

Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish

Reviewed by

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PRODUCT AT A GLANCE

Product Type:

Tutorial

Language:

Kurdish as a Foreign Language (KFL)

Level:

Beginners (Level one)

Age Group:

12 – Adult

Activites:

Multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, audio flashcards, pronunciation, and listening dictation. Learners can also record and play back their own voices, and compare their pronunciation with that of the native speakers.

Media Format:

1 x DVD-ROM

Operating Systems:

Windows 2000/XP/Vista/7 with a DVD-ROM drive

Hardware Requirements:

DVD-ROM drive; Speakers or headphones; Microphone (Strongly recommended & necessary)

Supplementary Software:

Internet Explorer 5.5 or greater; Windows Media Player 7 or greater

Price:

Individual copy: \$79.95; Site license: contact producer for details at <http://clp.arizona.edu/cls/> or brill@u.arizona.edu

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish* software is advertised as language software aiming to give (language) learners a solid foundation in Kurmanji-Kurdish for both oral and written expressions. The contents of the software are indeed good enough to meet the advertised targets. The software, which is a practical course, provides learners with confidence to communicate in everyday situations. This classroom-tested, peer-reviewed DVD-ROM contains 25 video clips and over 9000 audio recordings (over 45 minutes) made with native Kurdish speakers. Such authenticity is clearly a strength of the software. The motion visuals and authenticity of the media types expose target culture, authentic settings, different accents, and paralinguistic clues (Adair-Hauck, Willingham-McLain & Youngs, 1999; Hart, 1992). Such aspects permit learners to witness the target world and help them better understand the target culture, language, life style, and cultural differences (Nicholson & Ngai, 1996; Tschirner, 2001). These conditions are effective and necessary for foreign language learning (FLL).

The presence of over 9000 audio recordings can help improve learners' acoustic/hearing channel, as the lack of visuals require learners to rely completely on speech. Moreover, some learners are highly visual and some are highly auditory (Carson & Longhini, 2002). Pedagogically this requires the provision of different media types (Hoven, 1999). The software features a wide range of topics such as *greetings* (*Tu bi xêr hatî Kurdistanê*), *shopping* (*Ew bi çendêye?, Beşa II*), *food* (*Şîv hazir e*), *dining* (*Dilê te diçe çî*), *weather* (*Baran Dibare*), *education* (*Li Zanîngeha Silemanîyê*), *literature* (*Wêjeya Kurdî*), *holiday traditions* (*Em ê herin Seyranê*) and more (20 topics in total). Such a variety can further motivate the target learners. The texts are either scripted dialogues or unscripted discussions between native speakers.

The *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish* software consists of 20 lessons that aim to provide the target learners with basic Kurdish language skills so that the learners can express themselves in Kurdish. Each lesson features one or more dialogues with accompanying audio and video segments, grammar and footnotes. The footnotes provide additional explanatory notes about grammar, idiomatic expressions and Kurdish culture. These are some aspects that need to be taken into consideration when software is designed (Conrad, 1989; LoCastro, 2001; Rixon, 1992). Otherwise, the learners will have difficulty in understanding the texts. Moreover, attention theory, input theory and cognitive overload theory and the limitations of working memory require us to provide footnotes, grammatical explanations and different media types. Dialogues take place between two or three native speakers. Each lesson features different topics that are accompanied by audio and video features. While the audio provides native speaker pronunciation, both Kurdish and English, in word and sentence segments, the video segment offers paralinguistic elements such as intonation, gestures and facial expressions. In addition, each lesson contains a set of exercises such as *multiple choice*, *fill-in-the-blank*, *audio flashcards*, *pronunciation*, and *listening dictation* so that the target learners can practice the grammar, vocabulary, sentences and pronunciation. Such a variety of exercises engages learners and helps meet the needs of different language learners with different learning styles (Dunn, 1983).

The software, which is interactive, can be used as self-instructional material without the direct control of an instructor or alternatively as a main or supplementary material in a beginning or pre-intermediate level teacher-led Kurdish course. The learners can study the material at their own pace and can continue to repeat the same lesson as many times as they wish before moving to the next one. Such user-controlled flexibility is more useful than program controlled approaches (Dunkel, 1991). The software is the equivalent of a one-year college course.

The learners will learn Kurmanji-Kurdish as they travel with Şîler and Bawer around Dihok, to one of the three provinces of South Kurdistan (Iraqi-Kurdistan), in dialogues that explore the richness of traditional Kurdish culture. Each lesson consists of two sections: (a) *Text and Exercises* and (b) *Video*.

