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## The Influence of Language Proficiency on Assimilation of Kurdish Immigrants into American Society

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The Influence of Language Proficiency on Assimilation of Kurdish Immigrants  
into American Society

A Thesis Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty of  
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By

Zakaria Muhammed Amin

In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in  
Teaching English as a Second Language

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To  
*The memory of my Mom*

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study was to identify what factors may contribute to the adaptation of Kurdish immigrant adults into American society. Of particular interest is whether an immigrant's age and whether knowledge of English are major influences. Previous research indicated that these two may be factors, but no research on the Kurdish community was conducted. This study attempts to fill that gap and find out if the Kurdish community follows patterns seen with other groups. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data via interviews. Participants consisted of 20 Kurdish immigrant adults (ages 18-70) of families in Fargo-Moorhead Area. Interviews were recorded in two ways: through notes taken by the interviewer and with a digital recorder. After collecting the data, interviews were partially transcribed, and the qualitative data analyzed via coding, while the quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive statistics. The research revealed eight factors that contributed to adaptation of Kurdish immigrants into American society, including five that agree with work by previous researchers. Language plays a significant role in assimilation among Kurdish immigrants. Those who are fluent in English are well accepted in the community. Younger Kurdish immigrants learn English easier and quicker, and as a result they adapt quicker. My study also found that age and gender offset the number of years in country as a factor. Finally, the weather arose as a factor that has not been discussed in previous literature.

Keywords: Assimilation, Adaptation, Integration, Kurdish immigrants, Language proficiency

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The United States of America (USA) is the country of immigrants who came from many different backgrounds all over the world. Immigrants to the USA face abundant challenges as they struggle to assimilate into American society while trying to retain their cultural and ethnic identity (McDonald & Balgopal, 1998). First-generation immigrants are concerned about their children's losing their original identity, while the second generation blames their parents and older relatives for not integrating in to American society (Sheyholislami & Sharifi, 2016). Although immigrants are provided with interpretation services in many places like schools, hospitals, courts, and other places, English language competency remains as a main issue for many immigrants to fulfill their daily tasks and in assimilating in to host country society (Kawamura & Goza, 2013). As a Kurdish community member, I have noticed Kurdish immigrants are facing many issues trying to get assimilated into American society due to different factors, including language proficiency.

Kurds have constituted a large community in Fargo-Moorhead area, and their numbers are on the rise. Kurdish refugees from Iraq moved to the United States in 1975 and 1976 after the failure of their attempt to achieve autonomy from the Iraqi government, and another wave of Kurdish refugees arrived in the United States just after the Persian Gulf War in 1991 (Robson, 1996). The number of refugees coming to the country became fewer until 2003 when the USA invaded Iraq. A few hundred Kurds who worked for U.S forces as interpreters were given special immigrant visas and admitted to

the United States. I was one of those interpreters. I worked for almost eight years and was promised to get special immigration status after the majority of U.S forces left Iraq in 2013. It took me over two years until I received the visa and got resettled in the Fargo-Moorhead area.

When I arrived in the area in 2015, I noticed some people behaving like they were in the country where they came from. They only had social relations with the families who were originally from the same place. I noticed they had no idea about many basic and necessary principles that every single person in America should know about. For example, they had no clue about the banking system and tax system. Many of them were either jobless or did not have good jobs. (Those people are still many in Fargo-Moorhead area especially among Kurds coming from Iraq). On the other hand, I also observed that some others participated in community events, had good jobs, and attended schools.

After noticing some Kurdish immigrant families are well adapted while some others are not, I decided to start studying this issue and tried to explain what factors contribute to the adaptation of Kurdish Immigrant adults into American society and to what extent the lack of English knowledge might be the reason behind the lack of integration.

### **Literature Review**

Sociologically, assimilation has been defined as “a multidimensional process of boundary reduction and brokering which blurs or dissolves an ethnic distinction and the social and cultural differences and identities associated with it” (Alba & Nee, 2009).

“Over time the term has conflated various empirical descriptions and normative prescriptions to make sense of the incorporation of “ethnic” difference in American life.

The concept is used to refer at once to cultural adaptations, economic mobility, patterns of settlement and intermarriage, and social acceptance into a changing native mainstream.” (Rumbaut, 2015, p. 82)

**English language proficiency, stress, and adaptation.** Knowing the host country’s language, in general, is believed to play a significant role in helping the immigrants integrate into the society they live in (Amit & Bar-Lev, 2015). In their study, Lueck and Wilson (2010) reveal how English language proficiency helps immigrants reduce their stress. Part of the study was to examine whether a linguistic construct predicts acculturative stress in a nationally representative sample of Asian immigrants and Asian Americans. The participants in this study were 2,095 Asians who took part in face-to-face interviews. The results showed that English language incapability was one of the strongest predictors of acculturative stress. “Examination for English language proficiency shows that for every unit increase in the ELP score, the odds of acculturative stress are estimated to decrease by 13% (a factor of 0.887) on average and to decrease between 7.3% and 15% with 95% confidence.” (Lueck & Wilson, 2010, p. 53)

Based on their study findings, the researchers realized that the inability to speak English can negatively affect the adjustment of Asian immigrants, which leads to higher levels of acculturative stress. The researchers also indicated that those who are bilingual and can speak native and host languages fluently have less stress than those who don’t. “Since acculturation is a process by which individuals incorporate beliefs, behaviors, identities (including linguistic identities) and values from the new host culture into the context of beliefs, behaviors, identities and values from the native culture, it is important to also pay attention to the languages that are associated with these cultures” (Lueck &

Wilson, 2010, p. 53). I determined to find out if the English language proficiency has any influences on the adjustment of Kurdish immigrants. While the existing research provides some ideas regarding the importance of English language factor on adjustment, no one has researched the Kurdish community. Studies have focused on Asian communities in the U.S. (Lueck & Wilson, 2010; Hou & Beiser, 2006), but none has studied the recent Kurdish immigrant population. Because there are differences related to ethnicities, studies need to be conducted on the Kurds.

**Factors that influence language proficiency.** Since countries like the United States and Canada traditionally have received many refugees annually on humanitarian grounds rather than on the basis of selection; some of the refugees do not speak English or the language of the host countries (Bruno, 2014). Proficiency in the language or languages of the receiving society has profound impacts on economic and social integration as well as on newcomer well-being (Hou & Beiser, 2006). Hou and Beiser (2006) conducted a ten-year study on English language proficiency among 608 Asian people who moved to Canada in three different time periods. The research discovered that pre-immigration achievements in professional and academic perspective were the major factors determining English-language proficiency during the early years of resettlement, but post-migration opportunities and incentives became increasingly important over time. For my study, I decided to include people from the Kurdish community who moved to U.S. in different times and want to find out how long it took them improve their language. I also want to include questions on how pre-immigration education has affected their language proficiency.

Age was another factor that played a crucial role in learning the host language. Hou and Beiser (2006) deduced from the study results that older refugees not only had poorer pre-migration levels of English than their younger counterparts, they also tended to be slower to acquire English after immigration. The older people who had little English proficiency took advantage of using their mother tongue and relied on their youth and children to fulfill their tasks. As a result, those older people were not able to get integrated in to the host country's society. Without language, one can never truly enter a culture (Hou & Beiser, 2006, p. 159).

In the study, *The Effect of Age on Second Language Acquisition in Older Adults*, C. Major (2014) examined cognitive, affective, and demographic factors affecting language learning. The participants for this study were 38 native Spanish speakers (35 female, 3 male) in four groups based on age of acquisition: 10-19 (n=8), 20-29 (n=9), 30-39 (n=13), and over 40 (n=8). Participants in the study included 22 from Mexico, six from Peru, four from Chile, two from Panama, two from Argentina, one from El Salvador, and one from Honduras. The participants completed a questionnaire and answered a series of questions concerning experiential, affective, and cognitive features. As a part of stimuli, three tasks were also assigned including working memory task, switch task, and elicited imitation.

