

**A Phonological Comparison of Khorasan and Northern Kurmanji<sup>1</sup>**

Horasan ve Kuzey Kurmancî'nin Fonolojik (Sesbilimsel) Bir Karşılaştırması  
Berawirdeka Dengnasî di Navbera Kurmancîya Xorasanê û Kurmancîya Bakurî da

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Translation from Kurdish: Deniz ERBİLGIN<sup>3</sup>

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to compare the Kurmanji of Khorasan with standard north Kurdish (standard Kurmanji). The dialect of Khorasani Kurdish is north Kurdish (Kurmanji). The Kurds of Khorasan live mainly in the two districts, Northern and Razavi Khorasan. The total number of the Khorasani Kurds is estimated to be almost one million. This region is characterised by a large ethnic diversity; Kurds, Baluches, Faris, Lors, Turks, Turkmens, etc., though most of them have appeared here as a result of migration from other areas. The mixture of population in the region had some effect on Kurdish dialect that is spoken in that area. This study will focus on the phonological changes of kurmanji dialect of the Khorasani Kurdish

**Keywords:** Phonology, Kurdish language, North Kurdish (Kurmanji), Khorasani Kurmanji

**Kurte**

Ev xebat dixwaze kurmancîya Xorasanê, bi kurmancîya standard ya bakurî ve bide ber hev û analîz bike. Kurdên Xorasanê bi devoka kurmancîya bakurî diaxivin. Kurdên wê herêmê li du parêzgehên Xorasanê Bakurî û Xorasanê Rezewî niştêcih bûne. Li gor texmînên nefermî nifûsa kurdên wê herêmê ji milyonek kesî zêdetir e. Li vê herêmê gelek etnîk wekî kurd, tat, faris, tirk, lor, tirkman û belûç dijîn. Wisa xuya ye ku pîranîya van etnîkan ji deverên din hatine û li Xorasanê bi cih bûne. Pîrrengîya etnîkî di herêmê da hin bandor li ser zimanê kurdî danîne. Ev xebat dê nîşan bide bê ka guherînên dengnasîyê bi çi rengî di kurmancîya Xorasanê da pêk hatine.

**Kilfêbêje:** Dengnasî, zimanê kurdî, kurdîya kurmancî, kurmancîya Xorasanê

**Özet**

Bu çalışmanın amacı Horasan Kurmancisini standart Kuzey Kürtçesi (standart Kurmancî) ile karşılaştırmaktır. Horasan Kürtçesinin lehçesi Kuzey Kürtçesidir (Kurmancî). Horasan Kürtleri esas olarak Kuzey ve Razavi Horasan olmak üzere iki bölgede yaşıyor. Horasan Kürtlerinin toplam sayısının neredeyse bir milyon olduğu tahmin edilebilir. Bu bölge büyük bir etnik çeşitliliğe sahiptir; Kürtler, Beluciler, Fariler, Lors, Türkler, Türkmenler vs. olmasına rağmen çoğu başka bölgelerden göç sonucu burada ortaya çıkmıştır. Bölgedeki nüfus karışımının o bölgede konuşulan Kürtçe lehçesine de etkisi olmuştur. Bu çalışmada Horasan Kürtçesinin kurmancî lehçesindeki fonolojik değişimler üzerinde durulacaktır.

<sup>1</sup> Jafarzadeh, M. (2020). Berawirdeka dengnasî di navbera kurmancîya Xorasanê û kurmancîya bakurî da. Folklor û Ziman, 1(2),123-134.

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ses Bilgisi, Kürt Dili, Kuzey Kürtçesi (Kurmanci), Horasan Kurmancisi

## Introduction<sup>4</sup>

There is a region in northeastern Iran on the border of Iran and Turkmenistan called Khorasan. Some Kurds, whose dialect is Northern Kurdish, live there.

