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glottothèque

languages of Anatolia, Caucasus, Iran, Mesopotamia

Kurdish

Unit 1: Introduction and selected issues

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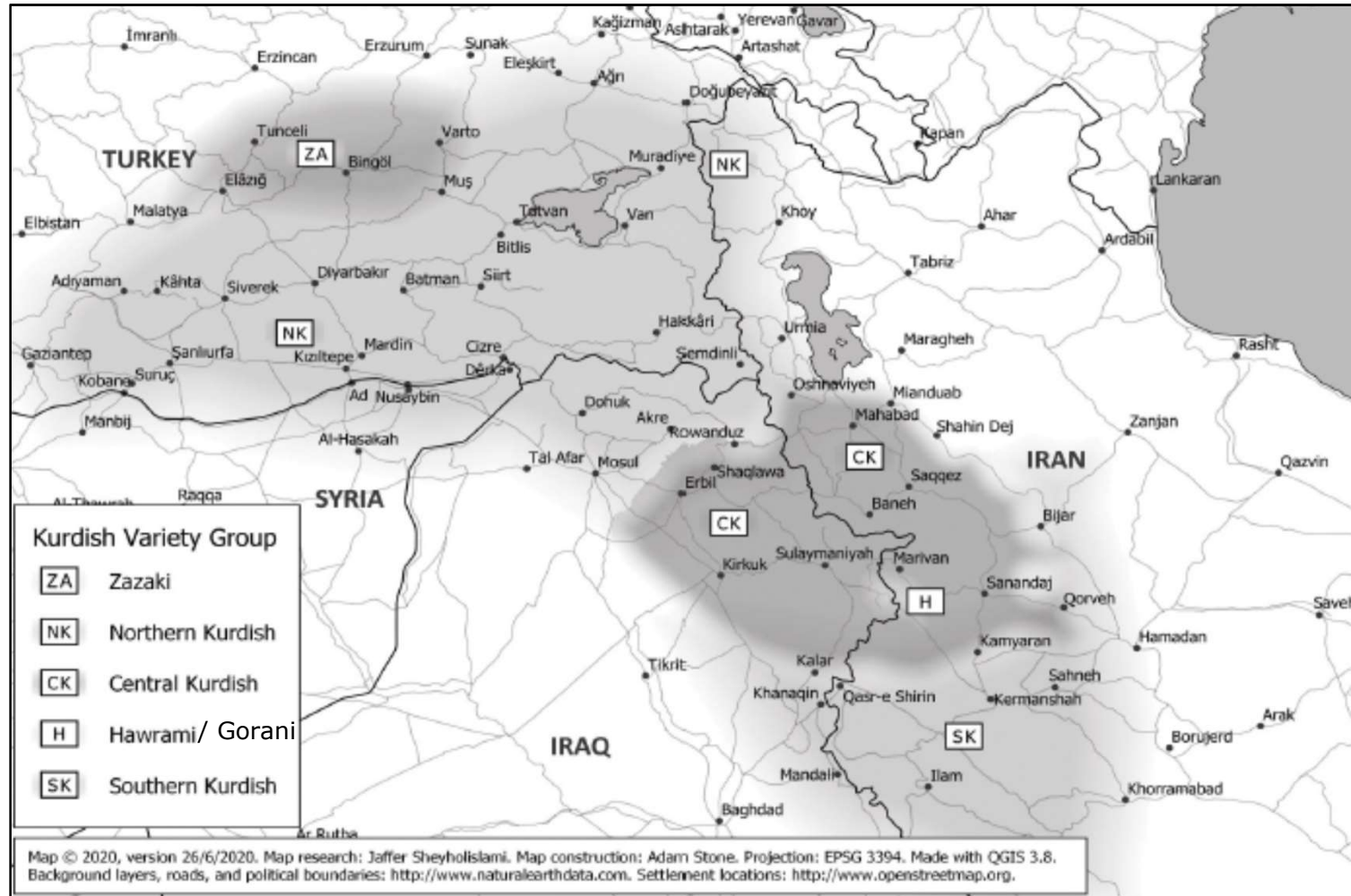
Content of the units on Kurdish