The researcher ran a one-way ANOVA with elicited imitation (EI) scores as the dependent variable. Elicited imitation (EI) is a testing procedure that involves the subjects hearing a sentence and attempting to repeat what they have heard. It has been used extensively in three different areas: child language research, neuropsychological research, and L2 research (Erlam, 2009). The results of the study showed there was a

sharp drop in proficiency scores around the age of onset of acquisition (AOA) of 19 or 20; the older AOA groups (20-29, 30-39, and 40+) gradually decline.

C. Major (2014) suggests that the most decisive factor for learning a new language in a host country is the age of arrival. Isphording (2015) supports the conclusion that the ability to learn new languages declines strongly with age. Meanwhile, Isphording (2015) believes immigrants arriving in the host country before adolescence almost effortlessly acquire the host country language at a proficiency level that equals or almost equals that of native speakers. Immigrants arriving at an older age face greater difficulty in acquiring a new language.

According to Isphording (2015), linguistic distance—the degree of dissimilarity between two languages in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and other elements of a language—is another important source of variation in language acquisition. The greater the linguistic distance between the immigrant’s native language and the host country language, the higher the costs associated with reaching a certain level of language proficiency (Isphording, 2015). The researcher believes that the impact of the interaction between linguistic distance and age at arrival on language acquisition varies with age on arrival. “Young arriving immigrants do not face additional penalties in their language acquisition as a result of greater linguistic distance. However, for immigrants arriving in their old ages, the combined impact of large linguistic distance and late arrival is considerable” (Isphording, 2015, p. 3). In my study, I will try to find out if age of Kurdish immigrants has any influences on learning English language, and I also want to know what the most difficult things for Kurdish immigrants about learning English have been.

**Lack of language proficiency causes alienation.** English language proficiency helps immigrants get better accepted in host communities. In their study, Ali and Alam (2015) examined adaptation of the immigrants in their new intercultural setting in Toronto, Canada, as well as the role of English language in their lives.

A Likert-scale survey was distributed among 64 participants who are from different countries: Syria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Palestine and Myanmar. In addition, semi-structured interviews were also conducted, and open-ended questionnaires were distributed among the participants.

It was discovered from the research that Canadian immigrants initially feel alienated and face numerous difficulties to adjust their lives in new and unfamiliar surroundings and one of the main reasons for that is lack of English proficiency. The study also indicated that the immigrants who are well educated and fluent in English are more involved and accepted in the Canadian society.

On the other hand, Akresh, Massey and Frank (2014), have a different opinion on language effect upon assimilation of immigrants. The researchers argue that focusing on condition for both social and cultural assimilation as defined here. “Our results suggest that proficiency is a necessary but insufficient condition for both social and cultural assimilation as defined here.” (Akresh, Massey & Frank, 2014, p. 209)

They think that language proficiency has no big benefits if it is not used properly by immigrants. They also think assimilation is not only indicated by the use of English in social situations, but also by the consumption of American culture.

The operationalization of cultural assimilation is based on survey questions producing responses on the frequency with which respondents consume



various U.S. cultural products---frequency of reading English language newspapers, hours spent listening to English language radio, frequency of watching English language DVDs, frequency of watching English language movies, and hours watching English language television. For each of these five measures, the interviewer first inquired about consumption patterns prior to coming to the U.S., specifically referring to the year before the respondent left their last foreign residence to come to the U.S. (Akresh, Massey & Frank, 2014, p. 205)

Research suggests that language acquisition is a reasonable factor to measure assimilation, but other factors might be involved as well. I want to find out if knowing English has been enough for integrating in American society among Kurds in Fargo-Moorhead or if other factors are involved in the process of assimilation. In my study, I will also observe the participants as to how they consume language in their daily life.

**Language proficiency's role on economic integration.** In his research, Isphording (2015) shows the importance of host country language proficiency in raising productivity. He believes language proficiency improves access to higher-paying jobs and facilitates interactions with the native-born population. "Having adequate language skills allows immigrants to progress along the job ladder, increases their employment probability, and eases their access to better-paying jobs" (Isphording, 2015, p. 2). Meanwhile, low levels of language proficiency create high hurdles to participating in the labor market.

In his study, Sandford (2002) shows the role of English language proficiency on earnings among immigrants. The research studied 81,059 labor market male Mexican

immigrants, and the results showed that only immigrants with low language proficiency and some U.S. labor market experience will make less than their immigrant counterparts who speak English very well. He strongly suggests that English language deficiency is the most important factor pressing down immigrant wages after controlling for human capital.

This research basically shows language proficiency is a main factor in immigrants' integration in to host country society. Some researchers believe that knowing and using the host country language helps immigrants have a better access to higher-paying jobs. Thus, language skills are considered as a vital part of an immigrant's human capital. Acquiring adequate proficiency in the host country language is a crucial factor to help immigrants get economically and socially integrated.

On the other hand, some researchers think language proficiency has no great value if immigrants do not use it. Those who support this opinion think that immigrants' pre- immigration and post-immigration views determine if they want to get assimilated in to their new society and environment.

Researchers acknowledge that immigrants vary in acquiring language as age of immigrants and grammatical and vocabulary distances between first and second language play significant roles in learning new languages. I have noticed many Kurdish adults suffering from not being able to integrate in to American society in Fargo-Moorhead, and I am wondering if learning English as a second language has any effects. I found it important to conduct a study on Kurdish adult immigrants and the role of English language in making them assimilate in to American society.

I want to discover to what extent English language proficiency plays a role in integration into American society and what other factors are involved in the process of adaptation. I also want to find out if age affects learning language and quick adaptation. Conducting research is helpful for immigrants for better assimilation and for ESL teachers in teaching language. However, this research is done based on data collection in Fargo-Moorhead area targeting the Kurdish community only.

For this study, I am going to address the following questions:

1. What variables have significant influence on Kurdish immigrants in terms of adapting to American society?
2. What role does English language proficiency play for the Kurds in integration into Fargo-Moorhead Area?
3. What does age have to do for the Kurds with learning language and quick adaptation?

At the end of my research, I concluded eight factors, including language proficiency, have significant influence on Kurdish immigrants in terms of adapting to American society. Five of these were identified by previous researchers, but three were unlooked for. One factor described by other researchers wasn't a factor for the Kurdish community in Fargo-Moorhead.

This report is comprised of five chapters that provide the details of the study. Chapter two clarifies the methods used for data collection. Chapter 3 shows the results of the data analysis in the form of charts and explanations. Chapter four describes the discussion of the results and shows the findings. Chapter five concludes the study and wraps up the whole thesis in brief.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

This study focuses on the integration of adults in the local Kurdish community into Fargo-Moorhead Area. Participants included the adults (age 18-70) in Kurdish families, and the research methodology employed oral interviews using an interview guide and observing participants. As a member of the Kurdish community and trilingual in English, Kurdish, and Arabic, I recruited the subjects. My participants consisted of 20 adults, ten males and ten females aiming at reaching data saturation and the selection was based on my familiarity with them.

Potential participants were presented with a letter of consent available in both English and Kurdish, which can be found in appendices (A and B). I reviewed the letter orally as well. Individuals signed the letter of consent and I commenced with the interview after they agreed to participate. The start of the interview again reaffirmed the participant's willingness to participate and be recorded.

