FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: TEACHING LAZURI WITHIN THE LIVING LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS PROGRAM OF TÜRKİYE

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submitted by **ZEYNEP BURAK** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in Sociology, the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Sadettin KİRAZCI
Dean
Graduate School of Social Sciences _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşe GÜNDÜZ HOŞGÖR
Head of Department
Department of Sociology _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN
Supervisor
Department of Sociology _____

Examining Committee Members:

Prof. Dr. Süer EKER (Head of the Examining Committee)
Başkent University
Department of Turkish Language and Literature _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN (Supervisor)
Middle East Technical University
Department of Sociology _____

Prof. Dr. Ayşe İdil AYBARS
Middle East Technical University
Department of Sociology _____

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Name, Last Name: Zeynep BURAK

Signature:

ABSTRACT

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: TEACHING LAZURI WITHIN THE LIVING LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS PROGRAM OF TÜRKİYE

BURAK, Zeynep
M.S., The Department of Sociology
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN

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This thesis examines the implementation of Lazuri elective courses within Türkiye's Living Languages and Dialects (*Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler*, LLD) Program. Focusing on the teachers responsible for carrying the courses into practice, the study investigates how the courses are realized, enacted, and sustained within their everyday institutional settings.The research draws on qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with eight teachers who have taught Lazuri courses in public schools, representing the overwhelming majority of individuals known to have taught the course. Using thematic analysis, the study examines the Lazuri teachers' personal linguistic trajectories, the grassroots realization of the course, the ways the teachers adapt and enact the course in practice, and the meanings they attach to the course as they carry it beyond the classroom. The thesis argues that minority language recognition within formal education does not automatically translate into durable institutional support or, by itself, create the necessary conditions for language revitalization and reversing language shift, but acquires meaning and practical significance through the sustained efforts of the actors who carry it into practice.

Keywords: Laz Language; Minority Language Education; Language Revitalization; Language Policy; Living Languages and Dialects (LLD)

ÖZ

POLİTİKADAN PRATİĞE: TÜRKİYE'DE YAŞAYAN DİLLER VE LEHÇELER PROGRAMI KAPSAMINDA LAZCA DERSLERİ

BURAK, Zeynep
Yüksek Lisans, Sosyoloji Bölümü
Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Ayşegül AYDINGÜN

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Bu tez, Türkiye'de Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler (YDL) Programı kapsamında yürütülen Lazca seçmeli derslerinin uygulanışını incelemektedir. Dersleri pratiğe taşıyan öğretmenleri odağına alan çalışma, derslerin gündelik kurumsal bağlamlar içerisinde nasıl yorumlandığını, hayata geçirildiğini ve sürdürüldüğünü araştırmaktadır. Araştırma, derslerin uygulanmaya başlamasından bu yana devlet okullarında Lazca dersi vermiş olduğu bilinen kişilerin büyük çoğunluğunu oluşturan sekiz öğretmenle gerçekleştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerden elde edilen nitel veriye dayanmaktadır. Tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılarak öğretmenlerin dilsel geçmişleri, dersin tabandan gelişen yapısı, öğretmenlerin dersi pratikte nasıl uyarlayıp hayata geçirdikleri ve dersi sınıfın ötesine taşırken ona atfettikleri anlamlar incelenmiştir. Tez, örgün eğitim içerisinde azınlık dillerine yönelik tanınmanın kendiliğinden kalıcı kurumsal desteğe dönüşmediğini ya da tek başına dil kaymasının tersine çevrilmesi ve dilin canlandırılması için gerekli koşulları yaratmadığını; ancak politikayı uygulamaya taşıyan aktörlerin sürekli çabaları aracılığıyla anlam ve pratik karşılık kazandığını ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Lazca; Azınlık Dili Eğitimi; Dil Canlandırma; Dil Politikası; Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler (YDL) Dersleri

For Lazuri,
and for those who continue to carry it forward.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores how the Lazuri (Laz, lzz ISO 639-1) elective courses offered within Türkiye's Living Languages and Dialects Program (*Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler*, hereafter LLD) have been experienced and enacted in practice by its teachers. The LLD courses introduced in 2012, enabled the teaching of eight non-official languages spoken in Türkiye in public middle schools and marked an uprecented moment in the relationship between these languages of Türkiye and the Turkish state. This study focuses on the narratives of the teachers responsible for delivering the Lazuri courses and investigates how this unique language policy is understood and experienced. It also aims to understand what the courses reveal about the possibilities and limitations of education as a site of linguistic recognition and how its teachers imbued its formal design with revitalizatory potential in practice.

1.1. Locating the Laz and Lazuri

The Laz (autonym: *Lazi*) are an autochthonous population concentrated along the southeastern coast of the Black Sea. Their settlement area spans present day northeastern Türkiye and southwestern Georgia (Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001, p. 9). In Türkiye, Laz communities are primarily located in the provinces of Rize and Artvin, especially in the coastal districts of Pazar (Atina), Ardeşen (Arťaşeni), Fındıklı (Vitze), Arhavi (Arkabi), and Hopa (Xopa). Across the border, Laz settlements continue into Georgia. In addition to the eastern Black Sea populations, substantial Laz communities live in western Türkiye in provinces such as Düzce, Sakarya, Kocaeli, Yalova, and parts of Balıkesir. Large-scale migration in the late Ottoman period led to this establishment of Laz settlements in the Marmara region. Muslim populations arriving from the South Caucasus were strategically resettled in the Marmara region to encircle the imperial capital of Istanbul (Özel, 2024). Today, these Marmara-based

communities constitute an important segment of the Laz population and can be described as a regional diaspora within Türkiye.

The language of the Laz, Lazuri, belongs to the South Caucasian language family,[1] alongside Georgian and Svan, and forms part of the Zan branch, in which it is most closely related to Mingrelian. Among these languages, Lazuri is the only one that is spoken predominantly in Türkiye. There is only a small number of villages on the Georgian side of the border who continue to speak Lazuri (Kutscher, 2008, p. 82). Lazuri is an agglutinative language with complex verbal morphology (Öztürk and Pöchtrager, 2011) and does not have grammatical gender (Holisky, 1991). It has historically been used as an oral language and despite succesful efforts to develop a writing system, Lazuri literacy and written use among the community remains limited (Haznedar, 2018, p. 68). Lazuri is internally quite diverse with multiple varieties (Xopuri, Vitzuri, Ark'abuli, Çxaluri, Atinuri and Art'aşenuri). These varieties are mostly mutually intelligible, but they show noticeable differences in vocabulary, morphology, and certain grammatical features.

The Laz are not officially recognized as a minority group by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.[2] As a result, Turkish census records have not accounted for the Laz as a distinct population group. Hence, the number of Laz people and Lazuri speakers can only be estimated. According to the 1935 census, there were 63,253 native Lazuri speakers, with an additional 5,061 people speaking Lazuri as a second language. The 1945 census recorded 46,987 Lazuri speakers. By the 1965 census, the number of native Laz speakers had decreased to 26,007, while the number of people speaking Laz as a second language had increased to 59,101. Estimates in linguistic and ethnological studies vary, ranging from 45,000 (Andrews, 1989) to 500,000 (Holisky, 1991, as cited in Kutscher, 2008). Extrapolating the demographic patterns in the Ardeşen distict, Kutscher (2008, p. 83) estimates that the Laz population in the eastern Black Sea region may be in the range of 200,000. These numbers remain as estimations. Also, they do not always account for Laz communities in the Marmara

[1] For a detailed discussion on the use of "South Caucasian" as the linguistically accurate designation for this language family instead of the term "Kartvelian", see George Hewitt (2017) "Instilling Pride by Raising a Language's Prestige".

[2] The Treaty of Lausanne adopts a religion-based understanding of minority, recognizing only the non-Muslim groups of Jews, Armenians and Greeks as minorities.

region and other areas outside the eastern Black Sea. What is clearer than any number, however, is the direction of language shift. The sociolinguistic condition of Lazuri today is described as one of endangerment (Moseley, 2010). The use of Lazuri has decreased sharply across generations. In contemporary Türkiye, all Laz speak Turkish but not all Laz speak Lazuri. Intergenerational transmission is very low; younger generations rarely understand Lazuri and almost never speak it (Kutscher, 2008). Beginning in the 1990s, Laz cultural and linguistic visibility increased through new associations, publications, and transnational networks. This period saw the emergence of a more explicit language activism among younger generations. In the 2000s, political shifts in Türkiye created new openings for minority language expression and 2012 saw the emergence of the LLD courses.

1.2. Defining the Political Context

With its establishment in 1923, the Turkish Republic pursued a republican model of nation-building which appointed linguistic unity as its base principle of political consolidation (Zürcher, 2004; Bayar, 2011; 2014). Turkish was institutionalized as the sole official language of the Republic. The linguistic diversity of Türkiye was not accommodated beyond the limited minority regime defined by the Treaty of Lausanne. A partial change began in the late twentieth century. The repeal of the ban on non-Turkish languages in 1991 marked an important turning point (Van Bruinessen, 1996, p. 7) and removed a significant legal barrier to cultural expression among non-Turkish Muslims. From the 1990s onward, reforms in relation to the Kurdish question and Türkiye's European Union accession process created new openings for the public articulation of ethnic and linguistic distinction. These developments created a sense of renewed ethno-cultural awareness and activism among groups who had been subject to processes of linguistic assimilation such as the Laz and Circassians (Kaya, 2005; 2012). Türkiye's recognition as an EU candidate country in 1999 intensified reform pressures. The accession process called for alignment with the Copenhagen criteria which included reforms related to democracy as well as linguistic and cultural rights. During the early 2000s, a series of constitutional amendments and harmonization packages expanded the legal space for non-Turkish languages in broadcasting and cultural production as a whole. In 2001, Articles 26 and 28 of the 1982 Constitution were amended in a manner that eliminated language that restricted expression and

publication in languages other than Turkish. Subsequent harmonization packages in 2002 and 2003 amended the Law on Radio and Television (Law No. 3984) and relevant provisions of the National Education Law. For the first time, limited broadcasting in "different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens" was permitted under state regulation. In 2003, a specific regulation was adopted allowing private courses for the teaching of such languages.[3]

The early period of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), which came to power in 2002, coincided with this reformist climate. EU membership was both an external incentive and a domestic legitimizing frame of liberalization (Sipahioğlu, 2017; Kaliber, 2012). In the late 2000s, the state introduced what became known as the "democratic opening" (*demokratik açılım*), focused on the Kurdish question. While the Laz were not the central subjects of this, this reframing of ethnic difference as a matter open to political negotiation had spillover effects where minority language claims gained a more legible place in public discourse. However, the implementation of these reforms were oftentimes uneven and contingent (Sipahioğlu, 2017, p. 64). It was in this reformist but bounded environment that the LLD courses was introduced in 2012.

1.3. The Living Languages and Dialects Courses

The LLD courses was officially introduced in 2012 by the Ministry of National Education. It emerged in the restructuring of the education system known as the 4+4+4 reform. It was incorporated into the elective pool of middle schools (grades 5 through 8). Students may select the course for up to four consecutive years with two hours of instruction per week. A minimum number of 10 students is required for a course to be offered. While the initiative was open in principle to all non-Turkish languages spoken in Türkiye, (formally including Abkhazian, Adige, Albanian, Bosnian, Georgian, Kurmancî, Lazuri, and Zazakî) it was far from encompassing the linguistic diversity of the country. Numerous other language communities, such as speakers of Romeika, Syriac, or Hemşince, remained outside LLD's scope.

The question of who would teach these courses was not straightforward. None of the languages included under LLD, apart from Kurmancî and Zazakî, have established

[3] These courses were under strict licensing conditions and were outside public schools.

university departments in Türkiye.[4] As a result, eligibility was extended to graduates of related departments like Turkish Language and Literature, Turkish Teaching, Contemporary Turkic Dialects and Literatures, Turkish Folklore, and Social Studies Teaching.

When the LLD courses were announced in June 2012, it was publicly indicated that the necessary infrastructure, curriculum, textbooks, and teacher assignments, would be organized by the Ministry of National Education. By the beginning of the 2012-2013 academic year, it became clear that these steps had not been taken with regard to Lazuri courses. As a result, no Lazuri classes could be opened for the first year of the Program. The Laz Institute subsequently assembled a team to draft a four-year modular curriculum for grades 5 through 8. This curriculum was approved by the Board of Education in September 2013. Lazuri was then included in the official list of electives beginning in the 2013-2014 academic year. A four-year set of textbooks was developed by the Laz Institute and made available the following year. In 2018, within the framework of the EU-supported "Living Lazuri" Project, the Laz Institute organized a certified instructor training program in cooperation with the Ministry's General Directorate for Teacher Training and Development. Teachers who completed the program received certification authorizing them to teach the course. As of the 2025-2026 academic year, there are no permanently appointed Lazuri teachers in the Ministry of National Education.

Official statistical data on the Lazuri electives is not available. Attempts to obtain such data through formal and informal inquiries have not yielded reliable results. As a result, the numerical reconstruction of the courses for this study have relied on secondary documentation. Data from two reports were used whose coverage overlaps between 2013 and 2020: Özge Bakay's *Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler Seçmeli Lazca Dersi Raporu (2013–2020)*[5] and Bülent Bilmez and İrfan Çağatay's *Sahipsiz Bir Hak: Dil Hakları Bağlamında Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler Seçmeli Dersi Lazca Örneği*

[4] At present, undergraduate programs in Kurdish Language and Literature are offered at Mardin Artuklu University, Muş Alparslan University, Dicle University, and Bingöl University. Zaza language programs are currently offered at Munzur University and at Bingöl University, where the Zaza Language and Culture Research Center is located.

[5] Bakay, Özge. *A report on the elective Laz courses offered by the Ministry of Education in Türkiye: 2013-2020*. Istanbul: Laz Enstitüsü, 2020

(2012–2021).[6] The figures in these two reports differ. However, they converge on the overall trajectory. Both confirm that implementation began in 2013-2014 following the approval of the curriculum and both show 2014-2015 as the year of highest enrolment. Both document a marked decline after 2015-2016 and a contraction in 2016-2017. Both record that no classes opened in 2017-2018 and show a limited reappearance in 2018-2019. This trajectory is visualized in the 3.4.1 the cLazuri classes were offered almost entirely in different districts of Rize (Fındıklı, Çamlıhemşin, Ardeşen, and Pazar). One course was opened in the Arhavi district of Artvin. The only exception outside the eastern Black Sea region was a one-time course opened in Istanbul in the 2018-2019 academic year. The statistical and institutional background of the courses is discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

1.4. The Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

This study stands at the intersection of language policy literature, theories of enactment, and language revitalization research. The central aim is to look beyond the policy of the LLD courses and the formal recognition of Lazuri in the public education system, to how that policy and recognition are experienced and transformed when it is turned into a reality by its teachers. Language policy research emphasizes that policy does not end at legislation. Spolsky (2004, p. 2154) maps it as an ever-changing, tri-fold operation of ideology, management, and practice. In the same vein, Ricento and Hornberger (1996, p. 420) conceptualizes how policy operates through multiple levels from macro-level state regulation to micro-level classroom interaction. Understanding policy in this way is especially important in centralized systems such as Türkiye, where the policy text and institutional reality do not always overlap. This framework suggests that the language policy that is the LLD courses should not be treated as a fixed reform but as a layered process whose meaning is produced and re-produced in its implemantation. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) provides us with the vocabulary to conceptualize this continuous and subjective process of re-production. They formulate the concept of "enactment" which involves the subjective work of interpretation and translation done by the teachers that are tasked with a new policy. They argue that teachers "do" policy through contextual negotiation and create what

[6] Bilmez, Bülent, and İrfan Çağatay. *An Unclaimed Right: The Case of the Laz Language Elective Course in the Context of Language Rights (2012–2021).* Istanbul: Laz Enstitüsü, 2021.

the policy becomes. To understand the nature and the conditions surrounding this process of enactment, the study draws on Lipsky' (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy". Lazuri teachers occupy a dual position. They are state employees working within a national curriculum, and they are also members of a linguistic community whose language is facing endangerment. They are thus conceptualized as "street-level bureaucrats" who as frontline actors, determine and deliver policy through the everyday decisions they make within their open-ended roles and resource-contraint institituonal contexts. Lazuri teachers are the key site where the LLD policy meets local reality. How they experience and "do" the course are therefore analytically significant in understanding the potential and the limits of the policy, especially in questions of language revitalization.

When it comes to language revitalization, the importance of institutional support and formal recognition is well-established in the field. However, revitalization scholarship shows that sustainability on an institutional level necessitates durable and concrete support like stable staffing, formal teaching materials, and formalized regulations (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006; Hinton and Hale, 2001). The Lazuri electives are examined to understand whether entry into the classroom constituted meaningful institutionalization or remained limited to formal permission. Fishman (1991, p. 372) argues that while incorporation into formal schooling plays an important role in bettering attitudinal commitment to a language, meaningful revitalization "requires extensive and recurring pre-school, out-of-school and post-school societal reinforcement, particularly if its initiatory efforts are to become cumulative and intergenerationally transmissible." Meaning that in order for the Lazuri courses to potentially carry any real revitalizotary power, they need to extend beyond the classroom. This directs attention to whether the courses have the potential to stimulate processes that ripple beyond the classroom and reach the families.

Within this framework, the study is guided by the following main question: How do Lazuri teachers understand and experience their role in bringing Lazuri into formal schooling, and what do they reveal about the possibilities and limitations of education as a site of linguistic recognition and language revitalization?

This question is explored through three interrelated sub-questions that aim to address different dimensions of the teachers' experiences:

• How do the teachers' personal biographies and relationships with Lazuri shape the ways they approach and assign meaning to the course?

• How do the teachers enact and sustain the Lazuri courses under the institutional, pedagogical, and social conditions surrounding their implementation?

• What does this educational intervention actually mean for language maintenance and revitalization and how do its teachers interpret and utilize this potential?

1.5. The Methodological Framework

The research questions of the study concerns themselves with dimensions like meaning-making and lived experience through the teachers' narratives. The number of the teachers involved in the Lazuri courses is quite small and the courses has operated unevenly over time. In this context, depth precedes breadth. For these reasons, a qualitative approach was selected for the study. A qualitative design makes room for nuance and ambivalence, and allow us to situate individual experiences of the teachers within bigger narratives of language recognition and revitalization.

This study was initially designed as a retrospective inquiry into former students' trajectories to understand the meaning of a Program that has now spanned for more than a decade. This expectation was unsettled. Despite extensive efforts, no former students could be reached, and none, it seemed, cultivated relationships with the networks involved in the courses. Their absence from the field was very unexpected but perhaps a finding in itself. During the search for former students, through the Laz Institute, I was already in contact with several Lazuri teachers, with my central point of contact being a teacher called Muhittin.[7] Muhittin, having heard of the announcement of the courses in 2012, had approached the Laz Institute to offer his support and went on to open the first Lazuri elective course in 2013. He was an organizer in the teacher trainings as well and he was central in helping others open Lazuri courses. Through Muhittin I reached out to the remaining teachers. As we traced the former students together and had conversations about the courses in the meantime, it became increasingly clear to me that the teachers themselves embodied the courses. By the time it became evident that no former students could be reached, I

[7] All of the names of the teachers used throughout the thesis are pseudonyms.

found my interest had already turned toward understanding the experiences of the teachers.

As we noted earlier, no publicly accessible, consolidated data exists on the number of teachers, schools, or students involved in the Lazuri courses, or on any of the other language courses of LLD. As a result, identifying the teachers relied solely on collective field knowledge and the reach of the Laz Institute. In total, 10 individuals were identified as having taught Lazuri within the public education system. All 10 were contacted. Seven agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews, one provided written responses, and two did not respond to repeated invitations. Although the number of interviewees is small, the sample represents nearly the entire identifiable population of Lazuri teachers who have taught the course. To the best of our knowledge, the study therefore reflects the experiences and perspectives of almost all individuals who have taught Lazuri in public middle schools. Among the participants, four were women and four were men, ranging in age from 31 to 42.

All interviews were conducted online between October and December 2025. One interviewee was based in Istanbul, while the others were located in Rize. Interviews were conducted in Turkish with occasional use of Lazuri expressions. The interview guide aimed to map language backgrounds, pathways into teaching Lazuri, experiences of implementation, institutional conditions, interactions with students and families, and reflections on continuity and change. The sequencing and emphasis of questions varied depending on the interviewees' responses. The written responses provided by one participant were adapted from the same interview guide. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and fully transcribed by the researcher. The interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The research was conducted in accordance with standard ethical principles. The interviewees were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Due to the absence of offical data, it was not possible to triangulate interview findings against official records. Connected to this lack of official data, it was not possible to reconstruct the course longitudinally. The course has now existed for more than a decade and has persisted through significant shifts like the 2016 coup attempt, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 elections. As the enrolment figures were not

accessible, it was not possible to periodize the trajectory of the courses over the years. These limitations reflect the characteristics of the course. The absence of official records, and the difficulty of tracing those involved with the course point to the precarious and weakly institutionalized position the course occupies in the education system. The limitations of the research, in this sense, are quite reflective of the structural conditions of the courses.

As a Laz researcher, my position in this study is that of an insider. However, I've grown up in an urban, middle-class environment that was detached from the usual lifeworlds associated with Laz identity. I do not speak the Black Sea variety of Turkish and came to Lazuri later in life as a learner and not as a native speaker. I did not acquire the linguistic or cultural markers that are usually taken to signal being Laz. This became visible during the fieldwork. On several occasions, other Laz people expressed surprise upon learning that I, too, am Laz. This positionality places me at a distance from usual narratives of language loss and revitalization. My interest in Lazuri has been shaped by its peculiar status in my life: as a language that was always present in the background but was never accessible, and as an object of curiosity and a question of inheritance. This position has made it possible for me to approach the language not as something that is "mine" to be reclaimed, but as something whose interruption and continuation invite analysis. This study does not bracket identity out of the analysis but approaches it with a grain of salt. As someone who identifies as Laz but whose relationship to this identitiy has been shaped by diasporic distance, I do not assume that identity alone confers insight. It is from this position that the research took shape, not as an attempt to speak on behalf of the community, but to let the community speak through the research.

1.6. Chapters of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 provides the historical and sociopolitical background to locate and situate the Laz identity and Lazuri within Türkiye. It lays out the fluid and diverse understandings of who is identified as Laz, examines the relationship between Laz identity and belonging within the Turkish Republic, and traces the late twentieth-century language revitalization efforts and community mobilization. Chapter 3 turns to the institutional context of the study by taking a closer look into the LLD Program. It situates the

languages of the program within the linguistic landscape of Türkiye. It outlines its institutional design, discusses uneven forms of support and implementation the different languages received over the years, and looks at the establishment of Lazuri courses. Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework of the study. It discusses language ideology and nation-building in Republican Türkiye. It then introduces approaches that understand language policy as a layered and multi-level process. It examines policy enactment at the school and classroom level, conceptualizes teachers as street-level bureaucrats, and situates the study within discussions on language revitalization. Chapter 5 presents the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with teachers. The themes examine teachers' linguistic trajectories, the grassroots efforts that established and continue to sustain the courses, teachers' enactment of the courses in practice, the role of formal education in legitimizing Lazuri, and the ways and the degree the effects of the course were made to extend beyond the classroom and into the family. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the main findings of the study. It discusses their theoretical implications, reflects on the contributions of the study, and offers avenues of future research.

CHAPTER 2

LOCATING THE LAZ AND LAZURI: LANGUAGE, HISTORY, AND REVIVAL

To understand the emergence of Lazuri as an elective subject in Turkish public schools, we should first trace the historical and political processes that shaped Laz identity and Lazuri within Türkiye. Beyond the seemingly simple question of "who the Laz are", are the questions of how an autochthonous community with deep roots along the Black Sea coast came to experience the loss of its language into private domains, and under what conditions that language later found itself a place within public schools. This chapter delves into the fluid meanings of the term "Laz", the recalibration of ethnic boundaries through the course of the Turkish Republic, and the framework of citizenship that structured incorporation into Turkishness. In doing so, it aims to situate the Lazuri courses within the history of nation-building, identity, and negotiated difference in Türkiye.

2.1. Tracing the Term "Laz"

The term Laz (ethnonym *Lazi*) appears in ancient Greco-Roman texts as early as the first century CE. One of the earliest references is found in the work of Pliny the Elder, in *Naturalis Historia* (Book VI): "In the hinterland of the mountains of this place lies Iberia, while along the coast are the Heniochi, the Ampreutae, and the Lazi […]" (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* VI, p. 19, translated by the author from the German edition). Pliny's reference is geographic and not ethnographic but his listing confirms the presence of a group identified as "Lazi" along the southeastern Black Sea coast in the first century CE.

