

The Sociolinguistic Situation of the Kryz in Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of sociolinguistic research conducted in May to November of 2001 among the Kryz people in northeastern Azerbaijan. The goals of the research were to investigate patterns of language use, bilingualism, and language attitudes with regard to the Kryz Azerbaijani languages in the Kryz community. Of particular interest is the dialect situation between the main Kryz villages. Interviews, observations, and questionnaires were employed.*

1. Background

The Kryz language belongs to the Lezgian subgroup of the Dagestani group of North Caucasian languages. It is spoken primarily in the northeastern region of the Republic of Azerbaijan. While it is frequently grouped together with Budukh and Khinalug as a Şahdağ language, it has linguistic links only with Budukh (Humphreys and Mits 1994). The Şahdağ subgroup is more geographic than linguistic. Saadiev (1994:409) states that there are about 8,000 speakers of the Kryz language, most of whom live in the villages of Əlik, Cek, Hapıt, and Qrız,¹ although population figures are difficult to obtain since the Kryz have been counted as ethnic Azerbaijanis in censuses since 1959 (Humphreys and Mits 1994).

The Kryz call themselves *kyrtuar* and their language *kyruay mez* (Humphreys and Mits 1994). Saadiev (1994:409) writes that different Kryz dialects are spoken in the four villages of Qrız, Əlik, Cek, and Hapıt, and that these dialects are so distinct that they may be separate languages. According to Humphreys and Mits (1994), it has been suggested that Cek and Hapıt are separate languages, but both are now considered to be dialects of a single Kryz language. In addition to these four dialects, Grimes (2000) lists a fifth dialect, Yergüc. There is no literary form of Kryz.

Administratively, the Kryz villages of Qrız, Əlik, Cek, Hapıt, and Yergüc were part of the former Qonaqkənd district of Azerbaijan (Humphreys and Mits 1994), which is now part of Quba district. These villages, along with the primary mountain villages of the Khinalug and Budukh languages, are in one of the most remote and least accessible areas of Caucasia. These villages are located more than 2,000 metres above sea level. The climate of these locations is severe, with cold winters and cool summers. The main source of employment in the villages is sheep husbandry (Qübatov 1991).

There has been little linguistic or sociolinguistic research done on the Kryz language. Smeets (1994:xvi) says that the 39-page linguistic description of Kryz in Saadiev (1994) represents “the largest introduction to Kryts in print.” Smeets further notes that while Saadiev’s first publications on Kryz date from the 1950s, his full description of the language completed in 1972 was never published.

In a study of the influence of the Azerbaijani language on the Kryz language, Qübatov (1991) states that Kryz has been strongly influenced phonetically and lexically

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¹ While we are using the generally accepted spelling of Kryz for the name of the language, we are using the current Latin-based Azerbaijani orthography and spelling for place names, personal names, and dialect names. Thus, Kryz is the name of the language and people group, but Qrız is the name of the village and the dialect. The village and dialect names Qrız, Əlik, Cek, and Hapıt are also known in English sources as Kryts, Alyk, Dzhek, and Khaput.

by Azerbaijani and that the Şahdağ languages have old Azerbaijani borrowings that have not been kept in Azerbaijani. Qübatov also indicates that the Şahdağ languages have affected the Azerbaijani language.

Previous studies have regularly claimed that the majority of Kryz speakers are fluent in Azerbaijani (Saadiev 1994, Qübatov 1991, Humphreys and Mits 1994). According to Qübatov (1991), one major factor contributing to bilingualism is that men from all the Şahdağ groups have had to go to Azerbaijani-speaking villages in order to sell or buy products. Only men did these tasks, hence they were the ones who had to learn Azerbaijani. In the villages, however, they continued to speak only in their own languages (Qübatov 1991, Humphreys and Mits 1994).

Another major factor contributing to bilingualism is that schooling for all Kryz, Budukh, and Khinalug is in Azerbaijani (Qübatov 1991, Humphreys and Mits 1994). According to Qübatov, the level of bilingualism is such that most speakers of Lezgi, Khinalug, Budukh, and Kryz find it difficult to identify which language in which they are most fluent.