- Unit 1 (this unit) General overview, some phonology and morphosyntax
- Unit 2: Issues in Kurdish word order
- Unit 3: Clitic/affix interactions in Central Kurdish

Geographic distribution of Kurdish speakers



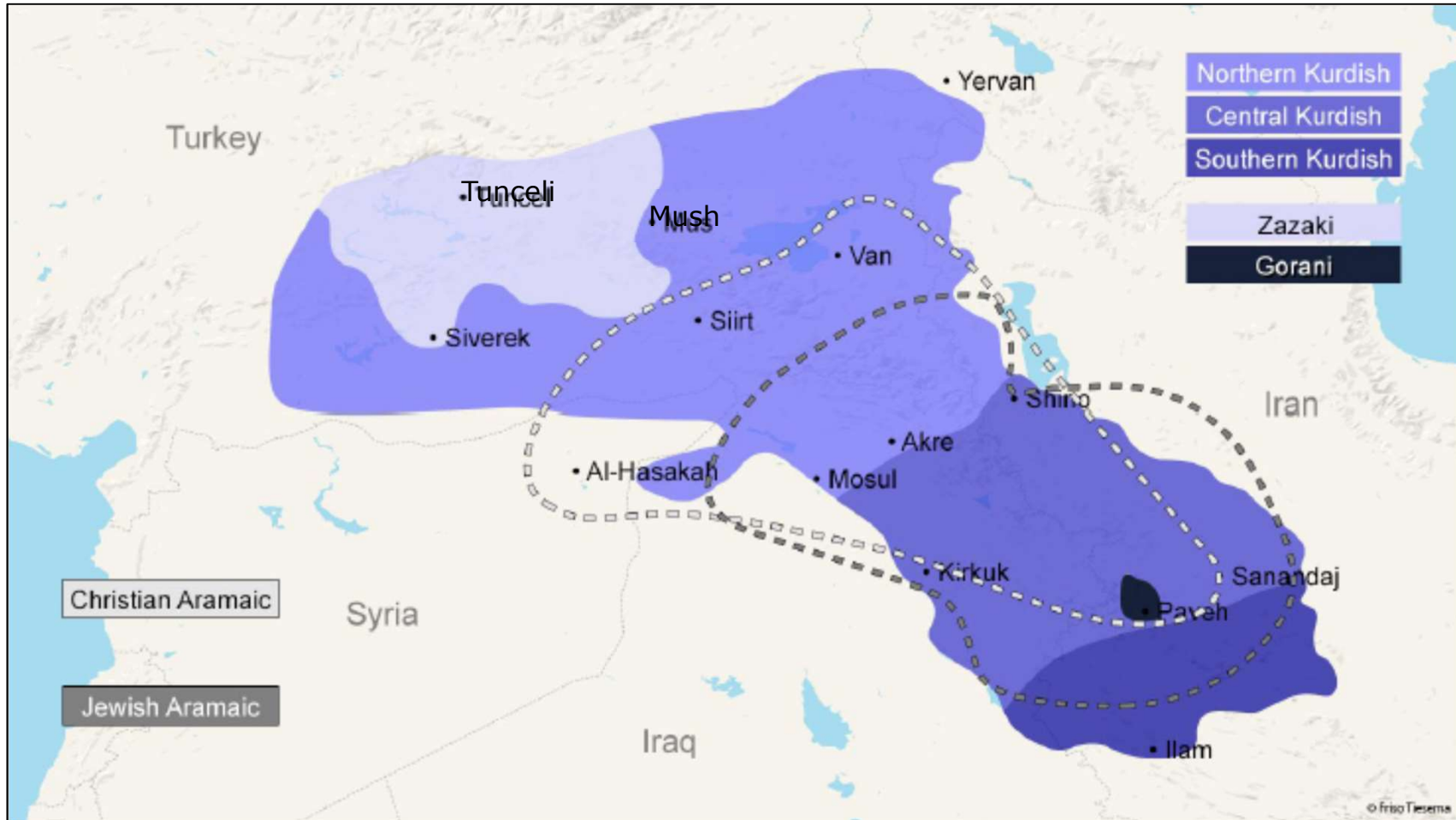
Main varieties of Kurdish in the broadest sense