In the second century, Arrian in his *Periplus of the Euxine Sea* refers to the "Lazi" among the coastal people he encounters in his maritime survey of the Black Sea. Again in the second century, Claudius Ptolemy mentions the "Lazoi" in his *Geographia* and

locates them in the Black Sea littoral. The recurrence of the ethnonym across sources suggests that the designation has been part of the vocabulary of the eastern Black Sea since classical antiquity. Discussions of Laz origins oftentimes intersect with the historical narrative of *Colchis*. Colchis is described as a political formation where the ancestors of various present-day Southern Caucasian populations participated (Zehiroğlu, 2000). Later Roman and Byzantine sources use the term *Lazika* for the western Caucasian polity of Late Antiquity (Öztürk, 2016, p. 740). The recorded continuity of settlement in this coastal zone supports the characterization of the Laz as an autochthonous population of the eastern Black Sea (Şendeniz, 2020, p. 188).

In the Ottoman period, this historical and geographical association became an administrative unit with the establishment of the Lazistan *Sancak*.[8] From the sixteenth century onward, the term *Lazistan* was used in the Ottoman administrative system which encompassed part of the eastern Black Sea region.[9] Importantly, the boundaries of Lazistan did not correspond neatly to linguistic distribution. The *sancak* included populations who did not speak Lazuri and many Lazuri-speaking communities lived outside its borders. During fieldwork conducted in Lazistan in 1910, Nikolay Marr observed that along the Black Sea coast the term "Laz" was used loosely and hierarchically. Coastal populations labeled one another "Laz" in a cascading manner, but only a narrower group (roughly corresponding to Lazuri speakers in the Rize region) were considered "true" Laz (Marr, 2016, p. 67). The show that, over history, the term Laz has been used as a regional label, an administrative category and an umbrella term applied to Black Sea groups regardless of ethnic background.

Today in contemporary Türkiye, three distinct communities are called Laz (Öztürk, 2005, as cited in Şendeniz, 2020, p. 191): First, there are Lazuri-speaking populations whose mother tongue is Lazuri and who inhabit the core southeastern Black Sea region (from the Melyat stream in Rize eastward to the Georgian border at Sarpi) and the

[8] A *sancak* was an administrative unit in the Ottoman Empire, governed by a *sancakbeyi*. It constituted a subdivision of a larger province (*eyalet*, later *vilayet*) and formed part of the empire's hierarchical administrative organization, particularly in matters of taxation and military organization.

[9] Lazistan was designated as a *sancak* in 1851. It encompassed the eastern part of present-day Rize (around the Fırtına River) to Batum (inclusive). Following the 1877–1878 Ottoman–Russian War and the incorporation of Batum into the Russian Empire, the boundaries of the *sancak* were redefined, coming to denote the area centered on present-day Rize, stretching from the eastern part of Of to Kopmuş, the eastern boundary of Hopa (Kalyoncuoğlu, 2019).

descendant communities settled in the Marmara region following the 1877-1878 Russo-Ottoman War. Second, there are Turkish-speaking populations along the western coastal districts of Rize and eastern Trabzon who are referred to as Laz but do not speak Lazuri. Third, the term is known to have been applied to Romeika-speaking Black Sea populations, most of whom were sent to Greece during the 1923 population exchange, while others had earlier migrated to Russia and former Soviet territories. This layered usage continues to be a source of ambiguity and confusion on who is considered "Laz" and on what grounds.

2.1.1. Who Will We Call Laz? Lazuri as the Boundary

Wolfgang Feurstein (1983, as cited in Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001, p. 207) argues that the Laz qualify as a *Volk* or *Ethnie*, a distinct people whose identity has endured over many centuries, who posses an *eigenständige Kultur* (a self-sustaining and unique culture). However, Bellér-Hann and Hann (2001), drawing on nearly two decades of ethnographic fieldwork in the eastern Black Sea region, argue that no fixed or essentialized notion of an "ethnic culture" can fully apply to the Laz or even begin to encompass the complex and overlapping identities of the Black Sea region. Instead, they argue there are more decisive frameworks outside of ethnicity that construct belonging among the Laz (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2001, p. 222). They begin with identifying religion and state that as Sunni Muslims, Islam connects the Laz both to one another and to the Turkish nation as a whole. Alongside religion, they emphasize the strong identification of Laz populations with the Turkish state and its political centers, which connects them to what they describe as the "national culture." They then draw attention to interpersonal norms of honor and shame that are shared across all neighboring communities in the region. Moreover, they state that the Laz participate in what they call a "global capitalist culture" and engage with transnational forms of consumption where social stratification follows class lines and not ethnic ones. Finally, they observe that most Laz individuals locate their primary sense of belonging in local attachments to villages or districts, resulting in a complex landscape of "local cultures".[10] Despite this multiplicity of identity frameworks and shared

[10] Nilüfer Taşkın (2016, p. 11) similarly notes that Laz people often answer in their hometowns (Arhavili, Pazarlı, Fındıklılı etc.) instead of a city, when asked about where they are from. She adds that this is used to differentiate their identity from the non-Laz in the same city.

paradigms with neighbouring groups of the region, Bellér-Hann and Hann (2001, p. 200) arrive at the conclusion that the distinctiveness of the Laz identity still stands. The persistance of the autonym Laz and the continued symbolic importance of Lazuri point to a recognizable and distinct sense of groupness. Language, in their formulation, is the single, albeit seriously worn away basis, for differentiation, suggesting that while all other boundaries may blur, language remains the key marker of Laz identity (Bellér-Hann and Hann, 2001, p. 221).

This study too, adopts language as its analytical anchor in demarcating Lazness. This is by no means to suggest that Lazness can be reduced to competence of Lazuri, nor it is to assume that all those who identify as Laz speak Lazuri. Most do not. Rather, it reflects the observable reality that Lazuri remains the most enduring and socially operative marker where group belonging is recognized. In everyday interaction, two questions attempt to peel the layers of Laz identity. The first is, as one might expect, "Are you Laz?" The answer to this question says very little. Along the Black Sea coast, the reply is, more often than not, yes. In this context, "Laz" can mean many things: being from the region, one's parents being from the region, or living in the region. The word stretches. There is, however, a second question that usually follows and the answer to that question is what sets the boundary: "Do you speak the language?"[11] This question does not ask for fluency but seeks to find out whether Lazuri exists somewhere in one's life. Regardless of whether the language is spoken with ease or regardless of whether it was acquired at all, partial knowledge or even the memory of a grandparent's speech is enough for a "yes". In this exchange, language appears as a living, albeit often thin and frayed, thread that ties the person to the community. It is through this thread that Lazness seems to be most clearly marked. Language also seems to be the realm where the pressures of assimilation are most visible. Therefore, the loss of Lazuri from the public domain and its later re-entry into formal schooling are turning points that cannot be understood without centering language analytically. Language appears to be the most tangible point where Laz belonging has been determined and is presently being rearticulated. Hence, examining how Lazuri began

[11] The Turkish formulation of this question is *"Dil var mı?"* and it translates literally as "Do you have the language?" The phrasing is significant in that it inadvertently frames the language as something one possesses and carries. The question therefore asks beyond practice and instead asks whether linguistic belonging is carried in some shape or degree.

to be taught in state schools requires treating it as the principal thread running through questions of identity, citizenship, revival and, recognition.

2.2. Loyalty and the Terms of Belonging to the Turkish Republic

Taking language as the most enduring and the most vulnerable boundary of Lazness, the question becomes how this boundary was reconfigured and renegotiated in the process of Turkish nation-state building. Looking back at the imperial period, Chris Hann (1990, p. 61) states that Laz loyalty to the Ottoman state had always been strong and that it had become even stronger over a long period during which their territory was exposed to Russian expansion threat into the Caucasus. As a Muslim, frontier population, the Laz were integrated to the imperial defenses and local militia. When the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 transferred Batum to the Russian Empire despite the military victory that had taken place on the ground, the Laz and other Muslim communities were resettled from the region. As frontier populations that had long been part of the Ottoman defense, they were regarded as politically reliable and were relocated in areas surrounding the imperial capital of Istanbul (Özel, 2024).

The Republican regime had an interest in ensuring that the loyalty of this frontier population would be smoothly transferred from the Ottoman state to the new Republic. The economic stimulation of the eastern Black Sea region with the tea in the 1930s may also be understood in this light. Tea farming was introduced to the region in the 1930s and was accelerated following the Tea Law of 1940. Tea became the dominant product of the region and completely transformed it. The relatively closed, subsistence-oriented local economy without a strong local bourgeois class entered into the national market with the tea. Through subsidies and legislation (especially via the state-owned enterprise Çaykur, headquartered in Rize) the Republic embedded itself in the region. New roads were built to transport tea leaves from the mountains to the factories on the coasts. Opportunities of employment increased, especially for men who used to migrate for work. Unskilled labor positions in collection centers and factories offered wages and state pensions. With the tea, the state was not a distant abstraction anymore. It was now a daily presence at the fields, in the factory, and along the new roads. The tea economy remained quite dependent on the state, even under the Democrat Party government of the 1950.

This transformation rendered irrelevant many a traditional ways of knowing in the region. While this was and is a great loss, to view the people of the region as mere victims to modernization would be reductive. In their stead, new ways of knowing emerged. Laz people may no longer know the way of hawking or the traditional way of building an *oxori*,[12] but they now knew how to open a bank account or how to buy a house in the city. Bellér-Hann and Hann argue that the Laz of the period were closer to understanding themselves as "proud members of a vibrant state nation" (2001, p. 215), that is to say, Laz identity experienced the nation-building project of the Republic not as an oppositional force, but in a welcomed framework of integration. As a small and non-contentious minority, the Laz sought economic mobility, social status, and full participation in national life. Barış Ünlü's (2017) conceptualization of the Turkishness Contract (*Türklük Sözleşmesi)* offers a lens to understand how this participation was to be accessed. By this contract of Turkishness, Ünlü refers to the implicit social bargain through which citizens participate in and benefit from a regime that is built around the privileges of being recognized as Turkish. Language was crucial in this contract. Mastery of Turkish was understood as civic maturity and alignment with the nation (Ünlü, 2017 p. 209).

The Laz, as a Muslim population without a history of territorial claims and as a group whose linguistic difference did not crystallize into political challenge, were positioned in a way that allowed smooth entry into Turkishness. As a community that fulfilled most other conditions of participation, their remaining difference was language. The language shift from Lazuri to Turkish can thus be understood as an internalized adaptation to the terms of the contract of full participation. Taşkın (2016) suggests that in cases like these where bilingualism arrives at an impasse, two paths crystallize: to preserve the mother tongue as a means of collective persistence or to allow it to gradually erode. The Laz and the Kurdish seem to have responded differently to this binary (Taşkın, 2016, p. 33). Kurds treated language as inseparable from collective existence; while the Laz gradually abandoned use of Lazuri and had it recede into the private domain. As noted earlier, Lazuri is an endangered language. Research[13] point to the clear decline in intergenerational transmission. Kutscher (2008) has documented

[12] Lazuri word for "house".

[13] Kutscher 2008/2011; Brendemoen 1990; Öztürk and Pöchtrager 2011; Moseley 2010

language attrition and loss especially concerning younger generations. Haznedar's (2018) research on language use across different interactional settings in both the eastern Black Sea and the Marmara regions, finds a significant drop in the competence and the use of Lazuri. While older speakers used to acquire Lazuri as a first language, younger generations now encounter Lazuri, if at all, in only informal settings. In many households, transmission has weakened or stopped altogether.

Sarıgil (2012, p. 272) has us revisit the historical episode of Russian expansion into the eastern Black Sea and argues that this was experienced as an "exogenous shock" that reinforced statist tendencies among the Laz. He notes that by contrast, Russian incursion into eastern Anatolia did not produce this consolidating effect among the Kurdish. This is not to say that the divergence between the Laz and the Kurds can be reduced to a single historical episode. Still, a clear distinction exists in terms of bilingual trajectory and mobilization. As Chris Hann (1990, p. 122) observes, "The Lazi of North-east Turkey have a fairly clear profile as a linguistic category, but they currently fall well short of mobilization as an ethnic group, let alone political separatism." Taşkın (2016, p. 45) argues that Laz identity has been constructed on a dichotomy that positioned Kurdishness as its other: "While the 'other' of the Kurdish identity is usually considered to be the Turks, the 'other' of the Laz is not Turks, but Kurds." This binary was perhaps another way of maintaining a secure and unproblematic place in the national framework. After the 1980s, as Kurdish identity begin to be expressed more openly in political terms, the category of "minority" acquired new political weight in Türkiye. It brought a discourse on cultural rights that opened a conceptual space for Laz people to rethink their minority status in more positive terms. It was in this atmosphere that the first signs of a modern Laz cultural revival began to take root.

2.3. Late 20th Century Revival and Community Mobilization

Before turning to the contemporary revival in detail, let us briefly trace earlier efforts that informed it. Early studies on Lazuri and the Laz were mostly on describing the language and on folklore collection. They were also mostly external in that they were conducted by European and Russian scholars. Among the earliest works was Georg Rosen's *Über die Sprache der Lazen* (1844), which examined the structure of the language. Later, scholars such as Nikolay Marr whose *Journey to Lazistan* was

originally published in 1910, and Georges Dumézil, who collected and published Laz folktales in *Contes lazes* (1937), contributed to the documentation of Lazuri through ethnographic and folkloric research.

The first attempt to introduce Lazuri into educational use was in the late 1920s under Soviet rule by İskender Tzitaşi. Tzitaşi developed the first Laz alphabet based on Latin letters which later became to be known as the Tzitaşi Alphabet. In 1929, he published *Mçhita Murutsxi* (Red Star), the first Lazuri newspaper, in Sohum (Abhazia-USSR). Between 1932 and 1936, he opened schools in Sohum and in the village of Sarpi (on the Georgian side of the border) where Lazuri was used as a medium of instruction. He prepared textbooks in Lazuri for these schools. These included a reading book (*Çkuni Çhara*, 1932), a life studies textbook (*Okitxuşeni Supara*, 1937), and a mathematics textbook (*Oxesapuşi Supara*, 1933), which remains the first and only Lazuri mathematics textbook. In 1935, he published a primer to teach children the Lazuri alphabet called *Lazuri Alboni*. This early educational experience in Lazuri came to an end when Tzitaşi was killed in Tbilisi in 1938. The initiatives died with him.

In the late twentieth century, Laz cultural and linguistic activity entered a new phase. In the 1980s, *Lazebura* was established in Germany. Lazebura published books and organized language courses in Lazuri, which was one of the earliest revival initiatives outside Türkiye. In 1992, a group of young Laz intellectuals in Istanbul found each other. They published the first issue of *Ogni* (*Duy*;Hear) in 1993. *Ogni* was the first Laz-language magazine in Türkiye and was also significant because it introduced a new Lazuri alphabet based on the Latin script. *Ogni* reignited the dialogue on orthography and standardization. The 1990s marked the beginning of a renewed interest in codifying and writing Lazuri. During this period, work on Lazuri lexicon and grammar began. In 1999, İsmail Bucaklişi and Hasan Uzunhasanoğlu compiled the first Lazuri-Turkish dictionary. This was followed in 2003 by the publication of a Lazuri grammar book written by İsmail Bucaklişi and the Japanese researcher Gôichi Kojima. In 2008, the Laz Cultural Association was established. In 2011, the Lazika Publishing Collective began operating. In 2013, the Laz Institute was established. After *Ogni*, other magazines appeared, including *Mjora* (2000), *Skani Nena* (2008), and *Tanura* (2011). In 2013, *Ağani Murutsxi* (New Star), the first newspaper published entirely in Lazuri, was launched.

These periodicals were short-lived and stopped publication after a few issues. Nevertheless, these parallel developments transformed Laz cultural activity into more institutionalized forms of mobilization. By the 2010s, these revival efforts had established an intellectual and organizational foundation for the Lazuri elective courses.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIVING LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS PROGRAM AND THE INCORPORATION OF LAZURI INTO FORMAL EDUCATION

Earlier, we have situated the emergence of the LLD Program within the political climate of the early 2000s. This period was characterized by the European Union accession process, debates around language and cultural rights, the democratic opening process and the reformist discourse of the early Justice and Develoment Party regime. This chapter now turns to the the institutional context of the LLD courses. It examines the official framing and discourse around the courses and discusses the varying realites of different languages. Finally, it looks at the establishment and the trajectory of the Lazuri courses to set the scene for the analysis that follows in the next chapter.

3.1. Languages of Türkiye and the Languages of LLD

According to *Ethnologue: Languages of Turkey*, 45 languages are currently spoken in Türkiye. Of these languages, 19 are categorized as "living, indigenous languages".[14] This category includes Turkish. The remaining 26 languages are classified as "living, non-indigenous languages" that are spoken within the country like English or Russian. The languages offered under the LLD courses are Abkhazian, Adyghe (with the option of Latin or Cyrillic alphabet), Albanian, Bosnian, Georgian, Kurmancî, Lazuri and Zazakî.[15] For all of these languages, the LLD courses marked the first time they received recognition within the Turkish formal education system. The languages of

[14] Bulgarian, Domari, Gagauz Turkish, Georgian, Hértévin, Laz, Levantine Arabic, Mardin Sign Language, North Mesopotamian Arabic, Northern Kurdish, Northern Zazaki, Pontic, South Azerbaijani, Southern Zazaki, Syriac, Turkish, Turkish Sign Language, Turoyo, Ubykh, and Western Armenian.

[15] Abazaca, Adıgece, Arnavutça, Boşnakça, Gürcüce, Kurmancca, Lazca and Zazaca. This is how the language names appear in official documents of the Ministry of National Education.

the LLD courses do not fall into a single category. They all converge in that, in Türkiye, none of them have formal status and none is recognized as an official minority language. Albanian, Bosnian, and Georgian hold official status in other countries. Half of the languages of the LLD courses are considered to be at risk to different degrees. According to UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger,* Abkhazian and Lazuri are classified as "definitely endangered", while Adyghe and Zazakî are categorized as "vulnerable". Albanian, Bosnian, Georgian, and, Kurmancî do not appear on the list of endangered languages. This is because they are spoken by large populations worldwide or have official/recognized status in other countries. However, their statues of not being endangered should be interpreted carefully in the context of Türkiye. The varieties of Albanian, Bosnian, and Georgian spoken in Türkiye are quite different from their standardized forms spoken in other countries. Because of this, from a linguistic perspective, these varieties could be considered as locally endangered (Eren and Taşkan, 2023, p. 39).

3.2. Institutional Framing of the Courses

The phrase "Living Languages and Dialects" is the name of the elective course category. However, the regulation that established the courses does not use this phrase.[16] The regulation refers to them as "different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives*"*. So, the phrase "Living Languages and Dialects" is a curricular category and not the formal designation of the policy. The meaning of the term "Living Languages and Dialects" is not defined in official documents. Neither the regulation nor policy texts provide an explanation as to why the languages of the Program were decided to be described as such. The objective of the courses was defined in Article 5 of the aforementioned regulation as follows:

> The objective of the course, and of language and dialect courses established for the same purpose in other language courses, is to carry out activities for the learning of the different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives, in accordance with the general aims and fundamental principles of Turkish National Education, in a manner not contrary to the fundamental characteristics of

[16] Türk Vatandaşlarının Günlük Yaşamlarında Geleneksel Olarak Kullandıkları Farklı Dil ve Lehçelerin Öğrenilmesi Hakkında Yönetmelik

> the Republic as stated in the Constitution and to the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation.[17]

Here, we see that the linguistic diversity of the country is recognized but is explicitly bounded by referencing the constitutional principles of the state and to the indivisible unity of the nation. The article describes the languages of the Program as "languages and dialects traditionally used in daily life". Linguistic or sociological designations such as "minority languages", "heritage languages" or "endangered languages" are not observed. Terminology associated with language rights or collective cultural claims are not featured. In a similar vein, a 2021 report prepared by the Ministry of National Education, frames the Program in a technocratic manner.[18] Below is the preface of the report:

> The ability of individuals to use more than one language and to meet their communication needs in multiple languages emerges as an important competence that people are expected to possess in today's world, where interaction between different cultures and nations continues to increase. Türkiye, both in terms of its social structure and geographical location, as well as its cultural and economic relations, is a country in which many languages are spoken and where individuals desire to acquire competence in more than one language and are in need of such competence. The education system also requires analyses, policies, and practices that will enable it to respond to these social demands and needs. Therefore, it is of importance that policies which can be implemented with the aim of increasing students' linguistic competence are discussed and developed on the basis of data.

What immediately catches the eye, is how the courses are squarely anchored in functional multilingualism. Being multilingual in these languages is presented as an individual competence that gives children a one-up in the increasingly interconnected world they are growing up in. The use and value of these languages are located outside the country's borders. The linguistic diversity of Türkiye is acknowledged but appears as a floating and self-contained social condition. Another striking feature of this

[17] Madde 5: Kursun ve diğer dil kurslarında aynı maksatla oluşturulan dil ve lehçe derslerinin amacı, Türk Millî Eğitiminin genel amaçlarına ve temel ilkelerine uygun olarak Cumhuriyetin Anayasada belirtilen temel niteliklerine, Devletin ülkesi ve milletiyle bölünmez bütünlüğüne aykırı olmayacak şekilde Türk vatandaşlarının, günlük yaşamlarında geleneksel olarak kullandıkları farklı dil ve lehçelerin öğrenilmesi için faaliyette bulunmaktır.

[18] Foreign Languages and Living Languages and Dialects in Primary and Secondary Education: Current Situation Analysis and Policy Recommendations (*İlk ve Ortaöğretim Kurumlarında Yabancı Diller, Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçelerin Öğretimi: Mevcut Durum Analizi ve Politika Önerileri*)

discourse is how the languages of the LLD courses are discussed in the same vein as foreign languages. Throughout the report, foreign languages such as English and German are treated within the same policy framework as the "living languages and dialects" of the country. This sociolinguistically inaccurate grouping puts minority or heritage languages of the courses in the same administrative and political category as global, majority languages. While it can be argued that such a framing allows these languages to borrow educational legitimacy from the global languages that have established educational traditions, it also limits the grounds on which they are recognized and understood. Instead of being framed as languages of specific communities and cultures of Türkiye's sociolinguistic landscape, they are subsumed into a general and a diffuse policy agenda of multilingual competence. As a result, questions related to language rights and cultural recognition are left outside the discourse. This framing seems to also be pedagogically misguided, as it treats these languages in the same educational league as foreign languages despite the highly different conditons of access and materials.

3.2.1. Institutional Design of the Courses

On paper, the implementation of the LLD courses is no different from the rest of the elective courses. Three groups of elective courses exist: humanity, society and science (*insanlık, toplum ve bilim)*, religion, morality and values (*din, ahlak ve değer)*, culture, arts and sports (*kültür, sanat ve spor)*. LLD is included in the first category. Students are expected to select at least one course from each group. Most elective courses are taught for two hours per week, so the students usually take three elective courses totaling approximately six hours a week. In order for a LLD course to open in a school, at least 10 students need to select the course. In principle, students could continue taking the course throughout the four years of middle school but it must be selected by enough students every year.

Unlike other subjects, these languages do not have an established infrastructure of teacher training. For other school subjects, prospective teachers graduate from university departments of education or complete pedagogical training and are then appointed to schools through centralized recruitment of the Ministery. For the languages of LLD, no such pipeline exists. Only Kurmancî teachers have been appointed as permanent (*kadrolu*) teachers for these subjects. No permanent teaching

positions exist for the other languages. What usually happens for these languages is, a teacher already employed at a school who has knowledge of the language and is willing to offer the course is assigned to teach the course as an additional duty (*ek ders görevlendirmesi*), once a sufficient number of students enroll. If there is demand but the school does not have a teacher who can teach the language, the administration may try to bring a teacher from another school through additional teaching assignment. The courses could also be taught by paid instructors (*ücretli öğretmen*). Teachers assigned to LLD courses are expected to graduate from certain higher education programs. These programs are: Turkish Language Teaching, Turkish Language and Literature Teaching, Turkish Language and Literature, Contemporary Turkic Dialects and Literatures, Turkish Folklore, and Social Studies Teaching. Graduates of programs that are not teacher training programs are required to complete pedagogical formation in order to teach.

3.3.2. Uneven Institutional Support and Language-Specific Trajectories

The languages included in the LLD framework have been reported to have received different levels of institutional support over time.[19] As a result, the reality of these courses has been very different across languages. In several cases, the main obstacle to the opening of a course have risen at the level of administration. This was perhaps most evident in the case of Kurmancî, which has remained the most widely selected LLD course since the introduction of the courses in 2012. Despite strong student demand year after year, teachers and activists report that school administrations often made it diffcult and, even impossible in some cases, to form classes. In the case of Adyghe courses, administrations sometimes openly, sometimes covertly discouraged students and parents from pursuing the course, usually by arguing that the class could not open due to technical constraints like a lack of space or scheduling.

Some languages appear to have benefited quiet visibly from institutional encouragement. The Albanian courses are a good example. Albanian courses were introduced with considerable institutional backing. Commisioned by the Ministery, the curriculum of the Albanian course was prepared by academics at Trakya University.

