An Ethnic Language and Culture without a Safe Enclave: A Socio-cultural Perspective

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Abstract: *The Sabean Mandaeans are the only minority group in Iraq 'without a safe enclave'. They are a religious ethnic group deeply rooted in the history of Mesopotamia whose existence dates back to around 2000 years. This study investigates the status of Mandaic among the Sabean Mandaeans of Baghdad and explores the cultural aspects they preserve. The researchers hypothesise that (1) Mandaic has been abandoned a long time ago, but (2) they have managed to keep alive some elements of their cultural and religious identity. A sample of 115 participants responded to a questionnaire which was preceded by a focus group interviews. Interviews were also undertaken with four participants to verify and enrich the data obtained from the questionnaire. Results show that the Sabean Mandaeans of Baghdad lack proficiency in their heritage language and that Mandaic retains ritual use while Arabic is their first language. However, Mandaeans have preserved many cultural elements, such as religious rituals, social, ethnic and religious festivals and celebrations, and family relations.*

Keywords: cultural preservation, Iraq, language loss, Mandaic, Sabean Mandaeans

1. Introduction

The study of language maintenance and language shift (LMLS) focuses on minorities in two contexts, namely, immigrant minority languages and territorial minority languages (Pauwels 2016). While recent studies normally shed light on immigrant groups who left their countries seeking refuge and freedom or advancement of their economic and social life in the 20th century, the Sabean Mandaeans are a religious ethnic group deeply rooted in the history of Mesopotamia whose existence dates back to around 2000 years. Their language, Mandaic (or Neo-Mandaic), was the most common language in the Middle East in the pre-Islamic era (Arnold 2000). Mandaic is neither considered an immigrant language nor could it be considered a territorial minority language because the Sabean Mandaeans are identified as the only minority group in Iraq 'without a safe enclave' (Deutsch 2007).

The contact between Mandaic and Arabic and their cultures has been

conducive to results favourable to Arabic (Arnold 2000; Häberl 2009, 2013). However, the Mandaean culture, although in contact with the Arabic one, could have another status. This study investigates the status of Mandaic among the Sabean Mandaeans of Baghdad and explores the cultural elements they have preserved. The researchers hypothesise that (1) Mandaic has been abandoned for a long time, and (2) despite language loss the Sabean Mandaeans have managed to keep alive their cultural and religious identity that distinguish them from other ethnic groups in the country. As a start, we intend to give an account of who the Sabean Mandaeans are. This background information encompasses a brief presentation of the scholarly views on their religion, origin, history, and language.

Who are the Sabean Mandaeans?
The Sabean Mandaeans are indigenous ethnic and religious people in Iraq. Their religion, Mandaean(ism), developed from Sumerianism (Al-Majidi 1997) as one of the oldest monotheistic religions in the Middle East that follows the teachings of John the Baptist (Abadirad 2013). According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2017), the Mandaeans viewed Jesus as a false messiah but revered John the Baptist, who performed miracles of healing through baptism. They have several books, such as the Ginza Rba (the Great Treasure), a cosmological treatise; the Book of John, describing the activities of John the Baptist; the Book of the Zodiac, a collection of magical and astrological texts; and the Baptism of Hibil Ziwa, describing the purification of the heavenly saviour of the Mandaeans.

The origin of the Sabean Mandaeans is a controversial issue. It is argued that they originated from the Levant area, i.e. Palestine, (Buckely 2002; Günduz 1994). However, other views oppose the theory of Palestinian origin of Mandaeans, favouring an origin of Mesopotamia, likely in the late second or early third century A.D. The basis of their arguments is the dependence of Mandaean legends upon both Jewish and Christian traditions (Lupieri 2008; Ymauchi 1970).

The presence of the Sabean Mandaeans in the region dates back to a period before the advent of Islam (Häberl 2013). Their numbers decreased gradually because they faced several persecutions and other discrimination acts at the hands of Sassanians in 273 A.D. (Mandaean Associations Union 2009). During the Sassanian rule, the evidence of existential Mandaean religion was not recorded in the history and had faded till the seventh century (Buckely 2002). When the Muslim Arabs took over, the Mandaeans had the status of 'the people of the book' and they showed tolerance to Mandaeans'. In that period, the Mandaeans appear to succeed, for religion flourishes, with intense activity. Mandaean texts are collected, compared, and consolidated as conscientious leaders among the priestly copyists exert themselves to weed out local variations in ritual texts'(Buckely 2002:5).

