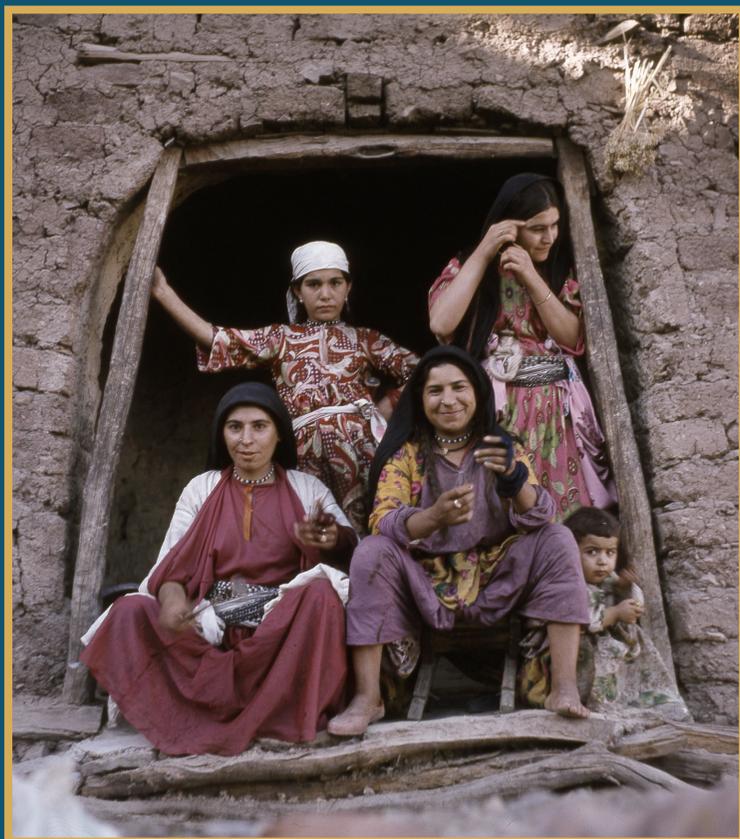


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Cover image: Women in the village of Harbole, south-eastern Turkey (photograph taken by Brunot Poizat in 1978 before the village's destruction).

Cover design: Anna Gatti

LANGUAGE LOSS IN THE ŞŪRAYT/ ṬŪRŌYO-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES OF THE DIASPORA IN SWEDEN

Sina Tezel

1. ṬŪr ‘Abdīn—the Language Situation

Before describing the state of ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo in the diaspora in Sweden, I shall give a brief account of the language situation in ṬŪr ‘Abdīn (SE Turkey) by way of background.

Nowadays, there are only a few villages, where the population speak only ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo. These are Mīdən, Bsŏrīno, Sāre (returning people from the diaspora), Bēqusyōno, Dayro du-şlībo (a few families), Kafro, Xarābāle and the villages around Xarābāle, namely Arbo, Eḥwo, Bādābe, Kharabemiška.

The current inhabitants of Kafro, with its impressive newly built houses, consist of only returning people. It was previously completely uninhabited due to migrations to Europe. The same is more or less true of the aforementioned villages around Xarābāle. The only village in the area known as Rāyīte that has remained inhabited is Xarābāle, nowadays also known as Arkaḥ among Suryōye (i.e. the Christian speakers of ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo).

There are also a few villages that each have a few ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo-speaking families but where the majority of the population are Kurds. These are: Mzīhaḥ, ‘Iwardo, Kfarze and Anḥəl. Finally, there is the chief town in the area, Məḍyaḍ (Midyat), where today the ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo-speakers are mixed. They consist of families who speak the original Məḍyaḍ dialect and ŞŪrayt/ṬŪrŌyo-speaking families who have moved to Məḍyaḍ from different villages around it.

2. Dialectal Differences

As is the case with any language, there were and are dialectal differences in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. What is noteworthy about this dialectal diversity is that the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo language area is relatively small. Two villages only two kilometres apart from each other may have dialectal differences. The rural village dialects as a whole can, however, be classified together in a group that contrasts with the urban dialect of Mədyad.