TEXT AND EXERCISES

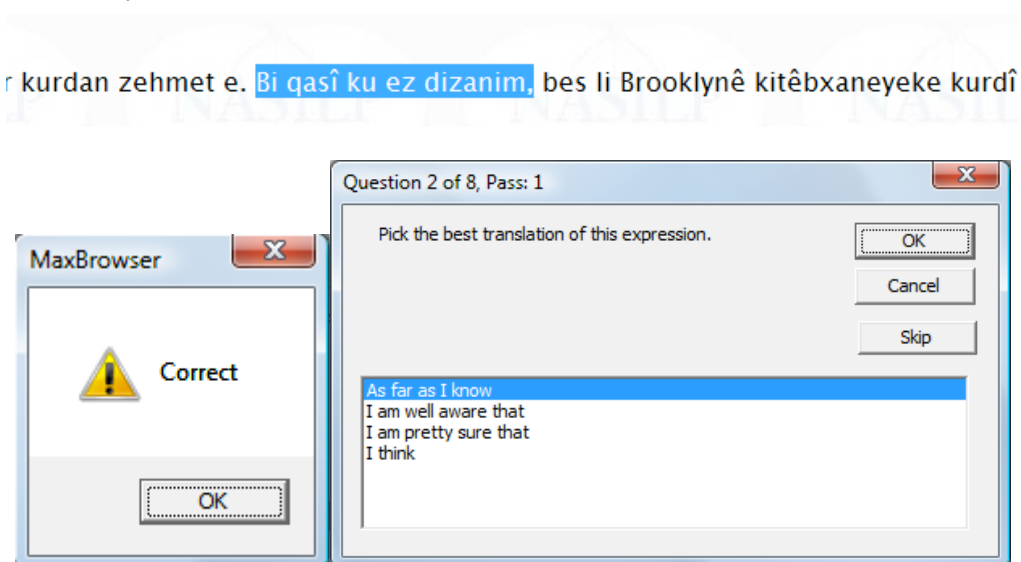
This section consists of a main text and a dialogue with accompanying audio and video segments. Not only is such a combined provision pedagogically effective as it can result in the incidental acquisition of word knowledge and target culture (Neuman and Koskinen, 1992), but this is also the requirement of the dual-coding theory and the generative theory of multimedia, which suggests that language learners should be provided with more than one mode/element that targets to teach one thing (Al-Seghayer, 2001; Chun and Plass 1996; Mayer and Sims, 1994). To be able to view the lesson video segment, the learners need to click on the video icon. There is both English and Kurdish audio for all of the texts. To hear individual word audio, learners simply need to click on the *Word* button first and then on individual words. To hear sentence audio, the learners click on the *Sent* button first and then on the individual sentences. To hear a translation of a sentence, the learners simply need to right-click on it.

A useful feature that works in both *Word* and *Sentence modes* is the *AllPlay* function. *AllPlay* automatically plays back all the words and sentences for learners without the learners having to click on them individually. Another very useful feature in this section is to automatically play the translation right after the native speaker. This can help learners acquire the target language in that acquisition happens only if the target language is comprehended (Long, 1983; Vidal, 2003) although translation alone does not help much.

The *Text and Exercises* section also features different types of exercises such as *flashcards*, *fill-in-the-blank/cloze*, *multiple-choice comprehension questions*, *listening dictation* and *pronunciation* (see Figure 1). Such a variety, as mentioned above, avoids boredom and helps meet the needs of different language learners with diverse learning styles.

Figure 1

A sample of multiple-choice exercise and correct feedback



Flashcards exercise

This exercise provides the learners with the opportunity of revising words. Revision helps comprehension (Parkin, Wood & Aldrich, 1988) and comprehension results in acquisition. In other words, language learners acquire only when they understand (Chapelle, 1997; Ellis 1997; Krashen, 1984; Schmidt, 1990). To start the exercise, the learners can click on the *Flash* button. The learners' task is to think of the meaning of each word. If they already know the meaning of the word, they simply click on the *Discard* button and it will be placed on the Discard deck. To hear a word, the learners need to click on the *Play Word* button. They can also be shown an example of the word in context. They can hear the word in a sentence, the sentence translation, or a translation of just the word alone. The ultimate goal is to remove the cards from the remaining deck to the discard deck.