I prepared my own interview guide, which I followed during interviews. Interview questions consisted of many qualitative and some quantitative items. Some of the questions in the interview consisted of basic demographic data, but most addressed the factors that previous researchers discovered in their works. Questions addressed factors that contribute to immigrants' adaptation into Fargo-Moorhead area and the role of language specifically in the process of integration. The language proficiency questions that were asked in the interview dealt with participants' ability in speaking, listening, writing, and reading skills. To assess these skills, I used the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Global Scale (Council of Europe, 2001) which divides learners into three broad divisions: basic user, independent user, and proficient user describing participants' ability in reading, listening, speaking and writing. The proficiency descriptions for the global scale can be found in Appendix C.

After preparing the interview guide in both English (Appendix D) and Kurdish (Appendix E), I used whichever language each participant preferred, even code switching whenever appropriate. Interviews were recorded in two ways: via notes taken by me and via a digital audio recorder. The recording was helpful to transcribe responses and to return to the data to check accuracy throughout the analysis phase. No special equipment was used: the recording device was an iPhone 7 Plus cell phone audio recorder, which is readily available to the general public and was not specially constructed or modified for this study.

The written notes protected the confidentiality of the participants as they were identified by a number representing a particular participant. They did not identify the participant by name at all. I protected the confidentiality of the participants by storing the recordings on a password protected folder in a password protected laptop for three years. Only I have the passwords. Reports and presentations present data after coding was completed, yielding thematic conclusions rather than individual perspectives. In the event any individual participants were quoted, they were referred to by participant number exclusively.

Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel were used for transcribing and analyzing the data collected. Quantitative data was analyzed with descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. Qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed with recognized

coding techniques to yield codes, categories, and themes. I sought connections between the qualitative and quantitative data.

### Chapter 3: Results

The results of this study include both quantitative and qualitative data. The former were analyzed with descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. Qualitative data collected from the interviews were analyzed with accepted coding techniques.

#### Demographic Data

Table 1 shows the number of participants in the study. Twenty adults participated in the study, including ten males and ten females.

Table 1

*Sex*

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	10	50
Female	10	50
Total	20	100

Table 2 shows the ages of the participants. I interviewed 20 adults whose ages ranged from 18 to 70. The group of 40-49 represented the largest number of participants with six people. Ages ranged 30-39 were represented by five participants. There were three participants each at 50-59 and 60-70. The group of 20-29 had only two participants and the remaining 18-19 age group only had one participant:

Table 2

*Age*

Years	Frequency	Percent
18-19	1	5
20-29	2	10
30-39	5	25
40-49	6	30
50-59	3	15
60-70	3	15
Total	20	100

Table 3 shows the education level of participants. Out of 20, eight participants (40%) did not have the opportunity to finish high school. One participant (5%) got a HS diploma, four of them (20%) had two-year diploma; five of them (25%) held bachelor's degrees and two participants (10%) had a master's degree.

Table 3

*Education Level*

Level Completed	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	8	40
High School	1	5
Two Year Diploma	4	20
Bachelor	5	25
Graduate	2	10
Total	20	100

Table 4 shows the duration participants have lived in the U.S. The highest number is eight participants (50%) who had been living in the U.S. for eight years.



Table 4

*How Long Have You Been Living in The U.S.?*

Years in U.S.	Frequency	Percent
4	2	10
5	1	5
8	10	50
18	4	20
25	2	10
40	1	5
Total	20	100

Table 5 shows the marital status of the participants. Only two participants were single while all the others were married, and among the married ones only one person married a non-Kurdish partner. All the other participants confirmed that they were married to a co-ethnic partner.

Table 5

*Marital Status*

Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	18	90
Single	2	10
Total	20	100

Table 6 and Table 7 show the country of origin and religious affiliation of the participants. All the participants confirmed they were originally from Iraqi Kurdistan region and considered Islam as their religion.

Table 6

*Country of Origin*

Country	Frequency	Percent
Iraqi Kurdistan	20	100
Total	20	100

Table 7

*Religious Affiliation*

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Islam	20	100
Total	20	100

**Immigration Goals**

Table 8 shows the percentage distribution of the participants according to the purpose of their moving to and living in the USA. Seventy-five percent of the participants migrated to the USA because of the political instability of their native country. Twenty percent of the immigrants were seeking a better life, and 5% of the participants came to the USA for study or work purposes and then thought of pursuing immigration.

Table 8

*What Was the Main Purpose of Your Immigration to the USA?*

Purpose	Frequency	Percent
Political asylum	15	75
To have a better life	4	20
Study/work	1	5
Total	20	100

Table 9 shows if the participants wanted to return to their country of origin eventually. Only two of them wanted to go back to Kurdistan region. I also found that 13 participants (65%) had no plans for returning, while the remaining five (25%) were unsure.

Table 9

*Do You Want to Return to Your Country of Origin Eventually?*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	10
No	13	65
Not Sure	5	25
	20	100

Nineteen of the participants immigrated to the USA due to security, political and economic instability in their country of origin and wanted to stay and live in the USA, and 13 of them never thought of returning to Iraq again. Some of them left their country in the 1990s fleeing from the Gulf War or civil war. Some others arrived in the country after the 2003 US-Iraq War. Participant 1 said:

I never go back to Iraq once again. I don't let my children go through the situations I experienced. Iraq has never been stable in any respects.

Kurdistan region sometimes is better compared to the rest of Iraq, but it is still part of Iraq.

Immigrants were aware that staying in America means confronting different cultures and accepting a different legal system from the ones in their country of origin. Some of them found it difficult to comprehend and transverse culture and lifestyle due to different reasons. "Life is totally different here and people are too busy to get together.

Everyone goes to bed early at night. I used to spend my evenings at teahouses in Kurdistan downtowns, but downtowns here are so different,” said Participant 17, who believes people in America are made to work like robots and have no strong social relations.

### **Daily Activities in U.S.**

Table 10 shows how the participants spend their days in the Fargo-Moorhead area. The table shows that five participants (25%) go to work. One person goes to school only, while four participants (20%) go to both work and classes. Four participants take care of the family at home; those four who take care of the families are housewives whose spouses work to feed their families. Another four go shopping, and finally, two participants claimed they only watch T.V.

Table 10

*How Do You Spend Your Days Now That You Live Here in The States?*

Activity	Frequency	Percent
Go to work	5	25
Go to school	1	5
Both work and school	4	20
Take care of family at home	4	20
Go Shopping	4	20
Watching TV	2	10
Total	20	100

When I asked them what they do to fit in to America and get along with Americans, participants had different responses. Five participants (25%) said they go to work which helped them improve their English language, understand the working

policies and get along with other Americans. Some of them even said working helped them create family relationships with other coworkers.

Another four participants go to work and take classes as well, while one person goes to classes only. Participant 7 said, “I work so that I can economically be independent and mingle with people here, and I take class so I can improve my language, learn more and get a better job that I want in the future.”

While interviewing, I found that those who do not go to work or take classes watch Kurdish TV channels, use social media and talk with their friends and families in Iraqi Kurdistan. “I sometimes watch English channels with the kids,” said Participant 16, while playing with his worry beads and watching a Kurdish TV channel. Six participants stated they only mingle with the people of their own country of origin who speak the same language. They feel separated from the native-born Americans. “I don’t know many people around here. It is very difficult for me to make friends with local Americans in this area because I don’t know the language well, and I also feel people don’t approach strangers as Kurds do in Kurdistan. That is why I mostly hang out with ^ who speak Kurdish and are from my original country because we understand each other better,” said Participant 13. According to this participant, lack of talking and interaction made some immigrants stick to their social norms only.

The remaining participants claimed they go shopping, talk to neighbors, and participate in the community events to get better adapted. The participants of my research all mingle with Kurdish community members through family gatherings, participating in their national, cultural and religious events. The 14 participants who were able to communicate in English stated that they like to interact with both American and Kurdish

community members. “I spend most of my time with English speaking people when I am in school or at work, and I sometimes go out with for a walk and coffee after work or classes. But I usually visit my Kurdish fellows in the weekends,” said Participant 4.

