

SOME USEFUL PHRASES IN SORANI

سلاو.

[sław]
/SLAHW/
Hello.

ناویت چیه؟

['nawit 'tʃijɛ]
/NAH-weet CHEE-yeh?/
What is your name?

خوشحالت به ناسینت.

[xɔʃ'halt be 'nasint]
/khosh-HALT beh NAHS-cent/
Pleased to meet you.

چۆنی؟

['tʃɔni]
/CHO-nee/
How are you doing?

لیم) ببوره.

[(lejɪm) bi'buɾɛ]
/(LEYM) bih-BOO-reh?/
Excuse me./Sorry.

خلكى كوڤي؟

[xɪl'ki 'koji]
/khall-KEE KOY-ye?/
Where are you from?

سو پاس؟

[su'pas]
/soo-PAHS/
Thank you.

خواله گهل؟

['xʷa le'gɛl]
/KHWAH leh-GHELL/
Good-bye.

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

1. Sorani is spoken by approximately 10 million of the estimated 25 million Kurdish speakers. The largest population of Sorani speakers can be found in eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, northwestern Iran, and Northern Syria, a land often referred to by Kurdish nationalists as Southern Kurdistan.
2. A member of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, Sorani shares many structural features with other Indo-Iranian languages, such as SOV word order.
3. Sorani uses a modified version of the Arabic script, so those already familiar with Arabic or Persian can learn to read and write Sorani with ease.
4. The Kurds are a nation of about 25 million people, but have never in history had their own nation state.
5. History buffs will enjoy studying Sorani and learning more about Kurds because of their ancient history: they have been around since 700 AD!

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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SORANI



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WHO ARE THE KURDKISH PEOPLE AND WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

Sorani (also referred to as Central Kurdish) is the second most widely spoken Kurdish language (after Kurmanji) and one of the official languages of Iraqi Kurdistan. Most Sorani speakers live in Northern Iraq and neighboring

regions in Northwestern Iran. These regions together are sometimes referred to by Kurdish nationalists as Southern Kurdistan. There are also some speakers of Sorani living in diaspora communities in the United States and Europe.

WHAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS SORANI?

Sorani is part of the Northwest sub-branch of the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian group of the Indo-European language family. It has changed considerably under the influence of Gorani (the historically dominant Northwest Iranian language in the region), Persian (a Southwest Iranian language), and Arabic. 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 Sorani is Kurmanji (spoken across southeastern Turkey), 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.

Sorani 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. The standard variety of Sorani used in official documents in the Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq is based on the dialect of the city of Silêmanî (or Sulaymaniyah in Arabic). This was an important center of Kurdish culture during Ottoman times, when the Imperial government built a school in the city that served as a cultural conduit between the Sorani-speaking region and capital in Istanbul. Sorani does not have an extensive written history prior to the 1920s, Arabic, Persian, Ottoman Turkish, and to an extent Gorani (another local Kurdish language) having been more popular historical written mediums in the area.

Sorani 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'.) Unlike neighboring Kurmanji, Sorani has lost any semblance of grammatical gender. However, Sorani does preserve a strange system common to some older Iranian and other Indo-European languages wherein conjugation marking for the subject in the past tense of transitive verbs appears on the direct object instead of the verb. Furthermore, sometimes conjugations on intransitives in the past indicates an indirect object or beneficiary instead of the subject!

WHAT ALPHABET DO THE KURDS USE?

Standard Sorani is written in a form of the Arabic alphabet invented in the 1920's by Kurdish intellectual, activist, and religious scholar Sa'id Kaban Sedqi. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein (whose regime was often at odds with the Kurds) there has been an abundance of media produced using the Sorani Arabic alphabet. Since Sorani is now the only variety of Kurdish with official status in any major

political entity, it is swiftly becoming the most widely accessible written Kurdish language.

WHAT IS KURDISH CULTURE LIKE?

Sorani speakers have historically had close contacts with speakers of Arabic, Gorani, Syriac (Eastern Aramaic), Iraqi Turkmen/Azeri, and Persian. Their culture shares aspects with all of these, but is especially close to those of other Iranian speaking groups.

Most Sorani speakers now practice Sunni Islam, though there is a sizable Christian minority. There are also some Sorani 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 *govend* or *hilperkê* -- a large dance performed in a circle, usually led by an important member of the community.