Many of the dialectal differences in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo are due to influences from the neighbouring languages such as Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish. Geographically, Ṭūr ʿAbdīn is surrounded by the Mesopotamian Arabic dialect area and Kurdish-speaking villages. Among the Arabic dialects in the area the dialect of Mardin, the chief town, was and still is the most important one. Between Mardin and Ṭūr ʿAbdīn there are several Arabic-speaking centres, including, among others, Bnēbīl, Şawro, Maʿsarte and Qelet. Around Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, especially near Mədyad, one finds the Mḥallami-Arabic dialects, which are spoken today only by Muslims. Beyond Mīdən eastwards there were three Arabic dialects, namely Āzəx, Espes and Bābake, whose original population consisted of Suryōye. There are also some Kurdish-speaking villages in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, namely Kerburan, ʿArbāye, Ḥaḥ, Kafro ʿElayto and Yardo, all had Suryōyo inhabitants. Today, among these villages only Ḥaḥ is populated by Suryōye, who today also speak Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo alongside Kurdish.

We do not know with any certainty what the historical depth was of the aforementioned influence on Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. An interesting statement concerning this question is found in Ritter (1967, *19*¹).¹ He refers to his informant Besim Akdemir speaking

1 See Ritter (1967, *19*) writing:

Der Metropolit von Mardin, Ḥasyo Ḥanna Dölapönü, sagte Besim Akdemir, der ihn danach fragte, der Einfluß des Arabischen und Kurdischen habe im 12. Jahrhundert eingesetzt. Der Patriarch ʿazīz bar Sabto (Ignaz VII, 1466–1488, Spuler, *Die Morgenländischen Kirchen*, Leipzig 1964, p. 214) habe den Gebrauch der fremden Sprachen verboten, sei aber damit nicht

to Ḥasyo Yuḥanon Dolabani saying that the influence from Arabic and Kurdish began during the 13th century and, as a consequence of this, the Patriarch Aziz Bar Sabto tried to forbid the people from speaking foreign languages (Arabic and Kurdish), but then it was too late since they had already lost many native words.

With this background, I shall now examine the current language situation in the diaspora. To the best of my knowledge, no systematic studies have been of this topic, so we cannot establish the full details. We can, however, obtain a general picture.

3. The Challenge of New Social and Cultural Terminology

The Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-lexicon in Ṭūr ʿAbdīn was characterised by agricultural, narrative and religious terms. During the 1960s and the 1970s the majority of Suryōye migrated from Ṭūr ʿAbdīn, mostly first to Istanbul and then to different countries in Western Europe. Previously, emigration from Ṭūr ʿAbdīn was mostly to the Arabic-speaking countries in the region, especially Syria, Lebanon and Iraq.

The emigration after the 1950s was far more intense than the earlier trend of emigration. It took place during a short period and resulted in the emptying of Ṭūr ʿAbdīn of the majority of Suryōye. Furthermore, the migrants settled in countries that were far more advanced than Ṭūr ʿAbdīn and the neighbouring areas in terms of their economic, political, cultural, social, technological and educational development.

In their new countries of residence in Western Europe the Suryōyo community became familiar with the concept of ‘mother tongue education’ and for the first time in their history Syriac and Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo were taught in official schools. This was an unexpected event in their history.

durchgedrungen. Man habe damals schon viele syrische Worte vergessen und statt dessen fremde gebraucht.

One serious challenge was the need to find linguistic equivalents to the social and cultural terminology of the Western European countries. This was difficult for a minority group from countries with very different social systems.²

4. Neologisms

During the period in which the Suryōyō community has been in the diaspora many neologisms have been formed. There was a need to create terms for the new cultural phenomena that the Suryōye encountered in Western European societies. These neologisms were formed almost entirely from lexical items of literary Western Syriac, which were given new meanings. As a result they were not considered as borrowings into Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo.

A situation of diglossia similar to that between Modern Standard Arabic and Arabic dialects exists between Western Syriac and Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. The Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers in general view Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo as the everyday language of communication, while they consider Western Syriac as the prestigious cultural and ecclesiastical language.

A large number of such neologisms are in use today in Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. Most of these probably did not exist before the 1950s, judging by their absence in Ritter's Ṭūrōyo collection. They appear to have been first introduced at the beginning of the 1970s, when Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speakers began to emigrate to Sweden and other Western European countries. The formation of their own clubs and associations in these countries, and the publication of their own newsletters and magazines have played an important role. They did not have the freedom to engage in such communal activities to the same extent in their homeland. The exact number of neologisms and their diffusion among the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speakers are not known. At any rate, it is clear that the neologisms are used by purists in clubs and associations, in television programs and in newspapers. They are disseminated

2 Ehrnebo (2013, 174–175).

through these means. These neologisms in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo have been created not only for describing new phenomena in society but also to replace foreign words.³

5. Language Loss

While the language has acquired many neologisms, the use of which is prestigious among the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers, the language has at the same time lost or is in the process of losing many native words.