Participants were asked about the specific areas of American life they successfully adapted to. Out of 20 participants, five of them considered going to work as the best means to live like native-born Americans and they claimed working helped them practice their language, meet new people and get economically independent. Those who would take classes and go to work had better understanding about American working and education system. They also confirmed they were better accepted in the community compared to those who chose to keep themselves indoors and stay within Kurdish community members only. One participant said taking classes at college assisted his learning about American education system and competing with domestic American students, while four others confirmed they took benefit from both working and going to school for getting better integrated. Participant 8 said:

I work full time and take classes at college level. It is not easy to live like Americans without getting advanced both educationally and professionally. I work in order to be economically independent and I take classes in order to have a better job in the future. Throughout this process I have been able to gain a better understanding about the working and education environment. I have met new people to whom I shared my culture and views on life. But it would have been very difficult if I had not known and consumed the language.

## Language Proficiency

Table 11 shows which language is used by participants to communicate at home. I found that five participants (25%) use mainly English while 15 (75%) use only Kurdish at home.

Table 11

*Which Language Do You Usually Use at Home?*

Language	Frequency	Percent
English	5	25
Kurdish	15	75
Total	20	100

Table 12 shows whether English or Kurdish is used by participants outside the home. The results included 14 participants (70%) using English, while six others (30%) use Kurdish outside.

Table 12

*Which Language Do You Usually Use Outside?*

Language	Frequency	Percent
English	14	70
Kurdish	6	30
Total	20	100

Table 13 shows whether participants use an interpreter for their appointments or other tasks. The results included six participants (30%) using interpreters for appointments and important duties, while eight (70%) did not need interpreters at all.

Table 13

*Do You Use Interpreter for Your Appointments or Other Tasks?*

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	30
No	14	70
Total	20	100

Participants who use Kurdish outside are those who have no or little English proficiency and use interpreters to fulfill their duties. Some of those use English while shopping and during social interactions.

Table 14 shows whether the participants are able to write English or not. I found that 14 participants (70%) out of 20 can write English with six participants (30%) who can only write simple words like their names and addresses.

Table 14

*Do You Write English?*

CEFR Level	Frequency	Percent
B1-C2	14	70
A 1	6	30
Total	20	100

Table 15 shows whether the participants are able to read English or not. I found that 14 participants (70%) out of 20 could read English, whereas three participants (15%) could understand familiar names. The remaining three participants (15%) could read basic common words and they were in level A2 based on *Common Reference Levels: Global Scale*. (Appendix C).



Table 15

*Do You Read English?*

CEFR Level	Frequency	Percent
C1-C2	14	70
A2	3	15
A1	3	15
Total	20	100

Table 16 shows whether the participants were able to comprehend oral English or not. Fourteen participants (70%) understand oral English well, but six participants (30%) could only understand basic communications. They fell into levels A1 and A2 based on *Common Reference Levels: Global Scale* (Appendix C).

Table 16

*Do You Understand English?*

CEFR Level	Frequency	Percent
C1-C2	14	70
A1	4	20
A2	2	10
Total	20	100

When I asked the participants some questions in English, all of them answered in Kurdish and the responses were completely related to the questions. I noticed most married participants speaking Kurdish while their young children spoke English, and they could understand each other with no big issues.

Table 17 shows the proficiency of participants in speaking English. I found

that 14 participants (70%) could speak English with a high level of proficiency, while two of them could only use simple phrases. Four of them were able to speak some but dysfluently and inaccurately as they had difficulties in word choices, especially verbs. I ranked those four participants in level A2 based on *Common Reference Levels: Global Scale* (Appendix C).

Table 17

*Do You Speak English?*

CEFR Level	Frequency	Percent
B1-C2	14	70
A2	4	20
A1	2	10
Total	20	100

For some participants, language is the biggest issue hindering them in getting socially and economically integrated. Additionally, the inability to speak English well made those participants have higher levels of acculturative stress compared to those who would speak both languages. For that same reason, two participants wanted to go back to their native country after they received American citizenship, and five others said they were not sure if they wanted to stay or return. “Sometimes I think I must find people here to talk to, but I don’t speak the language. I can’t go to language centers to learn English, as I must take care of the kids while my husband is at work, and I know daycare is so expensive,” said Participant 17. “I have been here for more than a decade and I have tried to learn English well, but I have not been successful because I forget things soon. I know I am wrong, but I don’t see myself getting integrated to this society because I don’t know the language. If I have an appointment, I would use interpreter,” stated Participant 15.

For those who did not know English, the degree of dissimilarity between English and Kurdish especially in vocabulary and pronunciation was an issue in language learning. “My biggest problem was the language. I studied in Kurdish and Arabic in Kurdistan in the 1980s. When I came here everything turned to English, which is a lot different from the language I studied. I still have issue in pronunciation. In Kurdish, we pronounce the way a word is spelled, but in English spelling is not a good guide for pronunciation,” said Participant 14.

Despite keeping themselves indoors or busying themselves with shopping, six other participants claimed they learned enough English needed to communicate with people in their neighborhood, cashiers at the markets and to perform other daily basic duties. Those participants could not go to Adult Basic Education (ABE) for improving their language regularly because of having to stay home and taking care of their kids. However, they all learned enough English needed to pass Permit Test to get driver’s licenses. For those who had basic information about English language, being shy and lack of self-confidence for using their English was a problem. On the other hand, Participant 8 said language is important only when it is used. “I knew the language, but I did not want to use it because I did not know about culture of the people. I started watching American movies and news for a while and started communicating with the neighbors.”

About 30% of the participants would struggle with learning English, and their major issue was with speaking. They believed they would speak better or at least start speaking if they would mingle more with natives. Participant 18 said, “Of course I want to improve my English but there is very little chance for me to speak with natives. Where

I work, most of my coworkers are immigrants who know little English. We don't speak much, and speaking is not encouraged.”

Two participants who used to go to Adult Basic Education (ABE) to learn basic English stated they did not get much benefit from visiting ABE because the classes mostly focused on listening and reading, and they did not have chance to speak with natives. Some participants, who had education and already went through the process of learning language, believed learning English has become easier nowadays compared to some years ago due to the existence of more resources. Participant 5 said, “Immigrants nowadays have more resources than what they used to. What they need to do is just to use the resources. They need to watch American news, movies, and shows. The biggest resources are their children who speak like natives.”

### **Barriers to Assimilation**

Most participants stated that the difficult things about adjusting their life in Fargo-Moorhead were language, weather and finding a job. All of them confirmed they still struggle to adjust with weather, but most of the immigrants mentioned language improvement and consumption of American culture have been the major issues in the way of adaptation. Among the 20 interviewees, ten of them said language was an issue only in their first two years in the country. For those who had no or little education before migrating to America, language acquisition has been a long process. Two of the participants who are above sixty years old have not learnt to speak English. They said it was too late to get adapted.

All the participants (100%) agreed that language proficiency level has a strong impact on getting a job. Four participants stated that language proficiency and going to

school helped them find the job they desired although it took them a long time. “I immediately found a job when I arrived in here because I knew some language. After finishing school and gaining more experiences, I found the job I wanted. I think school and job skills were very helpful, but they were impossible without knowing the language,” said Participant 2. Three others said they were not very happy with their jobs, while four others confirmed they did not like their jobs, but they might have found the job they wanted if their language were better. Participant 11 said he had a lot of skills of working but what he lacked was language proficiency when he entered America. After getting to know some people and learning basic language, he started working as a truck driver. He worked for two years for a company before founding his own company.