The population of Khorasan Kurds is more than one million and they are located on the border of Iran and Turkmenistan. In his research, Ali Madih indicates the number of Kurdish villages in the Khorasan region as 696 villages (2007, p. 1) and of course a large number of Kurds live in the cities of Mashhad, Qoçan, Çinaran, Farûc, Şirwan, Bujnord, Esferayên, Deregez, Kelatê Nadir, Laîn, Mane-Similqan and Ashkhane (Shekofteh, 2008).

Many other ethnic groups live in the geography of Khorasan such as Baluch, Lor, Turkman, Azeri, Arab, Persian, and Tat (Oberling, 2008). Of course, this multilingualism and multiculturalism is more evident in the cities of that region. The Kurdish villages in the Khorasan region are almost monogamous, that is, only Kurds live in most of the Kurdish villages. According to the science of linguistics, language contact can cause language changes, and languages can be influenced by each other. They can borrow words from each other and phonetic changes can even be seen in the nature of the languages in contact in the long term (Muriel Norde, Bob da Jonge, 2010, p. 13). This change can be seen in different ways, in some regions, this change occurs grammatical (rhetoric and syntax) and in some places it is seen more in terms of lexicology, but what one can see is more or less the same in all regions. This process is a manifestation of phonetic (phonology) change. According to the field work in the Khorasan region, people experience various types of changes.

## 1. Phonology

Phonology, which consists of two words, phoneme (sound unit) and logy (science), forms the grammar of sounds (hb. p. 319). The phoneme is an important element in the word and it is a set of phones that can distinguish one word from another in a particular language.

### 1.1. Phoneme

Phoneme is the basic unit of sound in phonetics where each phoneme represents a sound (Haden&Elgin, 1973, p. 21). The number of phonemes in the Kurdish language is high, but only 31 letters are included in the Kurdish alphabet of Bedirxani, for some aspirated and unaspirated sounds only one letter is used, even if these two sounds are different from each other or they are two phonemes and can change the meaning of the word. See the examples below:

Kar: (Job)

Kar: (Little goat)

In the examples above, the /k/ sound is seen as a phoneme, and even though the writing of two words is the same, it can be seen that the meaning of the words has been changed by changing the phonemes.

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<sup>4</sup> These abbreviations were added to the article by the translator: KX: Khorasan Kurmanji KB: Northern Kurmanji. Additionally, the English equivalents of the Kurmanji examples were added to the article by the translator.

## 1.2. Allophone

An allophone is known as a variant of a phoneme and the meaning of words does not change by changing allophones. For example, a sound like /a/ in a word like "rain" can be heard in different ways according to local dialects, its basic form is the same as /a/ but these different variations related to accents are known as allophones (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2011, p. 232)

For example, the /u/ sound can be heard in several ways in Kurdish dialects, that is, there are several allophones of the /u/ sound:

- [û] as far [dûr] in most Kurdish dialects
- [y] as Turkish /ü/, in Colemêrg accent, as far [dyr/dür]
- [uî/wî] in some dialects, as far [dwîr]
- [î] in a double accent as far [dîr]

The above terms are used a lot in the phonetics department and are necessary to understand all types of sounds and their variations. When one focuses on phonics and the purpose of phonics, the shortcomings of the alphabet become more apparent. For example, the Bedirxani Kurdish alphabet does not contain all the Kurmanji Kurdish sounds. Bedirxani saw some phonemes close to each other as a letter and only one letter of the alphabet is dedicated to them. Of course, there is a standard alphabet called IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) in the world for linguistics and international writing. But since this work is in the Kurdish language and the Bedirxani alphabet is almost known among Kurmanj people, this alphabet has been used here for the transcription of sounds and examples.

All language sounds fall into two categories: vowels and consonants.

## 1.3. Consonant

Vowels are sounds that are difficult to pronounce. That is, they are not easy to pronounce. Vowels are needed to pronounce these sounds.

For example, the /b/ sound itself is consonant, if one wants to pronounce that sound, it needs a vowel, that is, a vowel must be placed in front of that sound so that one can pronounce that sound.