In the 1830s, the Mandaeans who resided in the areas of Iraq and Iran were afflicted with a great plague. Cholera epidemic spread wide among the Mandaean community and caused many deaths of their priests and decreased largely the number of the Mandaean population to 1,500 (Smith 2016). Due to the absence of any official census, the exact number of the population is not clear. The

International Religious Freedom Report (2014:3) reports that about 1,000-2,000 remain in the country, mainly in southern Iraq with small groups in Kurdistan and Baghdad. However, other resources report that currently there are around five thousand due to continued persecution and forced mass relocation and assimilation (Assyrian International News Agency 2016; Mandaean Associations Union2009). As of late, thousands of Mandaeans have been departing Iraq mainly to Australia, the USA, Canada, Germany, and the UK. Over 4,000 Sabean Mandaeans are now registered with UNHCR in the Middle East and Turkey (A. Tyler, personal communication, September 2017).

The Sabean Mandaeans used to speak Mandaic which refers to the 'Eastern Aramaic dialect' (Smith 2016) of the last remaining non-Christian Gnostics, the Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran (Müller-Kessler 2012). The religious significance of Mandaic stems from being a dialect of the Aramaic language which was the primary language of Palestine in Jesus' day (Tresham 2009), and which is argued to be the language of John the Baptist. Although Aramaic was the dominant language in the Middle East for many centuries, it lost its leading role due to the rise and spread of Islam. Nowadays, various western and eastern dialects of the Aramaic language survived only in the three mountainous Syrian villages of Ma^{c}lu:la, Bakh^{c}a and Jab^{c}adi:n (Arnold 2000:347).

2. Review of literature

Although minority language policies are absent in Iraq (Yaseen and Shakir 2016) and the Arab world at large, LMLS research in this region and in other parts of the world, where heritage language (HL) policies are enforced, has shown similar results. Sociolinguistic research around the world showed one consistent finding which is 'the existence of intergroup or interethnic differences in maintenance or shift rates'(Pauwels 2016:100). For example, Assyrian Iraqis (Al-Obaidi 2013) proved to maintain their HL more than the Assyrian Jordanians (Al-Refa'i2013). In the same vein, British and New Zealander Arabs (Al-Sahafi 2015; Jamai 2008) have had more disposition to maintain Arabic than their American counterparts (Dweik 1992).

The idea that 'what begins as the language of social and economic mobility ends, within three generations or so, as the language of the crib as well, even in democratic and pluralism-permitting contexts'(Fishman 1989:206) indicates the inevitable result of language shift whereby a foreign language turns to be a native one within three or four generations (Fishman 1989; Holmes, Roberts, Verivaki, and Aipolo 1993). Although this has been held valid for many speech communities and ethnic groups, there are some exceptions (e.g. Dweik and Nofal 2013; Al-Obaidi 2013). The study of LMLS, as Fishman (1966:424) has suggested, involves three major topical subdivisions. Fishman's divisions have become the roadmap for researchers in LMLS as a field of inquiry. These subdivisions are

1. the habitual use of language at more than one point in time or space under conditions of intergroup contact,

2. the antecedent, concurrent or consequent psychological, social and cultural processes and their relationship to stability or change in habitual language use, and

3. the behavior toward language in the contact setting, including directed maintenance or shift efforts.

Fishman (1966:424)

While the first division scrutinizes the place, topic, context and interactants or as Fishman puts it 'domain of language use', the second pays attention to the attitudes towards languages available in the community, i.e. the heritage language and the mainstream language. The third division examines the social, political, economic factors, among others, that influence the people choice towards the continuity of language transmission or otherwise.

As far as language is considered an integral part of culture, and as cultural processes and norms are of great value to LMLS, it is worth noting the cultural aspects that an ethnic community maintains/loses in contact settings. Newmark (1988:95) discusses five categories of cultural elements. They were: (1) ecological: flora, fauna, winds, plains, and hills; (2) material culture (artefacts):(a) food,(b) clothes, (c) houses and towns, and (d) transport; (3) social culture-work and leisure, social events, and folklore; (4) Organizations, customs, activities, procedures, concepts: (a) political and administrative, (b) religion, and(c) artistic; and (5) Gestures, habits, and greetings. These cultural elements are considered when the researchers designed the questionnaire items of the culture section.

Empirically, various ethnic groups and speech communities have been the focus of sociolinguistic research in Iraq, e.g. Kurds (Abdulsalam 2014; Öpengin 2012; Çağlayan 2014), Chaldo-Assyrians (Al-Obaidi 2013) and Turkmen (Al-Rahal 2014). Many studies focused on preserving cultural aspects as well, e.g. (Abdelkhaliq 2014; Dweik 2000). Below is a glimpse sociolinguistic research conducted in Iraq.

Abdulsalam (2014) investigated LMLS among the Kurds of Mosul. The study used interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire that was distributed to 100 participants. Results showed that the Kurds of Mosul had positive attitudes towards both Kurdish and Arabic and they have maintained their language, highlighting the role of family and home in language maintenance.