[19] This section draws primarily on the findings presented in Bilmez, Çağatay, and Arslan (2022), *Öğretmenlerin, Aktivistlerin ve Medyanın Gözünden MEB Okullarında Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler Seçmeli Dersi*.

The opening of the first class in 2017 was marked by a public ceremony attended by high-level state officials and was celebrated in media as part of Türkiye's engagement with the Balkans. Reports from the period show that administrators encouraged their schools to open Albanian classes and sought out students for enrolment. The first class was opened in a village whose population consisted almost entirely of Bosniaks and where no students spoke Albanian. According to accounts from the school, neither the students nor the assigned teacher had cultural or linguistic ties to Albanian. Despite this, the school administration continued to include the course in the selection process each year and ensured that a teacher was assigned so that the classes would continue. While universities were commisioned to prepare curricula and textbooks for Albanian, some of the other languages experienced significant delays in the provision of teaching materials. In the case of Georgian, the one and only teacher of the course reported that the official textbook prepared by the Ministry of National Education was delivered only in the fourth (and last) year of the Georgian courses.

These cases suggest that regarding the policy that is LLD, the realization of a course depends on the presence of at least one form of support: institutional or community. As the experience of Kurmancî demonstrates, strong community demand and local mobilization can sustain a course despite negative administrative approaches. Conversely, as in the case of Albanian, institutional backing can make a course open for years on end, even when there is virtually no community demand. Where neither institutional backing nor organized local effort exists, the courses seem to cease to exist. The experience of Georgian shows how easily a language can fall through these gaps. The question is then, where the Lazuri courses fall in this context.

3.4. Teaching Lazuri

Before delving into how the Lazuri electives were established and implemented, it is important to situate them within other initiatives of teaching Lazuri in Türkiye. The first Lazuri teaching experience in Türkiye began in 1998 at the *Özgür Üniversite.*[20] These classes lasted for 2 years. In the following years, civil society organizations and publishing houses sporadically organized Lazuri classes in Istanbul. In 2012, a series

[20] *Özgür Üniversite* (Free University) is an Istanbul-based independent education collective founded in 2011 that organizes public seminars and lecture series outside formal university structures. It functions as an alternative space for critical and left-leaning intellectual production in Türkiye.

of Lazuri lessons videos were produced and published online as part of an open learning initiative. After its founding in 2013, the Laz Institute started regularly offering beginner-level Lazuri courses and became the main actor that developed teaching materials and organized lessons. Later, within the framework of the European Union-supported "Living Lazuri Project", instructional videos were prepared and made available through the Laz Institute's online channels. During the COVID-19 pandemic, live online Lazuri classes were broadcast on the Laz Institute's YouTube channel. Since the 2011-2012 academic year, elective Lazuri courses have been offered at Boğaziçi University. Following the establishment of the Linguistics Department in 2015, the courses began to be offered under the Caucasian (CAU) language course code. Elective Lazuri courses were also introduced at Istanbul Bilgi University in 2015 under the Modern Languages Program. In both universities, the courses have been taught by İsmail Avcı who also developed the teaching materials used in the classes.

When the LLD courses were announced in 2012, they were announced with the expectation that the curricula, teaching materials, and teacher assignments would be prepared by the Ministry of National Education. By the beginning of the 2012–2013 academic year, it became clear that these preparations were not made for Lazuri courses. As a result, Lazuri classes could not be opened during the first year of the courses. The Laz Institute submitted an application to the Ministry of National Education's General Directorate of Basic Education to prepare the curriculum in May 2013. A working group was formed in the Laz Institute with support from academics from Boğaziçi University. The resulting curriculum was submitted to the Ministry on June of 2013 and was approved by the Board of Education on September of 2013. Shortly after this approval, the first Lazuri class was opened in Rize. The teaching materials began to be preapered through a grant transfer agreement between the Laz Institute and the Ministry of National Education. The books were made available for use in the 2014-2015 academic year. The Ministry distributed the books only in digital format through its website and did not produce printed copies.[21] Teachers of the course and the Laz Institute printed the materials to distribute to students. In 2018, within the

[21] Textbooks with a nationwide demand below 500 copies are not printed and are instead made available only electronically (MEB Destek Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, *Ücretsiz Ders Kitaplarının Teslim Alınması ve Dağıtımı*, 01.07.2016, Art. 3).

framework and funding of the European Union-supported “Living Lazuri” project, the Laz Institute signed a protocol with the Ministry’s General Directorate for Teacher Training and Development and organized a certified teacher training program. The teacher trainings included instruction on the Lazuri alphabet, reading and writing, the structure of the textbooks, as well as the sociolinguistic situation of the language. At the end of the program, participants receive a Ministry approved certificate. These trainings have continued sporadically under the protocol signed between the Laz Institute and the Ministry, with independent funding.

3.4.1. Statistics: What We Know and What We Don’t Know

As mentioned earlier, one of the main challenges in assessing the scope of the Lazuri courses is the absence of official data. The Ministry of National Education does not hold comprehensive statistics on any of the LLD courses, so the number of students, schools and teachers involved are unknown. This lack of data has been noted by several researchers working on the various languages within the LLD courses and constitutes perhaps the most significant obstacle for evaluating the reach of the courses. This study relies on the two aforementioned reports by Bakay (2020), and Bilmez and Çağatay (2021) in order to reconstruct a partial picture of the trajectory of Lazuri courses. No comparable data is available for the years after 2021. References to developments in later years appeared in the fieldwork of this study but are not treated here as statistical evidence.

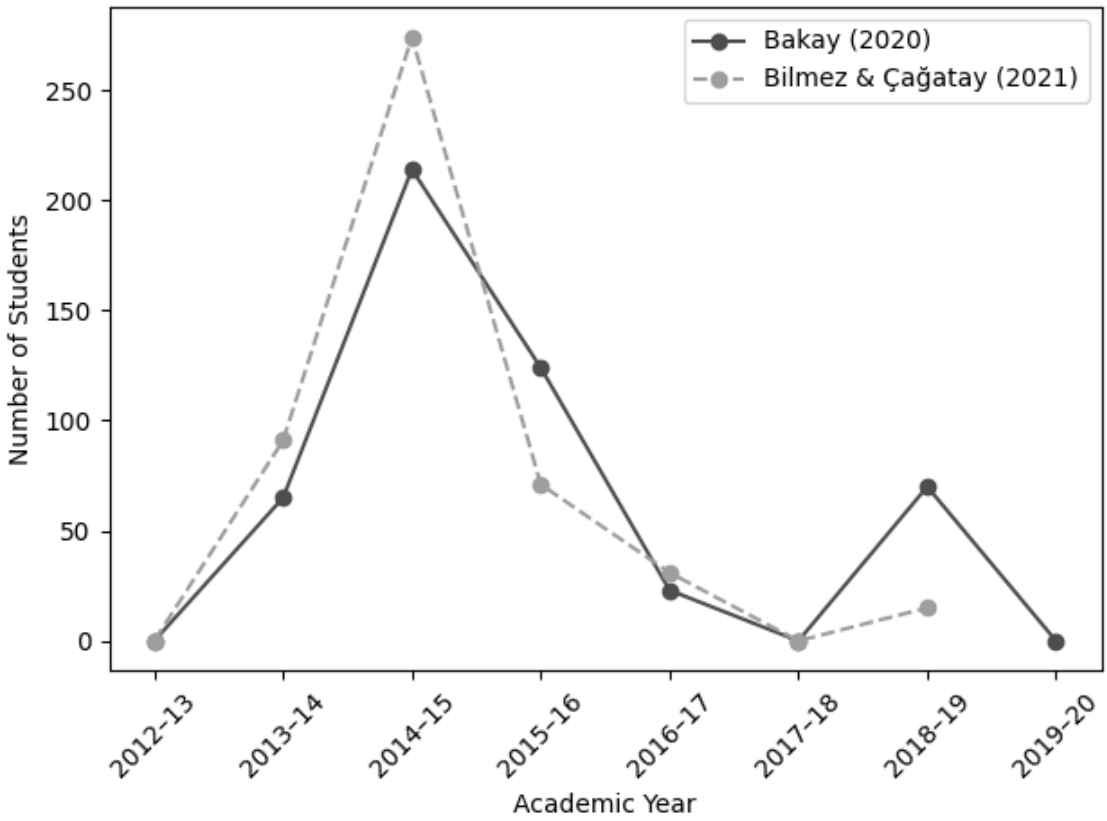

Figure 1. Number of students enrolled in Lazuri elective courses by academic year.
Sources: Author's compilation based on Bakay (2020) and Bilmez and Çağatay (2021).

Although the numbers reported in the two sources are different, they show the same trajectory. Both datasets confirm that no classes were offered in the 2012-2013 academic years and that the classes began in the 2013-2014 academic year with a relatively small number of students. This is followed by a rapid expansion in the 2014-2015 academic year, which represents the peak of enrolment in both datasets. Bakay (2020) reports 214 students for this year, while Bilmez and Çağatay (2021) report 274 students. After this peak, both show a sharp decline in the 2015-2016 academic year. The downward trend continues in the following year, with both sources reporting very small numbers of students. By the 2016-2017 academic year, enrolment appears to have reached a minimal level in both datasets. The data show that no Lazuri courses were opened during the 2017-2018 academic year. Both report zero students for this period. In the 2018-2019 academic year a limited reopening appears, although the scale remains significantly smaller than in the early years. Bakay (2020) records 70 students, while Bilmez and Çağatay (2021) report 15 students. Despite the considerable differences in the reported totals, the overall pattern remains consistent.

Both indicate an expansion of courses shortly after their introduction, followed by a rapid contraction in 2015, a full-stop in 2017 and subsequent instability in the following years. The courses were opened almost exclusively in the eastern Black Sea region, in the districts of Rize (Fındıklı, Ardeşen, Pazar, Çamlıhemşin) and Artvin (Arhavi). The only instance outside the Eastern Black Sea region was in Istanbul during the 2018-2019 academic year. Overall, the reports tell us that the implementation of the courses has been narrow and uneven.

This chapter have situated the Lazuri electives within the institutional framework of the LLD Program. It has shown that the implementation of the various language courses have depended on a combination of institutional backing and community initiative. Either one of these two forms of support seems to be necessary to have the courses opened. The infrastructure of the Lazuri courses seem to have depended almost solely on community effort, namely the Laz Institute. The chapter laid out the sequence of grassroots. The course's reliance on local actors and their uneven trajectory suggest that understanding how they have functioned in practice requires a theoretical framework that moves from policy as written, to policy as enacted. The following chapter therefore introduces the theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis of how the teachers of Lazuri, as the points where policy meets practice, experience and implement the courses on the ground.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE POLICY IN PRACTICE

Policy is not a linear mechanism, and this is even more the case for language policy (Spolsky, 2004, p. 2152). There exists a notorious gap between the intentions of policy and its realization. When the point in question is language education policies in monolingual nation-states, this gap, can become bigger. In these contexts, inclusive policies can indicate a step toward equity and recognition. However, they are usually bound in structures that limit their scope. This chapter draws on three interrelated bodies of literature. First, drawing on Spolsky's (2004) framework, the chapter examines language ideology as a central dimension of language policy and traces how the monolingual ideology of the Republic of Türkiye has historically constructed and institutionalized this ideology and how this determined the use and the public presence of non-Turkish languages. Second, theories of policy enactment and street-level bureaucracy are evoked to understand the interpretive work carried out by the teachers, focusing on the ways the policies are reworked and realized through their practice. Third, literature on language revitalization is utilized as a lens for evaluating the potential and limitations of the Lazuri courses. The revatalization perspective also provided the tools to distinguish between symbolic and substantive forms of recognition and offers the criteria to assess whether the Lazuri courses function mostly as a gesture of inclusion or as a meaningful measure against language shift.

4.1. Language Ideology and Nation-Building in Republican Türkiye

Bernard Spolsky (2004, p. 2154), offers a tripartite model of language policy that consists of language ideology, language management, and language practices. Language ideologies are assumptions about language such as what is considered legitimate, correct, or "good". Language management are the interventions of the state,

typically through education, that influence and regulate language use. Language practices refer to how the language is used within its community.

To make sense of the contemporary language ideology at work in the Turkish context, it is necessary to turn to the early Republican period that established its foundation. The Ottoman Empire had never been organized on the basis of a single vernacular national language in the modern nation-state sense that today's Türkiye is. The sociolinguistic order of the Ottoman Empire was plural and stratified. There was debate on the language question, however, these discussions, mostly concerned themselves with "not the Turkification of the language, but its elevation to an all-purpose medium of literature and writing" (Kushner, 1977, p. 59). Under the Republic, which inherited both the demographic violence and the territorial contraction of the late imperial period, the language question became a nationalist issue. To transform the heterogeneous, post-imperial population into a "modern" nation, Turkish was elevated from one language among others and was appointed as the unifying language of the nation. This ideological move was the foundation of the Republican nation-building, where "language could be reformed in accordance with a politically designed plan and thus used as an effective tool to rename and reshape the social and political order" (Çolak, 2004, p. 68).

The Republic's view of Turkish rested on several mutually reinforcing assumptions. First, Turkish was situated as the primary marker of the nation with language homogeneity envisioned as "the defining characteristic of the new nation" (Bayar, 2011, p. 111). This unity in language was equated with political unity. Second, linguistic difference was rendered suspect, backward, divisive, and in need of eventual absorption. Third, the purification and standardization of Turkish were treated as acts of national regeneration. The ideology did not just say that citizens should know Turkish but assigned Turkish as the language through which the nation would know itself. Aydıngün and Aydıngün (2004) show that language was standardized in order to create a Turkish national identity, and they connect this to the intellectual influence of thinkers such as Ziya Gökalp, for whom nationhood required a shared language. Nationalist projects almost always require a language that can stand in for the people as a whole, and the Turkish Republic was no exception. The nation could not remain multilingual in any politically meaningful sense without threatening the coherence of

the national identity. The ideological work of the Republic, then, was to collapse the distinction between "the language of the state" and "the language of the nation". Language became "the main tool that intellectuals and the founders of the Turkish Republic used to create the Turkish nation and define Turkishness" (Aydıngün and Aydıngün 2004, p. 427). The alphabet reform of 1928 is one of the clearest examples of this architecture. Turkish would be standardized and in the process its very "Turkishness" would be intensified. Words of foreign origin were to be removed or to be replaced with Turkic-origin words or their newly derived equivalents. Through this, the nation's supposed authentic linguistic core would be recovered. For Çolak, this was an act of "'forgetting'… a political will to cut new generations off from the influences of the Ottoman-Islamic cultural heritage, from the 'shame' of the past" (2004, p. 73).

Turkish was constructed simultaneously as the national language**,** the modern language**,** the people's language, and a civilizational language. As the national language, Turkish demarcated the boundaries of citizenship and participation. As the modern language, it meant rupture with the imperial past, ready to take on the "modern West". As the people's language, it contrasted with the elitist opacity of Ottoman Turkish and linked to populist narratives on education and accessibility.[22] Finally, as a civilizational language, it was inflated with historical theses that endowed it with ancient roots and universal importance.[23] While Turkish occupied the universal center, other languages were pushed toward the margins of the rural, the private, the residual, or the suspect. The "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" campaigns are a vivid example of this ideology: to be a proper citizen was to speak Turkish, audibly and publicly. Seen through Spolsky, then, the later architecture of language management in Türkiye

[22] Simplifying Turkish and reducing the gap between elite and vernacular forms did have populist implications. However, this process also worked to centralize linguistic authority in the state and to delegitimize other linguistic repertoires. In other words, the ideology of "the people's language" coexisted with a strongly tutelary politics where the state claimed the right to define what proper Turkish was and what counted as undesirable linguistic residue (Çolak, 2004).

[23] The Turkish History Thesis and the Sun Language Theory could also be read at this ideological level. The Sun Language Theory, which linked Turkish to the world's oldest linguistic origins and thereby elevated it to a civilizational source language, shows how far the regime was willing to go in investing Turkish with civilizational primacy. For critical analyses of linguistic nationalism and the ideological underpinnings of the Sun Language Theory, see Aytürk, *Turkish Linguists against the West: The Origins of Linguistic Nationalism in Atatürk's Turkey* (2004), and Beşikçi, *Türk tarih tezi, Güneş-Dil teorisi ve Kürt sorunu* (1991).

becomes easier to understand. Turkish having been ideologically constructed as the only legitimate language of the nation-state, management proceeded along relatively predictable lines. Turkish gained its sole place in education, bureaucracy, media, and public life.

4.2. Language Policy as a Layered Process

Language policy is better understood as a layered process–what Ricento and Hornberger (1996) describe as an "onion."[24] These intersecting layers (national, institutional, interpersonal), "together compose the LPP whole […]" and they "permeate and interact with each other in a variety of ways and to varying degrees (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996, p. 402). They argue that the policy that leaves the state's desk, changes as it moves through these layers of the instituons and the the individuals and that at every level "characteristic patterns of discourse, reflecting goals, values, and institutional or personal identities, obtain" (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996, p. 409).

4.2.1. The National Layer: Law, Policy, and Language Management in Türkiye

Ricento and Hornberger's concept of the national layer locates the level how language ideologies are made into language management. Language management operates at this level as law, policy, and regulation. This section takes a look at how Türkiye restructured the legal landscape that concerns its linguistic diversity and how it opened institutional space for LLD. The Constitution explicitly stipulates that the sole language to be used in education and public institutions in Türkiye is Turkish (Article 42). Accordingly, only the groups recognized under the Treaty of Lausanne possess the right to education both in and of their mother tongue, while no legal provision exists for the teaching of the languages spoken by other ethnic and linguistic minority groups.[25] "Many countries of the world have a similar "monolingual but..." policy.

[24] Like an onion, it is layered and reveals increasing complexity as it is peeled. Whether it also brings tears is, fortunately, beside the point.

[25] Alongside the Constitution, Eren and Taşkan (2023) identify the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the Treaty of Friendship with Bulgaria (1925) as the principal legal frameworks defining the protection of minority rights in Türkiye. As noted earlier, the Treaty of Lausanne adopts a religion-based understanding of minority, recognizing only the non-Muslim groups of Jews, Armenians and Greeks as minorities. The agreement with Bulgaria extended the minority rights defined under Lausanne to Bulgarians living in Türkiye. Nevertheless, irrespective of minority status, Article 66 of the Constitution defines as "Turkish" anyone bound to the Turkish state through citizenship.

They may name in their constitution or in their laws a single national or official language, but then modify the intolerance by proclaiming protection for one or more minority languages." (Spolsky, 2004, p. 2158). Within the context of EU candidacy and the Justice and Development Party's reformist orientation, Türkiye entered its "monolingual but…" era. A series of reforms opened space for non-Turkish languages to enter into institutions. However, Türkiye's engagement with the supranational norms brought by the EU accession process was selective and mediated (Sipahioğlu, 2017, p. 52): Türkiye ratified a number of international human rights instruments,[26] but refrained from ratifying conventions that directly address linguistic diversity.[27]

In 2002, amendments to the Law on Foreign Language Education and Teaching led to its renaming as the *Law on Foreign Language Education and Teaching and the Learning of Different Languages and Dialects Used by Turkish Citizens.*[28] This was followed by the adoption of the *Regulation on the Learning of Different Languages and Dialects Traditionally Used by Turkish Citizens in Their Daily Lives.*[29] Subsequent amendments in 2003 allowed for private courses and private schools to offer education in these languages. The most significant development for the purposes of this study, came with the Law No. 6287, adopted on March 30, 2012 (*Law on the Amendment of the Primary Education and Education Law and Certain Other Laws),*[30] which paved the way for the introduction of the LLD courses.

4.2.2. The Classroom Level: Enactment

How these reforms and openings were operationalized are found in the institutional layer of language policy. In the context of this study, this layer is most concretely

[26] The European Convention on Human Rights (1954), the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1962), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2003), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2003)

[27] The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995)

[28] Yabancı Dil Eğitim ve Öğretimi ile Türk Vatandaşlarının Farklı Dil ve Lehçelerinin Öğrenilmesi Hakkında Kanun

[29] Türk Vatandaşlarının Günlük Yaşamlarında Geleneksel Olarak Kullandıkları Farklı Dil ve Lehçelerin Öğrenilmesi Hakkında Yönetmelik

[30] İlköğretim ve Eğitim Kanunu ile Bazı Kanunlarda Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun.

located in the school. It is within schools that policy is assumes its concrete form. Schools are peculiar places. They are "neither a simple nor a coherent entity," and must instead be understood as fragmented and internally complex (Ball et al., 2012, p. 144). Schools are not of a piece; they are "precarious networks of different and overlapping groups of people, artefacts and practices" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 144). In other words, schools do not act as monolith institutions that respond to policy in a unified manner. Teachers, administrators, students, parents, and institutional traditions bring different priorities and expectations to the implementation arena. Understanding the school as differentiated and context-dependent, allows for a better picture as to how language policy operates at the institutional level. Within schools, the classroom practitioners, i.e. the teachers, are at the center of language policy (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996, p. 417). Teachers directly determine what policy will become in practice. This requires a move away from thinking of policy as something that is implemented and understanding it as something that is "enacted" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). Policy texts are inherently incomplete. They do not contain meaning within them readily and require actors in schools to read them, make sense of them, and relate them to their own contexts. Teachers are often seen as mere "policy transmitters" but they can be "policymakers if they so desire" (Ricento and Hornberger, 1996, p. 420). This policy-making power of the teachers, is enactment.

Interpretation is the first step in the enactment process, a first look, an initial reading. It is a reading where the classroom practitioner asks "[…] what does this text mean to us? What do we have to do?" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 43). Interpretation is always situated. Teachers bring their own positions to this reading of policy. This reading is "political and substansive", in that, policy is never read in isolation (Ball, 1993, as cited in Ball et al., 2012, p. 43). These interpretations do not stay individual and are stabilized and circulated within the institution. School leaders and other teachers articulate particular readings.[31] In this way, interpretation also organizes how other components of the school will make sense of the policy and sets the terms where translation will occur. Translation is the process of reworking policy, a "third space" between policy and practice (Ball et al., 2012, p. 45). In this third space of translation, policy is made into

[31] Ball et al. (2012, p. 44) desscribe these processes as forms of policy pedagogy where staff are encouraged to take ownership of their interpretations and align their practices accordingly.

lesson plans, classroom routines and assessments. Whereas interpretation is a kind of "decoding", translation is a kind of "recoding" (Buckles, 2010, as cited in Ball et al., 2012, p. 45). Interpretation is analytical meaning making; it "decodes" and breaks down the aim and the substance of the policy. Translation is where this cognitive activity is turned into material activity. It "recodes" and actualizes meaning and turns it into classroom practice. Together, they create the process of enactment where policy gains symbolic and practical meaning.

4.3. Lazuri Teachers as Street-Level Bureaucrats

To understand the nature and the conditions surrounding this process of enactment, the study turns to Michael Lipsky' (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy". Lipsky (1980) conceptualizes frontline workers who operate at the point where policy meets the public such as police officers, social workers and teachers as "street-level bureaucrats". The point where teachers operate is where "most citizens encounter government […] through their teachers and their children's teachers" (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3). The schools and the teachers are the earliest, most frequent and most direct points of contact where the citizens come across the state and its policies. These encounters are instances of policy delivery. Lazuri teachers, as state-employed educators in public schools, work to deliver a unique and an untested policy to an audience for whom its meaning and expectations are unclear. They work in a system that offers them limited institutional support. In this situation, Lipsky (1980) theorizes that they'd find themselves tasked with developing their own meanings, strategies, and methods of making the policy workable and this would eventually become the actual policy. As Lipsky puts it, "the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties effectively become the public policies they carry out" (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii).The continuous decisions they make on a daily basis on how the course could and should function in practice, such as how the curriculum could be structured, how the language should be positioned, are ultimately what LLD policy would become in reality. In this way, the Lazuri teachers have the potential to "make the policies they are otherwise charged with implementing" (Lipsky, 1980, p. xvi).

Central to Lipsky's (1980) framework is the concept of "discretion". Street-level bureaucrats have considerable room to decide how a policy is applied in practice. They

determine the nature, extent, and quality of what is delivered beyond the formal guidelines (Lipsky, 1980, p. 13). Discretion is built into frontline work. Frontline work cannot be prescribed and the guidelines that exist are often too broad, too numerous, or too contradictory to be applied mechanically (Lipsky, 1980, p. 15). This means that the guidelines at hand must be invoked selectively. We have noted earlier that there is no full oversight of how the LLD courses are taught and that the policy outlining the courses is relatively open-ended. This possibly creates scenarios where the teachers must rely on their own judgments and interpretations. The implementation of the Lazuri courses seem to invite heaps of discretion and judgement calls on how to teach. Discretion is especially releveant when it comes to relationships with administrators. Frontline workers may not always share the perspectives of those who design policy and those of their administrators (Lipsky, 1980, p. 16). In many cases, they operate with different understandings of what really matters. Lazuri teachers may not share some of the assumptions of the system they work in. They enter into their classrooms as individuals and not as mere "resource units to be applied to a task" (Lipsky, 1980, p. 31). As speakers of or advocates of an endangered language, they may approach the course with commitments that are different from those of the institution. Street-level bureaucrats are formally subordinate within organizational hierarchies, but in practice they have considerable personal autonomy (Lipsky, 1980, p. 16). Wielding this autonomy, they may prioritize revitalization, cultural transmission, or community engagement in ways that are not explicitly recognized by the formal policy or their administrations.