5.1. Dialect Mixing and the Loss of Dialectal Diversity

The dialectal differences found in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn do not exist in a consistent manner in the diaspora. A Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speaking community in a Swedish or a German town consists of people from very different dialectal areas. Consequently, the children born in these circumstances learn and develop their mother tongue in a linguistically mixed environment.

The mixing of the dialects results in a more homogenous language, which is an advantage for the diaspora communities. It has, however, the regrettable consequence of the loss of much dialectal native vocabulary.

I present here a few examples demonstrating the dialectal differences pertaining to the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo lexicon in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn:

(1) ‘street’

There are four dialectal words for the word ‘street’, namely *şūqo* (Mīdān), *başqūqo* (Bēqusyōno and Bsōrino), *basyōgo* (Rāyīte) and *zābūqo*. The last one is a borrowing from local Arabic into the dialect of Məḍyaḍ, while the others are native words found in the village dialects. Today *şūqo* has a new common meaning in the diaspora, namely ‘a market place, a shopping centre’. The

3 For details and treatment of a great numbers of these neologisms, see S. Tezel (2015, 100–109).

Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speakers in the diaspora use *darbo* for ‘street’, which used to refer to a road outside the villages in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn.

(2) ‘axe’

There are at least three words for ‘axe’, *nargo*, ‘*ašfo* ~ ‘*ağfo* and *ma‘wōlo*. The last of these, which is derived from Arabic *mi‘wāl*, is used in the Rāyīte-dialects.⁴

(3) ‘water-pitcher’

At least three dialectal words *gdōno* (< **kaddōnō*), *mxōlo* (< Western Syriac *mḵōrō*?) and *ğarra* (Arabic) denote a normal ‘water-pitcher’, a smaller one being termed *dgušto* (cf. NENA *gādušta* and Levantine Arabic *dakkūše*) in Məḏyaḏ and *kādūne* in villages.⁵

(4) ‘vineyard guard’

The word for ‘vineyard guard’ is *nōṭūro* in most dialects. Some dialects use the word *naḥtōr*, which is a loan from Kurdish. The Kurdish word is, in turn, a loan from Arabic *nāṭōr*, which itself is a loan from earlier Aramaic *nāṭōrā*.⁶ The form *naḥtōr* is in the process of disappearing in the diaspora.

(5) ‘to buy’

The verb for ‘to buy’, *zwānle*, which used to be common to all the village dialects in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, is in the process of being replaced by *šqīle*, which was and still is a typical Məḏyaḏ-word in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn. Nowadays *šqīle* is the common word for ‘to buy’ among almost all Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers in the diaspora.

(6) ‘hair’

In Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, the village dialects use(d) the word *ša‘ro* (< **sa‘rō*) for denoting ‘hair’, while Məḏyaḏ uses *sawko*. In the diaspora the

4 For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 175).

5 For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 161–163).

6 For details, see A. Tezel (2003, 178).

use of *şa'ro* among the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers from the villages has decreased and they tend to use instead the Məḍyōyo word *sawko*.

(7) 'good'

There is a similar situation with regard to the words for 'good', namely *ṭōwo* in the village dialects and *kāyīso* in the dialect of Məḍyad. Though the word *ṭōwo* is native and *kāyīso* is foreign, the foreign word *kāyīso* is in the process of being adopted even among the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers from the villages.

5.2. The Loss of Original Lexemes and Semantics

(1) 'to change'

The village dialects in Ṭūr 'Abdīn used the native verb *mḥālaḥle* 'to change'. Today in the diaspora this has almost entirely been replaced by three foreign verbs, namely *mḡāyarle*, *mbādēle* and *mdāgaşle*. The first two are of Arabic origin and the last one is of Turkish origin.

(2) 'to flee'

Likewise, the native verb 'to flee, run away', *āraq*, has been replaced by the foreign verb *mahzamle*, which is of Arabic origin. The use of the native word *āraq* was restricted to a few dialects in Ṭūr 'Abdīn and the foreign word *mahzamle* seems to have entered some varieties in Ṭūr 'Abdīn at an early date.

(3) 'to close'

The native verb for 'to close', *şxarle*, was a common word in Ṭūr 'Abdīn. Today many Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers living in or coming from Turkey have replaced it with the Turkish foreign verb *mḡāpaṭle*.

(4) 'to be informed'

A common expression that used to be in wide use and can still be heard in the speech of the older generation is *‘al ū-mamro*, 'according to what I have heard/been informed'. Today, the expression in question has been replaced by two foreign words. Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers from Turkey use *gōya/gūya* and those from Arabic-speaking countries use *‘ala bana*.

