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Analyzing The Discursive Strategies Employed for Term “Goran”: From Historical Argumentation to Linguistic Fallacy

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This study aims to examine the hidden ideologies embedded in the use and representation of the keyword “Goran” in historical and linguistic texts. The research is qualitative in nature and adopts a critical discourse analysis framework, combining van Dijk’s approach for analyzing ideological representations in the use of the term “Goran” with Reisigl’s historical-discursive approach, which facilitates the investigation of semantic layers and historical transformations of the term. The data consisted of historical texts, linguistic materials, and scholarly articles related to the term “Goran.” Samples were purposefully selected, meaning that texts were included in which the term “Goran” is associated with identity, linguistic, or historical issues. The findings indicate that the construction of “Goran” in these texts does not reflect a historical reality, but rather is the product of contemporary discourses, represented through various discursive strategies, including referential or naming strategies, propositional strategies, argumentation and conventionalized expressions, framing or discourse-representational strategies, and mitigation or intensification strategies. These representations sometimes depict the Goran people with negative attributes such as “timid,” “thieves,” “deceitful,” “bandits,” “robbers,” and “weak,” and at other times manifest as othering (Goran as the “Other” within the Kurdish population). Such representations, however, conflict with the geographical realities of Kurdistan and reveal researchers’ biases regarding the group. Consequently, the decolonization of linguistics can only be achieved through a critical re-examination of the history of linguistic scholarship and a deliberate distancing from biases that have conflated linguistic groups with ethnic identities.

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1. Introduction

The keyword “Goran” is a concept that has acquired an ideological charge in historical and linguistic texts and has often been accompanied by biased interpretations and misunderstandings. The notion of the keyword was first introduced by Benveniste (1954: 336) and later expanded by Williams (1976). In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), keywords are examined from multiple perspectives. First, they are used as cultural keywords; second, from a corpus-linguistic perspective, they refer to lexemes that are statistically significant and ideologically loaded (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 66). A keyword can reveal an essential phenomenon about a particular civilization or community—that is, cultures can be understood through their characteristic keywords. For instance, in German the word *Heimat* (“homeland”) and in Russian *dusha* (“soul”) hold such cultural significance (Wierzbicka, 1999).

In corpus linguistics, a keyword is identified when its relative frequency in a text or corpus is statistically significant using measures such as chi-square or log-likelihood tests compared to another text or corpus. Even grammatical or functional words, when identified as keywords, can provide crucial insights into the discourse patterns or argumentation strategies employed in a text. For example, McEnery (2006) demonstrated that the word “and” functioned as a keyword in texts advocating for the prohibition of swearing in the media. The reason was that *and* was repeatedly used to construct associations between swearing and other negative phenomena such as drunkenness or sin. The salience of keywords in linguistic discourse is not merely a linguistic factor; rather, it has become a discursive tool that some researchers employ to reproduce othering, particularly in opposition to the Kurds. However, the ethical responsibility of linguists within linguistic research methodologies is to remain aware of the social and cultural implications of their work. As Eckert (2013) argues, scholars must reflect on how their research findings are used, how they affect ongoing discourses (cultural or otherwise), and whether they respect the dignity of speakers while preventing misinterpretation and othering. In other words, ethical principles in linguistic research extend beyond the mere collection of linguistic data.

In this sense, when studying linguistic varieties, the researcher’s task is to document and analyze linguistic features, not to emphasize differences in ways that promote “othering.” (Mohammadi, 2025). Knowledge production, if handled uncritically, may reinforce discriminatory or exclusionary discourses. Therefore, before analyzing or publishing data, a responsible linguist should ask: *Does my work risk contributing to misunderstanding, inequality, or epistemic injustice? Could linguistic differences be used by others to justify social divisions or hierarchies?* The linguist’s ethical duty is to examine linguistic data with cultural and social sensitivity, avoiding representations that may legitimize scientific forms of segregation or bias. Research findings should instead be presented constructively acknowledging linguistic diversity while fostering respect and empowerment for the studied community (Eckert, 2013).

In the typological and descriptive study of linguistic varieties, as well as in ethnographic and anthropological analyses, researcher bias has always played a role. Linguists, relying on linguistic data, sometimes go beyond purely scientific inquiry to engage in the representation of identities and social hierarchies. Their findings may inadvertently become tools for legitimizing ethnic or cultural distinctions and oppositions. A historical example of such bias can be traced to the collaboration between certain academic scholars and the East India Company, an organization that, while initially commercial in purpose, gradually pursued long-term colonial objectives in the Middle East. Within this colonial framework, historical and linguistic theories were developed as part of a broader imperial epistemology (Mohammadi, 2023: 135).

As Newmeyer (1988: 16) observes, in 1786 the British linguist and Orientalist Sir William Jones, while serving the East India Company, claimed to have discovered racial and genealogical links among Asian and European languages through his comparative studies. Linguistics, therefore, evolved in a context where its scientific functions were intertwined with ideological and colonial agendas. In this regard, Kumaravadivelu (1999), within a postcolonial theoretical framework, contends that language constitutes one of the primary sites of struggle in postcolonial discourse, since the process of colonization itself begins with language. Similarly, Viswanathan (1989: 3) argues that in colonial India, English literary texts served as a mask for imperial domination, concealing the ideological mechanisms of colonial power beneath a veneer of cultural refinement.