Teachers as individuals often value development and care, while institutions are about coverage and performance. This common mismatch often creates a mindset of "alienation" in the profession (Lipsky, 1980, p. 75). However, the Lazuri course is not like other subjects. Its content is tied to identity and community and its teachers are members of the community whose language they teach. Therefore, the usual distance between the teacher and the object of teaching is breached. The work that normally calls for a *de facto* alienation, may bring a high degree of personal investment in their cases. This position might also introduce a form of advocacy tension. The Lazuri teachers are not formally tasked with language advocacy but their role invites it. They stand at a point between institutional expectations and commitments to their community. They must decide how far to extend the meaning of the course, whether

to treat it as a language elective or as part of a bigger effort to sustain an endangered language. They are not formally positioned as agents of language revitalization, but their work intersects with many of its core concerns.

4. 4. Language Revitalization: "A Good Problem"

Language revitalization are efforts that aim to stop and reverse the processes of language shift and language loss.[32] Language shift is usually framed as a natural by-product of modernization and progress (Fishman, 1991, p. 63). This is a convenient fiction. Language shift and loss are the not organic processes but the outcomes of unequal conditions where some languages are enabled to live and others are not (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994, p. 24; May, 2012, p. 4). The loss of a language shoukd not be understood as an inevitable collateral damage to modernization. A language encodes ways of relating, remembering, and understanding the world, making "the destruction of a language the destruction of a rooted identity." (Fishman, 1990, p. 4) The loss of a language is a loss of epistemology and community.

'Questions of language are basically questions of power' (Chomsky, 1979, p. 191). The field of language revitalization approaches language shift as a historically and politically produced outcome of power inequalities, and therefore understands it as open to intervention. The central concern of language revitalization is "reversing language shift", which means restoring the conditions where a language can be used and transmitted across generations (Fishman, 1991, p. 2). Reversing language shift is, in Fishman's terms, a "good problem" (1991 p. 6). It is a problem because it confronts categorical beliefs enmeshed with modern life. It is a good one because confronting them pushes against the conditions that produce dislocation in the first place. The solutions to this "good problem", work toward "the solutions of related problems rather than to their exacerbation" (Fishman, 1991, p. 6). This means that language revitalization should labor at the level of social reproduction in order to be substantial and meaningful. A language is not revitalized because more people learn it, but because it regains its place in everyday life (Hinton, 2011, p. 314). Revitalization

[32] Language shift refers to the process where a speech community gradually abandons its language in favor of another, typically for one associated with better social, economic and political power (Fishman, 1991, p. 1). Language loss is the outcome of this process, where a language ceases to be used in everyday communication and eventually becomes moribund or extinct (Crystal, 2000; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

requires deliberate efforts to restore functions and increase use in all domains (Grenoble and Whaley, 2006, p. 107). Seen in this light, the presence of a language in formal policy does not automatically indicate revitalization. Revitalization should go beyond teaching a language as an object of study and is ultimately concerned with sustaining it as a medium of communication of everyday life (Hinton and Hale, 2001). For this reason, evaluating language policies like the LLD courses requires a revitalization lens: To distinguish between recognition and continuity, and to ask if the initiative extends beyond the school to support the conditions where the languages can be sustained by the communities themselves.

The most influential of the criteria for revitalization and reversing language shift is restoring intergenerational transmission**.** The decisive point is if the language is passed from one generation to the next in natural settings within the family (Fishman, 1991, p. 6). A second key criterion of revitalization concerns the range and the distribution of domains of use. Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley (2006, p. 6) emphasize that revitalization should expand the functional load of a language across various social contexts, including the home, education, media, and public life. The critical issue is if the speakers have regular, meaningful opportunities to use the language in different areas of life. Leanne Hinton (2001, p. 310) notes that creating new speakers of the language is necessary, but these new speakers should be able to use the language beyond the educational setting and integrate it into their lives. A language can have many learners but only a few active users. It is the active users that determine the languages viability. Another criterion concerns institutional support and infrastructure. When a language enters into the education system, it is remade according to the logics of the school. This remaking produces a peculiar kind of linguistic competence. It is decontextualized and time-bound and detached from the actual, social world of the language. This is why teaching and learning endangered languages should understand itself as "a pioneering process" that imagines a whole new model of language teaching (Hinton, 2001, p. 308), in order to do the language and the goal of revitalizating it, justice.

Then, where the case of Lazuri courses sit within this spectrum of revitalization? The courses are a state-led, school-based initiative that introduces the language into formal education in a peripheral form in the elective slot. The design of the Lazuri courses within the LLD framework offers a short, discontinuous form of engagement. The

forms of language use it can potentially create seem limited. The framework of the courses, do not seem to adress the creation of conditions that would make these languages necessary and meaningful beyond the school, unlike for instance, an immersion model.[33] Revitalization requires that communities see value in the language. Hinton and Hale (2001) repeatedly show across cases that where revitalization initiatives take root, they do so because they were devised, designed and realized by the language community. Grassroots initiatives emerge from within the community and is built on already existing relationships and practices. They are usually small-scale, uneven, and limited in terms of resources but they nevertheless grow from a sense of ownership that institutions cannot generate or replicate. The conditions that made Lazuri courses possible and the efforts that kept them alive and going, were almost entirely sourced from community effort. So, while the Lazuri courses are state-led in form, they are grassroots in substance. The work of connecting the Lazuri course to lived contexts and expanding its meaning beyond the school falls to the teachers. What this makes clear is that the possible revitalization capacity of the policy would be determined by the teachers in a way that is not visible at the level of policy. As we stated, the continuity between classroom and community is not built into the design of the courses. It can, however, be potentially produced by the people that teach them and the grassroots know-how that they stand on. Thus, the following chapter turns to the teachers and lets their narratives illuminate the courses.

[33] Immersion refers to educational models where the target language is used as the primary medium of instruction. Students learn content (e.g., mathematics, science) in the target language which results in high-intensity exposure and use. Immersion models aim to re-embed the language as a vehicle of everyday communication. Classic examples include French immersion programs in Canada (Genesee, 1987), Māori-medium education in New Zealand (May and Hill, 2005), and Basque immersion (ikastola) schools in Spain (Cenoz, 2009). These models are cited in the revitalization literature for their success in producing new speakers and expanding domains of use, but their success depends on community support (Hinton, 2011; Grenoble and Whaley, 2006).

CHAPTER 5

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH THE TEACHERS OF THE ELECTIVE LAZURI COURSES

In this chapter, the interviews conducted with eight teachers who have taught Lazuri in public middle schools are analysed using thematic analysis. Through the reach of the Laz Institute and through snowballing, the total number of teachers was established to be 10. Among these 10, eight agreed to participate in the study. These eight interviewees constitute the overwhelming majority of people who have taught Lazuri within public education. Interviewees were asked about their early relationship to Lazuri, how they found their ways to the Lazuri courses, the practical processes behind opening and sustaining the courses in their schools, their relationships with the school body, their classroom practices and teaching methods, the materials they used, and the challenges and the support they encountered. Particular attention was paid to how they interpreted the larger significance of the courses, the role of the courses in recognition and the courses' relationship to language maintenance and and the future of Lazuri.

Through thematic analysis, five recurring themes were identified: The teachers' own linguistic biographies in shaping how they approach the course, the grassroots behind the courses, the teachers' ways of enactment, the legitimizing power of the courses, and spillover effects of the courses beyond the classroom and the school. The chapter begins by examining the teachers' experiences of acquiring Lazuri, migration and renewed linguistic awareness and explores the full-circle experience of returning to middle schools as teachers of Lazuri. Then, it lays out the grassroots labor that established and sustains the courses through their eyes and the ways they translate policy into classroom practice. The following themes explore how the courses can be an important means of legitimacy and recognition, how it opens dialogue on standardization within the community, and how it can generate new forms of pride and curiosity for both Laz and non-Laz students. The final section examines how the

course can seep into the ecology of the school and the family and can create reflection on the interrupted transmission of Lazuri.

Before delving into the thematic analysis, it is worth pausing to outline how the teachers found their way into teaching Lazuri. Muhittin (39)[34], my central point of contact throughout the fieldwork and whose commitment was key in keeping the courses alive, saw the announcement of the courses in 2012 and approached the Laz Institute to offer his support in any way he could. He opened the first Lazuri course in 2013. Later administrative responsibilities and becoming a school principle prevented him from continuing to teach the course himself, but he remained central to the spread of the courses. He was key in helping new courses open wherever he went, be it through teacher trainings, sharing his know-how and perspective, or mobilizing his local contacts for new teachers. Several of the other teachers encountered the courses directly or indirectly through his efforts. Sefer (42) described how using Lazuri in the school he worked in his everyday life created curiosity among his students. When students began expressing an interest learning or bettering their Lazuri, he decided to open a course. He had already heard of courses opening in nearby districts such as Fındıklı and Ardeşen. He contacted the Laz Institute, approached his administration with the idea and taught Lazuri in Pazar for two years. He stopped in the 2017-2018 academic year. He did not state why he stopped. Earlier, we noted that all courses stopped that year. It may have been related to the impact of the 2016 coup attempt. Muzaffer (36), heard of the courses while studying to become a teacher at university. Upon graduating and being appointed, he contacted the Laz Institute and prepared to open a course. Before he was able to do so, his request to be appointed to Ardeşen was accepted. Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened. He eventually opened courses the following year in 2021 and continues to open them today. Huriye (39) came into contact with the Laz Institute after being appointed to Istanbul and became involved in many initiatives related to Laz language and culture. She opened a course for one year in 2018, but decided not to continue due to the challenges of teaching outside the region. Her case was a much-appreciated window into a class with no Laz students.

Aynur (36) returned to her hometown after studying and working in Izmir for many years and decided to open a course out of a sense of responsibility toward the language.

[34] The ages of interviewees are indicated in parentheses upon first mention.

She managed to sustain it for two years before administrative concerns regarding workloads and scheduling prevented her from continuing. She holds that this was partly caused by influential people leaving the district, with Muhittin being one of them. Haluk (42) remembers first hearing about the courses in the news back in 2012. Having long being interested in the language, he contacted the Laz Institute and managed to open a course after a couple of years. Like Muhittin, when he became a school principal, he could no longer teach the course himself. However, both Muhittin and Haluk, even though they themselves could not teach the courses, facilitated them opening in their schools. Haluk is the administrator of Yasemin (31) and Muhittin is the administrator of Nazile (34). Seeing that they were highly competent and interested in Lazuri, they encouraged them to open courses and supported them along the way. At the time of the interviews, Muzaffer in Ardeşen, Yasemin in Fındıklı and Nazile in Çamlıhemşin were teaching Lazuri courses in their schools.

5.1. Teachers' Linguistic Trajectories from Acquiring Lazuri to Becoming Teachers of Lazuri

The teachers' childhood relationships with Lazuri varied. Some grew up in homes where Lazuri was their first and only language; while others heard the language through older relatives, seasonal visits to villages, or through songs but did not have the space to speak it regularly. Some described Lazuri as the sole language of their childhood, while some described it as periphery and background. Regardless, almost all recalled it as the "language of adults".

5.1.1. Acquisition: Rural-Urban Divide and Grandparents

One of the most prominent distinctions that emerged in the interviewees' accounts of acquiring Lazuri, was between village and urban childhoods. Interestingly, this distinction was, without exception, introduced unprompted by the interviewees themselves. All of them seemed to have reflected on the role that village life, or the lack of it, played in their relationship with Lazuri. For instance, the very first thing Muhittin mentioned during the interview was that he had grown up in the city:

> I grew up in the city, kids that grew up in the city do not know much Lazuri. The children whose parents had connections with the village knew Lazuri, they grew up hearing the language. We did not grow up like that. It was not spoken around us.

Similarly, Muzaffer, when asked whether Lazuri was part of his home growing up, answered by saying that he was raised in the city. To him, this was answer enough; I was to understand that growing up in the city meant he did not grow up with Lazuri. When asked if he could elaborate, he went on:

> The story goes like this for most people: 'I grew up in the village, people were speaking Lazuri all the time.' But that was not my experience. I did not grow up in a village, nor was I someone who spent a great deal of time there. I grew up in the city. By 'city,' I mean Ardeşen, which is still a Laz town. But if you ask whether Lazuri was spoken in the city at that time, the answer is that it was not spoken among children of my age. The adults spoke it among themselves, but not to us.

The story does seem to go like that. Nazile who grew up in a village, explains that Lazuri was the sole language of her childhood. She explains that she learned Turkish when she began school. Since she attended a village school, her elementary school years were still characterized by Lazuri. Sefer's account is no different, having grown up in a village:

> I was born into a family in which my mother, father, grandfather, in fact, my entire family, were Laz and spoke Lazuri. Everyone around me, especially the elders, spoke Lazuri and hardly ever used Turkish. Lazuri was spoken constantly in our home.

Haluk, too, associated his acquisition of Lazuri directly with village life:

> We grew up in the village. The elderly people, neighbors, older relatives… Arhavi's social structure is largely Laz. We spoke Lazuri. Lazuri was the language of the grown-ups, We did our best to respond to them and we picked it up along the way. […] When we went down to the city I had to speak Turkish in school. But as soon as I stepped foot in the village, I continued to speak Lazuri.

His account shows the clear distinction between the village and the city. It also echoes a motif that Muzaffer has raised earlier: Lazuri as the language of the adults. When asked where she usually heard Lazuri as a child, Huriye explained that:

> Lazuri was present everywhere older people were present. Our parents, our grandparents, or other elders. When we walked down the street or when we entered a store, we would hear Lazuri. But only if the people having the conversation were adults.

This is echoed by most interviewees. Lazuri was for them, the language of older generations. For Huriye, Lazuri was so closely associated with older generations that she described speaking Lazuri as speaking "adultish." As she explained: "When I spoke Lazuri, it almost felt as if I was pretending to be a grown-up. It was like I was speaking adultish." Huriye lived in the city throughout the school year, and spent her summers helping her parents in their tea and hazelnut orchards in the village, a common childhood experience in the Black Sea region. The summers were where she acquired Lazuri. This form of episodic but sustained connection to the village appears to have made language acquisition possible for her. Whether through spending summers picking tea like Huriye or maintaining relationships with relatives that lived in the village, these ties provided regular exposure to Lazuri. However, in the accounts of the "city-kids", exposure seems to be passive and excluding. Their attempts at trying to enter that space of Lazuri, was met with teasing and ridicule as Huriye recalls:

> I tried to speak Lazuri whenever I could. When I said I wanted to practice and tried to speak Lazuri, if I couldn't quite get the words out or couldn't find the right word, they would make fun of me. They would say, 'Oh, so you speak Lazuri too? Can you actually speak it?

The interviewees who grew up in the city frequently recalled that as children they heard parents, grandparents, and other elders converse in Lazuri all around them but being addressed only in Turkish themselves. In their cases, Lazuri was ever-present in the household, but they as the children were not invited in it. It was spoken around them but not to them. Nevertheless, all but Muhittin described growing up bilingual, with two, Nazile and Yasemin, recalling speaking exclusively Lazuri until the beginning of formal schooling. Among the two interviewees who primarily grew up in the city, one (Muhittin) reported only limited receptive competence in Lazuri, while the other (Muzaffer) described himself as proficient. Although Muzaffer largely attributed this competence to his personal interest and effort as a child, elsewhere in the interview he casually mentioned that his grandmother had lived with his family

throughout his childhood. This may have provided that foundation upon which his interest could later develop. Across the interviews the grandparents, especially co-residing grandparents, emerged as the primary carriers of the language. Grandparents seem to have been the strongest users of Lazuri in the home and so their presence within the home created regular exposure to the language. As Huriye recalls:

> Since my mother was busy with the garden and the field, my grandmother was the one who raised my sister and I. My grandmother was very childlike. She played games with us and told us stories in Lazuri. I spent a lot of time with her during my childhood.

Aynur, similarly, attributes much of her early exposure to Lazuri to the close relationship she had with her grandparents: "We were lucky because our elders were living with us, my grandfather and my darling grandmother. Thanks to them, we grew up immersed in the language." What is common in the language trajectories of the interviewees, is that two things seem to have determined the acquisition of Lazuri. First was growing up in the village or having some form of sustained contact with the village. The second seems to be grandparents, especially co-residing ones. Grandparents emerged as the strongest link between the children and Lazuri. The intimacy of living, playing, and growing up alongside grandparents seem to have kept Lazuri woven into the fabric of their childhood. Importantly, all but two interviewees recalled Lazuri as the "language of the adults", that is to say, even the ones that spoke and used the language, they perceived it as something increasingly becoming a relic of the adults.

5.1.2. The Point of Rupture: Schooling and "Proper Turkish"

Among the interviewees, all talked about how dominant the belief that speaking Lazuri would hinder speaking "proper" Turkish or give them an accent was when they were children.[35] This was mostly due to the adults internalizing the belief that speaking Lazuri would negatively affect the children's Turkish, which was and, still is, key for academic success. As Huriye explains, her parents addressed their children exclusively in Turkish while continuing to speak Lazuri among themselves: "They thought, 'These

[35] It is important to note here that, contemporary research on bilingualism provides no evidence that growing up with two or more languages undermines competence in either one.

children will go to school, their Turkish needs to be good.' They spoke nothing but Turkish to us and continued speaking Lazuri with each other. We learned it either way." Limiting the use of Lazuri with children did not stop them from knowing the language. What these practices did affect, however, was the place of Lazuri in the children's social worlds. As Huriye recalls:

> I would say to my friends, 'Come on, let's practice a little! This is our language, our mother tongue.' But I would get no response. Even though they were all Laz and the children of Laz parents, we were, unfortunately, the children of families who believed that only Turkish needed to be learned.

As children, they were discouraged to use it among themselves. As a result, Lazuri gradually lost its place in children's interactions and, for many, ceased to be a language of peer communication. The interviewees talked about both direct and indirect forms of discouragement. In some cases, their teachers explicitly instructed them to stop speaking Lazuri and urged the parents not to speak Lazuri with their children. Success in school depended on strong Turkish proficiency. This made Lazuri appear unnecessary at best, and harmful at worst. Nazile provides the clearest example of a direct intervention. She recalls that a Turkish teacher's intervention in middle school severed her bond with Lazuri until adulthood:

> Following our Turkish teacher's warning in middle school, speaking Lazuri was no longer permitted at school and at home. I can say that this was when I stopped speaking Lazuri, the sixth grade. I did not speak it again. Not until university.

This intervention was reinforced in parent-teacher meetings and adopted by families as a legitimate educational advice. As Yasemin explains:

> In middle school and high school, we were very careful not to let our Turkish deteriorate. Since we were speaking both Turkish and Lazuri, our Turkish teacher and literature teacher said that speaking two languages was harming our Turkish. So we tried not to speak it at school.

She further recalls:

> Yes, she would say this at parent-teacher meetings as well. She would tell us that we should not speak Lazuri and my family paid attention to that. The same was true for my cousins. We were all the same age. Lazuri was not spoken at their home too. Not to them.

In middle school, a teacher's authority extended beyond the school and determined the language practices in the family. The discouragement of Lazuri was adopted as a principle by parents who accepted the dubious educational logic behind it. Yasemin and Nazile, who spoke Lazuri as their primary language, stopped speaking it until adulthood. A similar memory appears in Aynur's interview. She grew up in a household where Lazuri was spoken regularly. She explains that, this changed when she started middle school:

> Lazuri was always spoken at home. Then I started middle school. I don't know if you and I are the same generation, but in our time the idea was this: 'Stop speaking Lazuri at home with the children, otherwise their Turkish will suffer.'

For Aynur too, middle school marked the point she stopped speaking Lazuri. Muhittin's experience is similar. He describes a subtler pressure, rooted again in assumptions about academic success and social mobility. Reflecting on this later, he distinguishes between older genarations and his generation:

> 'They did not let us speak Lazuri!' This was certainly true for older generations. For our generation, it wasn't a direct 'Don't speak Lazuri!' It was more implicit. What they believed was that only those who spoke Turkish well could get ahead in life and that you can't speak perfect Turkish and perfect Laz at the same time. Of course, years later we realized how unfounded that belief was.

This distinction is significant given the age profile of the interviewees, all of whom fall neatly within the Millennial generation, having been born between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. They differentiate their experiences from those of earlier generations, many of whom recall harsh punishment or humiliation for speaking Lazuri in school. The interviewees do not recall severe forms of repression and punishment. Instead, themselves and their parents were imbued with the idea that Lazuri would jeopardize Turkish competency, which, in turn, would jeopardize success and social mobility.

Through this internalized belief, they were made to leave Lazuri behind. For most, this was not without a fight, but they ultimately lost touch with the language. In this sense, they belong to an intermediate generation: young enough to have been spared the more extreme forms of linguistic punishment but not young enough that the language attitudes have completely changed that they grew up monolingual in Turkish. This liminal position is very visible in Yasemin's account. Although she grew up speaking Lazuri fluently, her two younger siblings did not: “We spoke Turkish with them. Children of their generation do not know Lazuri.” Yasemin's siblings are only around five years younger than she is. Within the span of a few years, the language shifted from being actively spoken by one child to being only receptive for the next. The interviewees seem to occupy a transitional position between their parents' generation and younger generations within a period of particularly accelerated linguistic change.

5.1.3. Leaving the Region: Migrationa and Reconnection

For many of the interviewees, leaving the Eastern Black Sea region for higher education marked a turning point in their relationship with Lazuri and their Laz identity. Having grown up in Laz communities, several of the interviewees described having little reason to reflect on the distinctiveness of their language or identity during childhood. Muhittin said:

> Because you live within the same homogeneous environment where everyone is like you. A fish is unaware of the water it swims in. We did not even know what we were speaking. This changed when I moved to Istanbul for high school. Words that I thought were Turkish turned out to be Lazuri. I could not form a complete sentence in Lazuri if you asked me to, but turns out most of my vocabulary were made up of Lazuri! I thought that was simply the correct way to say them.

For Muhittin, migration produced both a sudden awareness of Lazuri and of his own position within it. Until then, he had assumed that his only linguistic frame of reference was Turkish. Words and expressions he had always considered ordinary Turkish turned out to be Lazuri and made him realize that Lazuri had shaped his everyday speech far more than he ever knew. He also noted that many of his peers experienced a similar realization, although often later, when they left for university: “I experienced this a little earlier, in high school. When you're in high school, your emotions are

sharper. You think, 'This is my language! How can you not know about it?'" It was often only after leaving the region that most interviewees became aware of how little others knew about Laz people, Lazuri, or the differences between the Laz and other groups of the region. Migration transformed Lazuri from an ever-present background into an object of conscious reflection. In Haluk's case, moving to Erzurum for university exposed him to misconceptions about Laz people. He defined this phase as a process of mutual learning:

> People there [Erzurum] were quite closed off actually. They didn't know who the Laz were, or the Greeks, or where Laz people lived. They called everyone from Trabzon, Laz! They had no clue. I learned this when I went there. They learned it from me as well.

For Huriye, migration brought attention to something she had never previously considered: her way of speaking Turkish. Having grown up in Arhavi where people, regardless of ethnic background, spoke the Black Sea variety of Turkish, she had never imagined that her speech might be perceived as different:

> I never thought the way I spoke sounded different to people. I thought I spoke perfectly good Turkish! Then I arrived at university and realized that I sounded different to everyone. I thought, 'Do I really speak differently?' [...] And I was going to become a Turkish teacher, oh no!

Huriye frequently found herself explaining that Lazuri was a distinct language and not merely a regional accent of Turkish:

> As much as possible, I tried to correct them on this misconception and introduce Lazuri to them. Even now, there are people who are surprised to learn from me that Lazuri is a distinct language. They still think it's just a Black Sea dialect.

Studying in Konya, in Central Anatolia, exposed Nazile to people who had never encountered Lazuri as a distinct language. Nazile, who stopped speaking Lazuri after middle school, when asked to prepare a presentation for a course in university, chose to do it on Lazuri. She explained:

> At the time there was a Black Sea television series called '*Sevdaluk'*. People assumed that what they heard there was Lazuri, even though there

> wasn't a single Lazuri word in the show. When my classmates learned from me that Lazuri was a different language with its own alphabet, they were very surprised. Even my teacher was surprised. He has never met a Laz person before.

