

KURMANJI

SOME USEFUL PHRASES IN KURMANJI

Silav. Navê min Bawer e.

[si'lav. 'nave min ba'wære]

/sih-LAHV. NAHV-ey mihn bah-WEHR eh./

Hi. My name is Bawer.

Navê te çi ye?

['nave tæ 'tʃijɛ]

/NAHV-ey teh CHEE yeh?/

What is your name?

Çawan î? / Çawan in? (sing./plur.)

[tʃa'wani] or [tʃa'wanin]

/chah-WAHN ee?/ or /chah-WAHN in?/

How are you?

Ez ji te hez dikim.

[æz ʒi tæ hæz di'kim]

/azz zih teh HAZZ dih-kim/

I love you.

Pûşîya te pir xweş e!

[pu'ʃija tæ pir 'xwæʃɛ]

/poo-SHEE-yah teh pir KHWASH eh/

Your houndstooth scarf is really nice!

Avdestxane li kû derê ye?

[avdæst'xanæ li k'u 'dæreje]

/ahv-dast-KHAH-neh lih KOO DEH-rey yeh/

Where is the restroom?

Gelek spas!

['gælæk spas]

/geh-LEHK spahss/

Thanks very much!

Bi xatirê te. / Bi xatirê we. (sing./plur.)

[bi xa'tire tæ] or [bi xa'tire wæ]

/bih khah-TIHR-ey teh/ or /bih khah-TIHR-ey weh/

Good-bye.

Special thanks goes to Nicholas Kontovas
for his contributions to this pamphlet.

FIVE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD LEARN MORE ABOUT KURDS AND THEIR LANGUAGE

1. Kurmanji is the most widely-spoken Kurdish language, with approximately 15 million speakers worldwide. The largest population of Kurmanji speakers can be found in eastern and southeastern Turkey, a land often referred to by Kurdish nationalists as Northern Kurdistan.
2. A member of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, Kurmanji shares many structural features with other Indo-Iranian languages, such as verb-final word order and split ergativity.
3. Kurmanji uses a modified version of the Latin script, like English, so you don't have to learn a new writing system (or download a new font system!) in order to read and write (or type) in Kurmanji.
4. Kurds have had strained relationships with the various states that have ruled over them for the past millennium and a half.
5. Kurds have a rich history, oral literature, and culture, all of which are woefully understudied, and Kurds are enthusiastic about sharing their history and culture with others!

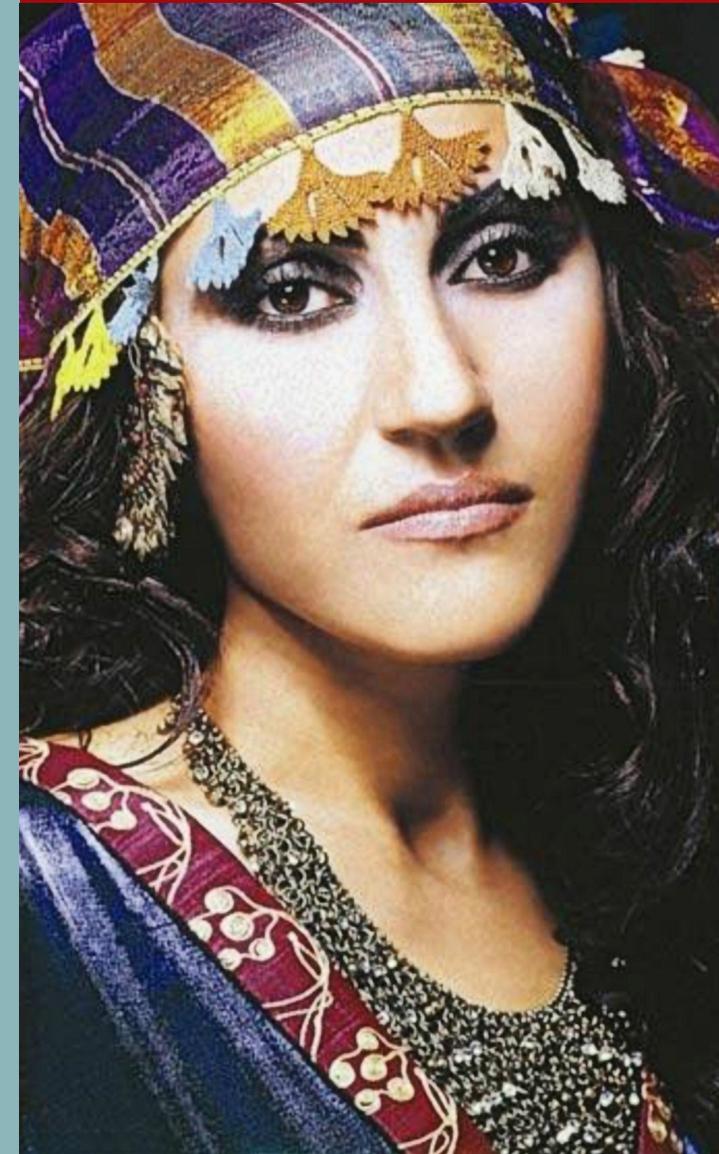
ABOUT US

The Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University develops materials for learning and teaching a wide variety of Central Asian languages.