Although these colonial patterns originated in the distant past, their discursive traces can still be discerned in contemporary linguistics. In other words, such patterns continue to resonate in modern research, particularly in analyses of keywords such as “Goran,” whose historical and linguistic representations often reveal the researcher’s own biases and may reinforce identity-based oppositions or forms of othering. Thus, the study of keywords is not merely a linguistic endeavor but also an effort to understand how scientific knowledge interacts with power structures and historical or colonial ideologies.

Accordingly, the central concern of the present study is to re-examine the keyword “Goran” in relation to historical reasoning, linguistic research ethics, and colonial ideologies. The study demonstrates how the representation of “Goran” within academic and social discourses becomes entangled with power relations, the fallacy of naming, and mechanisms of othering. Its innovation lies in treating “Goran” not as a purely linguistic or ethnic label, but as a discursive keyword situated at the intersection of colonial discourse, linguistic ethics, and power dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Among foreign studies, the first attempt to theorize the nature and equivalent of “Goran” was undertaken by Vladimir Minorsky. He presented the preliminary results of his work in 1922, completed it in 1927, and published some previously unpublished historical materials in 1943. His collaborator, Hadank (1930), also released related materials in 1930. Subsequent foreign research in historical and linguistic domains such as Blau (1989), Mackenzie (1961), Leezenberg (1993), and Asatrian (1995) focused primarily on the naming and conceptualization of the keyword “Goran” and its contrast with “Kurd,”

largely reproducing and reiterating Minorsky's and Hadank's findings, without providing new independent studies.

Recently, Abdi (2020, 2023) critically examines Minorsky's perspectives and those of other Orientalists regarding the concept of "Goran," demonstrating that many of these studies, in pursuit of general conclusions, relied on limited data and short-term investigations, often engaging in simplification, omission, or distortion of information and building on pre-existing assumptions. More recent evaluations indicate that arguments made by Christensen (1921), Minorsky (1943), and Mackenzie (1961) concerning the migration of the Zaza people and their alleged non-Kurdish identity lack reliable evidence and genetic support, and are better interpreted within the frameworks of social developments and historical sociology. Notably, Abdi (2020) emphasizes that part of Minorsky's analyses rests not on historical evidence but on selective and biased source choices, a tendency also observable in the works of Vilchevsky (1961), Akopov (2007), and Asatrian (1955). He concludes that, to date, no documented and impartial study has confirmed the separation of Goran identity from the Kurds.

Mohammadi (2021), in his study on the history of Laylakh, argues that the contrast between "Goran" and "Kurd" is not a historical phenomenon. He concludes that until the 19th century, all linguistic varieties in Kurdistan identified themselves as Kurdish, and no tribe or clan exclusively labeled themselves as Kurdish while classifying others as non-Kurdish. In other words, being Kurdish was not a linguistic marker, and all people within this geographic region considered themselves part of the broader Kurdish community. Consequently, the concept of "Goran" historically encompassed social class, tribal affiliation, religion, lifestyle, and other facets, forming an integral part of Kurdish society.

Karami et al. (2022) regard Gorani as the language of Yarsan sacred texts and classical literary works, noting that it does not correspond to any spoken language in the region. In this context, "Gorani" in their study refers specifically to the Literary Gorani Language. In Sajadi's (2023) research, the concept of the 'Gorani' is employed in a manner that leads to a conflation between terminology and the historical functions of this keyword. Such a representation does not reflect a consolidated historical reality; rather, it is the result of the perpetuation of discourses rooted in the Orientalist tradition.

Shams (2024), in an article critically revisiting Minorsky's theory of Goran, demonstrates that Minorsky selectively chose sources and adopted a reductionist perspective, interpreting historical evidence to suit his own conclusions. Contrary to his claims, historical sources provide no indication of Goran migration from the Caspian shores, and confirm their Kurdish identity. Unlike Shams, the present study not only conducts a historical critique but also employs a Critical Discourse Analysis with a historical-discursive approach to examine the ideological function of the keyword "Goran" across diverse texts and extensive data.

Saedi (2025) argues that the concept of "Goran" and the relative adjective "Gorani" in central and southern Kurdistan has always exhibited variable referents. Early Orientalists oversimplified the term, treating it as a general label for specific speakers; however,

contemporary research shows that the term is neither an ethnic nor purely linguistic category. Instead, it derives from the concept of “Gæbr/Gæwr”, meaning non-Muslim, and was historically applied in three contexts: tribal affiliation, sedentary/subject status, and followers of the Yarsan faith. These findings largely build upon and reflect the analyses of Abdi (2020, 2023). Nevertheless, presenting these perspectives in a historical and analytical framework clarifies the background for the current study and provides a coherent foundation for examining the keyword “Goran.”. Finally, Mirani and Weisi (2025, forthcoming) maintain that, although Hawrami Spoken Variety (HSV) is regarded by some linguists as belonging to the Gorani dialect, it has some linguistic features including phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic ones which make it different from Gorani Literary Variety (GLV) as a variety of the poetry writings under the wider umbrella term of Gorani/Zaza dialect. That is, for Mirani and Weisi, Gorani is largely considered a written variety of Kurdish that has not been used by Kurdish speakers as a spoken variety and has served only a limited literary function, similar to the role of Ancient Greek in ritual ceremonies.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Historical-Discursive Approach