Although there is general agreement that the Kryz community is highly fluent in Azerbaijani, the implications of this for the long-term status of the Kryz language are less clear. Humphreys and Mits (1994) claim that by the beginning of the Soviet period it was difficult to distinguish any distinctive features of the Kryz people due to the great influence of Azerbaijani culture and language. The Kryz language had been the only distinctive feature, but the number of its speakers had decreased. They further state that the Kryz language is perishing, with its use limited to older people at home, and predict that in a few decades, “we will only be able to refer to them as the Azerbaijanis of Kryz villages.”

This paper discusses our research into the sociolinguistic situation of the Kryz language in Azerbaijan. Our primary foci were in the areas of language use, language proficiency, and language attitudes. Secondary goals were to provide information on where the Kryz people live and descriptions of these locations.

2. Methodology

The primary method of investigation involved informal interviews with individuals and groups from the Kryz community. In July 2001 we were able to visit Hapıt village and stop briefly in Əlik village as guests of Eldar Abdulayev, the Vice-President of the Budukh Society. During our time in Hapıt, we were also able to interview residents from Kryz villages near İsmayılı town who were also visiting in Hapıt. We also collected information through interviews with individuals in Baku from May to November 2001.

3. Results

3.1 Location Descriptions

3.1.1 *Traditional mountain villages*

According to our interviews, there are five Kryz mountain villages: Hapıt, Əlik, Cek, Qrız, and Qrızdəhnə. All are located in the Quba district. We have almost no information on Qrızdəhnə village, so will not include this village in most of the following discussion.

Professor Veli Ferxanovich (personal communication), an ethnic Kryz, estimates that there are 10,000–15,000 Kryz in Azerbaijan. According to a resident in Hapıt village, there are seventy homes in Hapıt village, fifty in Əlik village, fifty in Cek village, and about thirty in Qrız village. On the basis of these numbers, we estimate that about 1,000 to 2,000 Kryz speakers live in these four mountain villages.

The villages are located in the lower Caucasus mountains in the Quba district. The roads to these villages are more easily accessible in the summer months, but travelling is dependent on the weather. Rain and snow make travel to these villages difficult. The best time to go to these villages is in June or September.

There is no bus to any of the villages. The drive from Quba to Cek village takes about 2½ hours. Əlik is approximately 4 km south of Cek, and Hapıt is approximately 6 km south of Əlik. Hapıt is far enough south that its people have more connections with İsmayılı district.

The three villages of Əlik, Cek, and Hapıt are in one administrative group. The village of Əlik is the administrative center for the group of villages, and as such, the mayor's office is in Əlik.

Qrıız village is the least accessible of the four villages. It is located north of Cek village. The final section of the road to Qrıız village is accessible only by foot or horse. Gilles Authier (personal communication), who is involved in linguistic research on Kryz, commented that people have been moving from Qrıız village to the villages of Qrıızdahnə and Cek.

The main source of employment in the Kryz villages is reported to be sheep herding. The farming cooperative for the Kryz villages, Khinalug village and Buduq village, closed in 1994.

The diet of the Kryz people seems to consist mainly of lamb, milk, greens, bread, cheese, butter, and rice. There is rarely any fruit. There is no store in Hapıt village, only a kiosk which sells cigarettes and gum. Food products and other amenities are brought in from Quba as people come and go.

Television reception is possible in Cek and Əlik villages without the use of satellite dishes. In Hapıt village, however, television reception is only possible with the use of satellite dishes.

Girls generally marry around the age of 16. There is some intermarriage between the villages of Əlik, Cek, and Hapıt. Less frequently, there is intermarriage between these three villages and the village of Qrıız. There is also a significant amount of intermarriage between the Kryz villages and some of the Lezgi villages. Brides from the Lezgi villages can generally understand Kryz. Some can also speak a little Kryz.

Since Əlik, Cek, and Hapıt are on the same road, most people from Hapıt are able to visit Əlik and Cek frequently. They go to Əlik and Cek for weddings, funerals, and social visits.

There are two mullahs and one doctor in Hapıt. The mosque, however, is not currently functioning. Instead, the kiosk mentioned above is located in the former mosque. Most of the homes are built of stone; some have been rebuilt with bricks made of clay and straw.