There were differences between the thoughts of highly educated immigrants and less educated immigrants concerning learning English. Pre-immigration characteristics, especially education, determined how immigrants considered learning English. The participants who are highly educated attributed the easiest thing of learning English to their pre-immigration education. The grammatical similarity between Kurdish sentence structure and English structure has been helpful in some ways. They also said being in the country helped them communicate with native speakers of English, find jobs, and go to school, whereas the less educated participants stated they faced or have been facing a lot of difficulties to learn English. However, they agreed with highly educated immigrants in the point that living in the country made the learning easier.

However, for those who had education and spoke the language before migration, discrimination has been the number one issue. Five participants stated that even though they wanted to adapt with the working environment, sometimes they failed to do so

because of what they perceived as discrimination, especially in working firms. Two participants said language only helped them to find simple jobs, and they believed immigrants are discriminated against no matter if their language is good or not.

Participant 6 said:

I had bachelor's degree in Kurdistan and spoke the language before I entered American. This helped me communicate with people and look for jobs. Because my degree was not counted here, I went back to school to get another college degree and volunteered for several firms to get American experience.

Volunteering and going back to school were very helpful to gain an office job.

But I have been stuck in my position with no promotion since I started.

He felt he had been discriminated against due to his accent and color. As a result of discrimination, he would sometimes think of going back to where he came from. When I asked Participant 3 why he was unsure if he wanted to stay in America or return to Iraq, he responded,

I had bachelor's degree in Iraq, but the degree was not recognized here. I went back to school here and got another bachelor and two associate degrees, but I can't get the job I want. I work in a place where all my coworkers have high school diploma, but they get a better payment. I feel it is discrimination which make me disappointed and be unsure if I want to live here forever.

Three other participants, who moved to America when they were young, said they had no big issues adapting to the community since they were raised, learnt the language and went to school with domestic Americans. But they said they had been aware of their parents' experiencing discrimination.

Finally, participants generally complained about not having a strong Kurdish community, like other minorities, helping them in making connections, referring to agencies and job centers, helping them with language improvements, and getting them to participate in community events.

## **Chapter 4: Discussion**

In this research, I studied the assimilation of adults in the local Kurdish community into Fargo-Moorhead Area. To answer the research questions of the study, I prepared an interview guide in both English and Kurdish, and interview questions of qualitative and some quantitative items were presented to the participants. After collecting and analyzing the data, I now discuss the following findings for my three main research questions and other unlooked-for findings.

### **Factors Influencing Immigrants to Adapt into American Society**

The first question I sought to answer was: What variables have more influence on Kurdish immigrants in terms of adapting to American society? I found six major factors that contributed to adaptation of Kurdish immigrants into American society: daily activities, consumption of host culture, goals of immigration itself, discrimination by host country natives, English language proficiency, and age. I also found one factor that is an influence on other immigrant groups studied by previous researchers did not have much influence on Kurdish immigrants: the number of years in the host country. Finally, my study revealed two unlooked for factors in the adaptation of Kurdish immigrants: gender and weather.

One of the significant factors is how the participants spend their days and how they participate in life in Fargo-Moorhead area. Four males and one female participant (25%), who go to work, claimed working helped them fit into America and get along



with Americans. They said working made them improve their English language, understand the working policies, get along with other Americans, and even create family relationships with coworkers. Another four male participants who go to work and take classes said the same thing. Another female participant who only takes classes claimed school helped her get out from home and make friends with natives. Four others (two males and two females) busy themselves with shopping and running daily errands. They said shopping did not help them much with assimilation, but they still found it better than keeping themselves indoors all day long. Another two participants (one male and one female) believed they were too old to get adapted and they rather spend their time watching Kurdish channels and hang out with Kurdish families only. The last four female participants said they don't have much chance to go out for work and school because of having to take care of their kids while their spouses are at work. My results show those who work and take classes seek to get economically independent and mingle with native English-speaking people, both of which predict a better future. My results agree with what Ali and Alam (2015) discovered in their research that the Canadians, who go to work and take classes, have better chances to use host country language and make friends with native Canadians.

Gender has an impact on some Kurdish families in Fargo-Moorhead area. Usually men have more chances than women to go outside and seek opportunities for integration. Four participants who are housewives choose not to go to work or take classes due to taking care of their kids while their spouses are out. This keeps them indoors and they have less chance to get integrated well.

It is very rare among Kurdish families to have both husband and wife work when they have little kids. Kurdish men usually work and prefer their wives stay home to take care of their kids. All the housewives stated that they do not work and take classes because they do not want to send their kids to daycare. They have brought this trend from Kurdistan region. "I might go to work if my kids grow up and can stay home legally. But I and my husband don't want our kids to be looked after at daycare now," said Participant 20. However, the married couple with no kids or those who have grown children, have better chances of going out for either working or taking classes. "School has helped to some extent to build relation with others. I want to finish my school and find a job. I think this is how I can integrate with the society," said Participant 9, who is an unmarried female.

Another variable affecting immigrants to adapt is the consumption of American culture and mingling with domestic Americans. Most of my interviewees, especially those who work in different firms or go to school, got better adapted because of mingling with native speakers of English and being closely acquainted with domestic American family life. Additionally, participants who watch American movies, listen to English radio shows and news feel more confident when communicating and mingling with domestic Americans. My results agreed with what Akresh, Massey, and Frank (2014) claim in their research: that cultural assimilation is based on the consumption of various U.S. cultural products, such as frequent reading of English language newspapers, hours spent listening to English language radio, frequent watching of English language DVDs, frequent watching of English language movies, and hours watching English language television. I noticed those who do not go to work or take classes, both males and females

including those who take care of their kids spend most of their time watching Kurdish TV channels and using social media to talk with their friends and families in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Goals of immigration and purpose of living in U.S. represent another variable affecting adaption. Those who intend to stay in the country, study, work and have a happy life, try harder to get adapted. On the other side, some immigrants were not sure if they wanted to stay in the country or not. I found uncertainty of staying and lack of clear goals of immigration negatively affected two of the participants in terms of adaptation. Here I identified a new variable, undescribed in the previous literature, which affects the assimilation of Kurdish immigrants into American society.

The immigrants who work, take classes, and participate in the community events were the most successful people in terms of assimilating to American society. However, some participants said they would never feel adapted fully because of being discriminated against, especially in the working firms. For this reason, two participants wanted to go back to their country of origin or were unsure at least if they would stay in U.S. One participant said he worked in a place where all his coworkers only have high school diplomas, but they get a better payment. He feels it is discrimination, which makes him disappointed and feel unsure if he wants to stay in the country. Two other participants said social relations between immigrants and native speakers of English have become weaker in the recent years due to the bad image media have portrayed of immigrants. My results agree with what Ali and Alam (2015) discovered in their research that (immigrants) Canadians sometimes fail to integrate because of what they perceived as discrimination and more advantages to the native Canadians.

Moreover, the number of years living in the host country did not have much effect on Kurdish immigrants in adaptation and learning English in my study. Other factors like age and gender differences made the length of residence less effective on adaptation. Two housewives who have been living in America for more than 10 years still have difficulties speaking English and mingling with local Americans because they are busy taking care of their kids. Two other participants, who are above sixty years old and have been living in the country for 20 years, still have difficulties with adaptation. My results disagree with Ali and Alam (2015), who discovered that the majority of Canadian immigrants feel alienated and face numerous difficulties only in their first two years in the host country but adapt well after living there longer.

### **English Proficiency Role in Adaptation**

My second research question was: What role does English language proficiency play for the Kurds in integration into Fargo-Moorhead Area? My findings agree with the findings of previous researchers; language proficiency is a major, if not the biggest factor, in positive assimilation.