The historical-discursive approach, a branch of Critical Discourse Analysis, was introduced by Reisigl and Wodak (2001) and later further developed by Reisigl (2017). This approach represents one of the most prominent critical perspectives in discourse studies, emphasizing historical dimensions. It should be regarded as a partial description reflecting a significant component of the whole (Reisigl, 2017: 44). Through discourse analysis, they critique abuses of power, injustice, and social discrimination, while simultaneously advancing their epistemological claims to reveal and enhance understanding (Reisigl, 2017: 49).

Within the framework of historical-critical discourse analysis, the concept of “critique” is grounded in three main theoretical sources:

1. First-generation critical theory (Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin) for critiquing oppressive and discriminatory ideologies and abuses of power
2. The notion of “arts of resistance” against power as proposed by Foucault (Foucault, 1990: 12)
3. Social theory, discourse ethics, and deliberative democracy as introduced by Jürgen Habermas (Forchtner, 2010: 211)

3-1-1. Discursive Strategies

In the historical-analytical approach to discourse, Reisigl and Wodak (2001: 44) define discursive strategies as precise and goal-oriented patterns of actions that “are adopted to achieve social, psychological, or linguistic objectives.” These strategies are realized through the systematic use of language. The set of different strategies includes referential or nomination strategies, predicational strategies, argumentation strategies and topoi, perspectivation or discourse representation strategies, and mitigating and intensifying

strategies. Reisigl (2017: 44) in Figure (1), elaborate each of these discursive strategies as illustrated in the following figure..

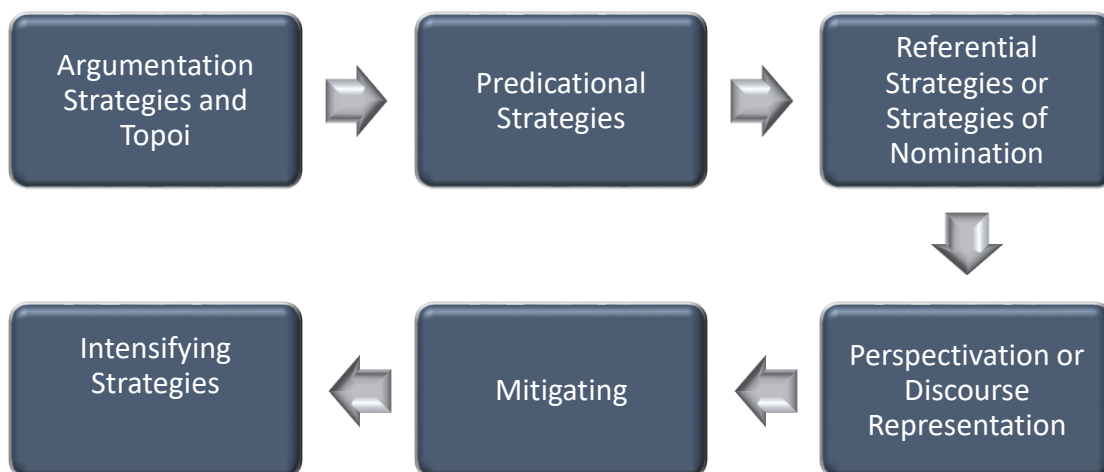


Figure 1 Discursive Strategies in the Historical-Discursive Approach (Reisigl, 2017: 52)

As noted earlier, cultural keywords are words that encapsulate the values, beliefs, and core concepts of a culture and are frequently repeated in significant social and historical discourses. The historical-discursive approach demonstrates that these keywords serve as tools for ideological representation and othering, and examining them within this framework can provide a deeper understanding of power and identity discourses. In other words, cultural keywords function as instruments of ideological representation and are realized through discursive strategies: they can refer to individuals, groups, or phenomena, play a role in positive or negative representation (e.g., denigration, praise, or legitimization), and adapt their meaning and usage over historical contexts. Thus, keywords operate both as discursive markers and as means for implementing referential strategies, legitimization, and othering within discourse (Baker & Ellece, 2011: 66–67; Levisen & Waters, 2018). Table 1 presents a summary of the discursive strategies in the historical-discursive approach, showing the main questions of discourse analysis alongside each strategy type and its corresponding purpose.