It is reported that many people have moved away from the villages to Quba, İsmayılı, and other lowland communities in recent years. For example, ten years ago there were about 120 families in Hapıt village, five years ago there were ninety families, but now there are approximately seventy families.

3.1.2 Lowland communities

Many families from the mountain Kryz villages, as well as from the villages of Khinalug and Buduq, have moved to the plains. Most of this movement is relatively recent, and ethnic Kryz are a minority in many of the communities to which they have moved. There is one group of three villages in İsmayılı district which are reported to be predominantly Kryz, although ethnic Azerbaijanis also live in all three villages. These are the villages of Hacıhətəmli, Mollaisaqlı, and Hapıtlı.

According to a resident of Hacıhətəmli, these three communities were founded at the beginning of the twentieth century by three families who came down from the village of Hapıt in Quba. Over a period of a few years several dozen more followed. At the present time, there is a larger Kryz community in these three İsmayılı villages than in all the mountain villages. These villages are easily accessible all year long. They are close to the center of İsmayılı district, so the residents of these villages have more interaction in Azerbaijani than do the residents of the mountain villages of Hapıt, Əlik, Cek, Qrıız, and Qrıızdahnə.

The villages of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı make up an administrative group of which Hacıhətəmli is the administrative center. The combined population of these two villages is reported to be approximately 4,500.

The ethnic Kryz residents of these three İsmayılı villages call their language Hapıt or, less frequently, Kryz. Because of this, we will refer to these villages as the İsmayılı Hapıt villages. Many of them do not know the history of their community. There is no social contact between the İsmayılı Kryz communities and any of the mountain Kryz-language communities. Instead, social interaction with Azerbaijani villages and the district center of İsmayılı is very high.

A resident of Hacıhətəmli reported that significant numbers of the ethnic Kryz who live in Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı have maintained the use of the Hapıt dialect. On the other hand, the village of Hapıtlı is almost entirely Azerbaijani-speaking although the majority of its residents are ethnic Kryz.

In addition to these three villages, Qübatov (personal communication) estimates that there are twenty-eight new communities in the plains where families from the Kryz, Budukh, and Khinalug language groups live together. Significant numbers of Kryz also reside in Baku and Sumqayıt. Some of the lowlands locations where Kryz people are reported to live are listed in table 1.

Table 1: Lowlands Communities with Minority Kryz Populations

District	Town or Village
Quba	Quba
Xaçmaz	Xaçmaz Yergüç
İsmayılı	Topçu Buynuz
Mərdəkan	
Zərdov	Söləyli Rəhmətli Qaxay Ağsu
Qəbələ	Ovuculu Sileyvi

The majority of residents in these communities are Azerbaijani speakers, although not necessarily ethnic Azerbaijani. The majority of the residents of Yergüç, for example, are ethnic Budukh who speak Azerbaijani. Some of the ethnic Kryz in these communities have continued to use the Kryz language, but in a limited number of domains. Most ethnic Kryz in these villages, however, have assimilated to the Azerbaijani speakers. Ethnically, they see themselves as Kryz, but they no longer speak the Kryz language.

According to a former resident of Hapıt village who now lives in the town of Quba, there are two distinct subgroups in the Quba Kryz community. One subgroup consists of Kryz who moved to Quba shortly after WWII. The second subgroup consists of Kryz who have moved to Quba within the last five to ten years. Members of the second subgroup still maintain a fair amount of contact with the villages. Generally, it is the residents of Quba who visit the villages; it is not common for those who live in the villages to make the trip to Quba.

A Kryz resident of Xaçmaz estimated that ethnic Kryz live in approximately forty communities in the Xaçmaz district. According to another resident of Xaçmaz, Kryz is the third largest ethnic group in the district of Xaçmaz. Some, but not all, of these families in Xaçmaz are reported to teach their children to speak Kryz.

In the other communities to which ethnic Kryz have migrated recently, they have reportedly fully switched to Azerbaijani. These communities include the towns in the districts of Mərdəkan, Zərdov, and Qəbələ, and the cities of Baku and Sumqayıt. Those

who speak Kryz in these communities are mostly people who are 55 years of age and over.