Al-Obaidi (2013) investigated LM within the Chaldo-Assyrian community in Baghdad. Data were collected by a community profile, interviews, and a questionnaire was distributed to 135 participants. Results showed that the Neo-Aramaic language was maintained within the community and used in a variety of domains, i.e. home, religious settings and in their inner speech. Neo-Aramaic is diglossically used in different domains such as the neighbourhood, workplace, and the media.

Al-Rahal (2014) investigated the language situation among the Turkmen in Baghdad. She explored language domains of Turkmen and Arabic, language attitudes towards both languages, and the factors that influenced LMLS. A sample of 100 participants was chosen on grounds of convenience. The instruments used

were open-ended interviews and a sociolinguistic questionnaire. Results revealed that Turkmen is still an active language within the community. They used it in several domains especially with family members and at home. Results also showed that a diglossic relationship between Turkmen and Arabic existed where each language was used in different domains such as home, neighbourhood, workplace, school, and the media.

All in all, Studies focusing on minority groups investigated the linguistic status within these groups, also, other studies focussed on the Mandaean groups in Iran. As there is a dearth of studies focusing on the linguistic and cultural statuses of the Mandaean group in Baghdad, Iraq, the current study is an attempt to fill this gap. (We here adhere to Newmark's (1988:6) definition of culture as 'the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression.')

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research involves quantitative measures of the questionnaire responses along with a qualitative analysis of the data obtained from the unstructured interviews with community members. The rationale behind using a mixed methods approach is of twofold. First, using a qualitative method allows for cross-checking the results obtained by the questionnaire for the purpose of achieving methodological triangulation. Second, the utilization of quantitative and qualitative measures alleviates the potential pitfalls of each method.

A total of 115 participants took part in the research. Firstly, five participants served as interviewees in the Focus Group Interview (FGI) which aimed at deciding on the questionnaire items, and gaining a sociocultural bird's eye view of the community as well. Secondly, an anonymous questionnaire was designed and distributed to 130 participants (printed and online). However, 15 have been excluded because they live elsewhere. Thirdly, online interviews were undertaken with four community members (who showed interest while responding to the questionnaire) to triangulate and extend the responses elicited from the questionnaire (See Figure 1). Questionnaire respondents were anonymous and pseudonyms were used to achieve the confidentiality for those who participated in the interviews. Consents were also taken from participants in the form of 'accepting to take part in the study'.

Figure 1.Data collection
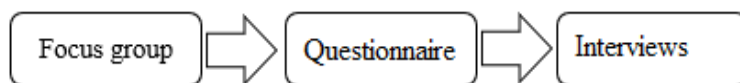
Participants were primarily approached using social networks. The 'friend-of-a-friend' technique (Milroy 1987) was used for distribution of the questionnaire. In addition to this, social media websites were also used, namely Facebook, duringthe course of distributing the online questionnaire. The researchers had the

questionnaire posted in close Mandaean groups. The sample comprised demographic variables including but not limited to age, gender, place of living, education, occupations, and marital status.

FGI, as a mechanism, is suitable to identify group beliefs and norms concerning a particular issue by capturing intra-group interaction (Bloor and Wood 2006). It is also useful as participants feel more comfortable to express themselves in groups (Barbour2008). The FGI, which aimed to develop ideas, and decide on the questionnaire items, was prepared in line with the research objectives. The FGI was carried out in Arabic with five participants for about 40 minutes.

The questionnaire was based on the data obtained from the FGI. It was also based on similar research conducted with similar groups in other regions (Dweik 2000; Fishman 1966; Al-Obaidi 2013). The questionnaire was prepared in Arabic and English and the participants opted for the Arabic version. The questionnaire was comprised of four sections. While the first section included information sheet and demographic characteristics of the participants, the second focused on self-identification and language proficiency in Mandaic and Arabic in terms of speaking, understanding, reading, and writing. The third section elicited information concerning language domains for both Mandaic and Arabic where the participants were asked to report on the language(s) they use in different places (e.g. home and work) with different people (e.g. siblings, children, and clerics). The last section focused on the preservation of different Mandaean cultural elements. In this section, Five-point Likert scale was used to represent the participant's opinions on the given cultural elements. Validity was achieved by having a panel of jurors commented on the form and content of the questionnaire. A test-retest technique was used to measure their liability of the questionnaire. Scores were relatively consistent.

The interviews were undertaken online (mainly on Messenger) and they lasted for 35 to 60 minutes. The interviews were undertaken in Arabic and (almost literally) translated into English. Data were transcribed and analysed using the qualitative analysis programme NVivo11. The interview guide was prepared in accordance with the questionnaire items, but also aimed at probing more details. The participants were encouraged to elaborate and give examples when answering the questions. One of the limitations was the fact that the interviewees were men because women did not show interest in the interviews. The findings of the current study are limited to the time, resources, instruments, and the sample of the study. They cannot be generalized beyond the sample. However, the current study opens up doors for further research focussing on the Mandaean communities in diaspora as huge numbers of Mandaeans have left Iraq for different countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and Sweden.