To know if English language proficiency has any influences on the adjustment of Kurdish immigrants, I assessed my participants in the four skills of language, including speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Of the 20 participants, 14 participants (70%) could speak English fluently, while two of them could not speak English at all. Four of them were able to speak, but dysfluently and inaccurately. As far as oral understanding is concerned, the same 14 participants (70%) could comprehend oral English well with six participants (30%) who could only understand basic communications. Two of the interviewees said they would hardly talk to the natives due to lack of English proficiency.

On the written skills—writing and reading—14 participants (70%) out of 20 could write and read English, while six participants (30%) could not write because of lack writing skills or illiteracy. However, three of those six participants could read a little, while the other three could not read at all.

Speaking was considered as the most important skill for assimilating into the community by participants of my study. Of the participants who were able to communicate in English, 70% stated that they like to interact with both American and Kurdish communities' members. However, participants who do not speak English well stated they only mingle with the people of their own country of origin who speak the same language, and, as a result, they are separated from the native-born Americans. My results agree with what Ali and Alam (2015) discovered in their research, that Canadian immigrants get alienated and face numerous difficulties to adjust their lives in new and unfamiliar surroundings and that one of the main reasons for that is lack of English proficiency.

All the participants (100%) agreed that language proficiency level has a strong employment impact. Some participants stated language proficiency helped them find jobs immediately upon their arrival to U.S., but they had to go to school and gain American experience before getting their desired jobs. Those who had low-paying jobs believed they could have the job they wanted if they were proficient in English. My results agree with Isphording's (2015) result that language proficiency improves access to higher-paying jobs and facilitates interactions with the native-born population.

Pre-immigration characteristics, especially education before migrating to U.S., were considered by most participants as main factors for making English language

learning easier and the adaptation quicker. Participants who already studied in Kurdistan benefited from the grammatical similarity between Kurdish sentence structure and English, which made learning English easier. Participants who worked for U.S. military forces in Iraq and migrated to the country after 2003 were highly educated. They didn't take much time to improve their language, and they didn't face a lot of difficulties in finding jobs and going to school, whereas the less educated participants, about 30%, took many years to learn English. As a result, they did not find the jobs they wanted. The result agrees with Hou and Beiser's (2006) discovery that pre-immigration achievements in professional and academic perspectives were the major factors determining English-language proficiency during the early years of resettlement among Chinese immigrants in Canada.

Hou and Beiser (2006) also found that post-migration opportunities and incentives became increasingly important over time, and my findings agree on this detail as well. Participants in my study also said being in the country exposed them to more resources, helped them communicate with native speakers of English, find jobs, and go to school. Less educated Kurds, just like less educated Chinese immigrants in Canada, would look for opportunities and incentives such as watching American TV, taking ESL classes, and communicating with natives outside.

The inability to speak the English language fluently among 30% of the participants created a negative impact on Kurdish immigrants in mingling with domestic Americans due to higher levels of acculturative stress. To the contrary, the bilingual participants had lower levels of so-called stress. My results agree with Lueck and Wilson's (2010) findings that the inability to speak English negatively affected the

adjustment of Asian immigrants, which led to higher levels of acculturative stress, and that those who are bilingual, speaking both their native and the host language fluently, have less stress than those who don't.

### **Age Role in Learning the Host Language and Integration**

My third research question was: What does age have to do for the Kurds with learning language and quick adaptation? I found that age matters to a great extent for learning English among the Kurdish immigrants who did not finish school before migrating to U.S.

Thirty percent of the participants either do not communicate in English or only have basic knowledge about English. Two participants (10%), who were close to 70 years old, tried very hard to learn English via visiting language centers and communicating with natives, but they did not learn a lot. They eventually gave up learning the language, claiming they were too old to learn. The other 20%, who were between 40-60 years old, said they learned with a lot of difficulties. The remaining 70% were those who either knew the language before migrating to U.S. or they were in 18-to-39-year-old group. I found the younger participants learned the language easier compared to older ones. My results agree with Isphording's (2015) discovery that the most decisive factor for learning a new language in a host country is the age of arrival in the sense that younger immigrants learn languages easier and faster than older ones.

### **Unlooked-for Findings**

I discovered some interesting points in my study; however, I didn't pose any questions about them. I found it useful to include them here in case others want to do further research on them. One of the unlooked-for findings is the gender variable. I found

that 20% of my participants did not have chances like men to go to work or take classes due to taking care of their kids while their spouses are out. This eventually influenced their lives and adaptation negatively. Participant 19 said:

Of course, I like to get educated and go to work, but I can't do that because of my kids. My kids are too little to be left at home alone and they need my care. This keeps me indoors and makes me have less chance to get integrated well.

The second unlooked-for finding is weather, which is one of the difficult things Kurdish immigrants struggle to adjust with. The long-lasting low temperatures hindered them from getting out and seeking assimilation. Families worry about blizzards and ice storms if they want to get out. "I have to check the weather before heading out for the day. I have to make sure I have all the necessary clothes on. I need to make sure my kids have a hat, scarf and gloves. Winter is brutal here," said Participant 12.

Adjusting with weather is an issue for Kurdish immigrants. Dissimilarities in temperature between Iraqi Kurdistan region and Fargo-Moorhead area makes it difficult for immigrants to adjust easily.

In the end, I found answers to my three main research questions, and they revealed that Kurdish immigrants in the Fargo-Moorhead area follow a similar, but not exactly the same path to assimilation that other immigrant groups follow. In particular, Kurdish immigrants do not exhibit a relationship between the length of time in country and English proficiency levels. Two unlooked-for results also appeared. First, the gender of Kurdish immigrants plays a role in both their level of English language proficiency and their level of acculturation. Second, the weather influences daily activities, which in



turn affects the ability of Kurdish immigrants to develop their English skills and assimilate into American society.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This study concerns the assimilation of adults in the local Kurdish community into Fargo-Moorhead Area and the role of language in the integration. Only adults (age 18-70) in Kurdish families participated in the study, and the research methodology employed oral interviews using an interview guide and observing participants. The research questions regarding factors affecting Kurdish immigrants in terms of adapting to American society were pursued. The role of English language proficiency in the integration, and the relationship of age to learning language and quick adaptation were tracked.

The research revealed nine potentially influential factors. Of these nine, eight factors actually influence the adaptation of Kurdish immigrants into Fargo-Moorhead, but one does not influence the adaptation of this group of immigrants. In my study, the number of years living in the host country does not have much effect on Kurdish immigrants in adaptation and learning English, a result that disagrees with previous research. Other factors like age and gender differences make the length of residence less influential on adaptation among the participants of this study.

Five of the eight influential factors identified in my study agree with what other researchers learned, while three others were unidentified in the general literature on assimilation or were not included in the literature review because they were unposed as a research question. First, the way participants spend their days impact how they fit into

Fargo-Moorhead area. My results show those who work and take classes are the most successful in terms of adapting, which agrees with previous results. Second, gender has an impact on some Kurdish families in Fargo-Moorhead area, which is a finding from my study that was unaddressed in much of the general literature on assimilation. Taking care of kids keeps housewives indoors and makes them have less chance to get integrated well. Third, the consumption of American culture and mingling with Americans help some Kurdish immigrants comprehend the American lifestyle better, again a finding that agrees with previous research results. Fourth, goals of immigration and purpose of living in U.S. affect adaptation. I found those whose purpose is to promote their skills and want to have a happy life are better in getting adapted. This finding is another that was not identified in the general literature on assimilation. Fifth, discrimination, especially in the working sites, causes disappointment and makes Kurdish immigrants uncertain if they want to stay in the country, a finding that agrees with previous research on assimilation. Sixth, language proficiency helps Kurdish immigrants find jobs, take classes, and adapt better. This finding agrees with previous research. Seventh, age is another influential factor influencing adaptation. I found younger Kurdish immigrants learn English quicker and adapt to society faster compared to older immigrants. My results agree with previous research. Eighth, weather is one of the difficult things Kurdish immigrants struggle to adjust with. The long-lasting low temperatures cause difficulties for them to get out and seek assimilation. This finding is another factor that was not identified in the general literature on assimilation.