## 2. Phonology of Khorasan Kurdish

The Kurdish Latin alphabet consists of 31 letters, 8 of which are vowels and 23 are consonants (Bedirxan, 2002, p. 12). This alphabet was spread through Hawar<sup>5</sup>. Although it does not contain all the sounds of Kurmanji Kurdish, there is still a consensus on it (Shojai, 2000). In the Khorasan region, although the official alphabet of Iran is Farsi with Arabic characters, it is unofficial.

Kurdish Latin alphabet is also used. In the region of Khorasan, three types of alphabets have been used to write Kurmanji; Persian alphabet, Sorani Kurdish alphabet, Latin Kurdish alphabet of Celadet Bedirxan. (Arabic-Sorani and Latin-Kurmanji)<sup>6</sup> (Jafarzadeh, 2017). Some books were also printed in both alphabets

<sup>5</sup> Hawar magazine was published from 1932 to 1957.

<sup>6</sup> For example, some examples of these books are: Hasen Roshan, Ciksay, Mashhad, Nashr-i Shamlu, 2011; Yehya Alewiferd, Shelpe and Sev, Qom: Emu Alevi, 2012; Faramerz Rostemi, Yeksed Sekhishti-i Kurmanci,

Here the voice changes in the Khorasan area will be determined and in general these changes will be clarified with examples, of course here the voice changes are divided into two categories: consonants and vowels.

### 1.1. Exchange of vowels

According to the alphabet that Mir Celadet Bedirkhan used for Kurdish in Hawar magazine, there are some sounds that are not included in the alphabet. The rate of use of those sounds is low, but they are still heard in speech. These sounds are defined in linguistics as unaspirated sounds (Hayes, 2009, p. 125). The four sounds /k/, /t/, /p/, /ç/ in the Bedirkhani alphabet are used equally for unaspirated and aspirated sounds, although these sounds are phonemes and can change the meaning of words<sup>7</sup> (Haig, 2004, p. 12). These four sounds mentioned above are also present in Khorasan Kurdish, and the meaning of the words changes according to the change of those phonemes.

Four interspersed phonemes

- a. kar: (work) (aspirated), kar: karik (little goat) (unaspirated)
- b. ta: (disease) (aspirated), ta: bandik (thread) (unaspirated)
- c. par: (part) (aspirated), par: sala borî (last year) (unaspirated)
- d. çeng: (paw) (aspirated), çeng: bask (wing) (unaspirated)

In the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is used in linguistics, for aspirated sounds [h], the small letter "h" is placed on the aspirated letter. In this way, they say for work: [k<sup>h</sup>ar], for money they say: [p<sup>h</sup>ar], for money they say: [ç<sup>h</sup>eng], for loot they say: [t<sup>h</sup>alan]. Thackston used the IPA alphabet to distinguish aspirated and unaspirated sounds as follows (Thackston, 2006, p. 4):

Added [h] to syllables for aspirated sounds

Added [ç] on syllables for unaspirated sounds.

In the examples (1 a, b, c, d) above, it can be seen that the aspirated and unaspirated sounds are two different phonemes, they are interchangeable, and with their change, the meaning of the words has also changed. This can be seen in the dialect of Khorasan. Of course, in this respect, the dialect of Khorasan and the northern Kurmanji are the same.

Sound change itself is a part of historical linguistics. When one wants to talk about voice changes, it is necessary to look at voice changes diachronically and comparatively (Hayes, hb, p. 125).

Therefore, more data is needed and texts from different periods. Of course, an attempt has been made here to present the analysis of the language of the Khorasan region in a descriptive manner.

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Suxenguster, Mashhad, 1384; Umîd Demirhanî, Features of the Kurdish language of Khorasan, Zend magazine h. 20, 2013, p. 68-74. In addition, Ergin Opengin also mentions these sounds in his article and says that, due to the lack of functional code of some phonemes, it is very common that those phonemes are not shown in the alphabet. Under. Ergin Opengin, Kurmanci spelling questions: a critical review of Mustefa Aydogan's spelling guide, Derwaze, Vol 1. Istanbul, 2017. p. 187.