4. Results and discussion
4.1 Language proficiency and self-identification
Results reported inTable 1show that the vast majority of respondents are poor in the four Mandaic language skills. While half of them indicate their poor language

skills, only 3% reports being 'good' and 'very good' in Mandaic skills. A close look at the participants' age range could inform us that 17% of them are 60 years or older and 34 % others are between 40 and 59. This can be seen as an indicator that the Mandaic language transmission across generations has been abandoned for a long time. This is evident in the high percentage of low (or no) proficiency in the old generation of respondents. Conspicuously, if they had such a proficiency measure, it would be axiomatic to say that the language is not used in any domain of language use. However, to verify this and to make sure that the participants did not underrate their linguistic knowledge, we asked them about language use in different domains (i.e. in the home, neighbourhood, place of worship and rituals, school or university, media, and workplace) in the subsequent sub-section.

Table 1. Language proficiency in Mandaic and Arabic (%)

I can …	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Satisfactory	Poor	No Response
speak in Mandaic	0	1	2	2	46	50
understand spoken Mandaic	0	1	2	2	43	52
read Mandaic	6	0	3	3	48	40
write in Mandaic	6	0	3	3	49	40
speak in Arabic	100	0	0	0	0	0
understand spoken Arabic	100	0	0	0	0	0
read Arabic	93	4	3	0	0	0
write in Arabic	93	7	0	0	0	0

Regarding proficiency in Arabic, Table 1shows that the respondents report having a strong command of Arabic. All respondents are proficient in oral skills and93% has 'excellent' literacy skills in Arabic (reading and writing).The fact that none of them indicate 'poor' skills in Arabic reflects their educational background as only 13% of them attend 'up to high school' in the Iraqi mainstream educational system. Looking at the respondents' professional backgrounds, we can also see that the majority have white-collar jobs (e.g. lawyer, physician, and teacher) within the wider society. Thirty-two percent of them are blue-collar workers (e.g. artisan and butcher) or unemployed. Therefore, claiming high competency in Arabic in light of their educational and professional backgrounds indicates their 'linguistic cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1977; 2011),which is gained from the Iraqi wider culture, and through which they communicate and present themselves.

Results of the interviews show that Mandaic is claimed as one of the participants' languages, but they repeatedly state they have poor proficiency in it. Interestingly, their poor language skills are justified by (1) living in an Arabic

speaking country, (2) not having formal Mandaic education/schools, (3) learning ritual language, and exposing to Arabic even in the Mandi (place of worship).In Excerpt 1, IHM40 refers to his knowledge in Mandaic as "some" (line 1) and proceed to justify this poor proficiency indicating he is not the only one as 70% of the community do not speak the language (line 3). He explains that people know religious expressions (line 8). IHM40 seems confident of the percentage he provides as he repeats it three times in the interview. Other participants confirm this but with less positive degrees. For example, TM47 indicates that 'only 100 people can speak Mandaic and almost half of them are clerics.'

Excerpt 1. Language proficiency and language users

1 IHM40:	My mother tongue is Arabic. I know some Mandaic, and English.
2 Researcher:	Some Mandaic?
3 IHM40:	I want to clarify that 70 % of the Mandaeans do not speak Mandaic.
4	Mandaic is not used for communication or education.
5	It is only for rituals.
6	It is mostly used by clerics.
7	They receive intensive Mandaic courses to know it well.
8	Ordinary people know some religious expressions.

In lines 4 and 5, the participant refers to Mandaic as not used in the community and at line 6 he refers to clerics as the only language users. This theme is salient in the discourse across the interviews; the four participants raise this point repeatedly. Another low percentage in Mandaic is provided by HH28, in excerpt 2 below, noting that only 5-10% can read it. TM47 further comments on the clerics' knowledge in Mandaic that "although clerics know it [Mandaic] still their knowledge [of it] is limited to religious knowledge. "The limited knowledge of Mandaic among community members encouraged us to ask about the most common words that community members know. The interviewees provided several examples as presented in Table 2. It can be noted from the table that all these expressions are related to religion.

Table 2. The most common Mandaic expressions in the community

English Meaning	Mandaic Expression
In the names of the Ever-Living, the Great	ܥܕܬܐ ܥܠܠܘ ܔ ܝܟܘܟܘܒܩܟ
Baptism	ܥܟܬܝܟܘܗ
Charity	ܐܥܕܬܐ
Blessing, prayer	ܥܟܥܕܘ
Praise be to God	ܥܘܥܕܬܘ ܠܐܟ ܝܟܘܥܕܬܘ
In the name of the Ever-Living, the Great	ܥܟܘܩܘܥܟ ܔ ܥܠܠܘ ܥܕܬܐ
Ablution, preparation to pray	ܥܟܘܩܘܟܘ
Great, big	ܥܟܟ
Peace be upon you, a prayer to wish the other good health	ܥܨܗܘܟܝܟܘܣ ܝܟܠܘ
Small Eid (a Mandaean religious feast)	ܥܕܠܘܗ ܔ ܥܕܟܘܟܐ ܥܟ