Table 1 Discursive Strategies in the DHA

Questions to Approach Discursive Features	Discursive Strategies	Purpose
How are persons, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions named and referred to linguistically in the discourse in question?	Nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions

What characteristics or qualities are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions mentioned in the discourse?	Predication	Discursive characterization of social actors, objects, phenomena, events, processes, and actions (e.g., positively or negatively)
What arguments are employed in discourse?	Argumentation	Persuading addressees of the validity of specific claims of truth and normative rightness
From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, arguments expressed?	Perspectivization	Positioning the speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance
Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated?	Mitigation and Intensification	Modifying the illocutionary force of utterances in respect to their epistemic or deontic status

2-2. Ideology as Social Cognition

Ideologies are cognitive systems stored in individuals' long-term memory and shared socially among members of ideological groups. They are organized around fundamental categories:

- Identity: Who are we?
- Actions: What do we do?
- Goals: What do we want?
- Norms and Values: What is considered good or bad for us?
- Reference Groups: Who are our allies and competitors?
- Resources: What resources do we have or lack?

The structure of ideologies typically emerges through ingroup/outgroup polarization (van Dijk, 2025: 3–4). Van Dijk's studies (1984, 1993, 1998) demonstrate that ingroup/outgroup polarization in ideologies shapes bipolar discursive structures at all levels. This influence operates through general strategies he refers to as the Ideological Square:

- Emphasize the positive aspects of "us"
- Emphasize the negative aspects of "them"
- Minimize the negative aspects of "us"
- Minimize the positive aspects of "them"

Ultimately, ideologies shape individuals' spoken and written discourse. Moreover, ideologies and attitudes are typically acquired and modulated through various forms of discourse. The complexity of discourse allows ideological influence to penetrate multiple levels: lexical choices, syntactic structures, sentence intonation, macro-topics of texts or conversations, rhetorical emphases, formal or informal style, argumentative structures

and logical organization, narrative techniques, accompanying images or music, and other elements (van Dijk, 2025: 6).

Referential and predicational strategies are directly linked to ideological ingroup/outgroup polarization. Referential strategies, through the selection of words and labels, represent the identities of “us” and “them,” thereby constructing the ingroup and outgroup. Predicational strategies attribute positive or negative characteristics to these groups and, by highlighting or downplaying them, enact the four pillars of van Dijk’s Ideological Square. Together, these two strategies serve as the main instruments for representing, evaluating, and legitimizing ideological attitudes and behaviors in discourse.

4. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and is conducted within the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, employing a historical-discursive approach. Within this framework, van Dijk’s (2025) theory of ideology is applied to analyze mechanisms of power and ideological representations in the use of the term “Goran,” while Reisigl’s (2017) historical-discursive approach enables the examination of semantic layers and historical transformations of this term.

The research data were collected through library-based methods and comprise historical and linguistic texts, as well as studies related to the keyword “Goran.” The samples were selected using purposive sampling, meaning that texts were chosen in which the keyword “Goran” appears in connection with issues of identity, language, or history. During the coding stage, linguistic units containing the keyword were identified and coded according to conceptual categories such as nomination, othering, and negative evaluation.

The analysis process involved identifying relevant data, coding according to theoretical categories, conducting thematic analysis, interpreting the discourse, performing historical comparisons, reconstructing discursive trends, and ultimately drawing conclusions regarding the function of the keyword within the contexts of power and identity.

5. Data Analysis and Discussion

1) *The European authorities generally maintain that Gorani is not Kurdish and that the people who speak it are not Kurds: but the people themselves feel themselves as Kurds in every way. (Edmonds, 1957: 10).*

The referential strategy in this text positions “Gorani” in contrast to “Kurd” through the perspective of European experts, while the intensifying discourse strategy emphasizes their strong identification as Kurds with the phrase “every way.”

2) *three other Iranian dialect groups which happen to be symbiotic or adjacent to Kurdish-speaking areas are sometimes considered varieties of Kurdish....Gorani fo*

und in the Hawraman region of the middle Zagros in Iran (Hawramani) and near Mosul in Iraq (mainly Bajalani) However, while these share, to various degrees, a common history and culture with the Kurds, and while there has been considerable convergence on all linguistic levels, in terms of Iranian historical dialectology, they are West Iranian language groups distinct from Kurdish (Windfuhr, 2009: 589).

The referential strategy in text (2) involves spatial and linguistic reference, identifying the groups through the naming of regions (Hawraman, Mosul) and language varieties (Hawramani, Bajalani), while the intensifying expression “sometimes considered varieties of Kurdish” highlights their distinction from the Kurds.

3) only the Kurmanji, and possibly the Kalhuri, come under the heading Kurd, whereas the Goran stand apart, both for linguistic and ethnological reasons (Minorsky, 1943: 1)
The referential strategy here is group-based and ethnically classificatory, emphasizing othering by distinguishing “Kurmanji and Kalhuri” as Kurds and separating the Goran.

4) I will be conservative, and stick to 'Gorani' as a generic label, while keepin mind that few locals use it in that way, and that no conclusions as to ethnic affiliation can be drawn from it (Leezenberg, 1993)

The referential strategy in text (4) uses “Gorani” as a general label for the linguistic group without judging ethnic affiliation. The author mitigates the claim through “conservative” and by stressing that “few locals employ it in this way.”

5) many ethnic groups living as enclaves, or in the vicinity of the Kurds, are traditionally considered part of the Kurdish conglomeration: The Gorans... (Asatrian, 2009: 4-5).