(5) 'to be surprised'

The word expressing surprise, *dūmōro*, and its verb *mdāmar* (mostly used with first personal pronouns *mdāmarno/mdamrōno*) has been replaced by the Arabic *‘ağbo* and its verb *m‘āğabno/m‘ağbōno*.

(6) *fulhōno* 'an arable land' > 'political activities'

Sometimes a word loses its original meaning and acquires a new meaning in the diaspora. A case in point is *fulhōno*. Today it usually denotes 'activities' in an association or 'political activities' in general in the diaspora. In Ṭūr 'Abdīn the word denoted 'an arable land'.

(7) *hāšo* 'back; belt' > 'back'

In some cases the semantic range of a word is restricted. For example, *hāšo* had both the meaning 'back' and also the meaning 'a belt of cloth' in Ṭūr 'Abdīn. In the diaspora, however, the younger generation is only aware of the meaning 'back'.

5.3. Phraseology and Idioms

Each language contains cultural-specific metaphors, phrases alluding to historical events or religious and social phenomena. Such phraseology is conditioned by the physical, cultural and religious environment of the language community. This is best described by the following quote in an article by Fishman (1996) entitled 'What do you lose when you lose your language?', where he (*ibid.*, 72) writes:

Take it [language] away from the culture, and you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, its laws, its literature, its songs, its riddles, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers.

In the case of Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo, the language has not entirely been extracted from its culture and religion, but it has been removed from its physical environment, which has influenced the language in different ways. I shall demonstrate this by a few illustrative examples.

In Ṭūr ‘Abdīn, for example, stones were a very important feature of life and constituted a crucial building material. This is evident from the phrases people formed with the word for ‘a stone’ *kēfo*, for instance:

- (1) *hāwən* *kēfo* *w-kalšo*
 became.they stone and-lime

‘They became inseparable friends.’ (Literally: ‘They became stone and lime.’)

The phrase is, of course, used figuratively. It is used when you are very good friends. The phrase *dā‘iri hāwən kēfo w-kalšo* can also be used when one is on bad terms with another person and then find their way back to each other, *dā‘iri* meaning literally ‘they returned’.

When one built houses, the most important components were stone and lime and then people experienced concretely how stone and lime were composed:

- (2) *mhē-le* *kēfe* *mīn-e*
 threw-he stones at (from)-him

‘to insult someone in an indirect way’ (Literally: ‘He threw stones at him.’)

- (3) *hawyō-no kēfo kamto lō sām-le b-dīd-i*
 became-I stone black not did-he in-my (mine)

‘Whatever I did, he did not do as I said.’ (Literally: ‘I became a black stone and he did not do in accordance with me.’)

- (4) *ʾī-kēfo yāqurto b-dukṭ-a ṭawtō = yo*
 the-stone heavy in-place-its good = is

‘The value of a person lies in his serious-mindedness.’
 (This was said of a person who does not laugh or smile,
 literally: ‘The heavy stone is good in its place.’)

In Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo body parts are used in the formation of metaphorical phrases. Many such phrases contain the words *lēbo* ‘heart’ and *mēne* (pl.) ‘hair’ (or *manṭo* ‘a single hair’). For example:

- (5) *m-ū lēbo (kammāt)*
 from-the heart saying.you

‘Are you serious? (Literally: ‘[Are you saying] from the heart?’)’

- (6) *twār-le lēb-e*
 broke-he heart-his

‘He hurt his feelings.’ (Literally: ‘He broke his heart.’)

- (7) *lat-le lēbo*
 is.not-to.him a heart

‘He does not feel like it.’ (Literally: ‘He does not have a heart.’)

- (8) *lēb-e qīṣ*
heart-his was.cut

‘He is suspicious.’ (literally: ‘His heart was cut.’)

- (9) *ʔāṭi mēne b-lišōn-i*
came.he hair on-tongue-my

‘I am sick of saying it over and over again.’ (Literally: ‘Hair came on my tongue.’)

- (10) *kō-ṣōlāḥ ʔi-maṇṭo*
IND-he.splits the-hair

‘He is very clever.’ (Literally: ‘He splits the single hair.’)

Religion played and still plays an important part in the life of the *Suryōye* and there are many phrases relating to this, such as:

- (11) *ṣubḥo l-ālo*
praise to-God

‘Oh my God!’ (Literally: ‘Praise be to God!’)

- (12) *ʔālo ṭōrē-l-ux*
God keep-ACC-you

‘May God keep you!’

- (13) *moryo w-aq-qādīše hōwəṇ ʔa‘m-ux*
Lord and-the-saints be.they with-you

‘May the Lord and the saints be with you!’