There is consensus among the interviewees that Arabic is theirfirst language while Mandaic is the religious and ethnic language. They present themselves as "Sabean Mandaean speaking Arabic", "Iraqi Mandaean but speaker of Arabic", "Arabic speaker, learning Mandaic". HH28 provides a full description of his self-identification in Excerpt 2.HH28 highlights different identities, i.e. ethnic (Mandaean), religious (Sabean), national (Iraqi), and linguistic (Arabic speaker) identities (lines 4-6), each of which emerges according to the situation the participant experiences. However, at the end, he confirms his linguistic identity as "Arabic is my native language" (line 6) and he further generalises this to all Iraqis except the Kurds (line 7).

Excerpt 2. Language and self-identification

1	Researcher:	How do you identify?
2	HH28:	As an Iraqi
3	Researcher:	And in terms of language?
4	HH28:	An Iraqi, Arab or Iraqi Sabean or Iraqi Mandaean.
5		According to the context, if religious, I'm Sabean, if ethnic I'm
6		Mandaean, and in general, I'm an Arab. Arabic is my native language.
7		You know, Arabic is the language of all Iraqis except the Kurds.

When asked about parents' efforts to teach Mandaic to their children, HH28 highlights three points in Excerpt 3. First, while he indicates the Mandaeans' desire to teach the language to their children (line 2), their limited knowledge of it hinders this desire and transform it into symbolic use through some expressions (lines 2, 3 & 6). Second, the lack of linguistic resources available to community members as "few people", "number is limited" and "not all people" (line 3) and "5-10%" (line 5) know/read the language. Third, drawing upon his personal experience of learning French, HH28 makes a clear distinction between learning the language and using it (lines 8-10). In his view, the language needs to be used in order for people to identify themselves as speakers of it (lines 11-13).

Excerpt 3. Language efforts, knowledge and use

1Researcher:	Do people try to teach the language to their children?
2 HH28:	Yes, but few people know Mandaic,
3	the number is limited and not all people know it.
4	Clerics and many people read it,
5	but it's like 5-10% of the Mandaeans can read it.
6	Parents teach their children only limited amount of words.
7	The language needs to be used not only to be learned.
8	For example, personally I had studied French for six years,
9	but now I do not speak French and do not understand it
10	because I didn't use it
11	so, I do not consider it as one of the languages that I know,
12	and the same is true for Mandaic,
13	if they don't use it, then it isn't useful to learn some words.

Results related to language abilities in Mandaic indicate that Mandaic has no place in (Fishman 1991:88) typology of language endangerment as the worst scenario in the typology is stage 8 of the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) where "most vestigial users of Xish [minority language] are socially isolated old folks and Xish [minority language] needs to be re-assembled from their mouths and memories and taught to demographically unconcentrated adults". Results reported regarding proficiency in Mandaic suggest that the grandparent generation do not speak Mandaic, nor do people beyond child-bearing age speak it. Therefore, Mandaic will need to be documented from its speakers in other regions such as Iran (Häberl 2009) if the community and the Iraqi government wish to respond to language rights in the new Iraqi constitution and exert language revival efforts.

4.2 Language use and the future of Mandaic

Figure 3 indicates the percentages pertaining to Mandaic and Arabic language choice in different domains with a special focus on the home and place of worship domains. The charts show that interaction with different people in different settings takes place in Arabic. Such a result could verify the language proficiency results that Mandaic intergenerational transmission had been abandoned and the language is not used within the community as a means of communication. Rather, Mandaic is a heritage 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 2011) as 50% of participants claim to have the language in the demographic section of the questionnaire while they are not proficient in it.

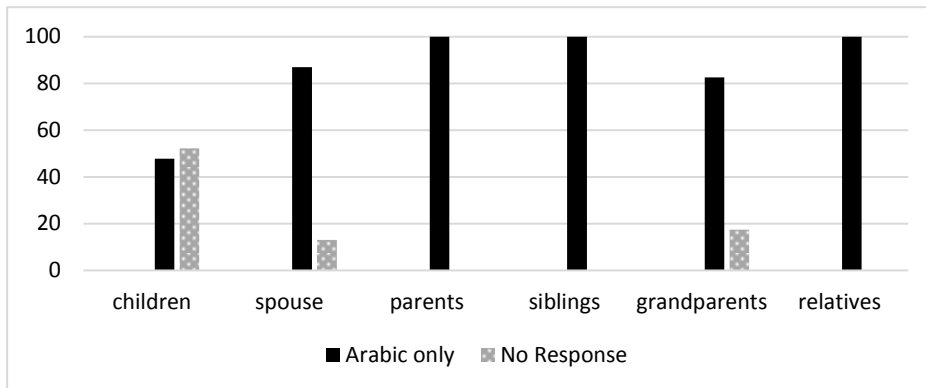Figure 2. Language use in the home among family members (%)