The referential strategy identifies “the Gorans” as a distinct ethnic group from the Kurds, with their geographic location highlighted, while the term “many” functions as an intensifier to emphasize the breadth of this feature.

6) it is quite clear what belongs to the “Kurdish language.” Of those languages that have been claimed to be Kurdish, Gorani clearly do not form part of the Kurdish language (Paul, 2008).

The referential strategy separates the linguistic group “Gorani” from “the Kurdish language,” with “clearly” serving as an intensifier to stress the distinction.

7) Gorans are a timid and heartless race, and said to be meaner, more thievish, and more deceitful even than the Persians. (Rich,1836:2015).

The predicational strategy here involves strong negative evaluation, attributing the traits “timid, heartless, mean, thievish, and deceitful” to the Goran and severely condemning the social actors. This statement also emphasizes negative outgroup polarization and constructs a wholly negative image of the target group.

8) Goran is the name of a group of tribes in Persia, and among the Belbas tribes the word is used to denote 'robber' (Edmonds, 1957: 12).

The predicational strategy assigns a negative evaluation to the social actors through the keyword "Goran," depicting their social or behavioral activity in a negative light.

9) 9) *the name Duzdān applied to their village would be not without justification.*" (Minorsky, 1955: 85)

Here, the negative collective evaluation links the actors to their place and group. Minorsky sought to locate two settlements, Bīr/ Bīāra and Duzdān, mentioned by Abū Dulaf Khazarjī, and identified the village of Nawsud with Duzdān to provide a historical rationale for using "Goran" in the sense of "robber."

10) 10) *Six or seven men can match a band of Goran.*

Text (10) from Marquart, written between 1915 and 1920 and published posthumously, portrays the Goran people through a quotation as a weak group who could be confronted by only a few men (Marquart, 1966: 292). This exemplifies a negative evaluative stance and a propositional strategy. In other words, by referring to this historical quotation, Marquart reinforces the negative polarization of the "out-group" and accentuates weakness and humiliation in the representation of the Gorans.

Overall, the representation of the key word "Goran" in these texts is predominantly negative, and such a perspective is ethically questionable from a scholarly standpoint. Beyond these writings, Oscar's letters reveal a prejudiced and colonial outlook toward the people he encountered during his travels (Kolivand, 2014: 14). The content of one letter, in particular, dated 1907, explicitly portrays the Goran as a tribe composed of fundamentally impure Muslims deserving the harshest punishments, reflecting his belief that the most appropriate approach toward them was one of neglect and violence (ibid., 639).

As observed in the aforementioned texts, ideologies are systematically reproduced in discourse through referential and propositional strategies. Referential strategies, by means of naming and positioning social groups, delineate the boundary between "us" and "them," thereby constructing and representing collective identity. In contrast, propositional strategies highlight positive traits of the in-group and negative attributes of the out-group, thus enacting the four dimensions of van Dijk's *Ideological Square*. These mechanisms reveal that discourse is not merely a vehicle for conveying meaning but also a powerful instrument for reproducing domination, polarization, and the legitimization of ideological perspectives. From Young's perspective (1990: 42–43), these discursive mechanisms are not confined to intra-group relations but also play a role in the production of knowledge. He shows that within certain Orientalist traditions, Asian cultures were represented in academic discourse as "exotic," irrational, passive, and backward, and that such negative portrayals were disseminated through scholarly knowledge. In doing so, these characterizations derived their legitimacy from the very academic and institutional structures that produced and circulated them. This suggests that scientific discourse itself

may participate in the reproduction of ideological frameworks through strategies of representation and nomination.

Explanation of the Keyword *Goran* and the Linguistic–Ethnic Conflation

As illustrated in the aforementioned examples, understanding the keyword *Goran* in the absence of attention to its genealogical and historical background has led to multiple misconceptions. According to Leezenberg (1993), scholars in linguistic studies have employed the term *Gorani* as a general label for a set of dialects; however, none of the native speakers except those familiar with European writings on the subject—have ever used this term to refer to their own language. In this regard, there exists a “naming fallacy” linking language and ethnic identity (Mohammadi,2025). Specifically, *Gorani* functions as a cultural keyword whose domain is not limited to the Hawraman region; ethnically diverse groups may be classified as Goran, yet as Mirani and Weisi (2025) depicted their linguistic varieties differ from Hawrami, and in some cases, their linguistic perception does not align with the Kurdish language category. For instance, the regions of Laylakh, Saral, Kumasi, Bardarsh, and Shikhan in Duhok, whose dialects differ from Hawrami, are also labeled “Goran,” although Orientalists did not refer to them.