3.2 Education

The language of education in the mountain villages of Hapıt, Əlik, Cek, and Qrız has always been in Azerbaijani, even during the Soviet period. Apparently, there have never been classes in the Kryz language in any of the villages. Education in these locations has been given little attention, however, since the fall of the Soviet Union. Teachers are finding it particularly difficult to teach the new Latin-based Azerbaijani alphabet.

There is no kindergarten in any of the villages. In the villages of Hapıt and Cek, there are schools with grades 1 to 4. The school in Hapıt village has a single teacher. The school in Əlik has grades 1 to 9. Students from Hapıt and Cek have the option of attending the school in Əlik for grades 5 to 9. Many of the students, however, do not choose to continue with schooling after grade 4. This is especially true for girls. Of those students from all three villages who finish grade 9 in Əlik, less than one-half go on for further education. Some residents of Əlik village said that the level of interest in education is low in the villages due to the fact that employment in the villages is mainly oriented towards sheep herding.

Both Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı have schools with grades 1 to 11, although neither village has preparatory classes. Azerbaijani is the language of instruction at both schools. While several teachers in these schools come from İsmayılı, most come from the villages themselves. Many students from these schools go on to study in Mingəçevir, Gəncə, or Baku after graduation.

Ethnic Kryz, who have lived in Baku for most of their lives, were educated in either Azerbaijani or Russian.

3.3 Language Proficiency

3.3.1 Kryz

In the mountain villages of Hapıt, Əlik, Cek, and Qrız, people in all age groups speak the Kryz language as their first language. Kryz is the language in which they are most fluent.

In the İsmayılı Hapıt villages of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı, Kryz is the first language of most residents 30 years of age and older. They speak the Hapıt dialect with one another. Due to marriages with non-Kryz spouses, however, Azerbaijani has become the language of the home for some of those from ages 30 to 55. Because of this, some in this group have lost proficiency in the Hapıt dialect. Language ability continues to decrease with those 18 to 30 years of age. It is claimed that no more than 30% of this generation speak the Hapıt dialect well. While 30 to 40% of children in these communities come from homes where at least one of the parents uses the Hapıt dialect occasionally, proficiency in this dialect is low among the children. The children of these villages are reported to be most fluent in the Azerbaijani language.

In all the other locations, the proficiency of the Kryz language varies. There are those who speak Kryz, those who only understand it and cannot speak it, and those who do not understand Kryz at all. The majority of Kryz who live in these other communities, however, are reported not to be highly proficient in the Kryz language.

3.3.2 Azerbaijani

It is reported that in the mountain villages, children do not know Azerbaijani well before they start school. It is further reported that children do not attain a high level of Azerbaijani even in school. Gilles Authier (personal communication) indicated that even at the age of 12 children have difficulties reading and writing Azerbaijani.

Most men in the mountain villages between the ages of 18 and 55 are said to speak Azerbaijani well. Men who are over age 55 are said to sometimes have trouble with Azerbaijani.

Those over 55 in the İsmayılı Hapıt communities of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı have a little trouble with Azerbaijani. Those between 30 and 55 are more fluent in Azerbaijani than the older generation and speak Azerbaijani very well. Azerbaijani is the first language of most school-aged children. Even children who are from homes where the Hapıt dialect is occasionally spoken will most often use Azerbaijani. Preschool children also have an adequate level of Azerbaijani when they first begin school.

3.3.3 *Russian*

In all locations, most of those interviewed reported a higher proficiency in Azerbaijani than in Russian. Russian proficiency is especially low among women, young adults, and children. Some of the men know Russian from their time in the Soviet army. Since independence, however, this has not been a factor in language proficiency.

3.4 **Language Use**

Kryz is the main language of communication in the mountain villages. It is spoken among people of all ages. While children of ethnically mixed families speak a mixture of Azerbaijani, the mother's language, and Kryz, most preschool children speak only Kryz.

Depending on the type of work, some men in the mountain villages use Azerbaijani as the language of work. It is more common, however, to use Kryz in the economic domain, since the primary economic activity is sheep herding. Azerbaijani is spoken in very specific commercial domains.