Summary: 'Kurdish' in the broadest sense

- Kurdish refers to a cluster of closely related northwest Iranian languages (i.e. they belong to the Indo-European language family)
- Northern Kurdish (N Kurd.), aka Kurmanji
- Central Kurdish (C Kurd), aka Sorani
- Southern Kurdish (S Kurd)
- Zazaki
- Gorani / Hawrami

Kurdish overlap with Neo-Aramaic



Phonology: Vowels in NKurdish (Barry 2019)

	Front	Back
High	/i/	/u/
Mid-high	/ɪ/ [ɪ] ~ [i]	/ʊ/ [ʊ] ~ [wɪ]
Mid	/e/	/o/
Low	/æ/ [æ] ~ [ɛ] ~ [ə]	/ɑ/

Illustration of main vowels (N. Kurdish)

Examples of the eight simple vowel phonemes in N.Kurdish in CVC contexts;
speaker from the Southeastern dialect group, township of Duhok in the Autonomous
Kurdistan Region of Iraq

PHONEME	EXAMPLE	MEANING
i	<i>sîr</i>	'garlic'
ɪ	<i>mir</i>	'die.PST.3SG'
e	<i>têr</i>	'satisfied, full'
æ	<i>ser</i>	'head'
ɑ	<i>sar</i>	'cold'
o	<i>sor</i>	'red'
ʊ	<i>gund</i>	'village'
u	<i>çûm</i>	'go.PST.1SG'



Summary: Vowels

Despite differences in the realization of individual vowel phonemes, most of Kurdish displays a very similar vowel system, with 8-10 vowel phonemes, and no phonemic length distinction

Barry (2019) proposes the existence of two further vowels with pharyngeal quality for Northern Kurdish