Figure **2** reports on language use with family members at home. Results show that Arabic is the language of communication at home. None of the respondents indicate using 'Mandaic only' or 'both Arabic and Mandaic'. About half of the respondents, 52%, give 'no response' answers when asked about the language they use with their children. Similarly, 13% and 17% give 'no response' when asked about language use with spouses and grandparents respectively. Giving such a response, especially when related to language use with children, spouses and grandparents, could be due to demographic characteristics of the respondents as 44% of them are single or engaged and 17% are above 60 years old.

All respondents indicate that they do not speak Mandaic at home which means that the language is lost and the prediction of (Häberl2009:XXVI) that "it will become extinct with the current generation of speakers" is borne out. These results are consistent with other ethnic communities in the Arab world, e.g. the Assyrians of Jordan (Al-Refa'i 2013) and the Kurds of Jordan (Al Kurdi 2015) where their ethnic languages are no longer used with family members at home. However, still there are some studies in the region where minority language speakers still use their languages, e.g. the Chechens in Jordan (Dweik 2000), the Indians in Yemen (Nofal 2011), and the Kurds in Iraq (Abdulsalam 2014).

Figure 3 presents language choice in different contexts. Results show the extent to which members of the Mandaean community rely on Arabic in all walks of life. Arabic is the language of communication in the neighbourhood, in the school and university and at the workplace. It is also their choice on the media (on Radio and TV) and at the place of worship apart from praying.

Figure 3. Language choice with Mandaeans in other domains (%)
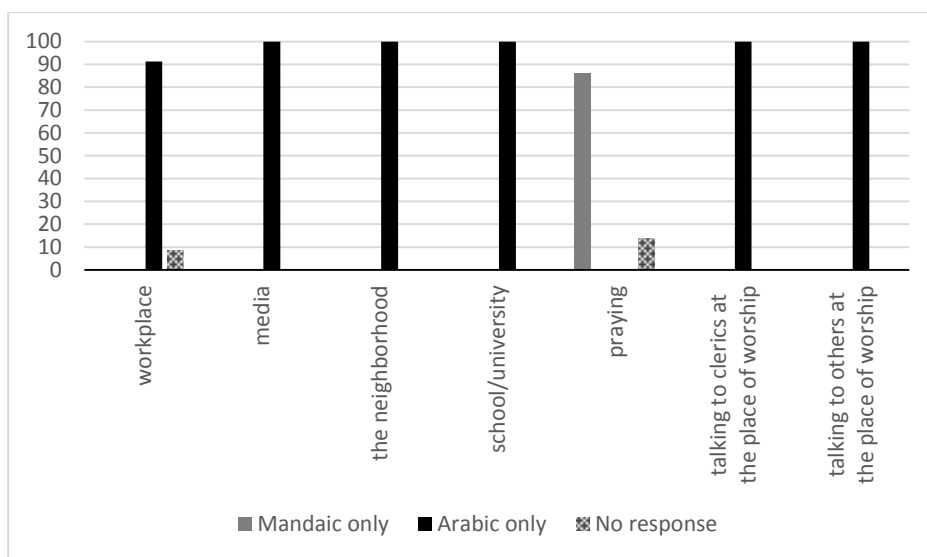
If we turn a blind eye to the reported language background in the questionnaire, language use results and demographic characteristics of the respondents reveal other issues at play. All respondents reported using Arabic in the neighbourhood because community members live in mixed neighbourhoods where the majority speak Arabic. Speaking the same language, Deutsch (2007) pointed out that the Mandaean community is a scattered minority without a safe enclave. The use of Arabic is salient at the workplace as the majority of respondents work in white-collar jobs. For traditional Mandaean professions, these professions do not require Mandaic. In addition to that Mandaic has no TV and radio channels, people usually watch Arabic and English shows, series and movies, and listen to the Iraqi local radio channels. Conspicuously, Mandaic has no place in the public sphere as school or university and education is delivered in Arabic and English. Thus, community members do not have access to Mandaic through education. The place of worship is supposed to be the domain that has some Mandaic use. However, it seems that the supposedly Mandaic domain is not

safe from the encroachment of Arabic. Results also showed that Mandaic is used only for rituals. Eighty-six percent indicated using it only when praying. Such a result corresponds with the encroachment of English into the Dutch 'sanctuary domains' in New Zealand, e.g. the Netherlands Society Christchurch Inc,(Kuiper 2005).

Results of the interviews confirm those of the questionnaire. The only domain where Mandaic is used is the Mandi. However, Mandaic is not used for communication, but for rituals. The interviewees elaborate on the activities in which they use Mandaic. Excerpt 4presents some of the activities in which Mandaic is used.