A resident of Hacıhətəmli reported that in the İsmayılı Hapıt villages of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı, those over 55 years of age regularly speak the Hapıt dialect with one another on the streets and in their homes. Those between the ages of 30 and 55 also speak Hapıt with one another on the street and in homes. However, mixed marriages are much more common for this age group and those who marry Azerbaijanis, Lezgis, or Tats will speak Azerbaijani at home. Because there are residents in these villages who are not ethnically Kryz, it is possible for an individual to live in these villages and not use Hapıt. It is, however, helpful to understand the Hapıt dialect as people frequently use it in interpersonal domains. It is more typical for an individual above the age of 30 to speak Hapıt than not to speak it.

Those between the ages of 18 and 30 in these İsmayılı Hapıt villages are mixed in their use of the Hapıt dialect. For those who marry non-Hapıt individuals, Azerbaijani is the language of the home. Children use mostly Azerbaijani in all domains of life.

The İsmayılı Hapıt community of Hapıtlı has become almost entirely Azerbaijani speaking.

Within the Quba Kryz community, those who moved to Quba town shortly after WWII do not use the Kryz language. Azerbaijani is the main language of the home and of the community for this subgroup. Those who moved to Quba town within the last five to ten years continue to speak Kryz, but their children do not. In these families, the parents speak Kryz to each other, but Azerbaijani to their children.

A resident from Xaçmaz district reported that there are Kryz who speak the Kryz language in the home and in social interactions with other ethnic Kryz. There are also ethnic Kryz who do not use Kryz in any domain of life. For both of these groups, Azerbaijani is the language of work.

3.5 **Language Attitudes**

3.5.1 *Vernacular*

According to Gilles Authier (personal communication), the Kryz do not have a strong identity as a people group separate from ethnic Azerbaijanis. The majority of those who live in the mountain villages recognize that they have a unique culture and language. There are some who have a desire for the Kryz language to be developed and written. At the same time, being considered a part of Azerbaijan is also important to most Kryz

people. For children who live in the plains, the Kryz language is considered to be the language of the grandparents and of the mountain villages.

In Baku, there are those of Kryz background who do not see the importance of speaking and maintaining the Kryz language at all. Some question the usefulness of the Kryz language in the city, since Azerbaijani is the language of the home in mixed marriages. Concern over the loss of the Kryz language is not high among those who are living outside of the mountain villages.

3.5.2 Azerbaijani

Azerbaijani is gaining prestige even in the mountain villages. Those in the villages know that Azerbaijani is important for the future. Among the youth, Azerbaijani is seen as a fun and trendy language.

Many of the Kryz who live in the plains see themselves as Azerbaijani. Moreover, Azerbaijani is the main language of communication among the Kryz who live in the plains. Azerbaijani is valued for its role in community life, work, and education.

3.5.3 Attitudes towards vernacular materials

There are apparently no Kryz language materials currently available in any form. Interviewees in Hapıt village said that they feel no need for Kryz to be a written language. On the other hand, they said that they would enjoy radio broadcasts in the Kryz language. When asked in which dialect they would like to hear radio programs, each of the respondents preferred programs in their own dialect. But they also recognized it would be difficult to have broadcasts in each dialect and indicated it would be acceptable to use one of the other dialects.

In the İsmayılı Hapıt communities, the Hapıt dialect is not considered to be important for literacy. According to a resident of Hacıhətəmli, there is little interest in the community for written materials in the Hapıt dialect. It is likely, however, that those over the age of 30 would appreciate audio materials in the Hapıt dialect.

A Kryz resident from Xaçmaz expressed a desire to have a Kryz alphabet and to have Kryz language materials developed. He felt that there is a high interest among the Kryz people in having books and radio programs in the Kryz language.

An ethnic Kryz professor, on the other hand, commented that there are not enough Kryz speakers to make the promotion and development of Kryz materials worthwhile. He stated that assimilation with Azerbaijani has already gone too far.

3.6 Dialect Situation

In our interviews and conversations with individuals, Kryz was recognized and considered to be the name of a single language, which consists of the four dialects Hapıt, Əlik, Cek, and Qrız. Contrary to the information in Grimes (2000), we did not discover any information to indicate that the variety spoken in the village of Yergüç represents a fifth variety of Kryz.