Nazile, who did not speak the Black Sea variety of Turkish, increasingly found herself explaining the distinction between Lazuri and the stereotypical Black Sea variety represented in popular culture: "When people said, 'How can you be Laz?' I felt the need to explain. It is not *yapayrum, cideyrum, celeyrum.*[36] We speak a language, and I try not to mix it with Turkish." This work of having to constantly disclaim and explain her language and identity, became a catalyst for learning more about the language. Nazile recalled purchasing dictionaries, researching Lazuri and buying books. For Aynur, migration and university life triggered a bigger process of exploration, too. Moving to Izmir with her brother, she described university as a place that "opened her eyes" and that she "realized and felt her Lazness there." For Aynur, Lazuri also acquired a new function in migration. She and her brother began using it as a private language: "My brother and I would be on the train home. If there were people around us and we didn't want them to understand, we spoke Lazuri. It was our language, something that belonged to the two of us." Together with her brother, she purchased a Lazuri dictionary, searched for books, and began thinking about what they could do for the language:

> Let's collect all of them and keep them! Let's understand our identity […] We found a Lazuri dictionary and bought it. We started examining it and thinking about whether there was something we could do, whether we could reach people and make recordings.

Migration also transformed the interviewees relationships with aspects of Laz culture that they had previously took for granted. Aynur describes becoming interested in questions that had never seemed important while growing up in the region:

> I became curious about Laz mythology and the beliefs of our region. 'Why do you call this that, Mom? Where does this come from?' I was suddenly

[36] In Turkish popular culture, Black Sea communities tend to be caricatured through exaggerated forms of regional Turkish such as *yapayrum* ("I do"), *cideyrum* ("I go"), and *celeyrum* ("I come"). These stylized expressions are frequently conflated with Laz identity.

> curios. I tried to read, learn, and engage with these things. At that point we had nothing to do with academia. We were just ordinary undergraduate students asking ourselves, 'What can we do?'

Distance from home appears to have intensified her interest and appreciation in her roots. Reflecting on her years in Izmir, Aynur described a growing sense of longing for her hometown and a desire to learn more about the place she had left behind:

> Every time I came back home, I was struck by how much I missed it. I love the nature here, the greenery, the village life. Whenever I returned, I tried to learn more about things that belonged to this place. I started asking questions about the things my mother did all the time, the things people here do every day.

Migration seems to have encouraged a more conscious engagement with a way of being that used to blend into the background of daily life. Aynur also linked this process to the influence of Kazım Koyuncu:[37]

> Like everyone else, Kazım Koyuncu had a huge impact on me. We loved him deeply. We watched his documentary. We kept asking ourselves: why aren't we protecting this? This is what makes us who we are. We are Laz. We need to learn these things.

Migration also brought them into contact with people from the region whose identities they had not previously reflected upon. Aynur recalled meeting many students from Hopa during university, many of whom identified as Hemşinli.[38] She said, "It was there that we first became truly aware of the distinction between Hemşinli and Laz." What is striking in Aynur's account is that this realization did not occur in the Eastern Black Sea, where Laz and Hemşinli communities have lived alongside one another for generations, but happened after leaving the region. It was in Izmir, among students

[37] Kazım Koyuncu (1971–2005) was a beloved Laz musician, activist, and one of the most visible public figures of the contemporary cultural revival of Laz identity in Türkiye. Through his music he played a significant role in popularizing the language among younger generations and remains an enduring cultural icon.

[38] Hemşinli people are a Muslim community concentrated in the eastern Black Sea region, particularly around Rize and Artvin, commonly understood to descend from Armenian-speaking populations that gradually underwent Islamization and language shift. For discussions of Hemşinli identity, history, and language, see Simonian (2007). For Hemşinli and Laz relations in northeast Türkiye, see Bellér-Hann (2007).

who shared a geographical background but identified differently, that these distinctions became a topic of discussion and reflection. Far from home, they found themselves not only explaining who they were to outsiders but also defining themselves in relation to others from the region.

5.1.4. The Full-Circle Return: Becoming Teachers of Lazuri

For many of the interviewees, becoming a Lazuri teacher represented an especially meaningful moment in their linguistic biographies. The school, and especially the middle school, had been the setting where they were told to stop speaking Lazuri. Years later, they found themselves at that very setting, teaching Lazuri to a new generation of students. This is why, becoming a Lazuri teacher can be understood as a full-circle moment in their biographies. The institution that once contributed to the marginalization of Lazuri had became the site where they could legitimize and transmit the language. Muzaffer remarked: "As a child, I could not even imagine that there would be a course like this in school. Now I am a Lazuri teacher. Some of the new students think that is my actual subject area. They ask me, 'Are you the Lazuri teacher?'" For Muzaffer, the very existence of a Lazuri class would have been unimaginable during his own childhood. Now, in the school he works in, he is known as the "Lazuri teacher", even though his actual subject area is Turkish. The teachers had come to occupy a position that would have seemed impossible during their own school years.

The magnitude of this reversal was not lost on them. As Aynur said, "Think about it. I taught Lazuri in the same place where, when I was a child, I was told that it had no place." Nazile described her involvement in the course as much an effort to maintain her own connection to the language as it was an effort of maintenance: "I was told to stop speaking it. That is engraved in my story. Now, I wanted to keep it from fading. I wanted it to not be forgotten and I wanted to keep myself from forgetting it. I wanted to keep it alive." This experience of interruption appears to have been "engraved" in how the interviewees understand both themselves and their responsibilities toward Lazuri. Their decision to teach Lazuri appears, at least in part, as a personal response to the earlier experience of loss. There is a narrative of personal repair. Their presence in the classroom is a point of reversal in the trajectory of their relationship with Lazuri: from students made to leave the language behind to teachers responsible for carrying it forward.

5.2. The Establishment of the Lazuri Course Through Grassroots

Across the interviews, the interviewees repeatedly emphasized that they felt the continuity of the course cannot be taken for granted. The interviewees described the course as something that must be continuously built, negotiated, defended, and sustained. They recalled the grassroots initiatives in developing the necessary infrastructure for the course and talked about the central role of local actors in opening and maintaining classes, and the considerable influence of administrative discretion in determining whether the course could be offered at all. They all highlighted the fragility of this arrangement and described an overarching sense of contingency regarding the courses due to their heavy reliance on administrative attitudes.

5.2.1. Building the Courses: Grassroots and Collective Purpose

For many of the interviewees, discussing the implementation of the Lazuri elective course meant discussing a process of institution-building. They emphasized that the course did not come to them as a fully developed educational program. As explained earlier, the necessary components for the Lazuri course were developed by community organizations such as the Laz Institute, local activists, and individuals committed to the language. Across the interviews, the course appeared less as a top-down state initiative than as a project that had to be built from below. Muzaffer summarized the situation bluntly:

> There was no infrastructure. There was no plan. There were no trained teachers. There was nothing. At that time, it existed only through the efforts of volunteers who knew Lazuri, who were willing to do the work. [...] All of it hinged on the commitment of the local teachers.

The interviewees frequently emphasized the gap between the legal recognition of the course and the necessary practical conditions for it to turn into a reality. The former had been achieved but the latter remained mostly absent. Muhittin recalled the challenges of the first year:

> The year was 2013. We opened the elective course. We struggled quite a bit with opening it because it was the first. Others had opened some elective course before and taught Lazuri under it. But mine was the first Lazuri course that actually existed within the curriculum, with a yearly

plan, a program, and its real name written as it appeared in the official program.

One of the recurring themes across the interviews was the support of the Laz Institute. The teachers all turned to the Institute when they wanted to open the courses. Haluk explained how his preparation for teaching the course relied on the resources and support provided by the Institute: “The Institute provided the textbooks. Then we attended the Institute's seminars and Lazuri groups. We received various talks and seminars on the language and the courses there. After that, we started our effort.”

Teacher training provides perhaps the clearest example of this grassroots infrastructure. Muhittin, an organizer of the trainings, was the one who explained to me that the first teacher training program was made possible through a policy agreement between the Ministry and the Laz Institute. He explained that the financial burden was assumed entirely by an EU-funded project carried out by the Institute. Recruitment for the teacher training programs was conducted through MEBBIS (the Ministry of National Education Information Systems platform). Announcements for Lazuri teacher training courses were circulated nationally through this system and were open to any and all interested teachers. Muhittin relaid that some applied out of curiosity, others because the training offered an opportunity for travel, and many had no connection to Lazuri at all. The organizers, however, were then expected to select participants from these applications. They were provided with just names and places of work. There was no way of determining if an applicant spoke Lazuri, had ties to the community, or would realistically be able to teach the course after the training. As Muhittin said, “We were given lists containing thousands of names and told to choose from among them. How was I supposed to choose? I didn't know any of these people!” To make the process workable, Muhittin began identifying candidates in local communities and encouraged them to apply. He noted that even with this intervention, many teachers that arrived at the trainings came without even knowing a word of Lazuri, which rendered much of the trainings ineffective. To him, the most important part of the trainings were the certificates. Many interviewees relaid that the absence of formal credentials could became a point of contention during the approval process. The certificate from the trainings served as a form of bureaucratic protection. Muzaffer reflected on the significance of obtaining this certificate: “We now had a document

showing that nobody could prevent us from teaching Lazuri. When I wanted to open a course, they could no longer say, 'Where is your certificate?'"

The interviewees also repeatedly referred to the absence of adequate teaching materials in the early days. Muzaffer recalled opening his first course without any official resources sent to the school. He said, "When I opened my first course, I had no teaching materials at all. Even now, the Ministry does not provide us with resources. Textbooks are not sent to us." The textbooks were printed and distributed by the Laz Institute. Muhittin talked about the highly improvised nature of his first experiences teaching the course: "There was not yet a textbook. We supposedly wrote learning outcomes. We made do." Several of the interviewees also found themselves undertaking the work of explaining and justifying the course to parents. Unlike established subjects, Lazuri required advocacy. As the teachers of the course, the interviewees had to become the intermediaries that introduced families to the course, responded to concerns, and advocated its cultural and educational value. Muhittin relays that having to explain the rationale behind the course required him to engage with families in a way he hasn't before: "For the first time I dealt with parents on an issue like this and answered their questions. There was a police officer's child, and he asked, 'Why is my child learning Lazuri?' I told him, 'I do not think of it only as Lazuri; they are learning about a culture.'" Similarly, Haluk said that answering the parents' questions required prudence: "You need to think very carefully about how you will explain it, how you talk about it. When you explain it well, people understand. When you explain that it is so that cultural awareness can develop, they understand." The teachers had to compensate for the lack of ready-made narratives and were positioned as advocates of the courses.

At the end of the day, the intervieewes all conveyed a sense of tirelessness and fulfillment in undertaking the work that surround the course. Aynur's reflection perhaps best summarizes the ethos that runs through the teachers' accounts:

> This was about being devoted to Lazuri. It is about keeping the language alive, keeping the culture alive. When that's the case, you do whatever is necessary and it becomes a source of immense joy.

These narratives show that the foundation of the Lazuri course was built through personal commitments that go beyond professional obligation. Interviewees described

investing time, effort, and emotional labor into making the course possible, without any material incentive and despite considerable uncertainty. For many interviewees, the labor for making the courses a reality was a source of joy. What is evident in their accounts is that the grassroots work was, first and foremost, sustained by this sense of fulfillment and collective purpose.

5.2.2. Opening the Lazuri Courses: Discretion, Local Trust, and Rapport

Before examining how teachers worked to open and sustain the elective Lazuri courses in their schools, it is important to understand the elective course structure in middle schools through their eyes. The interviewees consistently emphasized that opening an elective course is not straightforward. As Muzaffer succinctly put it: "Opening any elective course is not easy. It is not easy in itself, and it is certainly not easy in our case." Although the official logic of the elective system allows students to choose courses according to their interests, the interviewees described a far more intricate reality. Muzaffer explained that, an elective course acts as a separate class bringing together students from different sections and grade levels who select the same subject. An eighth-grade student could study alongside a fifth-grade student because both would begin at the A1 level. Aynur explained that organizational considerations such as staffing arrangements and scheduling decisions play into the equation:

> I wanted to open the course and there were enough students, but since I already teach in the primary school as well, my teaching load is already twenty-one hours. They could not give me additional classes. They opened another elective because the teaching loads of us teachers are required to be distributed evenly.

In practice, the interviewees explained that schools often lack the physical capacity to implement the system as intended. As Muzaffer stressed, administrators frequently make decisions based not on student interest but on available classroom space and teacher workloads. The interviewees also pointed to structural differences between larger and smaller schools. Muhittin explained that larger schools are usually better equipped to accommodate elective options, whereas smaller schools face constraints. In schools with multiple sections, students can be divided to different electives. In smaller schools limited class sizes create competition between choices, causing one

group of students' preferences to override anothers'. Within this tenous sytem, the LLD courses seem to occupy a particularly precarious position.

As we noted earlier, in the official elective course forms, Lazuri is listed under the broader category of "Living Languages and Dialects". They are often not explicitly stated as Lazuri. According to the teachers, many students and parents are therefore unlikely to recognize that Lazuri is even being offered. Muhittin described how he attempted to address this issue:

> On this elective list, mathematics is there, science applications are there, the Life of the Prophet is there, it goes on and on… and down at the very bottom, on the back page it says 'Living Languages and Dialects.' What is that? Nobody knows it's Lazuri. And it doesn't even matter because most students don't even look that far. So what did I do? I wrote 'Lazuri' and moved it to the top. But I could do that because I was an administrator by then.

The interviewees repeatedly emphasized that getting the course off the ground was a constant hassle. The course must compete for visibility, attract sufficient student demand, fit within staffing arrangements and the practical limitations of the schools. As a result, its continuation depends on factors far beyond the formal right to offer it. Perhaps the clearest summary of this reality comes from Muhittin:

> First you need a teacher. Then you need students. But even after students choose it, that's not enough. The school administration, the principal, has to want the course to open. That's the real issue. If a principal wants the course to open, everything else can be made to happen.

The decisions and relationships of teachers become particularly decisive. As Muhittin explained:

> If you are a well-liked and well-known teacher in your school and you have a good relationship with your principle, you go into the classroom and inform the students: 'I will be teaching a Lazuri course. If you would like to choose it, or if you have any questions, come and talk to me.'

The interviews suggest that opening the course depended heavily on the social position of the teacher within the school. Familiarity, trust, and reputation all became important

resources in the process. Haluk offers perhaps the clearest articulation of how these dynamics operate and how rapport is key:

> If the administrator wants the course to open, it opens. If the administrator does not want it to open, it does not open. The teacher has to be vigilant. They have to say, 'Let's open this course.' They have to push for it. They need to have a good relationship with the administrators.

His account shows how the same institutional structures that can constrain the course can also make it very easy when key decision-makers are on board. Huriye similarly emphasized the importance of the support of the administration. She described the process was relatively easy for her precisely because her school administration was supportive from the outset:

> I spoke with the school. The administration supported me in this matter. In general, one of the biggest problems is that school administrations are reluctant to open these courses. But I did not have that problem, my administration and I have a good relationship. So the process was easy.

Similarly, Muzaffer stated that his first course opened largely because his principal recognized and supported his enthusiasm. However, some of the interviewees noted that support for the course was not always immediate. In some cases, administrators and colleagues approached the idea with skepticism at first. Sefer, for example, recalled encountering prejudice when he first introduced the idea but explained that "over time, those prejudices disappeared through good relationships." Sefer's account points to the importance of interpersonal relations that the teachers have in keeping the courses in place. Through "good relationships", in Sefer's and Huriye's words above, initial reservations did not translate into opposition, and support was built. The success of the course appears to depend on the ability of teachers to cultivate positive relationships within their schools. The importance of rapport seems to go beyond the school, as well. Aynur, reflecting on the early days of being back in the region, relays:

> When I first came here, I wasn't exactly a well-liked person. I am a woman, I am unmarried, I am living here. I had returned from Izmir. From the way I dressed to the fact that I usually taught lessons outside instead of cooped up in the classroom, everything about me was strange. It took people some time to get to know me. This is a village after all.

Although she is originally from the region, the years she spent in Izmir had created a social distance between herself and the community she returned to serve. Over time, as the school body and the families came to know her and see her commitment to the school and community, trust developed. Looking back, Aynur attributed some of the course's success to this accumulated social capital:

> This is a small place and, as I said, this is my eleventh year here. That means something. People think to themsleves, 'The one teaching this course is Aynur.' Being from here originally matters. If someone from outside came and said, 'I'm going to teach this language,' it might be received differently.

Interviews reveal that the legitimacy of the course seems to be tied to the credibility of those teaching it. In these small communities, teachers' personal reputations, relationships with families, and embeddedness in local networks become crucial resources. The fact that Aynur was eventually reaccepted as "one of their own" created the necessary rapport for parents to embrace the course. Aynur also highlighted the importance of certain individuals in keeping the courses in place. Reflecting on why the course did not open in her school that year, she pointed to the absence of a key advocate:

> Previously Muhittin was here. In fact, he was our branch director last year. He had good relationships with our administrators and encouraged them to make sure the course opened. This year, unfortunately, he is not here. I wanted the course to open, but at the beginning of the year the administrators told us that we would not be able to offer it. So it did not open.

Again, the course seems to depend on the presence of committed and well-connected individuals who carve out space for it in institutions. When those individuals leave, the course leaves with them. The interviewees' discussions of teacher training certificates further illustrate the importance of good relationships with administration. As mentioned above, teacher training programs provided certificates that helped establish the teachers' legitimacy. Muhittin explained:

> If you are going to teach a course in the Ministry of National Education, you need a certificate. But let's say you are my teacher, I know that you

> speak Lazuri but you don't have a certificate. As a principal, I can still assign you to teach that course. But not every principal is that understanding. Some will say, 'Fine, you say you speak Lazuri, prove it. Where did you learn it? Who said you could teach it?' This is why we needed a certificate.

In supportive environments, the absence of a certificate could be overlooked. In less supportive ones, it could become grounds for delaying or preventing the course, as Muhittin explained:

> The upper administration, what we call the district directorate of national education, did not want to me open the course and said that I did not have a certificate. I said, 'But there is nowhere I can get such a certificate.' Later, I brought in influential people and managed to have the course opened. If I had not been from here and if I had not been someone known here, I would not have been able to open it. I can say that I opened the first course thanks to my connections. People could not openly say, 'What place does Lazuri have in school?' because it now had a legal basis. But there were people who tried to stop them quietly.

The course being formally recognized meant that people could not openly oppose them. However, some used the gaps in institutionalization, like a lack of certification, to implicitly obstruct the course. These attempts too were countered with rapport and local contacts. The interviews show that opening a Lazuri course requires far more than a certificate or student request. Teachers must lobby and at the end of the day, they are subject to principals and administrators who determine whether their efforts would succeed. As a result, the existence of the course depends on a combination of teacher initiative, their good relationships, and, most importantly, administrative willingness. Having experienced the process both as teachers and later as principals, Muhittin and Haluk have a distinct vantage point in this matter. Haluk explains that:

> Being both an administrator and a teacher was an advantage for me. As a teacher, I believed that the language should be taught and the culture should be introduced. As an administrator, there were no obstacles in front of me. I was already one of the two decision-makers. I was able to open the course when I was a teacher because my administration was

> supportive, and I did. Later, I was able to have courses opened and helped teachers open them.

This dependency on administrative attitude seems to be the main reason why the interviewees repeatedly describe the course as vulnerable and fragile. Aynur has been warned regarding such gate-keeping and resistance on the administrative level: *"*We had been told beforehand. We were told 'You will face resistance. In more ways than one. Be prepared.'" Muhittin situated these experiences of resistance within a more general climate of uncertainty of the courses earlier years. In his understanding, the issue was bigger than individual administrators. Reflecting on the political environment in which the Lazuri electives emerged, he said: "It was a sensitive period. You had to think above politics and avoid bringing politics, parties, or names into the work." Having played a central role in the development of the course, he repeteadly emphasizes both the significance of what had been achieved and the precariousness of those achievements. He remains acutely aware of how quickly political circumstances can change: "The state trusted us. This is important for us. But it is very fragile. Could they label us terrorists tomorrow? Separatists? They could, at any moment." He described adopting a pragmatic approach focused on protecting whatever opportunities existed for the language:

> Today, when I look back, we are people who signed protocols with the Ministry of National Education. Not everyone can do that. Of course there were problems. But I never went around talking about them because that would set us back. Lazuri is dying. This has always been my philosophy: 'What can you do? Whatever you can do for this language, do it and do it as well as you can.' In a country where policies change this quickly, we cannot win that fight. We cannot compete in that race.

What is seen here is not an absence of criticism, but a decision about where to direct his energies. Underlying this pragmatism is a strong sense of political contingency. Across the interviews, the possibility that today's legitimate educational right could become tomorrow's political liability appeared as a recurring anxiety. However, the interviewees consistently redirected attention away from politics and back toward the language. For them, political disagreements and institutional gate-keeping are rendered secondary to a single question: Does this contribute to the survival of Lazuri?

Language endangerment creates a sense of urgency that leaves little room for symbolic battles or ideology signaling. The interviewees describe two simultaneous realities: the significance of the gains and the fragility of those gains. Faced with the decline of the language and the unpredictability of the political conjoncture, the interviewees explain that the question is not what should ideally be possible, but what can realistically be accomplished that holds space for Lazuri in the present moment.

5.3. Teachers' Enactment of the Lazuri Course

Once inside the classroom, the interviewees described facing a set of questions regarding interpratation: What should be taught? How should it be taught? What can realistically be achieved through a two-hour-per-week elective course in an endangered language? The interviewees, first redefined the meaning and purpose of the course. Then, in the process of translation, they described of adapting the curriculum to their students backgrounds, creating their own materials, drawing upon music and local culture, and connecting Lazuri to students' everyday lives. In doing so, they reinterpreted the aims of the course and translated them into forms they believed would be achievable and meaningful within their contexts.

5.3.1. Redefining the Purpose of the Course

All interviewees questioned whether a two-hour weekly elective could produce fluent speakers of Lazuri and arrived at the conclusion that this was not quite realistic. Hence, rather than making proficiency their sole or even main measure of success, they focused on goals like raising awareness of Lazuri, fostering respect for diversity, strengthening students' connections to their cultural heritage, and cultivating a sense of curiosity and belonging among them. In doing so, they actively redefined what the course was for. This was one of the clearest examples of policy enactment in their accounts. Muhittin was particularly explicit on this point:

> You cannot teach any language with two hours a week. Then what is it that you are doing? To children who already know some Lazuri, you are strengthening their ties to the language. And for children who are not Laz, you are teaching respect for different languages, the awareness that there is such a language as Lazuri, and the culture. Later in life they can at least say, 'Yes, I took a course on that actually. It is a distinct and rich language.'

Muhittin reframed the course as a way of creating recognition and respect. For him, the true goal was to ensure that students left the classroom having a more comprehensive understanding of Lazuri and viewing it as something worthy of recognition. Muzaffer, too, explained that he is skeptical that the classes alone could reverse language shift:

> The lessons we teach are only an artificial thing. This is not something that will save Lazuri or prevent it from dying. First and foremost, this is the responsibility of us Laz people. Laz people have to speak Lazuri with their children.

Muzaffer realizes that the classroom could not substitute for language transmission within the family. Instead, he redefined the purpose of the course in a different way:

> Sometimes people tease me and ask, 'Are you the savior of Lazuri? Are you the one who is going to save Lazuri?' I always say: 'I am not saving Lazuri. I cannot save Lazuri. I am only trying to save the Lazness in these children. Even if they do not know Lazuri, I work so that they can at least live in a way that allows them to hold on to their identity.'

Muzaffer shifts the focus to heritage and continuity. In his interpretation, the course's most important contribution is in helping students maintain a connection to their heritage. Similarly, Haluk described the course as " a culture course and a way of connecting children with their heritage" and Huriye relaid that "the true goal was to make the students aware of this language and culture, and to instill an appreciation for this diversity and richness." All interviewees arrived at similar conclusions on what the course could realistically achieve and reimagined their classroom as a place of cultural awareness and language recognition.

Most interviewees recalled feeling initially unequipped for the task. Some were not language teachers and the ones that were, still found themselves responsible for teaching a language they had never formally studied. Nazile, whose professional background is in religious education, described her initial hesitation: "I wondered whether I could do it. Yes, I had looked through the textbooks before, but teaching a language is something completely different. After all, I am not a teacher of this subject." Aynur vividly recalled the uncertainty she felt when she first began teaching:

> I wasn't that proficient in the language, as in, I didn't know the formal grammar of the language. I didn't know how I was going to teach it. Muhittin really reassured us on that issue. He said, 'What matters right now is that a language is dying, a culture is disappearing. We are going to try to keep it alive. That's all we are going to do. We are going to try to keep it visible.' Once I understood that, I thought, yes, I don't have to be perfect here. I will do the best I can.

The interviewees initially evaluated their ability to teach through a conventional understanding of competence and felt inadequate because they lacked the formal training. What allowed them to step into the role was a redefinition of what teaching the course was meant to accomplish. To them, the immediate goal of the courses was making Lazuri visible and creating a space where it could continue to exist.