According to Safavi (2019: 15–16), it is misleading to equate language with ethnic identity, as speaking a particular language does not necessarily define one’s ethnicity. For example, speakers of Arabic in Egypt, Lebanon, or Morocco should not automatically be classified as “Arab” solely based on their language, since geographic, linguistic, and racial boundaries do not align directly. Ethnic groups are distinguished by biological characteristics, which do not necessarily correspond with place of residence or the dominant language of a region. From a racial perspective, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Mongolian populations are distinct yet speak different languages, and some have even been labeled “Turk” in historical texts. Similarly, Portuguese speakers in Portugal cannot be assumed to share the same ancestry as Brazilian Portuguese speakers, despite sharing the same official language. Likewise, Spanish-speaking countries do not constitute a single ethnic group, and many inhabitants of contemporary Arab-speaking countries including Egypt, Libya, and Mauritania do not ethnically identify as Arab.

From this perspective, equating *Gorani* with Hawrami and positioning it outside the Kurdish linguistic domain reflects the same naming fallacy. Within Kurdish, it is accurate to state that “Hawrami is not Sorani” or “Hawrami is not Kurmanji,” a distinction that is valid intralinguistically. However, questioning whether Hawrami is Kurdish reflects a reductionist perspective that either denies the existence of the Kurdish language or confines it to a limited set of varieties, such as Sorani and Kurmanji (Mohammadi,2025). Such a view, which separates Hawrami from the Kurdish language family, is in fact a manifestation of biased and ideologically driven referential and naming strategies.

It is important to note that labeling Hawrami as a distinct language within the framework of linguistic typology is not inherently problematic, and although the issue arises when this naming is employed as an argumentative tool to separate Hawrami from Kurdish,

producing a reductionist representation that misrepresents the true scope and diversity of the Kurdish language (Mohammadi, 2023: 134).

In essence, human societies are inherently multilingual, and language alone cannot serve as a reliable basis for separating ethnic groups or constructing ideological narratives of nationhood, as there is no one-to-one correspondence between language and identity. As Mohammadi (2024) argues, the historical trajectory of languages is far more complex than the political histories later built around them.

This perspective is relevant to the case of *Goran*, where the practice of positioning it in contrast to Kurdish reflects a colonial legacy of classification. Following Saussure's view that signs gain meaning through relational contrasts rather than by mirroring external realities, such representations inadvertently reproduce a hierarchical Self/Other distinction. In this sense, linguistic and historical research when conducted without critical awareness can unintentionally contribute to processes of othering and identity-based polarization.

In line with this perspective, it can be argued that academic and scientific structures also play a significant role in perpetuating these colonial patterns. Linguists, whether individually or collectively, may contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of colonial structures through the production of scholarly works such as articles and research studies. Accordingly, if a linguist aims to genuinely advance efforts to decolonize the field, they should avoid approaching communities merely as a means to collect linguistic data for personal gain (Montoya, 2024). Decolonizing linguistics requires transformations within academic power structures; as Riestenberget al. (2024) emphasize, without changes to institutional frameworks such as educational and research systems, escaping the colonial legacy is unlikely (Lydner, 2024).

In this context, historical discourse analysis allows us to reveal these power relations and the ideological reproduction occurring at various linguistic and discursive levels. Within the historical-discursive approach, this issue is examined through a referential lens, focusing on how researchers invoke texts, data, and historical examples to establish the credibility and legitimacy of their findings. From a propositional perspective, researchers reproduce identity and cultural meanings by constructing statements about "the Other" or specific ethnic groups. Furthermore, at the argumentative level, one can observe how identity and cultural dichotomies serve as the logical basis for legitimizing hierarchies of power and cultural superiority.

As previously noted, the evolution of the keyword *Gorani* and its opposition to *Kurd* originates from Minorsky's works, and there is no historical evidence of such a dichotomy prior to him. For instance, Minorsky (1877–1966) sought to establish a connection between the narrative of the battle between Badr ibn Hasanwayh al-Kurdi and Husayn ibn Mas'ud al-Kurdi, as recorded in *Mujmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qisas* and Ibn al-Athir's chronicle, by equating the term *Goranān* in the *Mujmal* with the tribal name *Jawzaqan* in Ibn al-Athir's text arguing that the correct form was *Jurqān* and thus suggested that the designation *Goranān* referred to a specific tribe that once inhabited Kermashan region (see Anonymous, 1939: 398–402; Ibn al-Athīr, 1863, vol. 9: 173; Minorsky, 1943: 82–

83). The term *Goraniyya/Goraniyyeh* was also used with a religious connotation to refer to adherents of an ancient faith. This religious connotation can be observed in Sharaf Khan Bidlisi's (*Sharafnama*, 949–1012 AH) account of the rulers of the Kalhuri emirate: "Among the rulers of Kalhuri, divided into three branches [...], their tribe is called *Goran*" (Bidlisi, n.d., 1005 AH: 108b–109a).

Even earlier, Shihab al-Din al- 'Umari referred to the inhabitants of the territories under the Kalhuri rulers as *Goraniyya*: "Between the mountains of Hamadan and Sharazur lives a tribe of Kurds known as *Goraniyya* [...], whose main centers are Maydasht and Daratang" (al-'Umari, 2010: 198). It is evident that the term *Goran*, in its religious sense, was used to denote adherents of the Yarsan or Ahl-e Haqq faith: "The Ahl-e Haqq are also called *Goran*" (Mashkur, 1989: 78).