<sup>7</sup> In addition, Ergin Opengin also mentions these sounds in his article and says that, due to the lack of functional code of some phonemes, it is very common that those phonemes are not shown in the alphabet. Look at : Ergin Opengin, Kurmanci spelling questions: A critical review of Mustefa Aydogan's spelling guide, Derwaze, Vol 1. Istanbul, 2017. p. 187.

3. Changing the sounds of /v/ and /d/<sup>8</sup>.

a. *Lawî paşê verdekevi ser qesrê xwe.* (KX<sup>9</sup>) → Lawê padişêh **derdikeve** ser qesrê xwe. (KB<sup>6</sup>) (The pasha's son goes to his palace) (KX<sup>5</sup>) → (The king's son goes to his palace) (KB<sup>10</sup>)

b. Verxistin(KX) → Derxistin (Take off) (KB)

A. In the Kurmanji of Khorasan, the sounds of /b/ are often changed to /w/ and /y/ in dashes.

a. *Fikrek **w**e/ye halê me bikin* (KX). (Give us an idea) Fikrekê **bi** halê me bikin. (KB) (Give us a thought)

b. *Ye xewn dewîni ku ta heft salan paşati le henî...* (KX) (He dreamed that he was in the past for seven years...)

Di xewna xwe da dibîne ku heta heft salan paşatî li enî ... (KB) (He saw in his dream that he was in the past for seven years...)

c. *Hinek **w**e/ye xwe dexwinî.* (KX)

Em hinekî **bi** xwe dixwin. (KB) (We are eating a little by ourselves)

(4) The /h/ sound at the beginning of some words has remained the same:

a. Henîşk (KX) → Enîşk (KB) (Elbow)

b. Henî (KX) → Enî (KB) (Forehead)

c. Hanîn (KX) → Anîn (KB) (To bring)

d. Havîtin (KX) → Avêtin (KB) (To throw away)

e. Herd (KX) → Erd (KB) (Earth)

(5) The /d/ sound becomes /t/ in some words:

a. Dînim (KB) → tînim (KX) (I bring.)

b. diavêjim (KB) → tavêjim (KX) (I throw away.)

c. dihêm (KB) → têm (KX) (I am coming.)

d. dixim (KB) → têxim (KX) (I am putting.)

(6) The change of /b/ to /w/ in the dialect of northern Kurmanji is also present as in Meletî, Samsur, Maresh. In Khorasan Kurdish, it is like this:

a. Ji karê xwe kêfxweş **bû**. (KB) (He was happy with his work.)

b. Le karê xe kêfxaş **wû**. (Malatya)

c. Je karê xwe xoşhal **wû** (KX)

<sup>8</sup> Malmîsanij, in his book called "Kürtçede ses değışimi", talks about the change of sounds in Kurdish dialects and also shows the changes within a dialect and their changes. On page 30 of the same book, he gives some examples of the change of /d/ and /b/ sounds between Kurmanji and Zazaki. On page 52 of the same work, another change between Kurmanji and Zazaki shows that the /v/ and /b/ sounds have changed.

Kurmanji: Derî (The door). Zazaki: Ber.

Kurmanji: Bêje: (Say) Zazaki: Vaje.

Now let's pay attention to the changes in sounds, how the change between d and v has been made. Something like this can be assumed that the first sound /d/ became /b/ at another stage, as in (8a) the sound /b/ was transferred to v.