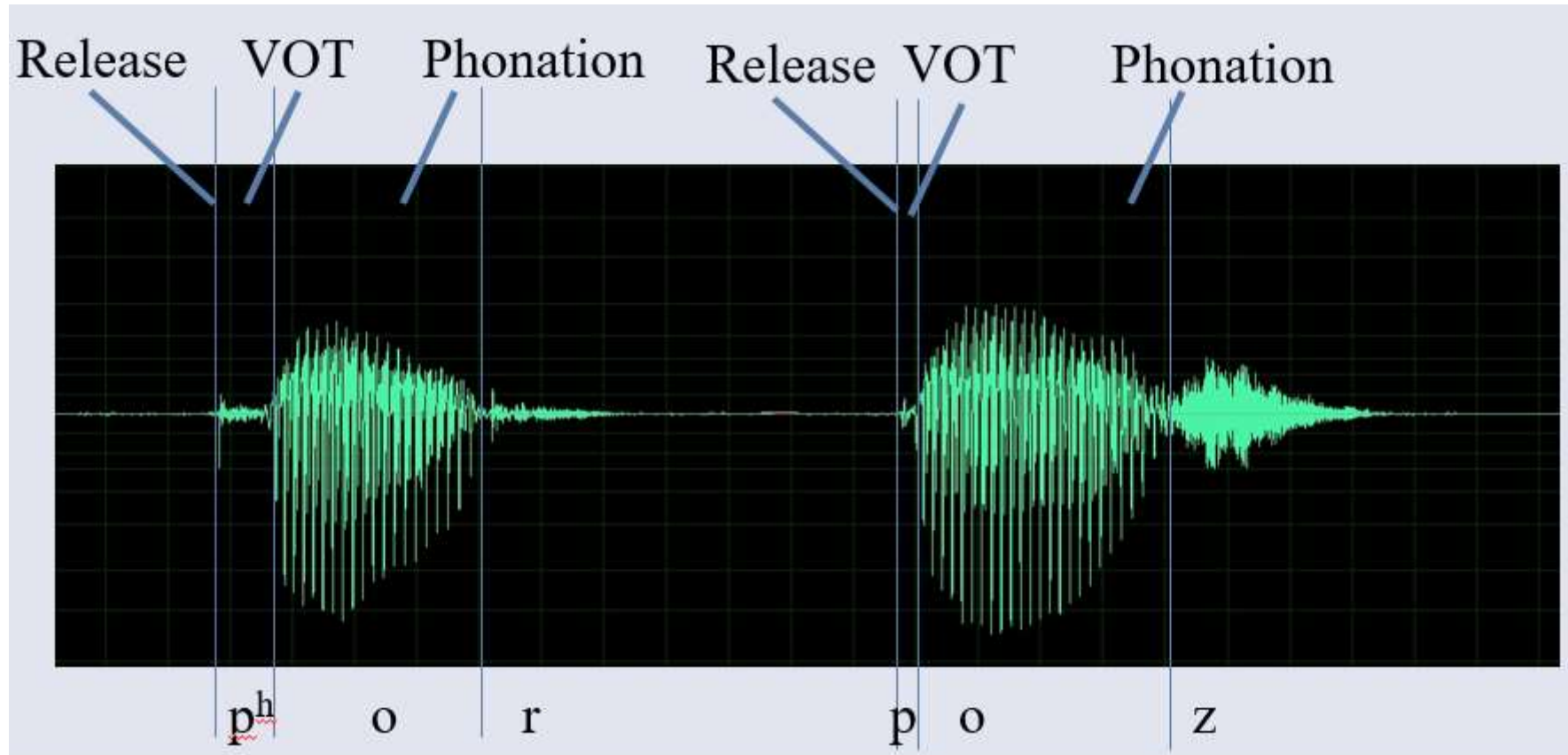
In some dialects of Southeastern Kurmanji, /u/ undergoes fronting and de-rounding, merging with /i/: /u/ → /y/ → /i/

Glides and diphthongs exist, but are not treated here

Consonants in NKurdish (Barry 2019)

	Labial	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Glottal
Stop/affricate	p ^h p b	t ^h t d	tʃ ^h tʃ dʒ		k ^h k g	q	
Fricative	f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		x		h
Nasal	m	n					
Lateral		l					
Flap		ɾ					
Trill		r					
Glide	w			j			

Voice Onset Time distinction, plosives in NKurd



The problem of identifying “Kurdish”

PHONOLOGICAL AND MORPHOLOGICAL FEATURES		ZAZA	N KU.	C KU.	S KU.	GOR./ HAWR.
Gender in nominal morphology (case, ezafe)		+	+	(-)	-	+
Inherited case distinction (Direct vs. Oblique)		+	+	(-)	-	+
aspirated/non-aspirated distinction obstruents		+	+	-	-	-
Clitic pronouns		-	-	+	+	+
Definiteness suffix		-	-	+	+	+
Lexical ‘have’ verb		-	-	-	+	-
Morphological passive / de-transitivizer		+	-	+	+	+
*Vm > Vv/w	‘bridegroom’	<i>zama</i>	<i>zava</i>	<i>zawa</i>	<i>zawa</i>	<i>zema</i>
	‘name’	<i>name</i>	<i>nav</i>	<i>naw</i>	<i>naw</i>	<i>nam</i>
	‘step’	<i>game</i>	<i>gav</i>	<i>hengaw</i>	<i>hengaw</i>	<i>hengame</i>
	‘eye’	<i>čim</i>	<i>čav</i>	<i>čaw</i>	<i>čaw</i>	<i>čem</i>
	‘tail’ (of an animal)	<i>dim(e)</i>	<i>dûv</i>	<i>dû</i>	<i>dü</i>	-
	‘mouth’	-	<i>dev</i>	<i>dew/dem</i>	<i>dem</i>	<i>dem</i>