Excerpt 4. Language use in the Mandi

1 TM47:	In worship, we use our language [Mandaic] only in rituals.
2	For example, in 'Sabbaga' [Baptism], praying for the dead people,
3	giving condolences and alms, in any daily rituals, during festivals
4	and occasions, and many other things.
5 Researcher:	Do people speak Mandaic among themselves in these activities?
6 TM47:	No, Sabean Iraqis Speak Arabic and now the younger generation
7	starts to speak the language of the country in where they live […]
8	Dutch in the Netherlands and in Swedish in Sweden German in
9	Germany, and English in Britain, the United States, and Australia.
10	

In Excerpt 4, TM47 elaborates on the activities where Mandaic is used. Mandaic language use is totally linked to religious practices such as baptizing, supplicating, giving condolences and alms, daily prayers, and religious occasions (lines 2-4). However, Arabic is used in regular communication among people. TM47 refers to the Mandaeans in the diaspora as starting to use the mainstream languages of the countries where they live (lines 7-9). This result suggests that Mandaic retains ritual rather than communicative use. Seemingly, Semitic languages have such a trend as old Hebrew is only used in the Classical Testament and Syriac is used in prayers only among Assyrians (Al-Refa'i 2013).When the interviewees are asked about the future of Mandaic in Iraq, they provide two views. TM47 and OT39 expect a better future. In Excerpt 5, TM47 indicates that community members are exerting efforts to keep Mandaic alive (line 2). Line 4 presents the fact upon which he builds his positive view of the Mandaic future as the newly released Iraqi constitution recognises minority languages.

Excerpt 5. The TM47's positive view of the future of Mandaic in Iraq

1 Researcher:	In your opinion what is the future of Mandaic in Iraq?
2 TM47:	We're working on it. We're teaching it to people in cooperation
3	with other Mandaeans in diaspora and we'll do a good job.
4	The new constitution recognises our language and we'll work to
5	get Mandaic back home

Conversely, IHM40 and HH28 present Mandaic as having no future in Iraq.

In Excerpt 6, HH28 elaborates on the future of Mandaeans and their language, beginning with migration (line 2) and ending with the continuity of migration (line 5) among the young people (line 4). Giving estimates, he expects that Mandaeans and their language will disappear (lines 5 & 6). In fact, his argument that "migration continues" is documented in UNHCR records as over 4,000 Sabean Mandaeans are now registered with UNHCR in the transit countries and waiting to be resettled in the host countries (A. Tyler, personal communication, September 2017).

Excerpt 6. HH28's negative view of the future of Mandaic in Iraq

1 Researcher:	In your opinion what is the future of Mandaic in Iraq?
2 HH28:	Most of the Mandaeans left Iraq after 2003.
3	The remaining population is less than 5,000 out of 60,000
4	most of them are the elderly, over 50.
5	Migration continues, I think within a decade or two or three
6	there won't be any Mandaean in Iraq.

Results of language use confirm that the Sabean Mandaeans of Baghdad have shifted to Arabic and lost Mandaic as reported by Häberl (2009) and the Mandaean Associations Union (2009). These results correspond to Fishman's (1989:206) dictum that 'what begins as the language of social and economic mobility ends, within three generations or so, as the language of the crib' as all respondents claim Arabic as their first language. Results show that the Mandaeans are unlike their Turkmen (Al-Rahal 2014) and Kurds (Abdulsalam 2014) and Chaldo-Assyrians (Al-Obaidi 2013) counterparts who have maintained their ethnic languages in Iraq.

4.3 Preservation of culture
Results of the interviews show that the Mandaeans feel that the Mandaean culture is the only thing that distinguishes them from other people. Their religious practices which have been inherited and preserved for thousands of years are what make them Mandaeans, what unify them and what make them proud. They also believe that they have the same ancestral stock, and share the same language which is a distinguished language, and it is the origin of other languages in the region. The most prevailing cultural aspects in the interview data were akin to religion. Again, interviews data confirm the results of the questionnaire, but also provide several examples of each cultural aspect as follows:

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Table 3 presents the percentages of the respondent's opinions on the given cultural elements. Results show that there is a consensus that these cultural elements are preserved. Religious rituals, social celebration, and food are unanimously preserved. Also, 99% of the respondents indicate preserving their Mandaean habits, customs, and traditions. Although Mandaic festivals and family relations, music and songs have less agreement, they still have high percentages. All these cultural aspects are related to religion in a way or another. However, 45% of participants are sceptical about the idea that traditional Mandaean professions are preserved. Seemingly, the Mandaeans have preserved the cultural elements that relate to religion. The disagreement on preserving professions could be justified by the fact that 77% of the participants hold academic qualifications and work in white-collar jobs. These results suggest that members of the community value their culture and acknowledge their Mandaean identity. However, their religious beliefs and rituals are what make them Mandaeans.