- (14) *mḥālaq-le rūḥe qəm raḡl-e d-ū-qādišo*
 threw-he himself at feet-his of-the-saint

‘He sought protection or help from the saint by [visiting his tomb or church].’ (Literally: ‘He threw himself at the feet of the saint.’)

Many oaths of a religious content were used in the community, e.g. *b-ālōho* ‘[I swear] by God’; *bə-mšīḥo* ‘[I swear] by Jesus’; *b-ū-mgalyun* ‘[I swear] by the Bible’; *b-aq-qādiše* ‘[I swear] by the saints’; *b-ū-šlībo* ‘[I swear] by the Cross’; *b-ū-qabro* ‘[I swear] by the grave [of Jesus]’; *b-indāt-ālo* (< **yōldaṭ* ‘*alōhō*’) ‘[I swear] by the Virgin Mary’.

Except for the phrases *b-ū-šlībo* and *b-ū-mgalyun* all these expressions of oaths are in the process of disappearing among the younger generation of speakers. In Sweden, for instance, the younger generation frequently make use of the Swedish phrase *Jag lovar* ‘I promise’.

6. Language Attrition and Codeswitching

The fact that many original words and meanings are being lost in the diaspora is due to the imperfect learning of the language by younger speakers and the lack of planning on the part of the older generation as to how to pass on the language to the younger generation. I shall illustrate this by two concrete examples.

The native verb *mṭāwēle*, which was used in many villages in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn with the sense of ‘to grill’, has been almost entirely replaced by the Arabic loanword *mšāwēle* in the diaspora or by the mixed Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo and Swedish phrase *səmle grilla*, which literally means ‘he did the grill’.

Another example is as follows. Once I was in a lift and somebody told me to press the button by saying *səm trycka!*, which consists of Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo *səm* ‘do, make’ and Swedish *trycka* ‘press’. The phrase could easily be expressed by the Ṣūrayt/Ṭūrōyo phrase *dəš ‘al u-zra’lo* ‘press the button!’

The younger generation uses codeswitching, which is, of course, very common among bilinguals. They begin a conversation in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo and then they suddenly switch over to Swedish for various reasons. This is partly because the words required in the conversation are lacking in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo or they have not mastered them.

7. Phonology and Hypercorrection

The previous discussion concerned changes relating to the vocabulary of the language. There has also been an important change in phonology in the diaspora. Many of the children born in the diaspora pronounce the interdentalals /t/ [θ] and /d/ [ð] as [s] and [z]. For example, *qrīto* ‘a village’ is pronounced [qrīso], and ‘ēdo (m.) ‘a feast’ [ʔēzo]. The latter coincides with ‘ēzo (f.) ‘a she-goat’.

A shift from interdentalals to sibilants is not a recent phenomenon among the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers. The dialects of two villages, namely Bēquyōno and Dayro du-şlībo, had undergone this shift long ago. Interestingly, in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn today the shift in question has spread to the dialects of other villages. There is a phonetic motivation behind the changes *t* > *s* and *d* > *z*, in that it is easier to articulate *s* and *z* than the original interdental fricatives *t* and *d*. The phenomenon is also known from Mlaḥsô and some dialects in (NENA). The same is true in many Arabic dialects.

When some Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo speakers try to correct their pronunciation, they create hypercorrections. They pronounce interdentalals where sibilants are correct. For example the correct word for ‘a bishop’, *hasyo*, becomes instead [haθyo].

8. Bilingualism, Multilingualism and the Future

Many among the younger generation grow up as bilingual or multilingual. The younger generation born in the diaspora are not normally familiar with a large part of the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo vocabulary that was originally used in Ṭūr ‘Abdīn. All the younger generation in the diaspora normally speak the national language

with each other. They speak Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo with their parents, relatives and elderly people.

Many of the younger Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo generation have difficulties in making themselves understood in Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo. This is a gradual process, but eventually the younger generation will lose so much of the language that they will inevitably shift entirely to the national language. This situation is, of course, a common phenomenon in minority groups, especially with minority groups of stateless immigrants.

Fishman (1996) writes about a story told by John MacNamara, who studied Irish all his childhood in school. He was scolded one day when he was buying sweets by the woman who ran the shop. He began speaking English to his sister and the woman asked him why he did not speak Irish with her. When they came out, his sister asked him: ‘Is Irish really for talking?’ It did not occur to them that Irish was for talking. They considered it rather to be a school subject. This is also what is happening among the Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo-speaking younger generation. It is no longer natural for them to speak Şūrayt/Ṭūrōyo among each other, despite the efforts to teach the language in schools. This confirms the view of Fishman (1996, 79) that a real—not institutional—social space has to be created for a language to survive.

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