For more information, go to celcar.indiana.edu.



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WHO ARE THE KURDISH PEOPLE AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?



Kurmanji (or Kurmançî, also referred to as Northern Kurdish) is the most widely spoken Kurdish language and the mother tongue of about 80% of all people who identify as Kurds. Most Kurmanji

speakers live in eastern and southeastern Turkey, a land often referred to by Kurdish nationalists as Northern Kurdistan. However, there are also large populations of Kurdish speakers who have migrated to cities in western Turkey; Istanbul now boasts the largest Kurdish population of any city in the world. Overall, there are approximately 10 million native speakers of Kurmanji throughout the Turkish Republic. Outside of Turkey, there are about 5 million more Kurmanji speakers, bringing the total number of speakers worldwide to about 15 million.

WHAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS KURMANJI?

Kurmanji is part of the Northwest sub-branch of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-European language family, though it has undergone considerable mixing with Southwest Iranian as well. The terms 'Kurd' and 'Kurdish' have been used by a number of groups throughout history. In general, they can refer to any of a number of groups indigenous to the area of Eastern Anatolia and Mesopotamia who speak Northwest Iranian languages, though not all such groups



use these terms to refer to themselves. Not all languages spoken by Kurds are mutually intelligible.

The major language closest to Kurmanji is Sorani (the official language of Northern Iraq), but other languages sometimes

referred to as 'Kurdish' include Kermanshahi, Laki, Gorani, and Zazaki. No two of these are mutually intelligible, but learning one will help to learn the others.

Kurmanji itself is composed of a number of dialects which are mutually intelligible. Most of these dialects are named after the place in which they are spoken, though the dialects of certain tribes or religious sects have their own special names, e.g. Shikakî. Written Kurmanji is based on the Botanî dialect, spoken in and around the modern Turkish city of Hakkâri. This was an important center of Kurdish culture during Ottoman times, and was the site of the composition of the first major works of Kurmanji literature, such as the Kurdish epic love story *Mem and Zîn* by the 17th century Kurdish intellectual Ehmedê Xanî.

Kurmanji shares a number of features with the majority of other Iranian languages, such as Subject-Object-Verb word order, and the use of both prepositions and postpositions -- sometimes in conjunction with one another on the same word. (These combinations are referred to as 'circumpositions'.) Kurmanji shares with Sorani an archaic system of split ergativity, in which the cases of subjects and objects of transitive verbs are reversed in the past tenses. However, unlike Sorani, Kurmanji also preserves a robust system of grammatical gender.



WHAT ALPHABET DO THE KURDS USE?

Standard Kurmanji is written in the Latin script in Turkey and in most of the Kurdish diaspora, however there are also standard Cyrillic and Arabic alphabets for Kurmanji used in the former Soviet states and the Middle East, respectively. All these standard alphabets were first codified and popularized by the Kurdish aristocrat and intellectual Celalet Bedirxan in the early half of the 20th century. However, there has been no standard conformity because the Kurds have never had a nation state of their own.

WHAT IS KURDISH CULTURE LIKE?

Kurmanji speakers have historically had close contacts with speakers of Aramaic, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, and more recently Turkish. Their culture shares aspects with all of these, but is especially close to those of other Iranian speaking groups.



Most Kurmanji speakers now practice Sunni Islam, though there are sizable Alevî, Christian, and Jewish minorities. There are also some Kurmanji speakers who profess the Yezîdî faith, a syncretic religion particular to Kurds. Because of centuries of persecution, its practitioners tend to be very secretive; however, according to the few existing accounts, it centers on the worship of angels and resembles many of the other religions -- old and new -- which have passed through Kurdistan.

Throughout history, Kurds have played a crucial role in the formation of various Armenian, Byzantine, Persian, and Turkish states and empires. Kurds commemorate their history with a rich oral storytelling tradition. Through the most popular style of epic recitation -- called *dengbêj* -- Kurds have passed down the stories of their ancestors, like the Kurdish hero Saladin who founded the great Ayyubid dynasty.

Kurds espouse a strong sense of community, expressed in their communal celebration of important traditional and religious festivals. Among the most important aspects of Kurdish celebratory culture is the *gowende* -- a large dance performed in a circle, usually led by an important member of the community.