5.3.2. Making the Course Meaningful: Affective Engagement and Music

The interviewees, as teachers, were learning how to teach Lazuri while teaching it. They figured out ways to adapt familiar teaching methods to the context of the Lazuri course. Yasemin, an English teacher, described approaching Lazuri through techniques she was already using in her English class:

> I thought that if I could teach these topics in English, I could teach them in Laz. All the games I used in English classes, the activities, the drawings, the writing exercises, the listening and speaking activities–I adapted them to Lazuri. Because I balanced things in this way, I could see that the children enjoyed the lessons much more.

A similar emphasis on interaction and participation emerged in Aynur's account:

> I have always had good communication with children. I'm not the kind of teacher who sits and lectures from the board. I use interactive methods a lot. *S*mart boards, computers, games, drama activities and so on. Perhaps that contributed to their enthusiasm as well.

Many interviewees described creating opportunities for active participation. They incorporated games, technology, and drama to get students to engage with Lazuri in more dynamic ways. They also described drawing upon resources beyond the textbook. Sefer explained: "I benefited from Lazuri videos on YouTube. I used Lazuri

cartoons, Lazuri dubbing projects, and other social media content." These materials allowed the interviewees to supplement the teaching materials with culturally relevant content. Muhittin connected Lazuri learning to students' general experience of language learning. He described collaborating with an English teacher in his school:

> We collaborated with the English teacher. While teaching Lazuri, I would give examples from English, and while teaching English, she would give examples from Lazuri. We observed a noticeable increase in the students' success in English class and in their understanding of what it means to learn another language.

While his observation is informal, his way of thinking is significant. He deliberately anchored Lazuri to English, the language students most readily associate with formal language learning. The interviewees also adapted the curriculum according to the students' needs. Reflecting on his advice to new teachers, Muhittin argued that lessons should not begin immediately with grammar or alphabet instruction:

> Yes, the book starts directly with the alphabet. But don't start with the alphabet. First introduce the Laz people, introduce Lazuri, introduce other cultures, create connections with them. Talk about Turks, talk about Georgians. We talked a lot about Georgians because many Georgian workers come here during tea season and the children were already familiar with them.

Before teaching linguistic forms, Muhittin sought to establish cultural context. This approach reveals another act of enactment: The teachers reordered and reinterpreted the curriculum according to the needs of the students. Yasemin described modifying textbook content when she felt it exceeded students' abilities:

> Some of the grammar in the book were quite heavy. In English, for example, we always say that tense structures should not be taught in fifth grade. Lazuri also had some tense concepts that I knew the children would not be able to grasp. So I covered those sections very superficially and started to really introduce them this year.

Yasemin adjusted the pace and content of the course according to her students' responses. Similar practices appeared in Huriye's account:

> Of course, I tried to support the lessons with additional background information and supplementary materials of my own. We did not move very far, and we certainly did not move quickly. Since I was not under any obligation to complete a set curriculum, I focused on teaching well and not teaching fast.

Here, again, curricular coverage was secondary to what the teachers considered actually realistic and meaningful. Also, because the regulatory mechanisms of the Lazuri courses are open-ended, it gave them the opportunity to put quality over quantity. Muzaffer articulated this approach clearly:

> When preparing for lessons, I did not stick strictly to the textbook. In any case, I could never have had the goal of finishing that book. Instead, I focused on what I could teach in a way that would be memorable and that would allow children to express themselves comfortably in daily life.

His emphasis on memorability and practicality shows how prioritized usability over coverage. The goal was that the students left the classroom with something meaningful and lasting. Haluk described regularly taking students outside and teaching the language through their surroundings:

> We would go out into the schoolyard. We would go see the animals. We had a chicken coop. We'd go there. This is a chicken; this is a rooster. We would go next to the trees. This is a cherry tree; this is a mulberry tree. That's how I taught it: Through life itself.

Several of the interviewees described discovering gaps in their own knowledge while teaching the course. They revisited aspects of Lazuri they had forgotten and learned alongside their students. Yasemin reflected:

> I learned many things myself through those course resources. I would study at home and then teach them to the children at school. I realized there were so many things I had forgotten. In fact, it was almost as if I didn't really speak Lazuri. Turns out, I only used a handful of words that I actively spoke in daily life. When I started teaching it, my understanding deepened.

Similarly, Aynur remarked: *"*I was learning too. I learned many things. I even still have notes written in the margins." The interviewees experienced the classroom as a shared space of discovery where their own relationship with the language deepened. Plus, it was *fun*, as Nazile tells us: "The kids are having so much fun. I'm having so much fun. And we are very aware of this." Among the pedagogical methods described by the interviewees, music occupied a particularly prominent place. All interviewees spoke about music as an important part of their relationship with Lazuri, both before and during their experiences as teachers. Long before they entered the classroom as Lazuri teachers, Laz songs was a means of maintaining contact with the language and culture for them. For some, music was one of the earliest ways they encountered Lazuri. For others, it became a way of sustaining that connection during periods of distance. Muzaffer, for example, associated his childhood memories of Lazuri with music: "When I was a child, my father would buy me cassette tapes for my Walkman. Tapes of Laz songs, Lazuri songs… If not Lazuri songs, at least tulum[39] music. I grew up surrounded by those songs and the culture." Similarly, Muhittin described Laz music as one of his "most important teachers of Lazuri". For Nazile, music was a bridge to her identity during the years she spent away from her hometown. Recalling her time working in Ordu, where she had little contact with other Laz people, she explained that she would play Kazım Koyuncu songs for celebrations and ceremonies in the school. Across the interviews, music seems to be a carrier of language and memory. It is therefore unsurprising that many later brought music into their classrooms. Laz songs were great for creating emotional engagement with the language. Aynur reflected on this discovery:

> I realized that music and this course works incredibly well together. You need something lively, something that motivates and energizes students. Music was wonderful. Once they heard those songs, they started listening to them all the time and shared them with others. They started singing them. By the end of the year we were even talking about forming a choir.

[39] The *tulum* is a traditional bagpipe-like wind instrument of the Black Sea region. It constitutes one of the most widely celebrated elements of the region's shared musical culture and is rocked across communities including the Laz, Hemşinli, and others.

Across the interviews, music was valued both because it made learning more fun and because it made Lazuri socially and emotionally meaningful for the students. Students got to know Lazuri as something that could be sung and enjoyed. Through figures such as Kazım Koyuncu, they encountered histories and role models. Aynur explained her perception with the following words:

> At one point I felt as if I were teaching in a school somewhere in Europe. I wasn't dependent on any curriculum and I was able to use whatever educational model I wanted. I wasn't simply opening a textbook and teaching something from it. I could play a song. Through that song I could teach the language, transmit a culture, talk about the life of a very important and admirable person. I could do the very best kind of values education through it.

The relative openness of the course seem to have provided the teachers with an unusual degree of pedagogical freedom. The teachers explained that they were able to experiment and improvise the course in their terms. In many ways, the loosely institutionalized nature of the course created a rare pedagogical opening where teachers could define meaning and success for themselves.

5.4. Legitimacy and Reshaping Perceptions of Lazuri

The interviewees often emphasized that the significance of the Lazuri elective course lies in making the language visible and legitimate within the institutional space. They communicated that the presence of Lazuri in schools signaled that the language was worthy of recognition and deserving of a place in formal education. Muhittin illustrated this symbolic significance through an experience he described as “historic”. Recalling a Ministry of National Education review process for textbooks, he explained:

> In 2015, reviews were initiated to check whether there was any propaganda in textbooks. Who was going to review Lazuri? Who would they call? They had to call someone and, for the first time in history, the Ministry of National Education called a Lazuri teacher. They called me. And again, for the first time in history, under the Ministry's emblem it said ‘Lazuri Teacher.’ It said ‘Lazuri Teacher Muhittin.’

For many of the interviewees, one of the most powerful aspects of the courses was that it brought written Lazuri into the school. Muzaffer reflected on how difficult it had once been to access written materials in Lazuri. Looking back on his own youth, he recalled that although he spoke the language, he had no materials he can use to better his Lazuri:

> I knew Lazuri, but I had never thought about what a systematic engagement with the language might look like. I did not have any materials. There was nothing I could study from, no grammar I could consult, nothing at all. Seeing the written resources as an adult was the first time I started thinking about what could be done with Lazuri, about what was possible.

Opportunities to engage with Lazuri through written materials were very limited when the interviewees were younger. Some of the interviewees explained that for the older members of the community, the appearance of Lazuri in written form was very surprising. An oral language that many associated with the home and the village suddenly appeared on timetables alongside other school subjects. Nazile said that parents that saw Lazuri on the course schedule thought it had been written there by mistake. For Nazile, the arrival of textbooks played a particularly important role in changing these perceptions:

> Then our textbooks arrived. I brought one today as an example. This is the fifth-grade textbook; we use it in class. If there had not been a written source, there would have been a gap. But once the textbook arrived, seeing it in writing… They had never seen it written before. Lazuri had always remained in the home.

Muhittin connected the existence of written materials to linguistic survival: “Lazuri will not disappear because we have a book now, we felt this deeply.” Although clearly not a literal guarantee against language loss, the statement show the emotional weight that written materials carry for endangered language communities. For many of the interviewees, the textbooks and the resources that the courses brought represented permanence for Lazuri.

5.4.1. Laz Students: Recognizing Existing Knowledge of Lazuri

Many interviewees observed that for the Laz students, the significance of the course lay in seeing informal and domestic knowledge and competency get recognized by the school. In Nazile's case, the students all had some degree of competence in Lazuri:

> The students already knew something. Everyone speaks at least a little. Even students who came from outside the province know some Lazuri because older family members speak it at home. They enjoy seeing themselves succeed through something they already know.

In Nazile's classroom, because all students already had some degree of competence in Lazuri, the class progressed beyond the level of the textbook. Her course was different than a typical beginner language class. The students spent their time speaking Lazuri and enjoyed being in the language. The Lazuri classes became a space where their existing knowledge was valuable and could be practiced and expanded. This was a reversal of the usual direction of knowledge and recognition. The usual flow of knowledge for other subject was from the school to the home. For the Lazuri classes, the knowledge was flowing from the home to the school. Their skills and experiences that were confined to informal domains were now being acknowledged and valued in the school. Sefer remarked that many students entered his classroom with competence but limited confidence in speaking. For his students, the course offered an environment where their latent knowledge could be activated. The transition from understanding Lazuri to being able to speak it was experienced as a source of joy by the students. The interviews revealed that one of the course's most significant effects is its capacity to validate and expand a form of knowledge that use to remain outside the school. In this way, the courses granted recognition both to Lazuri and to the knowledge and competencies of its speakers.

Several of the interviewees remarked that part of the course's attraction stemmed from its rarity. The Lazuri courses carried a sense of distinctiveness that made students feel they were being part of something special. Huriye observed that this uniqueness of the courses contributed to their appeal: "They were never going to see an elective like this again. It was not the kind of course that could be opened in every school." Nazile similarly noted that students enjoyed this sense of distinction that came with the course. She explained that Lazuri became something the students could claim proudly:

> It's nice thing to be different at school. The course was only opened for one class. And after all, it is our mother tongue. They would say to other classes ‘We're taking Lazuri and you're not!’ ‘We're learning Lazuri, we're reading Lazuri, we're speaking Lazuri!’ It gave them a swagger in school, a pep in their step.

The course seems to have acquired a certain prestige because it was unusual and unique. The course allowed students to experience Lazuri as something worth displaying. Through the course, they discovered a new way of valuing and identifying with Lazuri.

5.4.2. Negotiating Standardization From Within

Bringing an endangered language into education involves standardization. For languages such as Lazuri, which display considerable regional variation, this was not an easy task. The textbooks used in the courses are a standardized version of Lazuri that is mostly based on the Pazar variety. This means that students and teachers from other parts usually encounter vocabulary and expressions that are different than those used in their own communities. Nazile described how this issue emerged almost immediately after the course began:

> At the moment I speak the Ardeşen variety of Laz. The textbook is a little distant from us, some words are different. During the first month we spent a lot of time trying to figure this out. The kids would say, ‘But we don't say it like that. That's not our Lazuri. Ours is better!’ They would immediately object. ‘No, that's not right. In our village we use this word. That's how it's said. This is what it means.’ They would become quite defensive.

At first, the standard forms in the textbook were met with resistance by the students. They challenged the differences. They defended the forms they use and challenged the textbook. Nazile explained that over time, the pushback from the students started to ease:

> But eventually we started working through it. Now they are trying to learn the different usages, too. They read the sentences and say, ‘O.K. and this is how we say it.’ and write next to them their own expressions. I'm happy

> we've reached that point because we spent the entirety of the first month dealing with this issue.

With time, the students started to approach the differences as something that is open to discussion and exploration. Through these discussions, their classroom became a space where different forms of Lazuri could coexist and be made visible. In this process, students became active participants in the production of linguistic knowledge. Nazile also drew attention to a different point regarding variation:

> In this sense I am fortunate: The Lazuri I speak and the Lazuri spoken by my students are the same. But if I had been teaching, say, in Arhavi, I might have struggled as a teacher.

This shows another common tension that occurs when an endangered language enters education. Standardization produces the necessary teaching materials, but it often leaves the question of linguistic diversity within the speech community unanswered. Teachers and students of the Lazuri course found themselves navigating multiple varieties simultaneously: the language of the textbook, the language of the teacher, and the language spoken in the homes of the students. Nazile considered herself fortunate that the variety she spoke overlapped with that of her students, however, this might not always be the case. Haluk, for instance, grew up in Arhavi, taught the course in Fındıklı, using the textbooks based on the Pazar variety. In his classroom, he and his students were managing a three-way negotiation between varieties. In all of the cases, some form of mismatch between the varities seem to have been the case. When Lazuri entered the classroom in its standardized form, it made two differences visible: the differences between the standardized form and the local spoken varieties of Laz and the differences between the spoken varities themselves. In the classroom, when these forms encountered one another, they were discussed, negotiated and then made mutually intelligible. In this way, Lazuri students became part of the work of teaching and learning Lazuri.

5.4.3. Non-Laz Students: Curiosity and New Perspectives

Not all students who enrolled in the courses were Laz. In several cases, the course attracted students from different backgrounds. Many interviewees described the children of seasonal agricultural workers in the region taking the course. They relaid that, living in predominantly Lazuri-speaking environments, these students saw the

course as an opportunity to understand and engage with the people around them. Aynur explained: *"*They would say, 'Now we'll understand our sahip![40] Or*,* 'Now I'll understand my Laz friends in the village!'" Yasemin encountered similar motivations among students whose families had settled in the region:

> I have children from Ordu. Here we have 'yarıcı'.[41] Some of these children belong to those families. They settled in the village, but Lazuri is not their language. I asked them why they wanted to learn it. They said, 'When we go to the market, we want to understand people. We hear grandpas on the street saying things and we're curious. For example, they say *kaite*.[42] We want to be able to say it back.'

For these children, Lazuri is a big part of their social reality. Haluk described these students as "living alongside the language without access to it." Learning it would give them a different, deeper kind of access to the conversations and relationships they're surrounded with. They heard Lazuri around them on a daily basis but lacked the ability to participate in even the simplest exchanges. Haluk focused on helping them acquire basic expressions that they could use in everyday settings:

> They live here, they hear the language, but they don't understand it. Our goal was simple. When they go to the village shop, they should be able to buy a loaf of bread. They should be able to say 'How are you?' We didn't say 'Good morning' in Turkish; we said it in Lazuri. We didn't say 'Good evening' in Turkish; we said it in Lazuri. We started with very simple things and tried to create basic, daily competence.

Huriye's experience in Istanbul offers a unique case. She is the only one among the teachers that opened a course outside the region. Her school was located in Istanbul and none of her students were Laz. However, the district her school is located in is

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[40] *Sahip* means "owner" in Turkish and in this context refers to local landowners whose lands the seasonal workers work on.

[41] *Yarıcı* refers to a sharecropping arrangement common in the eastern Black Sea region, particularly during tea harvests, where agricultural workers receive a share of the harvest as wage. The term derives from the Turkish word *yarı* ("half"), referring to the division of the yield between the landowner and the worker.

[42] *Kaite* is a Lazuri expression used to say "goodbye." It derives from the Lazuri word *kai*, meaning "goodness" or "well-being".

populated largely by families originating from the Black Sea region, mostly from Trabzon. Some students were heritage speakers of Romeika which is another endangered language of the region. Although the students did not have a direct connection to Lazuri, many were intrigued by it because of its association with a geography and cultural world they considered their own. While the course had limited potential for producing speakers in this context, it nevertheless created an opportunity for the students to engage with a linguistic heritage connected to their ancestral region. Reflecting on this experience, Huriye explains why she ultimately chose to offer the course only once:

> If I had been teaching in my own region, perhaps I would have continued. If there had been children from Laz families, it might have been different. Starting in fifth grade and continuing with the same group through sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, with family support, would have been much more meaningful. The children could practice at home and reinforce what they learned at school. Still, learning about a culture and picking up a few words from a different language is invaluable.

Unlike the classrooms in the Black Sea region, where the students have the opportunity to encounter Lazuri after school and could reinforce their learning through their families and communities, Huriye's students had no environment of practice. That is why, Huriye decided not to open any more courses and stated that the course has fulfilled its purpose in her context.

The interviewees also described moments when the course challenged prejudices. Aynur recalled one particularly memorable encounter with a student who identified as Hemşinli:

> There was a boy who was something like the leader of the class. He said, 'Teacher, we're Hemşinli! What do we need Lazuri for? What do we need Laz people for? We don't like them.' I heard this from a middle-school kid and the reality hit me. It was a sobering moment. I said, 'I am Laz too. Don't you like me either?'

In her case, a policy designed to support one community's language incidentally became a site where relationships between different communities came into view. Throughout this thesis, migration has emerged as an important catalyst for ethnic

awareness. Some of the teachers began reflecting on distinctions between Laz, Hemşinli, and other regional identities after leaving the Eastern Black Sea for university. Aynur's account suggests that the Lazuri course can produce a similar effect at the local and at a much earlier age. In the process of bringing Lazuri into the school, the state inadvertently created a point where the different groups of the region encounter one another in a new way, articulate boundaries and challenge assumptions and prejudices.

5.5. Beyond the Classroom: Spillover to the School and into the Home

The courses affected the environment of the school and the community. Once the courses became part of the school they generated spillover effects that went beyond the students enrolled. The interviewees showed an acute awareness of the importance of re-engaging families in the process of transmission. To this end, they made conscious efforts to extend the course into the home.

5.5.1. Transforming the Linguistic Ecology of the School

Several interviewees stated that the course generated major curiosity in the school. Yasemin mentioned that one of the vice principals became so interested in the lessons that he often talked about wanting to learn Lazuri and frequented her classes. Similarly, Muzaffer explained that the arrival of textbooks sparked conversations among teachers, many of whom were also Laz: *"*When I brought the books to school, they were very curious. They wanted to know what was written in them, what it was teaching, what kind of book it was. They became more curious about Lazuri too." He noted that their curiosity on the course and the textbooks became curiosty about the language. Huriye encountered similar reactions in Istanbul:

> My colleagues loved the idea. They would say, 'Give us lessons too.' They browsed the books. I had brought the book copies to school and all of my students received their books. We had many extras left over, so we put them in the school library. It attracted a great deal of interest. Everyone took at least one look.

Looking back she feels: "For all of us, it was nice that such a unique elective was being taught at the school." Huriye's use of "all of us*"* is telling. No student or teacher had a connection to Lazuri in her school but she relays that the course was experienced as a

collective enrichment of the school's cultural profile. It was something new, something different. While Huriye's experience shows how the course could generate curiosity and visibility in a non-Laz context, Nazile's case offers a glimpse into the other end of the spectrum. In the school where Nazile works, Lazuri forms a big part of the social fabric. Located on the banks of the Fırtına River in Rize, the language was already very present in the biographies of the school body. Nazile relayed that almost the entirety of the student body and a large part of the teachers are Laz. In this setting, the significance of the course was in expanding the place of Lazuri in the daily life of the school. She recalled the curiosity that was sparked when she began the course:

> During the first week we had extra textbooks. The other teachers each wanted a copy. They wanted to look through them. They were curious themselves. When I first started teaching the course, colleagues would ask me afterwards, 'How did it go?' Sometimes I would tell them about something that had happened in class.

The course quickly became a matter of interest in the school. Colleagues wanted to see the textbooks and followed the progress of the course, catching Nazile after classes to ask how it went. Lazuri became a topic of conversation in the staff room. Nazile explained that students increasingly started to use more Lazuri outside the Lazuri lessons:

> They speak Lazuri with me even during breaks or in situations outside the lesson. And I don't think that's wrong. I think it's right that they continue using it in school and in their daily lives. They can speak Lazuri with me whenever they want, I always tell them that.

Nazile makes and holds space for Lazuri in the school for her students. Her encouragement stands in notable contrast to her own school experience, where she was discouraged from using Lazuri by her middle school teacher. In her, the students find a teacher who openly invites them to use Lazuri and who makes school a place where speaking Lazuri feels legitimate and safe. Importantly, she noted that the course also changed patterns of language use among adults in the school:

> Students are now discovering that their teachers also know Lazuri. Nobody used to speak it at school. But now it's more relaxed and more supportive.

> Other teachers speak Lazuri too. Students speak it with their teachers and teachers who aren't from the region and don't know Lazuri are learning words from the students.

Because their students' started using Lazuri regularly and enthusiastically in the school, teachers who knew the language but never spoke it in work began speaking it. Students discovered that some of their teachers were Laz through this. This was probably not because the teachers were hiding it necessarily, but because the school is a place that renders those identities irrelevant. This perhaps speaks to the peculiar nature of the school as an institution. Teachers are expected to enter the school as just teachers; students as just students. The linguistic and cultural markers are expected to be left at the door. The Lazuri courses changed this perception. The courses revealed the latent linguistic and cultural reality and reincluded it in the school. Nazile also noted that the attention and enthusiasm that the course received throughout the school made her job very easy. The course becoming a valued and celebrated part of school life allowed Nazile to just focus on and enjoy teaching. This atmosphere reduced the emotional and practical labor that often comes with teaching an endangered language. In many ways, Nazile's experience represents the fullest realization of the legitimizing potential of the course that is discussed throughout this chapter. The language gets woven into the everyday life of the institution, it attracts curiosity, generates conversation, and encourages the school body as a whole to use and enjoy their shared language.

5.5.2. Re-Engaging the Families with the Question of Transmission

Many interviewees explained that the students oftentimes went home and shared what they learned that day with their families. Nazile talked about how the children bringing home the textbook and their homeworks was the first time many parents have seen Lazuri written on a page:

> Even though I told them they didn't have to take the books home, they took them anyway and explained the topics we covered to their families. The parents have never seen Lazuri in written form before. They didn't know written materials existed. So the parents read the books too and they studied together.

As we mentioned above, the textbooks were intriguing for older generations who had grown up speaking the language without ever seeing it written down. The teachers built on that interest. Many talked about intentionally giving out homework assignments that would call for family participation. Nazile described some of the assignments she invented that deliberately relied on family participation:

> I ask the students to record videos with their families. For example, I asked them to walk around their gardens and introduce the names of the vegetables and the flowers together. They made cooking videos with their parents, too. Some made cornbread, some made *lu*,[43] some anchovies. They explained the recipes in Lazuri together. They recorded videos introducing themselves and their families in Lazuri. As the families shared the videos in the group, I could see how enthusiastic they were. That's why I want to continue.

Nazile marked the excitement and enthusiasm of the families in participating in these assignments. Muhittin, too, intentionally designed homework assignments that would draw parents and grandparents into the language:

> I gave assignments that would spill over into the home. I wanted their families to listen, to pay attention. Your child is learning Lazuri, the language is living. I'd ask them to bring Lazuri idioms and proverbs from home. Let them ask their father, let their father ask his father, let them think about it together.

These assignments were directed as much at the parents as it was at the students. For instance, by asking children to collect idioms and proverbs from family members, Muhittin deliberately created a context where Lazuri becomes a topic of conversation in the home. Through these assignments, parents are reminded that Lazuri remains relevant, that it is now being taught in school, and that their children are becoming part of its future. Many interviewees described a generation of parents, both theirs and their students', who possess the language but, for various reasons, did not fully pass it on. Homework assignments like these reinvites the parents into the transmission process. They also reverse the usual direction of transmission. Instead of knowledge flowing

[43] *Lu*, are traditional Laz food made of black cabbage.

from elders to children, children return home carrying knowledge and recognition of the language. The teachers sought to draw families into a vision of language continuity and to remind them that the survival of the language depends on their participation. Some parents expressed a desire to participate more directly. Nazile recalled: “One parent even said, ‘Teacher, I want to come into the classroom and speak Lazuri. Let me just sit in the back and let’s speak Lazuri together. I want to speak Lazuri.’” The emotional significance of these reactions became clearer when the interviewees reflect on their own history of language interruption. Several described a sense that previous generations had underestimated the possibility of total language loss. As Huriye observed: *“*It never occurred to our elders that Lazuri could one day completely cease to exist.” Muzaffer argued that older generations are just now aware of the consequences of their language choices:

> Among Laz people, adults are very aware of the mistakes that were made when it comes to the language. They realize those mistakes now, even if it feels a little too late. Because they now realize this and feel this, they appreciate how much labor and effort is being invested in these courses.