The recognition of these factors recommends what immigrants can do in order to get integrated better. Going to school and working are two important activities

immigrants in general can consider for catching up with natives, and immigrants also need to consume the host country's culture regularly for the sake of better comprehension. Setting goals of immigration and the purpose of living in the new country lead immigrants to determine adaptation variables.

Meanwhile, the U.S. government needs to work on decreasing discrimination in the working places, so all people, including immigrants, can feel comfortable and satisfied. The business owners also need to create nondiscriminatory working environment so everyone would be treated fairly.

The study also reveals the position of the English language in the immigrants' lives in a primarily English-speaking country. The immigrants who are fluent in English are more involved and well accepted in the community. Speaking is considered the most important skill among Kurdish immigrants. Those who speak well have better chances to get high paying jobs and to get more economically independent. Meanwhile, the inability to speak English fluently created a negative impact on Kurdish immigrants in mingling with domestic Americans due to having higher levels of acculturative stress. My findings suggest that immigrants need to interact with people and go to language centers to improve their language. They can benefit from their younger children whose English is more like that of domestic Americans.

Another point in my study is the relationship of age to learning language and adaptation. The findings revealed that younger Kurdish immigrants learn English easier and get adapted to American society quicker. The older immigrants, in turn, face more difficulties when dealing with dissimilarities between Kurdish and English languages, and their age on arrival explains why the number of years living in America didn't have

as high an impact on language acquisition and adaptation to America. Age is a stronger factor than years in country.

I got my research questions answered as there are several factors that have significant influence on Kurdish immigrants in terms of adapting to American society. Daily activities like going to school and work have positive impact on adaptation. Kurdish Immigrants mostly moved to U.S. fleeing from wars and their immigration goal is to have a better life. Most of them like to consume American cultures and mingle with locals, however some unfair social norms like discrimination negatively affected the adaptation. Kurdish females get less adapted compared to males because of spending their time mostly with taking care of kids at home while their male spouses are at work.

Language plays a significant role in assimilation among Kurdish immigrants. Those who are fluent in English are well accepted in the community. Younger Kurdish immigrants learn English easier and quicker, and as a result they adapt quicker.

Since this study focused on Kurdish immigrants only in Fargo-Moorhead, I suggest further studies be conducted on Kurds in other parts of United States since the demographic settings might result in different findings. I also suggest research on the factors that arose in my study, but I didn't find in the previous research, such as gender, weather, and goals of immigrants.

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### **Appendix A: English Consent Letter**

You are being invited to participate in a study of the integration of Kurdish immigrants into American society. I hope to learn what variables have more influence on immigrants to get adapted in American society. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because my research is on Kurdish immigrants who are aged 18-70. Thus, you meet the requirements for my research.

If you decide to participate, I will come and visit you at home for the interview. Expected time for completing the interview is 30-45 minutes. I will take notes during the interview and I will record the interview on my phone to make sure I get the information accurate.

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts related to this research that you would experience that are different from anything you might feel in an ordinary conversation about this topic. However, should you feel uncomfortable with any part of this study at any time, you have the right to terminate participation without consequence. If you choose to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and we cannot offer you any compensation for your participation.

The results from this study will be reported in general terms in the form of speech or writing that may be presented in manuscript submitted for publication in M.A. thesis or seminars. Your personal information, including your name, will be kept confidential

and not be distributed in any way. Nor will the recordings be used in any presentations; only written transcripts of comments with your name removed may be used as quotations. The recordings will be kept on my password protected laptop in a password protected folder for three years. If you wish to receive a copy of the results from the study, you may contact the researcher at the e-mail address given below.

Please feel free to ask questions regarding this study. If you have additional questions or want to find resources about integrating into America, I can be reached at 218-200-9485 or [zakzandy@gmail.com](mailto:zakzandy@gmail.com). You may also contact Dr. Linda Houts-Smith, my research supervisor at Minnesota State University Moorhead, by phone at 218-477-4059 or by email at [houtsli@mnstate.edu](mailto:houtsli@mnstate.edu). Any questions about your rights may be directed to Dr. Lisa Karch, Chair of the MSUM International Review Board at 218-477-2699 or by e-mail at: [irb@mnstate.edu](mailto:irb@mnstate.edu). You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have understood the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

.....  
Signature of Participant

.....  
Date

.....  
Signature of Investigator

.....  
Date

## Appendix B: Kurdish Consent Letter

### فۆرمی رازی بوون

بەریزتان بانگهێشت کران بۆ بەشداری کردن له پرۆژیهك لهژێر ناو نیشانی "کاریگەری زمان لەسەر خو گونجاندنی کوچبەرانی کورد لەگەڵ بارودۆخی ژیاڵی ئەمریکا". هیوادارم بتوانم ئەو هۆکارانە دەست نیشان بکەم که کاریگەری بیان هەیه لەسەر خو گونجاندنی کوچبەران لەگەڵ بارودۆخی ژیاڵی ئەمریکا. تۆ وەک کەسیکی گونجاو بۆ ئەم پرۆژیه هەلبژێردراوی چونکه پرۆژەکهی من لەسەر ئەو کوچبەرە کوردانەیه که تەمەنیان له نیوان 18-70 ساڵیدایه. لەبەر ئەوە تۆ تەواوی مەرجەکان تێدا بەدی دەکری.

ئەگەر رازی به بەشداریکردن، ئەوە من (زەهەریا محەممەد ئەمین) سەردانی مألوهەتان دەکەم بۆ ئەنجامدانی چاوپێکەوتن که ماوهی 30-45 خولەک دەخایەنێت. له کاتی چاوپێکەوتنەکه تێبینی دەنوسم هەروەها چاوپێکەوتنەکه له رێگەي ریکۆردەرەي مۆبایلەوه تۆمار دەکەم بۆ ئەوەي زانیارییەکان به دروستی وەر بگرم.

هیچ مەترسییهك و نارهەتیهك بەدی ناکری له ئەنجامدانی ئەم گفتووگۆیه. له ئەگەري پەشیمان بوونەوه له ئەنجامدانی ئەم گفتووگۆیه، دەتوانی بەی دودلی داواي هەلۆشان دەنەوه بکەیت و کۆتایی به گفتووگۆکه ببیت بەی روون کردنەوهي هۆکارەي. هەلۆشان دەنەوهکەش هیچ زیانیکی لێناکەوتنەوه.

دەرەنجامەکانی ئەم پرۆژیه له فۆرمی ناخاوتن و نووسیندا پێشکەش دەکریت بۆ بلاوکردنەوه له نامەي ماستەر و سیمیناردا. زانیارییه کەسییهکان و دەنگییهکان به شێوهي نەپنی دەپاریزریت له ناو فۆلدریک که پاسوردی تاییهتی لەسەر دەبیت بۆ ماوهي سێ سال و به هیچ شێوهیهك بلاو ناکرینەوه. ئەگەر ویستت کۆپییهك له دەرەنجامەکانی ئەم پرۆژیهت دەست بکەوی، ئەوا پەيوەندی بکه به تویژەرەکه بهو ناو نیشانهي له خوار موه نامازەي پیکراوه.