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Table 3. Respondents' opinions on the preservation of the given cultural elements (%)

Cultural aspect	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Clothes	92	5	0	3	0	100
Food	95	5	0	0	0	100
Habits, customs, and traditions	99	1	0	0	0	100
Religious rituals	100	0	0	0	0	100
Family relations	86	7	0	6	1	100
Music and songs	78	14	0	3	5	100

Social celebrations	100	0	0	0	0	100
Festivals	81	12	0	7	0	100
Professions	37	18	0	14	31	100

Religious rituals: the interviewees point out that all rituals are preserved. These rituals include baptism, ablution and doing prayers three times a day, supplications and fasting, attending Al-Sharea House. They also highlight using running water (e.g. the Tigris) for religious purposes. The Mandaeans live near rivers and build the Mandi close to it. They use running water for Baptism, Rashama (ablution), and marriage celebration. Additionally, Mandaeans slaughter meat according to the Mandaean teachings which is comparable to the Muslims' Halal.

Clothes: the Mandaeans preserve their white traditional dress called 'Rasta'. They wear Rasta for ritual purposes such as prayers and baptism. Mandaean men and women cover their heads with white turbans.

Celebrations, festivals, and food: the interviewees link food to Mandaean celebrations and festivals. They point out that Mandaeans prepare certain meals on certain celebrations. For example, they mash wheat with seven kinds of grains (called hari:sah) on a celebration called 'abu alhari:s'. Another occasion is 'abu alful' also known as 'daqelful'. On this occasion, they prepare traditional meal called 'almadqu:qah'. Mandaeans are famous for the 'Sabean chicken' which has a special way of cooking, adding to it a certain kind of spices called 'Sabean spices'. Furthermore, 'altimanwalrawb' [rice and yoghurt] is a popular Iraqi Sabean dish. Mandaeans are also famous for eating fish and the 'stuffed duck'.

Habits, customs, and traditions: the interviewees note that clerics have long beards. Mandaean marriage is one of the repeatedly mentioned traditions. They hold marriage celebrations on the riverbank of 'Dijla' (the Tigris) and use candles, mirror, and fish. Their marriage is held on Sundays. There is another popular Sabean tradition called 'elkarra:s' in which Sabeans stay at home for 36 hours and do not socialize with people outside the household.

Family relations: the interviewees confirm that Mandaeans maintain strong relations within their families and community. They note that "Sabeans marry only Sabeans". To them, this indicates the strong family relations and there is a famous slogan saying "Sabean Mandaeans are one family".

Professions: the interviewees report that the Mandaeans are famous for working in gold and silver industry. HH28 note that "Sabeans work in jewellery, even the educated Sabeans work in it." Seemingly, Mandaeans do not have many traditional professions or this might be the only preserved one. This could justify that 45% of the questionnaire respondents disagree with the preservation of traditional professions.

Music: the interviewees emphasise that Mandaean songs and music are preserved. They also point out that one of their traditional music, 'tu:r elsabby'

[Sabean melody], is popular in Iraq and many Iraqi singers sing it.

5. Conclusion

This article has examined the status of the Mandaic language andits culture within the Sabean Mandaean community in Baghdad. Our participants have reported poor Mandaic language skills and strong command in Arabic. Even our elderly participants have reported 'low' or 'no' proficiency in Mandaic, which indicates that the Mandaic language intergenerational transmission has been abandoned for a long time. The community use Arabic in all walks of life. Arabic is the language of communication in the neighbourhood, in the school and university and at the workplace. It is also their choice on the media, and at the place of worship apart from rituals.

Identification seems to be a complex issue. Despite having limited Mandaic skills, reporting Arabic as their first language and identifying as 'Arabic speaker', there is a general trend to claim Mandaic as one of the participants' languages. Claiming Mandaic is mirrored through religion as it is their 'religious and ethnic language'. Language turns to be a 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 2011) rather than a 'linguistic capital'. For them, identification is multifaceted. They foreground their ethnic (Mandaean), religious (Sabean), national (Iraqi), or linguistic (Arabic speaker) identities according to the situation the participant experiences. The future of Mandaic in Iraq is blurred. While some hold positive views of the future as the newly released Iraqi constitution recognises minority languages, others believe that the language will disappear due to the continuous migration of Mandaeans.

To sum up, the researchers' hypotheses are borne out. The Sabean Mandaeans of Baghdad lack proficiency in Mandaic and although Mandaic retains ritual use and is connected to religious practices only, the Mandaeans have preserved many cultural elements, such as religious rituals, social celebrations i.e. marriage, ethnic or national festivals and family relations, which are associated with religion. The current study highlights the need for further research focusing on the Sabian Mandaean communities in diaspora and Mandaic heritage language education in Iraq and other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and Sweden

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