The Hapıt and Qrız dialects are considered to be the least similar. The general consensus was that speakers of the dialects of Hapıt, Əlik, and Cek can understand each other more easily than any can the Qrız dialect. At the same time, several individuals indicated that people from any of the four mountain villages could understand speakers from any of the other villages. In a conversation between speakers from different dialects, each is reported to speak in their own dialect.

Speaking as an outsider, Gilles Authier (personal communication) has seen no major obstacles to comprehension between dialects. In addition, Authier indicates that less than 10% of the words are different between the dialects.

A resident of Hacıhətəmli reported that the people of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı each have their own accents. Lexically, however, the varieties of Hapıt spoken in these

two villages are very similar to each other and there is no need to consider the Hapıt spoken in these villages as separate dialects.

In fact, the greatest differences in the varieties spoken in the İsmayılı Hapıt communities are reported to be between generations. The oldest individuals in the village, those over 70 years of age, speak a dialect which is quite similar to that spoken in the mountain village of Hapıt itself. There is, however, greater influence from Azerbaijani among those who are younger. It is reported that Hapıt spoken by those between the ages of 30 and 55 is quite different from that spoken in the mountain villages. It is likely that comprehension may be more difficult between these speakers and speakers of the mountain dialects.

While it was noted in section 1 that Budukh and Kryz are related languages, it is difficult for speakers of either group to understand one another. One Kryz speaker who has a great deal of contact with Budukh shepherds has begun to understand them a little. He says the grammar and the way of speaking are very similar but that they use many different words. According to Gilles Authier (personal communication), only 60% of the roots of Budukh words are found in the Kryz language.

4. Discussion

4.1 Assessment of Background Information

4.1.1 *Number of speakers*

Previous studies indicated that there are about 6,000 to 8,000 speakers of the Kryz language, most of who live in the villages of Əlik, Cek, Hapıt, and Qrıız. Our research indicates that there are only about 2,000 remaining speakers of Kryz language in the mountain villages. There are at least the same number in the İsmayılı Hapıt villages. The majority of Kryz people live in the plains, and in general, they have chosen Azerbaijani as the language of the home and community. The number of Kryz speakers has apparently decreased since many of the previous studies were made.

4.1.2 *Azerbaijani proficiency*

There is general agreement in the previous studies that all Kryz speakers are fluent in Azerbaijani. This is definitely true for those living in Quba, Xaçmaz, Baku, and the İsmayılı Hapıt communities. In these communities there is a high level of interaction with Azerbaijani speakers, and the main language of communication is Azerbaijani.

Proficiency is reported to be lower, however, for those in the mountain villages. While it is reported that most of the residents have a high level of proficiency in Azerbaijani, men who are over age 55 are said to sometimes have trouble with Azerbaijani. There were no reports about women's proficiency in Azerbaijani. It is probably safe to assume, however, that their proficiency is lower. They do not tend to spend as many years in school and have less interaction outside the village than do the men. The fact that children do not know Azerbaijani well before school probably also indicates that the normal language of interaction between mothers and children is Kryz, not Azerbaijani. The low level of Azerbaijani among children before starting school seems to call into question the claim by Humphreys and Mits (1994) that Kryz is only spoken at home by the older people. The fact that children do not attain a high level of Azerbaijani while they are in school also indicates that Kryz is the main language in the village. It is possible that the general proficiency in Azerbaijani reported among men is due to contacts outside the village after they leave school. In general, our research indicates that in the mountain villages Kryz continues to be the primary language in the domains of the home and of the community for every age group.

Given the current state of affairs, it appears that among the mountain villages, proficiency in Azerbaijani results primarily from contact with Azerbaijani speakers outside the village. The generally low level of interest in formal schooling, together with the limited schooling actually available, make it unlikely that schooling will play a significant role in the development of proficiency in Azerbaijani.

4.1.3 *Dialect situation*

Previous research indicates that the four dialects of the Kryz language are different enough that they might be separate languages. According to our research, speakers of all the dialects view them as variants of a single language. In addition, comments regarding communication seem to indicate that they are intelligible. We do not know, however, whether this is inherent or acquired intelligibility. There are some indications that the intelligibility may to at least some extent be acquired. The younger people in the İsmayılı Hapıt villages were reported to speak quite differently from the older people in the community. There is no evidence that there is any problem in communication between these two groups. There were, however, comments that there may be problems in communication between the younger people and speakers of the other mountain dialects. It could be that the source of such problems may be due to the dialects being divergent enough that a certain amount of the intelligibility is not inherent, but needs to be acquired through contact.