Nazile encountered similar sentiments among parents: *“*They would say, ‘We wanted to teach it. You are doing our work.’” The course came to be understood as a form of repair, albeit one that the interviewees viewed as partial, belated, and, in Muzaffer's words elsewhere, "artificial". Transmission in the family weakened and the school has been called upon to assume its role. The institution that many of the interviewees associated with the marginalization of Lazuri has become one of the few remaining institutions where the language can be passed on. Parents' reactions reflect an awareness of this reversal. The parent who wanted to sit in the classroom and speak Lazuri, the families who read the textbooks alongside their children, and the parents who told Nazile that they’ve always wanted to teach it to their children all point to some sense of realization and remorse. The teachers attempted to create scenarios where families can participate in this new mode of transmission and hopefully take up the mantle.

However, the interviewees were careful not to overstate what the course and schools could accomplish on their own. Throughout the interviews, they repeatedly

emphasized that language maintenance ultimately depends upon the families. Nazile stressed:

> What really matters is that it continues at home. Even if the course were five hours a week, if it doesn't continue at home the progress will come to a halt eventually. Our task is to make sure that doesn't happen, that it continues in the home.

Most emphasized that the course could only be a stand-in for keeping Lazuri alive until transmission within the family could eventually and hopefully be restored. Haluk said: *"*If children don't speak it at home, if we ourselves don't take ownership of it, there can't be progress. We open the course. For now, that's what we can do." Sefer expressed that: "Parents need to speak the language in front of their children and to their children at home. Lazuri will survive through those who speak it." Aynur expressed her concerns:

> I would like to pass Lazuri on to my future children. But I don't know what will happen. When I look at my family now, my parents, my grandparents, everyone in my village speaks it. But in the generation after mine, will I be the only one speaking it?

Yasemin, on the other hand, was very blunt: "Unfortunately, it is a language condemned to die." Huriye offered a more nuanced but cautious assessment:

> There are books now. We now have a presence everywhere, in digital spaces too. But a language whose number of speakers is declining every year will find it very difficult to survive. Lazuri is no longer a language people need. Step by step it will disappear from people's mouths. It will remain in books and in culture.

Muhittin approached the question differently:

> Aren't you going to die one day, Zeynep? Do you wake up every day worrying about it? That's how we have to look at it. Otherwise we wouldn't be able work. I don't care for pessimism; it has no use. First, we have to believe. First and foremost, Laz people have to be the ones that believe it. Lazuri will not disappear because now we have a book. Lazuri will not

> disappear because now we have a digital footprint. Yes, Lazuri will not be spoken the way it once was. But it will not disappear.

Muhittin's comments capture a bigger philosophy that transcends language revitalization. For him, if one becomes preoccupied with failure, meaningful action becomes impossible. His response is not naïve optimism but a decision to focus on what can still be done. This perspective is visible throughout his involvement with the Lazuri course. Muhittin, who is the backbone of the Lazuri courses, consistently emphasize action and perseverance. His, is a mindset common among activists working on endangered languages. Success is rarely assured and setbacks are inevitable but the work continues because inaction in pessimism is a sure way to make the very outcome one fears a reality. Muhittin's emphasis on books and digital traces reflects this philosophy as well. These do not eliminate the threat of language loss, but they fundamentally alter the terrain where the struggle takes place. For Muhittin, this is enough reason to reject fatalism. The future of Lazuri cannot be known. What can be known is whether people continue to create books, teach classes, speak the language, and pass it on. For the teachers of the courses, that commitment is what sustains the work.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to understand how the Lazuri elective courses are experienced and turned into a reality by its teachers. It explored how the teachers understand the course, how they navigate the conditions under it operates, and what meanings they attach to its existence. It asked what the courses potentially meant for Lazuri in terms of recognition, legitimacy, and its future and delved into how its teachers assess and transfrom the possibilities and limitations of formal education as a site of language revitalization. The narratives presented in the previous chapter demonstrate that the Lazuri teachers were not passive implementers of a fixed and fully fleshed-out policy but were diligent policy-makers who adapted the course's goals and requirements to their local institutional contexts and classroom realities at every step of the way. A central finding of this study is the importance of the teachers' own linguistic trajectories in shaping how they approach the course. The interviewees who grew up in villages or sustained some type of connection to the village generally acquired the language regardless of whether adults directly addressed them in Lazuri, as the language continued to function as the primary medium of communication among older family members. Those who grew up in urban settings described Lazuri as being far less present within their social worlds. The decisive factor here might not be village upbringing itself, but the family structures that tend to accompany it. In village settings, children are more likely to grow up in extended family households with grandparents and older relatives. This allows the language to continue circulating in daily life even if the children are not directly addressed in Lazuri themselves. Urban life, in contrast, usually coincides with nuclear family arrangements in the home. Supporting this interpretation, one interviewee who spent his childhood in the city but acquired Lazuri fluently, was raised by his grandmother. This suggests that what

matters here may be less the village life than the practice of intergenerational co-living in the family.

The early experiences of acquisition of the interviewees were frequently followed by interruption. For many interviewees, starting middle school marked a fracture from Lazuri, as their parents increasingly internalized the belief that the use of Lazuri would interfere with children's Turkish proficiency and, therefore, educational success.[44] However, in the region the dominant variety of Turkish is the Black Sea variety. The speakers of this variety show the same phonological and lexical features in their speech regardless of whether they are monolingual in Turkish or bilingual in Lazuri, Georgian, or another local language. What seems to have been stigmatized and devalued was speaking a variety outside of the prestige variety of Turkish which was mistakenly attributed to being bilingual in Lazuri. Parents seem to have acted on concerns about the social meanings of not speaking the prestige variety of Turkish, which is often associated with rurality, peasant backgrounds, migrant status and limited education. For almost all of the interviewees, leaving the region for education created the conditions where they started to reflect more consciously on their relationship with Lazuri. Distance from home heightened their awareness of linguistic and cultural distinction and belonging. This was the point where they started to rebuild their relationship with their identitiy and language. Perhaps the most striking finding concerns what might be understood as a full-circle return in the teachers' personal histories. For many of them, middle school was the place where they lost touch with Lazuri. Years later, they returned to that exact institutional setting as teachers of Lazuri. The individuals now tasked with implementing a language education policy are themselves members of a generation marked by interrupted transmission due to schooling. Their understanding and experience of teaching the Lazuri course is inseparable from their experience of language loss and recovery. The policy is therefore enacted by individuals whose histories are intertwined with an acute and personal awareness of language shift.

[44] Contemporary research offers no evidence that growing up with two languages negatively affects linguistic competence, if anything, the opposite seems to be true. See Cummins (1979) for a discussion of the interdependence between first- and second-language development and Bialystok (2015) for a discussion of the positive effects of bilingualism on executive function and attentional control.

The findings also demonstrate that the existence and continuity of the courses rely heavily on the perpetual efforts of individuals working at the local level. The teachers repeatedly described how the institutional infrastructure of the courses did not emerge organically through formal policy but how instead they turned to grassroots and civil society actors like the Laz Institute for support in opening the courses. This shows that policy and recognition, in itself, does not bring implementation. Formal recognition establishes a possibility but what that possibility becomes is, then, on the actors willing to transform it into practice. The findings show that opening and continuing the Lazuri courses also depended heavily on discretion exercised in tandem by the teachers and their administrations. Linking to Lipsky's understanding of street-level bureaucracy (1980), the teachers were operating in systems of institutional ambiguity and limited resources while at the same time retaining considerable discretionary power at the local level. The findings extend Lipsky's framework by showing that as street-level bureaucrats, the teachers were doing more than simply managing the constraints of practice but were actively creating the very conditions for practice to happen in the first place. Opening the course required informing students, communicating with families, navigating bureaucracy, and maintaining positive relationships with administrators whose cooperation ultimately decided whether the course could be offered at all. Still, the courses remain vulnerable to institutional desicions external to the teachers, as relatively minor changes in scheduling or administrative priorities could determine whether the course continues from one year to the next. The implementation of the Lazuri courses therefore remains structurally fragile and contingent.

The findings further reveal that the teachers approached the course with a much bigger understanding of what it should and could achieve. They defined success in terms of sparking curiosity, building connection with heritage, and making engagement with Lazuri a positive experience. The ways the teachers reworked the course speak directly to Ball, Maguire, and Braun's (2012) understanding of policy enactment. Teachers interpreted and decoded what aspects of the course could realistically be prioritized given their conditions. They then recoded and translated content and pedagogy according to the reality of their classrooms. Music, storytelling, informal interaction, and flexible lesson planning became ways of translating the course into something workable and meaningful in their contexts. These findings also illustrate Ricento and

Hornberger's (1996) argument that language policy is transformed as it moves through different layers of the policy process. By the time the Lazuri course reached the classroom, its practical objectives had already considerably changed from the formally articulated goal of multilingual competence. What emerged in practice was therefore a situated version of policy whose goals and priorities had been reformulated at the local level. For Laz students, the course functioned as a space where existing linguistic knowledge, however partial or informal, could be recognized and revalued. The course transformed a kind of knowledge that was confined to the private sphere into something publicly visible and legitimate for them. For non-Laz students the course helped portray the language as worthy of institutional recognition and education. In this way, the course extended legitimation beyond its target group and contributed to reshaping perceptions surrounding the language for other groups. In the case where the course was met with resistance by Hemşinli students, it became apparent that a policy designed to support one language could have an effect where it makes relationships between different communities newly visible. Through the course, the boundaries between neighbouring communities of the region came to the surface. Assumptions and prejudices were challenged, and regional diversity was encountered and discussed in a new way.

Recognition also seem to have brought internal differences within the Laz community into focus. Entering schools required Lazuri to be standardized. Once inside the classroom, the diversity of Lazuri revealed how complicated standardization can be.[45] Students and teachers brought different varieties into the classroom and found themselves constantly moving between the standardized form of the textbooks and their own varieties. Their own varieties did not always overlap either. They found themselves negotiating variation and pondering questions of representation. The findings also demonstrate that the effects of the Lazuri course can seep into the social and linguistic ecology of the school to different degrees. In a school where the students and teachers had no connection to Lazuri, the course was experienced as a form of collective enrichment that made the school feel culturally distinct and special. In

[45] This tension between the need to standardize and the impossibility of fully representing linguistic diversity is not unique to Lazuri and is a recurring challenge in the education of endangered languages. For a comparative discussion of standardization dilemmas in endangered and Indigenous language education, see Drapeau (2021).

schools located in predominantly Lazuri-speaking settings, the course made visible a latent linguistic reality. As students began using Lazuri in school, teachers who knew the language but did not use it in the institution, began speaking it. The course created the conditions where Laz identity and linguistic belonging that existed beneath the surface became socially meaningful and visible. The findings therefore suggest that courses such as these have the potential to alter institutional environments by allowing suppressed linguistic realities to re-enter these spaces. The findings also suggest that the teachers have made deliberate efforts to extend the course beyond the school and into the home to re-engage the families in the question of language transmission. Students brought the words they learned, the songs they heard, and the textbooks of the course into the home. This sparked interest in the home. The teachers built on that interest and strived to reposition parents and grandparents as resources of Lazuri. They strived to create new ways where families could be drawn back into the process of transmission. By connecting the lessons to lived realities, the teachers attempted to expand the domains and density of use. All in all, the teachers initiative and resourcefulnes emerged as paramount revitalizatory forces that transcended the design and capacity of the policy. However, the findings caution against overstating what the courses can realistically accomplish on their own. As we noted earlier and as it was reiterated by the teachers across the interviews, long-term language maintenance and revitalization ultimately depends on daily and natural use within the families and the communities. Through the diligent efforts of its teachers, the Lazuri courses helped reopen channels of transmission. More importantly, it opened dialogue between the children and the parents. But, the courses alone shoulder the weight of the community investment that sustains a language across generations.

The case of the Lazuri courses reveals the fault lines in the contemporary approach to linguistic diversity in Türkiye. The findings demonstrate that formal recognition did not continue into stable institutional support. Recognition appears to have remained conditional and not wholly institutionalized. The state created the formal conditions where Lazuri could enter schooling, but this recognition seems to have acquired substance only through the everyday labor of those who sustain it in on the ground. Without the institutional commitment, the initiative remains fragile and dependent on actors who carry responsibilities far exceeding the formal support available to them.

The study makes several contributions to the growing literature on endangered and/or minority language education and language policy in Türkiye. First, it provides an empirical contribution by offering an in-depth examination of the experiences of almost the entirety of the identifiable population of Lazuri teachers. Second, it contributes theoretically to discussions of language policy and planning by underlining the value of understanding implementation as a process of enactment. Making teachers' lived experiences the center of analysis provides insight into dimensions of practice that are, more often than not, invisible in official accounts. Third, the study contributes to discussions of language revitalization by showing how the community actors of the Lazuri courses transformed the limited opening into opportunities for family engagement and renewed dialogue around transmission.

One important direction for future research could be examining the experiences of students who took the Lazuri courses. Their narratives would provide invaluable insight into how the former students understand the course, if and how participation in the course influences their relationship to Lazuri and their heritage, and how they evaluate its impact over time. It would be an excellent way to look back on these courses, which have now been in place for over a decade, and revisit them retrospectively. Research involving parents can contribute to understanding the wider familial effects of the courses, especially in terms of language transmission and maintenance. Comparative research with other languages offered under LLD could illuminate how implementation varies in different contexts. Finally, comparative research with education programs from different parts of the world would situate the Lazuri case within the international discussions of minority and heritage language education.

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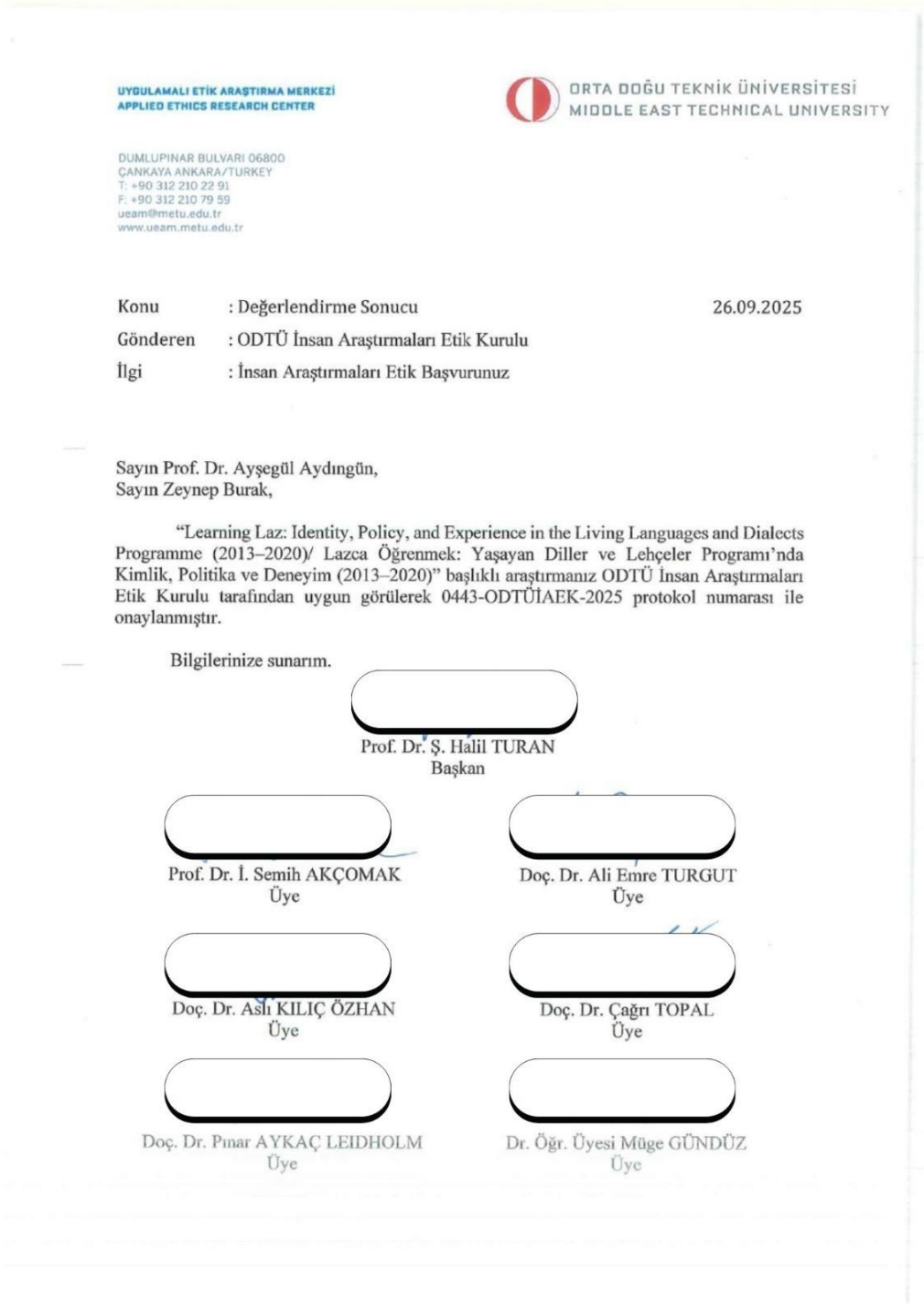
APPENDICES

A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE



UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY
T: +90 312 210 22 91
F: +90 312 210 79 59
ueam@metu.edu.tr
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu 26.09.2025
Gönderen : ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu
İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Başvurunuz

Sayın Prof. Dr. Ayşegül Aydıngün,
Sayın Zeynep Burak,

"Learning Laz: Identity, Policy, and Experience in the Living Languages and Dialects Programme (2013–2020)/ Lazca Öğrenmek: Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler Programı'nda Kimlik, Politika ve Deneyim (2013–2020)" başlıklı araştırmanız ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek 0443-ODTÜİAEK-2025 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Bilgilerinize sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN
Başkan

Prof. Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK
Üye

Doç. Dr. Ali Emre TURGUT
Üye

Doç. Dr. Aslı KILIÇ ÖZHAN
Üye

Doç. Dr. Çağrı TOPAL
Üye

Doç. Dr. Pınar AYKAÇ LEIDHOLM
Üye

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ
Üye

B. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Bu tez, Türkiye'de Yaşayan Diller ve Lehçeler Programı (YDL) kapsamında sunulan Lazca seçmeli derslerinin öğretmenleri tarafından nasıl deneyimlendiğini ve pratikte nasıl hayata geçirildiğini incelemektedir. 2012 yılında başlayan YDL dersleri, Türkiye'de konuşulan ve resmî statüye sahip olmayan sekiz dilin (Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı'nın belgelerinde yazıldıkları şekliyle: Abazaca, Adıgece, Arnavutça, Boşnakça, Gürcüce, Kurmancca, Lazca ve Zazaca) devlet ortaokullarında öğretilmesine olanak sağlamış ve bu diller ile devlet arasındaki ilişkide benzeri görülmemiş bir dönüm noktasına işaret etmiştir. Lazca derslerini yürüten öğretmenlerin anlatı ve deneyimlerine odaklanan bu çalışma, bu özgün dil politikasının nasıl yaşandığını, derslerin, eğitimin dilsel tanınma açısından bir alan olarak sunduğu imkânlar ve sınırlılıklar hakkında neler ortaya koyduğunu ve öğretmenlerin bu sınırlı kurumsal açılımı uygulamada nasıl dil canlandırma potansiyeliyle donattıklarını incelemektedir. YDL kapsamındaki diller, sosyodilbilimsel özellikleri bakımından birbirlerinden önemli ölçüde farklı olmakla birlikte, Türkiye'de resmî statüye sahip olmamaları ve daha önce devlet okulları içerisinde herhangi bir kurumsal tanınma biçiminden yararlanmamış olmaları noktalarında birleşmekteir. YDL kapsamındaki dillerin önemli bir kısmı farklı derecelerde tehlike altındadır.

Tez, öncelikle Lazları ve Lazcayı, Lazca seçmeli derslerinin ortaya çıkışını şekillendiren tarihsel, dilsel ve toplumsal bağlam içerisinde konumlandırmaktadır. Türkiye'de Laz toplulukları ağırlıklı olarak Rize ve Artvin illerinde, özellikle Pazar (Atina), Ardeşen (Arťaşeni), Fındıklı (Vitze), Arhavi (Arkabi) ve Hopa (Xopa) ilçelerinde yaşamaktadır. Bununla birlikte, geç Osmanlı dönemindeki nüfus hareketleri sonucunda Marmara Bölgesi'nde de önemli Laz yerleşimleri oluşmuştur. Günümüzde Düzce, Sakarya, Kocaeli, Yalova ve Balıkesir'in bazı bölgelerinde yaşayan bu topluluklar, Türkiye içerisindeki bir iç diaspora niteliği taşımaktadır. Lazların dili olan Lazca, Güney Kafkas dil ailesinin Zan koluna mensuptur ve en yakın akrabası Megrelcedir. Bu dil ailesi içerisinde Lazca, konuşurlarının büyük çoğunluğu Türkiye'de yaşayan tek dildir. Tarihsel olarak sözlü bir dil olan Lazca için yazı dili

geliştirme ve standartlaştırma yönünde önemli adımlar atılmış olsa da yazılı kullanım ve okuryazarlık hâlâ sınırlıdır. Lazca kendi içerisinde çeşitli dilsel değişkelere sahiptir. Bu değişkeler büyük ölçüde karşılıklı anlaşılabilir olmakla birlikte, sözcük dağarcığı, biçimbilimsel yapı ve bir takım dilbilgisel özellikler açısından belirgin farklılıklar göstermektedir. Laz nüfusuna ilişkin doğrulanabilir demografik veriler mevcut değildir. Lozan Antlaşması kapsamında resmî azınlık statüsüne sahip olmamaları ve nüfus sayımlarında ayrı bir kategori olarak yer almamaları nedeniyle Laz nüfusu ve Lazca konuşur sayısı ancak tahmin edilebilmektedir. Bununla birlikte, tek tek rakamlardan daha açık olan olgu, kuşaklar arası dil aktarımındaki keskin gerilemedir. Günümüzde Türkiye'deki tüm Lazlar Türkçe konuşurken, tüm Lazlar Lazca konuşmamaktadır. UNESCO tarafından açıkça tehlike altındaki diller arasında sınıflandırılan Lazcada kuşaklar arası aktarım oldukça zayıflamış, genç kuşaklarda dili anlama ve özellikle konuşma becerileri ciddi ölçüde azalmıştır.

1990'lardan itibaren Kürt meselesi etrafındaki gelişmeler ve Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği üyelik süreci, etnik ve dilsel farklılıkların kamusal alanda ifade edilmesi için yeni alanlar açmıştır. 1999 yılında Türkiye'nin Avrupa Birliği'ne aday ülke statüsü kazanmasıyla birlikte, Kopenhag kriterleri doğrultusunda gerçekleştirilen reformlar yayıncılık, kültürel üretim ve dil hakları alanlarında yeni düzenlemeleri beraberinde getirmiştir. 2000'li yılların başında iktidara gelen Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin ilk dönemleri de bu reform atmosferiyle çakışmıştır. Özellikle Kürt meselesi etrafında şekillenen demokratik açılım süreci, Lazlar gibi dil toplulukların taleplerinin de daha görünür ve ifade edilebilir hale gelmesine katkı sağlamıştır. Ancak bu reform süreci sınırlı ve koşullu bir karakter taşımış, hukuki değişiklikler kurumsal dönüşümler tarafından takip edilmemiştir. 2012 yılında hayata geçirilen YDL dersleri da bu reformist ancak kısıtlı siyasal ortamın bir ürünü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Dersler, Türkiye'de konuşulan ve resmî statüye sahip olmayan pek çok dilin küçük bir kısmının devlet okullarına girişine olanak tanırken, bunu seçmeli dersler çerçevesi içerisinde gerçekleştirmiştir.

Çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesi dil politikaları, dil canlandırma ve politika uygulaması literatürlerinin kesişiminde yer almaktadır. Çalışmanın temel amacı, YDL derslerinin hukuki ve kurumsal çerçevesinin ötesine geçerek, Lazcanın eğitim sistemi içerisindeki tanınmasının öğretmenler tarafından nasıl deneyimlendiğini ve gündelik pratik içerisinde nasıl hayata geçirildiğini incelemektir. Dil politikası literatürü, dil

politikalarının yalnızca yasal düzenlemelerden ibaret olmadığını, ideoloji, yönetim ve gündelik pratiklerin kesişiminde şekillendiğini vurgulamaktadır. Bu nedenle YDL dersleri, sabit ve tek yönlü bir reform olarak değil, anlamı uygulama sürecinde yeniden üretilen katmanlı bir süreç olarak ele alınmalıdır. Bu doğrultuda çalışma, Ball, Maguire ve Braun'un (2012) politika uygulamasını yorumlama, uyarlama ve müzakere süreçleri üzerinden kavramsallaştırdığı "enactment" yaklaşımından yararlanmaktadır. Bu süreçlerin doğasını ve şekillendikleri koşulları anlamak için çalışma, Lipsky'nin (1980) "sokak bürokrasisi" kavramından faydalanmaktadır. Bu yaklaşım, devlet okullarında çalışan öğretmenler gibi vatandaşlarla doğrudan temas içindeki, ön saflardaki kamu görevlilerinin politikaların pasif uygulayıcıları değil, onları gündelik kararları aracılığıyla biçimlendiren sebatkâr aktörler olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Bu çerçevede Lazca öğretmenleri, bir yandan ulusal müfredat içerisinde çalışan devlet memurları, diğer yandan ise dili tehlike altında bulunan bir topluluğun üyeleri olarak ikili bir konum işgal etmektedir. Bu durum onları, devlet politikalarının yerel gerçeklikle buluştuğu temel nokta haline getirmektedir. Çalışma aynı zamanda dil canlandırma literatüründen hareketle, eğitimin dil aktarımı ve dilin kamusal meşruiyeti açısından taşıdığı potansiyeli ve sınırlılıklarını tartışmaktadır. Okulların dil canlandırma süreçlerinde anahtar bir yere sahip olduğu kabul edilmekle birlikte, literatür kalıcı, sürdürülebilir ve anlamlı sonuçların ancak aile ve topluluk tarafından omuzlanan ve yürütülen kapsamlı süreçlerle mümkün olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu nedenle çalışma, Lazca derslerinin okulun ötesine uzanan etkiler üretme noktasında öğretmenlerin nasıl bir rol üstlendiklerini sorgulamaktadır. Bu çerçevede çalışma şu temel araştırma sorusundan hareket etmektedir: Lazca öğretmenleri Lazcanın örgün eğitime taşınmasındaki rollerini nasıl anlamlandırmakta ve deneyimlemektedirler ve bu durum eğitimin dilsel tanınma ve dil canlandırma açısından bir alan olarak sunduğu imkânlar ve sınırlılıklar hakkında neler ortaya koymaktadır? Bu temel soru, öğretmen deneyimlerinin farklı boyutlarını ele alan üç birbiriyle ilişkili alt soru aracılığıyla incelenmiştir: Öğretmenlerin kişisel dil deneyimleri, dersi ele alış biçimlerini ve ona yükledikleri anlamları nasıl şekillendirmektedir? Öğretmenler, Lazca derslerini içinde bulundukları kurumsal, pedagojik ve toplumsal koşullar altında nasıl uygulamakta ve sürdürmektedir? Bu eğitim müdahalesi, dilin korunması ve canlandırılması açısından ne anlama gelmektedir ve öğretmenler bu potansiyeli nasıl yorumlamakta ve kullanmaktadır?

Araştırma sorularının anlam ve deneyim gibi, nicel veriler aracılığıyla erişilmesi güç boyutları ele alması nedeniyle çalışma nitel bir araştırma tasarımı benimsemiştir. Araştırma başlangıçta, YDL derslerinin uzun vadeli etkilerini anlayabilmek amacıyla eski öğrencilerin yaşam öykülerine ve dersle kurdukları ilişkiye odaklanan geriye dönük bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Ancak kapsamlı çabalara rağmen eski öğrencilere ulaşılamamıştır. Buna karşılık, eski öğrencilere ulaşma süreci araştırmacıyı Lazca öğretmenleriyle temas ettirmiştir. Bu süreçte en önemli bağlantı noktası, 2013 yılında ilk Lazca dersini açan öğretmenlerden biri olan ve sonraki yıllarda öğretmen eğitimleri ile yeni derslerin açılmasında merkezi bir rol üstlenen Muhittin olmuştur. Eski öğrencileri birlikte ararken ve dersler üzerine konuşurken, derslerin sürekliliğini ve anlamını asıl taşıyan aktörlerin öğretmenler olduğu giderek daha görünür hale gelmiştir. Böylece araştırmanın odağı öğretmenlerin deneyimlerine yönelmiştir. YDL dersleri kapsamında görev yapan öğretmenlere ilişkin kamuya açık ve bütünlüklü veriler bulunmamaktadır. Bu nedenle öğretmenlerin tespiti, Laz Enstitüsü'nün kayıtları ve kartopu örnekleme yöntemi aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu süreç sonucunda, bugüne kadar devlet ortaokullarında Lazca dersi verdiği belirlenebilen toplam on öğretmene ulaşılmıştır. Bu kişilerin tamamı araştırmaya davet edilmiş; yedi öğretmen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelere katılmış, bir öğretmen yazılı yanıt vermiş, iki öğretmen ise geri dönüş yapmamıştır. Sayısal olarak sınırlı görünmekle birlikte, bu örneklem Lazca derslerini vermiş olduğu bilinen öğretmenlerin neredeyse tamamını kapsamaktadır. Görüşmeler Ekim-Aralık 2025 tarihleri arasında çevrimiçi olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılara dil geçmişleri, Lazca öğretimine yönelişleri, derslerin uygulanma süreçleri, karşılaştıkları kurumsal koşullar, öğrenciler ve ailelerle ilişkileri ile derslerin geleceğine ilişkin değerlendirmeleri sorulmuştur. Tüm görüşmeler katılımcı onayıyla kaydedilmiş ve araştırmacı tarafından çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma süreci boyunca gönüllülük, bilgilendirilmiş onam ve geri çekilme hakkı gibi temel etik ilkeler gözetilmiştir. Resmî verilere ulaşılamaması nedeniyle görüşme bulgularının kurumsal kayıtlarla karşılaştırılması mümkün olmamıştır. Benzer şekilde, on yılı aşkın süredir devam eden bu derslerin zaman içerisindeki dönüşümünü uzunlamasına olarak yeniden kurmak da mümkün olmamıştır. Bu sınırlılıklar derslerin eğitim sistemi içerisindeki kırılgan ve zayıf kurumsallaşmış konumunu yansıtmaktadır. Bu anlamda araştırmanın

sınırlılıkları, büyük ölçüde araştırma nesnesinin yapısal koşullarına bir pencere sağlamaktadır.

Görüşmelerin tematik analizi sonucunda beş birbiriyle ilişkili tema ortaya çıkmıştır: Öğretmenlerin dilsel biyografilerinin dersle kurdukları ilişkiyi şekillendirmesi, derslerin temelindeki taban örgütlenmesi ve sivil inisiyatif, öğretmenlerin dersleri "enact" etme biçimleri, derslerin meşrulaştırıcı etkisi ve derslerin okulun ve sınıfın ötesine taşan etkileri. Çalışmanın en temel bulgularından biri, öğretmenlerin kendi dilsel yaşam öykülerinin dersleri nasıl anladıkları ve yürüttükleri üzerinde belirleyici bir etkiye sahip olmasıdır. Köyde büyüyen ya da köyle bağlarını sürdüren öğretmenler, yetişkinler kendileriyle doğrudan Lazca konuşmasa bile dili edinmişlerdir. Bunun temel nedeni, dilin büyükanne, büyükbaba ve yaşlı akrabalar arasında gündelik iletişimin temel araçlarından biri olarak varlığını sürdürmesidir. Buna karşılık, kent ortamında büyüyen öğretmenler Lazcanın kendi sosyal dünyalarında çok daha sınırlı bir yer tuttuğunu ifade etmişlerdir. Bu durum, belirleyici olan unsurun doğrudan köy yaşamı mı yoksa köy yaşamına eşlik eden aile yapıları mı olduğu sorusunu da gündeme getirmektedir. Köy yaşamı çoğu zaman çocukların büyükanne ve büyükbabalarla aynı hanede yaşadığı geniş aile yapılarıyla ilişkilidir. Bu durum, çocuklara doğrudan Lazca hitap edilmese bile dilin gündelik yaşam içerisinde dolaşımını sürdürmesine olanak sağlamaktadır. Kent yaşamı ise daha çok çekirdek aile düzeniyle ilişkilidir. Bu çıkarımı destekler biçimde, çocukluğunu şehirde geçirmiş olan fakat babaannesi tarafından büyütülen bir katılımcı Lazcayı akıcı biçimde edindiğini ifade etmiştir. Bu bulgu, belirleyici olanın köy yaşamının kendisinden çok kuşaklar arası birlikte yaşama pratiğinin devamı olabileceğini düşündürmektedir. Bu erken edinim deneyimleri çoğu zaman dilden kopuşla devam etmiştir. Birçok katılımcı için örgün eğitime başlama, özellikle de ortaokul yılları, Lazcadan uzaklaştıkları anı işaretlemiştir. Aileler Lazca kullanımının çocukların Türkçelerini ve dolayısıyla akademik başarılarını olumsuz etkileyeceği düşüncesini içselleştirmiş ve evdeki Lazca konuşma pratiğini bu doğrultuda kısıtlamış veya sonlandırmıştır. Bu anlatılar çoğu zaman iki dilliliğe yönelik kaygılar şeklinde ifade edilse de güncel araştırmalar iki dilliliğin dil gelişimi üzerinde olumsuz etkileri olduğuna dair herhangi bir kanıt sunmamaktadır. Aksine, iki dilliliğin bilişsel ve dilsel gelişim açısından pek çok avantaj sağladığına dair geniş bir literatür bulunmaktadır. Burada asıl damgalanan iki dilliliğin kendisi değil, Türkçenin Karadeniz değişkesi olabilir. Lazca, Gürcüce veya

başka bir dili konuşup konuşmamalarından bağımsız olarak bölgedeki birçok kişinin Türkçesi benzer fonolojik ve sözcüksel özellikler taşımaktadır. Lazca iki dilliliğine ilişkin kaygıların altında, Türkçenin prestij değişkesi dışında kalan konuşma biçimlerinin taşıdığı ve çoğu zaman kırsallık, köylülük, göçmenlik ve düşük eğitim düzeyiyle ilişkilendirilen toplumsal anlamlar yatmaktadır.

Birçok öğretmen için eğitim amacıyla bölgeden ayrılmak, Lazcayla kurdukları ilişkiyi yeniden düşünmeye başladıkları bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Evden uzaklaşmak, dilsel ve kültürel aidiyetlerine ilişkin farkındalığı artırmış ve Lazcayla daha bilinçli bir ilişki kurmalarını sağlamıştır. Bu süreçte öğretmenler Lazca üzerine daha bilinçli biçimde düşünmeye başlamış, sözlükler ve kitaplar araştırmış, ailelerine kültüre ve dile dair sorular sormuştur. Çocukluklarından itibaren olağan ve doğal kabul ettikleri bazı önyargıları ve hiyerarşileri fark etmeye başlamış, Lazcaya ve Laz kimliğine ilişkin toplumsal algıları yeniden değerlendirmişlerdir. Göç, öğretmenlerin dilsel ve kültürel aidiyetleriyle aralarına refleksif bir mesafe koymuş ve gündelik hayatın olağan bir parçası olarak deneyimledikleri farklılıkların görünür hale gelmesine ve yeniden anlamlandırılmasına zemin hazırlamıştır. Belki de en dikkat çekici bulgu, öğretmenlerin kişisel hikâyelerindeki "tamamlanan daire" anlatısıdır. Birçoğu için ortaokul, Lazcadan koparıldıkları yer olmuştur. Yıllar sonra bu kurumsal mekâna, bu kez Lazca öğretmenleri olarak geri dönmüşlerdir. Lazcanın okulda bir ders olarak yer alması, kendi çocukluk deneyimleri düşünüldüğünde tahayyül dahi edilemeyecek bir gelişme olarak aktarılmıştır. Bu dönüşümün büyüklüğü öğretmenlerin anlatılarında açıkça hissedilmektedir. Bugün bu dil politikasını uygulamakla yükümlü olan bu bireyler, bu dil kaybı ve kesintiye uğramış aktarım deneyimlerini yaşamış ve bunları yaşam öykülerinde şekillendirici bir dönüm noktası ve kurucu bir unsur olarak konumlandıran bir kuşağa mensuptur. Dolayısıyla, öğretmenlerin Lazca dersleriyle kurdukları ilişki, kendi dil kaybı ve yeniden kazanım hikâyelere yan yana okunmalı ve düşünülmelidir. Araştırmanın ikinci temel bulgusu, derslerin ortaya çıkışı ve devamlılığının yerelde çalışan bireylerin sürekli çabalarına bağlı olmasıdır. Öğretmenler tekrar tekrar derslerin kurumsal altyapısının devlet mekanizmaları tarafından kendiliğinden ortaya çıkmadığını, aksine Laz Enstitüsü gibi sivil toplum aktörlerinin ders materyallerini geliştirdiğini, öğretmen eğitimlerini düzenlediğini ve derslerin açılabilmesi için gerekli koşulları yarattığını vurgulamışlardır. Bu durum, tanınmanın ve politikanın tek başlarına uygulamayı getirmemiş olduğunu

göstermektedir. Resmî tanınma bir imkân yaratmış, bu imkânın neye dönüşeceği ise onu gündelik pratik içerisinde hayata geçiren aktörlere bağlı kalmıştır. Bulgular aynı zamanda derslerin açılması ve devam etmesinin öğretmenler ile okul yönetimlerinin kullandıkları takdir ve temyize bağlı olduğunu göstermektedir. Lipsky'nin (1980) sokak bürokrasisi yaklaşımıyla uyumlu biçimde öğretmenler, sınırlı kaynakların ve kurumsal belirsizliklerin bulunduğu bir ortamda hareket etmekte, fakat aynı zamanda önemli ölçüde takdir ve otonomiye sahip olmaktadırlar. Bu çalışma, öğretmenlerin mevcut koşulları yönetmenin ötesinde, bu koşulların inşaasını sağlamış olduğunu göstermektedir. Öğrencileri bilgilendirmek, ailelerle iletişim kurmak ve dersi açıklamak, karmaşık ve iyi tanımlanmamış bürokratik süreçleri takip etmek ve okul yönetimleriyle olumlu ilişkiler tutmak işlerini öğretmenler omuzlamıştır. Bununla birlikte derslerin devamlılığın büyük oranda öğretmenlerin kontrolü dışındaki kurumsal kararlara bağlı olduğu görülmektedir. Ders programlarında yapılan küçük değişiklikler, öğretmenlerin ders yükü ve değişen yönetimsel öncelikler gibi detaylar derslerin devam edip etmeyeceğini belirleyebilmektedir. Lazca derslerinin kurumsal konumu yapısal kırılganlığını korumaktadır.

Bulgular ayrıca öğretmenlerin dersi, dersin resmî çerçevesinin öngördüğünden çok daha geniş bir anlam ve amaç dünyası içerisinde tecrübe ettiklerini göstermektedir. Öğretmenler başarıyı dil yetkinliği kazandırmanın ötesinde, öğrencilerde merak uyandırmak, Lazcayla duygusal bağ kurulmasını sağlamak ve Lazca ile kurulan bağı olumlu bir deneyim haline getirmek üzerinden tanımlamışlardır. Bu nedenle müzik, hikâye anlatımı, gündelik sohbetler ve esnek ders planları, dersleri kendi bağlamları içerisinde anlamlı ve sürdürülebilir kılmanın temel araçları haline gelmiştir. Öğretmenlerin dersleri yeniden şekillendirme biçimlerinin Ball, Maguire ve Braun'un (2012) “enactment” kavramıyla doğrudan örtüştüğü görülmektedir. Öğretmenler, içinde bulundukları koşullar altında dersin hangi yönlerine gerçekçi biçimde öncelik verilebileceğini çözümlemiş ve yorumlamıştır. Ardından içerik ve pedagojiyi sınıflarının gerçekliklerine göre yeniden kodlamış ve tercüme etmişlerdir. Bu bulgular aynı zamanda Ricento ve Hornberger'in (1996) dil politikasının farklı katmanlardan geçerken dönüşüme uğradığı yönündeki yaklaşımını da desteklemektedir. Lazca dersinin sınıfa ulaştığı evrede, çok dillilik yeterliliği gibi resmî kurumsal hedefler önemli ölçüde dönüşmüş durumdadır. Ortaya çıkan, hedefleri ve öncelikleri yerel düzeyde yeniden tanımlanmış bağlamsal bir politika olmuştur. Laz öğrenciler

açısından ders, mevcut dilsel bilgi ve deneyimlerin tanındığı ve yeniden değer kazandığı bir alan işlevi görmüştür. Böylece daha önce tamamen özel alanla sınırlı kalan bir bilgi biçimi kamusal olarak görünür ve eğitimsel olarak meşru hale gelmiştir. Ders aynı zamanda Laz olmayan öğrencilerin de Lazca ve Laz topluluğuyla kurdukları ilişkiyi şekillendirmiştir. Lazca, bu öğrenciler tarafından eğitim kurumlarında karşılığı ve yeri olan bir dil olarak algılanmıştır. Bu anlamda ders, meşrulaştırıcı etkisini yalnızca hedef kitlesiyle sınırlı bırakmamış, dil ve topluluk etrafındaki algıların daha geniş ölçekte dönüşmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Laz olmayan öğrencilerin derse karşı direnç gösterdiği bir örnekte, bir dili desteklemek amacıyla tasarlanmış bir politikanın farklı topluluklar arasındaki ilişkileri de görünür hale getirebildiği ortaya çıkmıştır. Topluluklar arasındaki sınırlar yeni ve farklı bir şekilde görünür hale gelmiş, varsayımlar dile getirilmiş ve sorgulanmış; bölgesel çeşitlilik ile yeni biçimlerde karşılaşılmış ve müzakere edilmiştir. Tanınma süreçleri aynı zamanda Laz topluluğu içerisindeki farklılıkları da daha görünür hale getirmiştir. Lazcanın okullara girebilmesi, Lazcanın standartlaştırılmasını gerektirmiştir. Ancak Lazcanın değişkesel çeşitliliği bu süreci karmaşıklaştırmıştır. Öğrenciler ve öğretmenler kendi değişkelerini sınıfa taşımış, ders kitaplarının standartlaştırılmış dili ile kendi değişkeleri arasında sürekli olarak hareket etmek durumunda kalmışlardır. Böylece içsel çeşitlilik, özgünlük ve temsil soruları sınıfın gündelik gerçekliğinin bir parçası haline gelmiştir.

Bulgular ayrıca Lazca derslerinin okulun toplumsal ve dilsel ekolojisini dönüştürme potansiyeline de sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Öğrencilerin ve öğretmenlerin Lazcayla bir bağa sahip olmadığı bir örnekte ders, tanınma üretmenin bir aracı olarak işlemiştir. Aynı zamanda okul atmosferinin kültürel açıdan farklı ve özel hissettirmesine katkı sağlayan bir kolektif zenginleşme deneyimi olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Buna karşılık Lazcanın hâlihazırda konuşulduğu yerlerde ders, görünür olmayan bir dilsel gerçekliği kamusal hale getirmiştir. Öğrenciler okul içerisinde Lazca kullanmaya başladıkça, dili bilen ancak kurum içerisinde kullanmayan öğretmenler de okulda Lazca konuşmaya başlamıştır. Ders, görünmez kalmış aidiyet biçimlerinin ve dilsel kimliklerin görünür ve toplumsal olarak anlamlı hale gelmesini sağlayan koşulları yaratmıştır. Bu bulgu, bu tür derslerin bastırılmış ya da görünmez hale gelmiş dilsel gerçekliklerin yeniden kamusal mekâna girmesine olanak sağlayarak kurumsal çevreyi dönüştürebileceğini düşündürmektedir.

Öğretmenler dili okulun sınırlarının ötesine taşımak ve aileleri yeniden dil aktarımı sürecine dahil etmek yönünde bilinçli çabalar göstermişlerdir. Öğrenciler öğrendikleri kelimeleri, dinledikleri şarkıları ve kullandıkları ders kitaplarını eve taşıdıkça anne-babalar ve büyükanneler ile büyükbabalar yeniden dilsel kaynaklar haline gelmiştir. Bu, önceki kuşakları yeniden dil aktarımının aktörleri haline getirmiş; onları çocuklarının bir parçası haline geldiği dil aktarımı ve dilin korunmasına ilişkin diyaloğa davet etmiştir. Öğretmenler dersleri gündelik yaşamla ilişkilendirerek Lazcanın kullanım alanlarını ve kullanım yoğunluğunu artırmaya çalışmışlardır. Bu yönüyle öğretmenler, derslerin canlandırıcı gücünün yaratıcıları ve taşıyıcıları haline gelmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte bulgular, derslerin tek başına başarabileceklerinin sınırlarının altını çizmektedir. Uzun vadeli dil aktarımı ve dil canlandırma süreçleri nihayetinde aile ve topluluk içerisinde sürdürülen gündelik ve doğal kullanıma bağlıdır. Öğretmenlerin yoğun çabaları sayesinde Lazca dersleri bir takım aktarım kanallarını ve belki daha da önemlisi dil etrafındaki diyaloğu yeniden açmayı başarmıştır. Ancak derslerin tek başına kuşaklar boyunca sürecek topluluk yatırımının yerini alması ne gerçekçi ne de hedeflenendir.

Lazca dersleri örneği, Türkiye'de dilsel çeşitliliğin tanınmasına yönelik çağdaş yaklaşımın fay hatlarını ortaya koymaktadır. Türkiye'de dil politikaları tarihsel olarak Türkçeyi kamusal yaşamın tek meşru dili olarak konumlandıran ulus inşa süreçleriyle yakından ilişkili olmuştur. Bu nedenle YDL dersleri bu tarihsel yaklaşım açısından önemli bir kırılma noktası oluşturmaktadır. YDL dersleri, her ne kadar sınırlı olsa da, Lazca ve diğer yedi dilin devlet okullarına girmelerinin önünü açmış ve onlara tanınma sağlamıştır. Bununla birlikte araştırma bulguları, bu tanınmanın istikrarlı bir kurumsal desteğe dönüşmediğini göstermektedir. Tanınma büyük ölçüde koşullu kalmış ve tam anlamıyla kurumsallaşmamıştır. Devlet bu dillerinin kamu kurumlarına girebilmesi için gerekli biçimsel zemini yaratmıştır; fakat bu tanınma ancak onu süreğen emekleriyle ayakta tutan bireylerin çabaları sayesinde somut bir gerçekliğe dönüşmüştür. Yerleşik ve güçlü kurumsal destek olmadan bu girişimler kırılgan kalmakta ve mevcut destek yapılarının çok ötesine geçen sorumlulukları üstlenmek durumunda kalan bireylere bağımlı hale gelmektedir.

Çalışma, Türkiye'deki tehlike altındaki ve/veya azınlık dili eğitimi ile dil politikası literatürüne çeşitli katkılar sunmaktadır. Öncelikle, Lazca seçmeli derslerine ve daha özel olarak Lazca öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerine ilişkin ayrıntılı bir inceleme sunarak

ampirik bir katkı sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca, Lazca derslerini vermiş olduğu belirlenebilen öğretmenlerin neredeyse tamamının deneyimlerini kapsaması bakımından önem taşımaktadır. İkinci olarak çalışma, politika uygulama süreçlerinin bir "enactment" pratiği olarak ele almanın önemini YDL dersleri üzerinden tartışarak dil politikası ve planlaması tartışmalarına kuramsal bir katkı sunmaktadır. Öğretmenlerin deneyimlerini analizin merkezine yerleştirmek, resmî anlatılarda çoğu zaman görünmez kalan pratik boyutların anlaşılmasını mümkün kılmıştır. Üçüncü olarak çalışma, derslerin öğretmenlerinin bu sınırlı açılımı aile katılımını teşvik eden ve dil aktarımına ilişkin diyaloğu yeniden canlandıran fırsatlara nasıl dönüştürdüklerini göstererek dil canlandırma literatürüne katkı sunmaktadır. Gelecek araştırmalar açısından önemli yönelimlerden biri, Lazca seçmeli derslerini almış öğrencilerin deneyimlerini incelemek olacaktır. Böyle bir çalışma, öğrencilerin dersleri nasıl değerlendirdiklerini, derslerin Lazcayla kurdukları ilişkiyi nasıl etkilediğini ve dersin uzun vadeli etkilerini nasıl yorumladıklarını anlamaya katkı sağlayabilir. Benzer biçimde ebeveynlerle yürütülecek araştırmalar da özellikle dil aktarımı açısından derslerin aile ve topluluk üzerindeki etkilerini daha iyi anlamayı mümkün kılacaktır. YDL kapsamındaki diğer dillerle yapılacak karşılaştırmalı çalışmalar uygulama süreçlerinin farklı bağlamlarda nasıl işlediğini ve değiştiğini ortaya koyabilir. Son olarak, dünyanın farklı noktalarından benzer eğitim modelleriyle yapılacak karşılaştırmalar, Lazca örneğini azınlık ve miras dili eğitimi alanındaki uluslararası tartışmalar içerisine yerleştirmeye katkı sağlayacaktır.

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