Furthermore, Sharaf Khan employed the term *Goran* geographically to denote the territory ruled by the Kalhuri emirate when describing the three Kurdish tribes Siyah Mansur, Chegini, and Zanganeh that had migrated from Kurdistan and settled within the Safavid domain: "The principal Kurdish groups of Iran are three: Siyah Mansur, Chegini, and Zanganeh. It is well known and widely repeated that they were originally three brothers who left Luristan or, according to another account, *Goran* and *Ardalan* to serve the Iranian kings and subsequently rose to prominence and attained positions of emirate" (Bidlisi, n.d., 1005 AH: 110b).

Given the association of this Kurdish subgroup with the Kermashan region and the Yarsan faith, the term *Goran* came to designate that portion of the Kurdish population that had left Kurdistan and lived under Safavid rule: "Regarding the Kurdish rulers of Iran, who are known as *Goran*, they are divided into four branches: Siyah Mansur, Chegini, Zanganeh, and Pazuki" (Bidlisi, n.d., 1005 AH: 4a). Likewise, in his reference to the four groups—*Kurmaj*, *Kalhur*, *Lor*, and *Goran* (ibid., 5a) the fourth group, *Goran*, comprises those Kurds who had moved beyond Kurdistan and into territories under Safavid control. When the Yarsan faith receded within the Kalhur dominion and parts of the population converted to Shi'ism, some inhabitants of the region remained adherents to Yarsanism. Evidence suggests that many of them became collectively known under the religious label *Goran*. Today, most Yarsan followers in this region live in a community called the "Goran tribe," located in the Dalahu district, where most of the Yarsan shrines are situated. The use of the term *Goran* among this group of Kurds is not tribal in origin but rather religious, directly linked to the Yarsan faith: "The only common bond uniting the *Goran* tribes of Kerend is their shared belief in the Ahl-e Haqq religion" (Soltani, 2002: 422).

In the modern period, Rich (1787–1821), who visited the Baban region in 1820, introduced *Goran* as a term applied to non-tribal peasants: "Among the Bulbas, there are people who are dependents or peasants without the right to express opinions in affairs, belonging to the lowest social stratum. These people, scattered throughout Kurdistan, belong to no tribe or clan. The tribal members call them *klawspri* ('white cap') and also *Goran*" (Rich, 1836: 152). Rich considered Kurdish society consisting of two distinct groups: the tribal (nomadic) and the peasant (*Goran*), citing Mahmud Pasha Baban: "The

Goran can be easily distinguished by their appearance and Kurdish dialect” (ibid.: 80–81). Although the accuracy of this quotation is uncertain, prior to entering Sanandaj, Rich had already used the term *Goran*, referring to the people of Sanandaj, and upon visiting the palace of Amanullah Khan, he noted: “The men I met here were all of the Goran group; they spoke Gorani Kurdish among themselves and Persian with me” (ibid.: 201). Following Rich, Oskar Mann (1867–1917), who conducted linguistic fieldwork in the region between 1901–1903 and 1906–1907, had some of his findings posthumously published in 1930 and 1932 by Karl Hadank (1882–1945). Mann was the first to group the linguistic varieties spoken in the areas such as Hawraman, Kanduleh, Biyunij, Ghavareh, Zardeh, Rizhab, and Bajelani, labeling them all as *Gorani* with reference to Rich’s report. However, he did not recognize that *Gorani* lacked an independent linguistic concept; this categorization was ideologically motivated and reflected subjective interpretations. Mann concluded that through linguistic analysis, he had identified the *Goran* mentioned in Rich’s report. In his 1902 report, he suggested that the Kanduleh dialect be adopted as the basis for *Gorani* studies (Hadank, 1930: 49). Subsequent reports continued to designate the local population as *Goran*, and in the 1906–1907 report, he discussed cultural similarities between the Zaza tribe and the *Goran* (ibid.: 18). In his 1908 article, he reaffirmed their local identity (Mann, 1908: 839), yet in his 1909 book, he reclassified both *Zazai* and *Gorani* as non-Kurdish, associating them with central Iranian dialects (Mann, 1909: XXIII). This revision indicated that *Goran* no longer referred to displaced locals but to migrants settled in Kurdistan.

Mann, perceiving himself as an explorer akin to Christopher Columbus, believed he had discovered isolated linguistic islands corresponding to marginalized populations. His findings, however, conflicted with Rich’s reports on the widespread presence of *Goran* in the plains of Sharazur and Sanandaj (Rich, 1836: 177). To reconcile this discrepancy, Mann relocated the *Goran* settlements from the plains to mountainous areas, without addressing the differences between his findings and Rich’s. Subsequently, most scholars, without sufficient evidence, adopted Mann’s perspective as a continuation of Rich’s report, asserting that most inhabitants of the Sharazur and Sanandaj plains had quickly shifted to a Kurdish dialect, while only residents of remote areas remained unaffected.

