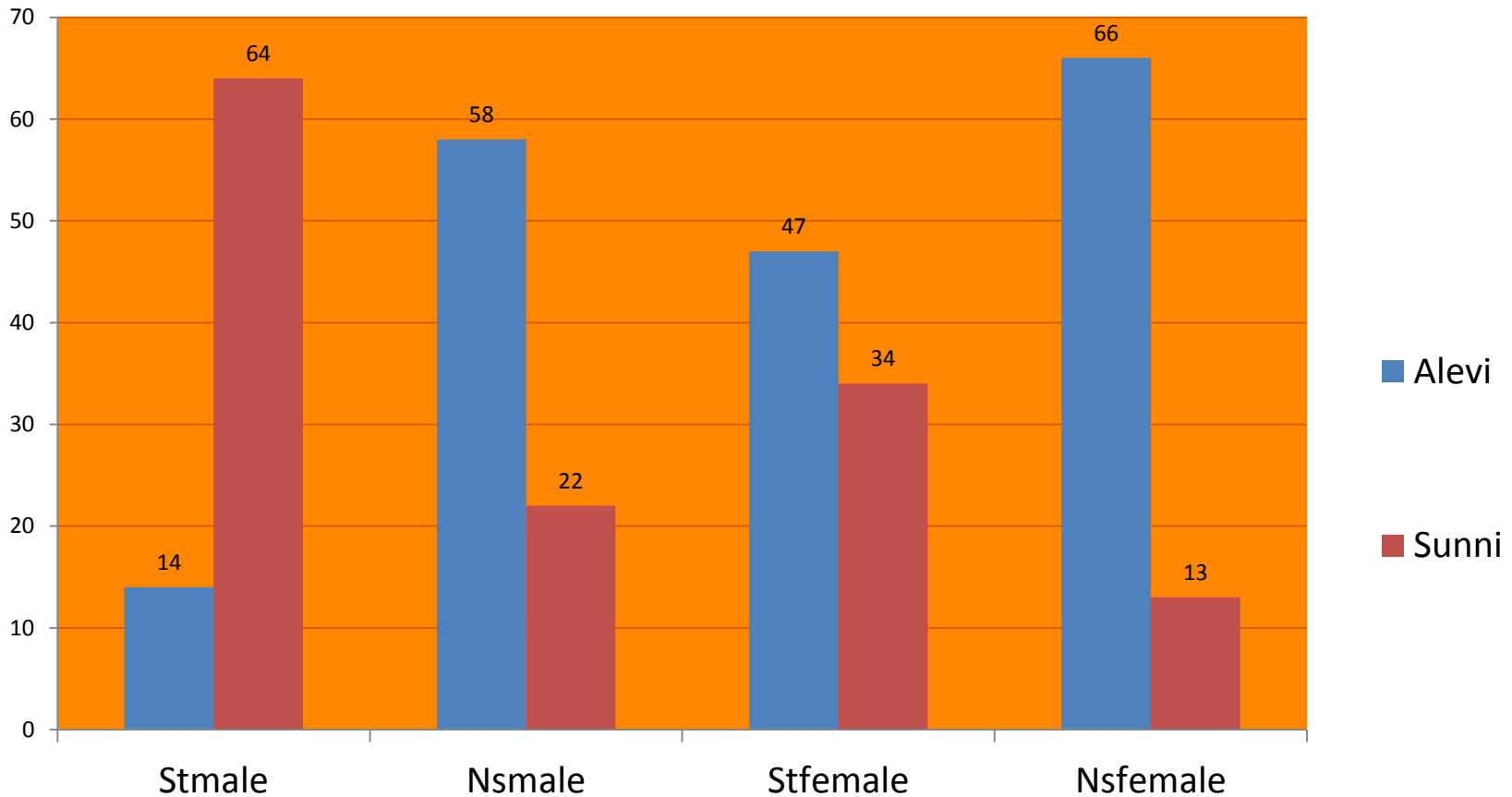
What is the speaker's occupation?



Where is the speaker from?



What is the speaker's religious affiliation?



Conclusion

1. “an individual’s multiple identities are unlikely to be equally salient at any particular moment in time: rather, one or more may be foregrounded at different times. It is quite possible for an individual not to be conscious of a particular identity until it becomes contextually salient” (Ivanič 1998:11).
2. Studies show that the relationship between language and identity is important in terms of the formation of a group identity: both language identity and group identity might affect each other (Sachdev and Hanlon, 2000).
3. “Social psychological research suggests that ingroup identification and positive language attitudes are important precursors of language maintenance, learning and revitalisation (Sachdev and Hanlon, 2000:71).

Transcription notation based on Gumperz and Berenz (1993:121)

?	final rise
,	slight rise as in listing intonation (e.g., more is expected)
-	Truncation (e.g., what ti- what time is it/)
..	pauses of less than .5 second
...	pauses greater than .5 second (unless precisely timed)
=	overlap and latching of speakers' utterances
()	unclear word
(did)	guess at unclear word
[laugh]	nonlexical phenomena, both vocal and nonvocal, that interrupt the lexical stretch
<translate>	translated segments
{TR}	Turkish
{KR}	Kurdish
<u>underline</u>	extra emphasis
[...]	omitted text