

# *The Kurdish Language*

A close look at; cultural differences, educational history, writing system, linguistic features, and English language acquisition.

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# The Kurdish People

*The Kurds are a distinct group of people who have inhabited the Middle East for as long as there have been written records.*

- Kurds are the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest ethnic group in Iraq and Turkey.
- Kurds are located in: Turkey, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Georgia, Lebanon, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Germany, as well as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan .
- Most Kurds used to live in small villages in remote mountain regions.
- There has been a shift to living in urban centers in recent decades after political turmoil and war led to the displacement of Kurds from their rural villages.



# Kurdish Education

- Children are only taught in Turkish; their non-native language, when they start school at age 7.
- Kurdish families have very little control over their children's education.
- Many Kurdish children resist going to school due to the discriminatory and inequitable learning environment.
- Boys and girls are equally represented in schools, proportionate to their regional population.
- Many children are unable to attend school due to dangerous living conditions



# Classification of Kurdish Language

## Classification

- Belongs to the Western-Iranian group of Indo-European Languages
- Inflected language with both gender and number

## Countries Spoken

- Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey and the Caucasus, and by sizable communities elsewhere.

## Two Main Dialects

- Kurmanji (North)  
&
- Sorani (South)

*Sorani Kurdish is spoken in West Iran and most of Iraqi Kurdistan.*



# Common Kurdish Words

## *Lexicon*

<u><i>English</i></u>	<u><i>Kurdish</i></u>
bread	nan
you	tu
friend	heval
Child/childlike	zaro/zarok

# Kurdish Phonology

## Kurdish Vowels

contrast in quality, they often carry a secondary length distinction that does not affect syllabic weight. This distinction appears in the writing systems developed for Kurdish.

## Three Short Vowels

/i/ = bii

/i/ = beet

/e/ = beet & baat

## Consonants

/x/= German ach

/gh/= like /x/ vibration

/r/ = like spanish /r/

/q/ = /k/ pronounced very far back of mouth



# Kurdish Grammatical Structure & Syntax

*Kurdish grammatical structure is very similar to English*

Kurdish word order = subject – verb- object

I had arrived home when the game started.

Ez hatibum malé gave lístiké destpékir.

*S p.p.verb O when the game started.*





# Kurdish Writing System

*The Kurdish language uses three writing systems*

## In Iran and Iraq

- *Use of Arabic and Latin Alphabet*

## Turkey, Syria & Armenia

- *Use of the Latin Alphabet*

## Former USSR

- *Modified Cyrillic Alphabet*

<sup>16</sup> (چونکه خردا بهم جزره جیهانی  
خۆ شهو یست تهنانهت تاقه رۆلهی خۆی پیشکەش  
کرد، ههتا ههموو نهوانهی باوهری بی ده کهن لهناو  
نه چن، به لکو ژبانی ههتا هتایی به دهست بهین.<sup>17</sup>



# The Arabic-based Kurdish Alphabet

*commonly used by all Kurds converted to Islam*

- This alphabet is written from **right to left** and does not make a distinction between capital and lower-case letters.
- The Kurdish version contains extra letters to represent Kurdish sounds that do not exist in Arabic.

IPA	Latin1	Latin2	Cyrllic	Final	Medial	Initial	Isolated	IPA	Latin1	Latin2	Cyrllic	Final	Medial	Initial	Isolated
[o]	Oo	Oo	Оо	و	-	و	و	[e]	Aa	Aa	Аа	ا	ا	ا	-
[p]	Pp	Pp	Пп	پ	پ	پ	پ	[b]	Bb	Bb	Бб	ب	ب	ب	ب
[q]	Qq	Qq	Qq	ق	ق	ق	ق	[ʎ]	Cc	Çç	Чч	چ	چ	چ	چ
[r]	Rr	Rr	Pp	ر	-	-	ر	[d]	Dd	Dd	Дд	د	-	-	د
[r]	rr		P'p'	ر	-	-	ر	[e]	Ee	Ee	Ээ	ه	-	-	ه
[s]	Ss	Ss	Cc	س	س	س	س	[e]	Éé	Êê	Ее	ئ	ئ	ئ	ئ
[ʃ]	Shsh	Şş	Шш	ش	ش	ش	ش	[f]	Ff	Ff	Фф	ف	ف	ف	ف
[t]	Tt	Tt	Tт	ت	ت	ت	ت	[g]	Gg	Gg	Гг	گ	گ	گ	گ
[u]	Uu	Uu	Öö	و	-	و	و	[h]	Hh	Hh	hh	-	ه	-	ه
[y]	Úú	Ûû	Уу	وو	-	وو	وو	[ɪ]	Ii	Ii	Ъъ				نانوسری
[v]	Vv	Vv	Вв	ف	ف	ف	ف	[i]	Íí	Îî	Ии	ی	ی	ی	ی
[w]	Ww	Ww	Ww	و	-	و	و	[ɟ]	Jj	Сс	Щш	ج	ج	ج	ج
[x]	Xx	Xx	Xx	خ	خ	خ	خ	[ʒ]	Jhj	Jj	Жж	ژ	-	-	ژ
[j]	Yy	Yy	Йй	ی	ی	ی	ی	[k]	Kk	Kk	Кк	ک	ک	ک	ک
[z]	Zz	Zz	Зз	ز	-	-	ز	[l]	Ll	Ll	Лл	ل	ل	ل	ل
[h]	-	-	h'h'	ح	ح	ح	ح	[t]	ll	-	-	ل	ل	ل	ل
[ʕ]	-	-	ʕ'ʕ'	ع	ع	ع	ع	[m]	Mm	Mm	Мм	م	م	م	م
[ɣ]	-	-	Г'г'	غ	غ	غ	غ	[n]	Nn	Nn	Нн	ن	ن	ن	ن

# Language Learning Difficulties

## No access to a formal education during Primary Years

- *In northern Iraq, public education has been intermittently available in Kurdish - mostly at the primary level.*
- *Many young children, particularly girls have not developed their L1 reading or writing skills. This will make the transfer to L2 a more difficult process.*



# Kurdish Communication Styles

## Formalities

- Kurds tend to be more formal than Americans although in addressing others, many names are shortened to show informality.

ex. Michael to Micho

Stephanie to Stéphé

## Opinions of Kurds

- Kurds are forthright in voicing their opinions and can be perceived as aggressive or rude b

## Protocols

- Kurds are strongly tied to titles and observe strict protocol.
- They are wary of laws, regulations and authority and may attempt to get around regulations that do not appear to be in their immediate best interests.
- In order to be polite, they refuse an offer of food two or three times, however hungry they might be.



# Kurdish Communication Styles cont..

## Greetings

- Kurdish men will expect to be greeted first, prior to acknowledging a spouse/wife.
- Many Kurdish families are matriarchal.
- Many families with renowned heritage are often known by the name of the female head of the family.

## Friendly Gestures

- Kurdish men tend to misinterpret Americans' friendly and casual manners of saying "hello" through simple pats on a back as intrusive and rude.
- Kurdish men also tend to misinterpret friendly gestures from American woman as gestures of sexual interest.
- ***American women should gesture only with a nod and simple smile.***

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