The possible problems in intelligibility also have implications for development of materials (either written or oral) in Kryz. It could well be that materials in the Hapıt variety would be maximally useful, since they would be understood both by the mountain communities and the İsmayılı Hapıt communities. It would probably be more difficult for members of the İsmayılı Hapıt community to understand materials in one of the other mountain varieties.

4.2 **Migration Trends**

We noted above that ten years ago there were about 120 families in Hapıt village, and now there are approximately seventy families. This represents a decline of almost one half of the families. It was also reported that Qrız village is being depopulated as people move to the other Kryz language villages. We do not know if this is a typical migration trend for all the other mountain villages. At least in the case of Qrız, it appears that many of the families are moving to Qrızdəhnə and Cek, other mountain villages where Kryz is regularly spoken. It could be that while some families are moving to lowlands villages, others are moving to the more central mountain villages. It is clear that the majority of Kryz have moved to the lowlands, and that there are only about 2,000 Kryz in the mountain villages. But we are unable to determine the extent to which this movement will continue.

The extent of continued movement to the lowlands may well play a crucial role in the future of the Kryz language. Our research indicates that the Kryz language has generally not been maintained as the language of the home in lowlands communities. As a result, children of these Kryz speakers grow up using Azerbaijani and viewing Kryz as the language of their heritage. Although most Kryz who have migrated to the lowlands continue to live in communities with other Kryz speakers, Azerbaijani has become the language of communication due to the high level of contact with Azerbaijani speakers.

4.3 **Hapıt Communities of İsmayılı**

At least three factors have contributed to the apparent gradual loss of Kryz in the Hapıt villages of İsmayılı: social contact, assimilation, and sense of history. The people of these communities have not maintained contact with any other Kryz villages, including the mountain villages where the Kryz language is spoken on a regular basis in a number of domains. Instead, the primary social contact is with Azerbaijani speakers. This contact is both in the village, as the Hapıt villages are all ethnically-mixed villages (although with Kryz majorities), and between the Hapıt villages on the one hand, and neighboring villages and İsmayılı town on the other hand. Because of this, Azerbaijani has become the main language of communication outside the home.

This social contact has resulted in assimilation with the neighboring Azerbaijani speakers. In the realm of language, the Hapıt in these villages has been influenced by Azerbaijani to the point where it may not be understandable to the Kryz speakers from the mountain communities.

Finally, many of those who live in these communities do not know the history of their village and their heritage with roots in the Kryz villages in the mountains. Without a sense of ties to the Kryz villages, there is not a strong loyalty to maintenance of the language.

As a result of these factors, the village of Hapıtlı is now almost entirely Azerbaijani speaking. While Hapıt continues to be used by many individuals and groups in the villages of Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı, its use is becoming restricted to certain age groups and certain domains. We do not know why the rate of language shift is greater in Hapıtlı than it is in Hacıhətəmli and Mollaisaqlı. We also do not know why the shift to Azerbaijani is greater in all three of the Hapıt villages of İsmayılı than it is in the Lezgi-speaking village of Qalacıq, which is also in the İsmayılı district.

5. Conclusion

The Kryz people of Azerbaijan have a unique heritage, culture, and language. Although there is an indication that people may be moving from the mountain Kryz villages to the lowlands, there remains a significant community of Kryz speakers in the mountains for whom Kryz is the main language of communication. In addition, at least some of the movement seems to be between mountain villages.

There are a number of important issues that still need to be answered through further research. Perhaps the most important of these deals with proficiency in Azerbaijani. In light of the fact that it is reported that children and those of the older generation in the mountain villages do not speak Azerbaijani at a high level, the claims of overall bilingualism need to be objectively verified. Related to this, the level of Azerbaijani literacy in the mountain villages needs to be researched. Our research suggests that proficiency in Azerbaijani in the mountain communities may not be as great as was claimed in previous studies.

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