ئەگەر هەر پرسیاریکت لا دروست بوو، دەتوانی پەيوەندی بکەي به من

لەرێگەي ژماره تەلەفۆنی

218-200-9485

یان لەریگەى ئەمەیلی

[zakzandy@gmail.com](mailto:zakzandy@gmail.com)

یاخود دەتوانی پێوهندی بکەى بە سەرپرشتیاری توێژینهوه له د. لیندا هاوتس-سمس له زانکۆى مینیسۆتا ستەیت-

مۆر هید له ریگەى ژماره تەلەفۆنى -477-4059-218

یان لەریگەى نێمەیلی

[houtsli@mnstate.edu](mailto:houtsli@mnstate.edu)

له کاتی دروستبوونی هەر پرسیارێک لهبارەى مافهكانت، دەتوانی پێوهندی بکەى بە د. لیزا کارچ، سەرۆکی بۆردی

پیداچوونهوهى نیودهولتی زانکۆى مینیسۆتا ستەیت-مۆر هید

لەریگەى ژماره تەلەفۆنى 218-477-2699

یان لەریگەى ئەمەیلی

[irb@mnstate.edu](mailto:irb@mnstate.edu)

نێمزا کردنت له خواروه ئاماژهیه بهوهى که زانیارییهکانی سەر موەت خویندۆتهوه و رازی به بەشداریکردن. له هەر

کاتیکیدا دەتوانی پەشیمان ببیوه له بەشدايریکردنت لهم پرۆژهیه.

واژۆی بەشدار بوو..... بەروار.....

واژۆی لیکۆلهی..... بەروار.....

### Appendix C: Common Reference Levels, Global Scale

Proficient User	C2	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	B2	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken.

		Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	A2	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p.24)

### Appendix D: English Interview Questions

I am going to ask you some questions, and I will make notes of your answers on this sheet. I will also record you talking in case I can't write fast enough. Is that okay with you?

Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Country of origin: \_\_\_\_\_

Religious affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of residence: \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status: Married/Single

Level of education: Primary school/ High school/ Bachelor's degree/ Advanced

Kindly answer the following questions.

1. How do you spend your days now that you live here in Moorhead? (Mark all)
 

Go to work  Go to classes  Take care of family at home  Go shopping

Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What was the main purpose of your immigration to the USA?
3. Do you want to return to your country of origin eventually? Why/why not?
4. Tell me what you do to fit into America and get along with Americans.
5. In what ways do you still mingle with Kurdish people?

6. What are the specific areas of American life you have successfully adapted to?
7. What are the problems you have had doing that (if any)?
8. What has been the most difficult thing about adjusting to life in USA?
9. How do you use English during a normal day?
10. Which language do you usually use at home?  
Kurdish  English
11. Which language do you usually use outside?  
Kurdish  English
12. Do you use interpreter for your appointments or other tasks?  
Yes  No
13. Do you write English?  
Yes  No
14. If yes, would you please write this sentence (I live with my family here)?
15. Do you read English?  
Yes  No
16. If yes, would you please read these two sentences? (My name is Azad. I live in Moorhead.)
17. Do you understand English?  
Yes  No
18. If yes, I can ask you some questions in English, you can answer me in Kurdish.
19. Do you speak English?  
Yes  No
20. If yes, tell me something about Moorhead in English (How was today's weather?)



21. How do you feel if you make small talk/have conversations with the native speakers of English?
22. What do you think are the easiest things about learning English?
23. What have been the most difficult things about learning English in USA for you?
24. What do you think would make learning English easier?
25. You said that you have/don't have a job. Do you have the kind of job you want? /  
Do you want a job? What has affected you finding a job you want?
26. Do you want to add anything else?

## Appendix E: Kurdish Interview Questions

### پرسیارەکان

چەند پرسیار نیکت ئاراستە دەکەم ، وەلامەکانت لەسەر ئەم کاغەزە تۆمار دەکەم. هەروەها دەنگیشت تۆمار دەکەم  
نەو ئەتوانم هەموو زانییەرییەکان خێرا بنوسمەوه. ئایا ئەمەت لا ئاساییه؟

ژمارە ی بەشدار بوو:.....

تەمەن:.....

رەگەز:.....

ولاتی رەسەن (نەو شوینیە ی لێو ی هاتووی):.....

ئاین:.....

ماو ی نیشته جیوون:.....

و ئەلامی راست هەلبژێرە: باری خێزانی: خێزانداری/رەبەن

ئاستی خویندەواری: سەرەتایی/ئامادەیی/ئامادەیی/بەکالۆریۆس/بەرتر

تکایە و ئەلامی ئەو ئرسیارانە بدووه:

1- چۆن رۆژەکانت بەسەر دەبە ی لێرە لە شاری مۆر هێد؟ (هەمووی دەست نیشان بکە

کار  دەرس خویندن  لاگاداری خێزان لە مالمو  بازاری کردن

شتی تر.....

2- مەبەستی سەرەکیت چی یە لە کۆچ کردن بو ئەمریکا؟

3- ئایا دەتەو ئ رۆژی لە رۆژان بگەر ئیتهوه ئەو ولاتە ی لێی هاتووی؟ لەبەر چی؟

4- پیم بلێ چۆن هەول دەدە ی بو ئەو ی لەگەل خەلکی رەسەنی ئەمریکی تیکەل بی؟

5- بە چ شێوازیک لەگەل خەلکی کورد تیکە لاویت هەیه؟

6- ئایا لە چ بواریک دا توانیوتە خۆت بگونجینی لەگەل ژبانی ئەمریکا؟

7- ئەو کێشانە چین لەکاتی خۆ گونجاندن رووبەر ویان بوویهوه؟

8- زەحمەتترین شت چی بووه بو خۆگونجاندن لەگەل ژبانی ئەمریکا؟

9- چۆن زمان بەکار دینی لە لە رۆژیکی ئاسایی؟

10- - کامە زمان بەکار دەهینی لە مالمو؟

كوردى  ئىنگلىزى

11- كامه زمان بهكار دههئى له دهرهوه؟

كوردى  ئىنگلىزى

12- وەرگىر (مترجم) بهكار دههئى بۇ راپهراندنى كارمكانت؟

بهلى  نهخير

13- دهتوانى به ئىنگلىزى بنووسى؟

بهلى  نهخير

14- ئەگەر بهلى، دهتوانى ئەم رستهيم بۇ بنووسى؟

(I live with my family here)

15- دهتوانى به ئىنگلىزى بخوئنييهوه؟

بهلى  نهخير

16- ئەگەر بهلى، دهتوانى ئەم دوو رستهيم بۇ بخوئنييهوه؟

(My name is Azad. I live in Moorhead)

17- نايا له زمانى ئىنگلىزى تئدهگهئى؟

بهلى  نهخير

18- ئەگەر بهلى، من ههئى پرسىارت لى دهكهم به ئىنگلىزى توش به كوردى وه لام بدهوه.

19. دهتوانى بهزمانى ئىنگلىزى قسه بكهئى؟

بهلى  نهخير

20- ئەگەر بهلى، دهر بارهئى شارى مورهئى قسه بۇ بكه به ئىنگلىزى ( بۇ نمونه ناوو ههواى مورهئى چوون بوو ئەمرو )

21- ههستت چوونه كاتىك لهگهل كهسانىك قسه دهكهئى كه زمانى بهكهمىيان ئىنگلىزىيه؟

22- ناسانتريين شت چيه لهبارهئى فيربوونى زمانى ئىنگلىزى؟

23- زهمهتتريين شت چيه لهبارهئى فيربوونى زمانى ئىنگلىزى له ئەمريكا؟

24- پئيت وايه چ شتىك فيربوونى زمانى ئىنگلىزىت بۇ ناسان دهكات؟

25- تو گوئت كارت ههيه/ يان نيته. نايا ئەم كارهئى ههته به دلئى خوته؟/ نايا كارت دهوئى؟ چ شتىك كاريگهئى ههبووه لهسهر دوزينهوهئى ئەوه كارهئى تو دهتهوئى؟

26- هيجى تر ههيه بيلىئى؟