Der→ber→ver, (derketin→verketin), (To get out)

Look. M. Malmisanij, Kürtçede Ses Değışimi, Vate, Istanbul 2013. p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Khorsan kurmanji

<sup>10</sup> Northern kurmanji

d. xerîw (KX) → xerîb / (KB) (Foreigner)

d. xerew (KX) → xerab / (KB) (Bad)

(7) The presence of a sound between /x/ and /q/ so that in some words it seems that this sound is closer to the sound of /x/.

a. *Aşiqî/ê keçikê wûye.* (KX) (He fell in love with the girl)

b. *Aşiqî keçikê bûye.* (KB) (He fell in love with the girl)

c. *wexm* (KX) → *weqf* (KB) (Foundation)

(8) Changing the sound of /b/ to /v/.

a. *Ez devêjim.* (KX) → *Ez dibêjim.* (KB) (I say)

(9) Changing the sound of /w/ and /v/.

a. *Pezê me wenda bûye.* (KB) → *Pezê me venda bûye.* (KX) (Our sheep is lost)

b. *vexm* → *foundation*

(10) Changing the sound of /d/ and /y/. Often the /d/ sound in

The present tense of verbs is changed to /y/.

a. *yekevi* → *dikeve* (he/she/it falls)

b. *yewîni* → *dibîne* (he/she/it sees)

A part of these examples can also be found in a story from the region as follows:

“... yekevi (dikeve) yewîni (dibîne) baxek e baxek e ye bin zemînê wa ku hûşê yêkê tere ku tikevî vî baxa, va tere le

penêk xwe veyeşeri (vedişere) yewîni (dibîne) ku keçikek kitawek le wer e yexwîni (dixwîne) ye vî, yêk je der da kete

orta vî baxa ningî xwe yekullê...”<sup>11</sup>

These considered examples are not always correct, often the /d/ sound remains the same and no change occurs.

a. Example: *Ez kar dekim.* (KX) (I am working)

In this example, because the last syllable of the word /kar/, /r/ is a consonant, after that /d/ at the beginning of the tenth has remained the same. But the change of /d/ to /y/ often occurs as a contraction. For example, if the last letter of the word before a word is a vowel, then there is a chance of confusion and the sound of /d/ changes to /y/.

b. *Yekevi yewîni.* (KX) (The only one)

*Dikeve dibîne.* (KB) (He falls and sees)

c. *Kitawek le wer e yexwîni.* (KX)

*Kitabek li ber e dixwîne.* (KB) (He is reading a book in front of him)

d. *Radewi yekevi.* (KX)

*Radibe dikeve.* (KB)

As the examples and data show, the changes of the voters were evident to some extent, the only purpose here is to register and show the changes. These examples in which the change has been determined do not exist in a regular way, that is, these changes do not always occur in the same way in the conversation.

## 1.2. Vowels and vowel exchange

<sup>11</sup> Part of the Qere-Noker story, sub. Jafarzadeh, M. (2017). Analysis of the Kurdish language of the Khorasan region according to the elements of linguistics. Unpublished master's thesis.

There are 8 vowels in Kurdish, of which 3 are short and 5 are long (Bedirkhan, 2002, p. 12).

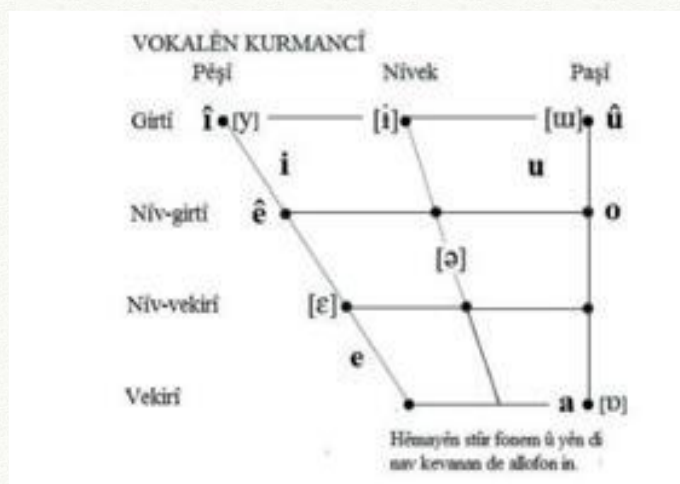


Table 3: Kurdish vowels and their place of pronunciation.<sup>12</sup>

As can be seen from the table, the vowels in Kurmanji are like this;

Vowels: a, e, ê, i, î, o, u, û

Short vowels: i, e, u

Long vowels: a, ê, î, o, û

There is also a change of vowels in Khorasan Kurdish, according to the northern Kurdish, there are some characteristics of Khorasan Kurdish that will be explained below.