In the second half of 1902, Mann resided in Kermanshah at the house of Hyacinth Rabino (1877–1950), collaborating with him (Rabino, 1903: 51; Hadank, 1930: 27), and was influenced by Rabino’s interpretations. In a 1903 publication, Mann reported that the *Goran* tribe in Kermanshah comprised four to five thousand households, half sedentary and half nomadic (ibid.: 51). This figure was corroborated by George Curzon (1859–1925), who likewise reported a population of five thousand households in Kermanshah, evenly divided between sedentary and nomadic segments (Curzon, 1892, vol. 1: 557).

Rabino equated this tribe with the *Goran* identified by Mann and Rich; however, since his interpretation did not align with the equation *Goran* = *peasant/sedentary*, and given the heterogeneity of the local population, he classified the nomadic portion as a “non-element.” He noted: “Rawlinson writes that after Sultan Murad IV, the Kalhur tribe, expelled from Daratang and Darneh, adopted the name *Goran*, previously applied to

sedentary farmers in contrast to nomads. [...] Mann’s detailed research indicates that sedentary people originally inhabited this block (the Goran block), speaking a Tajik dialect. These Tajik speakers were displaced by the Kalhur and Zanganeh tribes, forming the new Goran group. Sedentary families retained their language, whereas nomads adopted the Kalhuri and Zanganeh Kurdish dialects” (Rabino, *ibid.*: 52).

As noted earlier, some Kurds in Laylakh, Saral, Kumasi, Bardarsh, and Sheikhān in Duhok, speaking Ardalan and Kalhuri dialects, are also referred to as *Goran*. However, orientalists did not address this group. They may be linked to the Kalhur ruling tribes—the three lineages described by Sharaf Khan as *Goran* or to non-tribal peasants. Overall, linguists visiting Kurdistan from the early nineteenth century tended to interpret such differences in light of preexisting assumptions about the existence of two distinct “races” in the region, equating language with ethnicity: Kurdish = Kurmanji, and other dialects were labeled non-Kurdish.

Ultimately, Mann’s equivalence of *Goran* was uncritically generalized by subsequent orientalists beyond the “Goran tribe,” applying it to all similar or identical mentions in historical texts a phenomenon termed “hasty generalization” within historical-discursive analysis. For example, Marquart (1966: 291), based on phonetic similarity between «Γουρανίωv» and *Guranioui* [yu'ra.ni.on] in Strabo, equated the two. Hadank (1930: 4) repeated this view, and Minorsky (1943: 75–84), a close associate of Mann, similarly equated the *Goran* identified by orientalists with *Goranān* in *Mujmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qisas* and the *Goran* mentioned by Sharaf Khan Bidlisi. However, Mann’s conceptualization of *Goran* bore no actual connection to the *Goran* described by Rich.

6. Conclusion

The historical and discursive trajectory of the keyword *Goran* demonstrates that over time, its reference has shifted from primarily religious and geographical connotations to an ideologically and politically constructed notion. Analysis of the data through a historical-critical discourse framework, employing referential, propositional, and argumentative strategies, revealed that the labeling of *Goran* in orientalist texts was not aimed at examining linguistic features, but rather emerged as a process of *othering* in contrast to “Kurd.” This phenomenon was first initiated by Minorsky, who, by juxtaposing inconsistent historical data, sought to represent *Goran* as a marker of an “independent people,” despite the fact that preexisting historical sources did not establish such a dichotomy between *Goran* and “Kurd.”

Moreover, an analysis of the works of Sharaf Khan Bidlisi, al-‘Umari, and later sources shows that initially, the term *Goran* primarily referred to a group of Yarsan adherents and to a geographical area in the Kermanshah region, rather than to a distinct ethnic or linguistic group. However, from the nineteenth century onward, orientalists such as Mann (1908, 1909), Marquart (1966), Minorsky (1943), and Rabino (1903), relying on formal similarities or phonetic correspondences and without detailed dialectal description, conflated historical and linguistic concepts. Through what can be termed “hasty generalization” across temporally disparate data, they applied the term *Goran* to the entire population of a region. In this process, equivalences such as “Kurdish = Kurmanji” and consequently “non-Kurmanji = non-Kurdish” emerged, thereby reproducing racialized ideologies and reflecting discursive practices of dominance in linguistics.

From a critical discourse analysis perspective, this trajectory exemplifies the reproduction of power and ideology through naming practices. Referential strategies demarcate in-group and out-group boundaries, while propositional strategies highlight positive features of “us” and negative traits of “them,” thereby consolidating identity-based oppositions. Descriptions such as “cowardly, thief, deceitful, brigand, robbers, weak” serve as instances of negative evaluation and propositional strategies, employed in the representation of the keyword *Goran*, signaling the biased and unscientific perspectives of the authors toward this keyword. Consequently, the keyword *Goran* does not reflect a historical reality but is rather a construct produced and elaborated within contemporary discourses and reproduced through discursive strategies. Accordingly, decolonizing linguistics requires a critical reexamination of the history of language scholarship and the elimination of ethnically prejudiced perspectives in the naming of linguistic groups. Ultimately, the notion of *Goran* as the “other Kurd” is a modern phenomenon; this process of *othering* is rooted less in historical precedent than in the political conflicts of the modern era.

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