(MacKenzie 1961; Paul 1998; 2008; Haig & Öpengin 2014; Asatrian 2009; Öpengin & Haig 2018; Haig 2018)

Tense-sensitive alignment

Rules of case assignment and agreement ('alignment') are sensitive to tense, and transitivity of the verb

1) **All intransitive verbs (regardless of tense), and all transitive verbs in the present tense, share the same alignment:**

- **Case:** S/A are in the unmarked 'Direct' case form; P is in the marked Oblique case, if the language has retained an Oblique case, otherwise unmarked.
- **Agreement:** verbs **obligatorily agree** with S/A in person/number.

2) **For all past transitive verbs:**

- **Case:** A is in the Oblique case (if available in the language); P is unmarked for case.
- **Agreement:** differs systematically from 1), either through a different controller (P), or a different paradigm of person markers (e.g. mobile clitics, as opposed to verbal suffixes), or both.

Alignment N. Kurdish (Bahdini dialect)

Past tense, intransitive:

Subject is Direct case (DRCT), **verb** agrees with S

(1)	<i>Ez</i>	<i>çû-m = e</i>	<i>Hewlêr-ê</i>
	1SG.DRCT	go.PST-1SG = PRT	Hewlêr-OBL.F
	'I went to Hewlêr'		



(2)	<i>Ew</i>	<i>zalam</i>	<i>çû</i>	<i>Hewlêr-ê</i>
	that(DRCT)	man(DRCT)	go.PST.3SG	Hewlêr-OBL.F
	'That man went to Hewlêr'			

Past tense, transitive:

Subject is Oblique case (OBL), P is DRCT, **verb** agrees with P



(3)	<i>Min</i>	<i>ew</i>	<i>zalam</i>	<i>dît</i>
	1SG.OBL	that(DRCT)	man(DRCT)	go.PST.3SG
	'I saw that man'			

(4)	<i>Wî</i>	<i>zalam-î</i>	<i>ez</i>	<i>dît-im</i>
	DEM.OBL	man-OBL.M	1SG.DRCT	see.PST-1SG
	'That man saw me'			

Alignment Central Kurdish

Past tense, intransitive:

Subject is unmarked for case (no DIRECT/OBLIQUE distinction is available in morphology); **verb** agrees with subject

(5)	<i>Min</i>	<i>čû-m = e</i>	<i>Hewlêr</i>
	1SG	go.PST-1SG = PRT	Hewlêr
'I went to Hewlêr'			



(6)	<i>Ew</i>	<i>piyaw = e</i>	<i>čû = we</i>	<i>Hewlêr</i>
	that	man = DEIC	go.PST.3SG = PRT	Hewlêr
'That man went to Hewlêr'				



Past tense, transitive:

Subject unmarked, object unmarked; **verb** in default 3SG form; subject agreement realized through a mobile clitic on the first stress-bearing constituent of the VP (here = object)

(7)	<i>Min</i>	<i>ew</i>	<i>piyaw = e = m</i>	<i>bînî</i>
	1SG	that	man = DEIC = 1SG	see.PST.3SG
'I saw that man'				



(8)	<i>Ew</i>	<i>piyaw = e</i>	<i>min = î</i>	<i>bînî</i>
	that	man = DEIC	1SG = 3SG	see.PST.3SG
'That man saw me'				



Summary: Alignment

- Present tense and past intransitive: almost identical systems across the entirety of Kurdish
- Past transitives: Locus of **enormous variability**
- **No clear evidence for syntactic ergativity** in Kurdish
- Strictly transitivity-based: **No evidence for active / split intransitive** systems of the Georgian type
- Historical roots in the past stem, which is based on an Old Iranian **participial form**
- The participle **lacked the ability to assign accusative case to the P**; from this basic fact, most of the ‘ergative’, or at least ‘non-accusative’ structures of Kurdish can be derived
- The latter point is of course shared with Indo-Aryan languages, though the details differ (origins of the respective ergative cases etc.)

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