(11) Changing the sound of /i/ and /e/ in prefixes:

a. a. Ez je êş têm (KX)

Ez ji êş têm (KB)

b. Le mala me mîvan hene. /There are guests in our house. (KX)

Li mala me mêvan hene. (KB)

In (11 a, b) it can be seen that in Khorasan Kurdish, da, le and je are used instead of "li" and "ji" in the prepositions of northern Kurdish.

(12) Changing the sound of /a/ and /e/ in suffixes.

a. *Va jî tê ye qêzê ra yeyêji* (KX) → *Ev jî dihê bi qêzê ra dibêje* (KB) (He also tells the girl)

b. *Xani ye ser te wa bikevi.* (KX) → *Xanî bi ser te da bikeve.* (KB) (The house will fall on you)

(13) Changing the final sound of verbs or nouns; /i/ and /î/ are changed.

a. *Hêstirê mi balgî şil kir.* (KX) → *Hêstirên min balgî şil kir* (KB) (My tears wet the pillow)

b. *Sa xwe ra xanî çêkirîye.* (KX) → *Ji bo xwe xanî çêkirîye* (KB) (He built a house for himself.)

<sup>12</sup> This table is taken from the notes of Behruz Shujai of Artuklu University. I thank Mr. Shujai once again for sharing these notes.

(14) Changing the sound of /e/ and /i/ at the end of verbs or nouns.

Of course, the sound /e/ at the end of verbs or nouns can be heard as /i/ or /ê/, which is closer to /i/.

- a. Verdekevi/ê yevini/ê → derdikeve dibine (He/She comes out.)
- b. *Yekevi* → dikeve (he/she/it falls.)
- c. Yewini → (He/she/it sees)
- d. *Veyeşêri* → vedişêre (He/she/it is hiding.)
- e. Yexwîni → dixwîne (He/she is reading.)

(15) Change of two sounds /he/ with /o/ in some words:

- a. *Dwîtin* (KX) → dotin (KB) (to milk)
- b. *Kwîr* (KX) → kor (KB) (blind)
- c. *Swîr* (KX) → sor (KB) (Red)
- d. Twij (KX) → toj (KB) (hot)
- e. Kwin (KX) → kon (KB) (tent)

(16) Changing the sound of /o/ and /î/ in some words.

- a. Rîvî → (intestine, fox)
- b. *Fîrtin* → firotin (Sale)
- c. Mîrî → morî (ant, bead)
- d. Kivi → kovî (wild)

According to the data of Deregeze region and by comparing those data in the northern Kurdish people, it can be seen that there is a change in the voters; According to examples, two notable changes are seen;

(17) The systematic change of the sound /i/ to /e/ in the prefix of the present tense:

- a. Dexwim (KX) → Dixwim (KB) (I am eating.)
- b. dekim/dekem (KX) → Dikim (KB) (I am doing.)
- c. Derevim (KX) → direvim (KB) (I am running away.)

(18) Changing the sound of /î/ and /ê/:

- a. Mîvan (KX) → mêvan (KB) (Guest)
- b. bîn (KX) → bêhn (KB) (Smell)
- c. bivil (KX) → bêvil (KB) (Nose)

As can be seen from the examples, the basic differences and changes in the Kurmanji phonetics of Khorasan are as shown above.

## CONCLUSION

From the examples, it seems that linguistic, lexical, term and phonological changes have occurred in the Kurmanji dialect of Khorasan. The passage of time and the distance from other Kurdish-speaking areas can have an impact on the language in any way, it seems that this has affected the Kurdish language of Khorasan. Although there have been some general changes in the syntax of Khorasan Kurdish, when people pay close attention to the language of that region, more phonetic changes can be seen. We have also seen in the work that these changes have taken place in both voters and non-voters, and some of them are systematic.



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