Fill-in-the-blank/cloze exercise

To make use of this exercise, the learners need to click on the *Cloze* button. The exercise gives the learners the opportunity to fill in the blanks. This is done by selecting the correct answer from the drop-down menu or by typing the correct answer into the blank if the drop-down menu is not provided. When the learners are comfortable with their answers, they can click on the *Grade Me* button at the bottom of the page. Their correct answers will be highlighted in blue and incorrect answers will be marked with a red line.

Multiple-choice comprehension exercise

To be able to start this exercise, the learners need to click on the *Multi* button from the toolbar. The questions being asked will relate to the highlighted portion of the text. Questions are in English. The correct answer displays a window with the word 'correct' and an incorrect answer displays a window with the correct answer indicated.

Listening dictation exercise

This exercise provides the learners with the opportunity to listen to sentences from the lesson and type what they hear. To be able to make use of this exercise, the learners need to click on the *Dict* button. The learners' task is to transcribe what they have just heard into the box. They type in their answers and click on the *Grade me* button. Correct answers are awarded ten points. Answers with mistakes will have points deducted and will show indicators where the mistakes have occurred. The learners have three options of hearing: *normal speed word by word* and *slowly word by word*. If the learners want to hear again, they need to click on the *Play Again* button and one point will be deducted. If the learners want to hear *word by word*, two points will be deducted. If the learners want to hear *slowly word by word*, three points will be deducted. If the learners do not know the answer and type a random answer, no points will be awarded. When they exit the exercises, they can see a transcript of their responses and the correct answers, which are useful for a review for later on or to send to an instructor. The main text of each unit has at least eight dictation sentence exercises.

Pronunciation exercise

This exercise type exposes target learners to authentic aspects of speech such as pauses, stress, intonation and hesitation phenomena, and rhythm patterns. Drawing target learners' attention to such aspects can result in strategy competence and FLL. This view is one of current cognitive psychology which suggests that 'learning without awareness is impossible' and 'conscious awareness is necessary' for FLL (Schmidt, 1990, p. 131). To be able to make use of this exercise, learners click on the *Pron* button first, and then the pronunciation exercise is displayed. After this, learners click on the *Record* button to play the native voice and record themselves for each word first and then for the entire sentence. Following this, the

native speaker's recordings and the learners' are played back-to-back, so learners may have a chance to hear how their pronunciation compares to that of the native Kurdish speakers. The learners can repeat this as many times as they want until they are satisfied with their pronunciation. After this, they can use the *Next* and *Prev* toolbar buttons to move between sentences. If the learners want to save their recordings, they need to click on the *Back* button.

VIDEO

This section provides the learners with the opportunity to revise what they have learned in the *Text and Exercises* section of the lesson. Since it does not have any accompanying tasks, the focus of the learners will only be on what they view. In other words, the learners will be able to focus on the paralinguistic elements such as intonation, gestures and facial expressions. Moreover, (authentic) video can help make many cultural differences comprehensible (Herron, Dubreil, Corrie & Cole, 2002).

Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish also provides the following features: (1) on-line help, (2) tutorial videos that explain how to make the best use of the software, (3) a *Kurmanji Kurdish Alphabet, Phonology and Grammar* section that provides information about *Kurdish* language and grammar, (4) the ability to print out any section of the software, and (5) footnotes, which will be focused on below.

EVALUATION

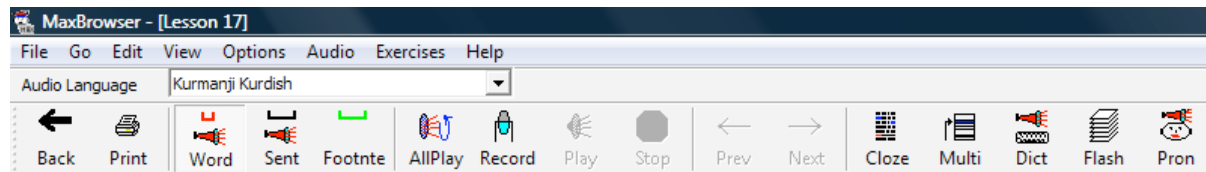
Technological features

The *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish* software is quite easy to load because of the 'Auto play' feature in Windows 2000 / XP / Vista. In addition to easy loading, it also performs very well. In order to find out whether it had any problems in terms of performance, the reviewer ran it on a few separate computers (PC) several times and did not encounter any difficulties at all. It never crashed. The software is designed for PCs, and has a mechanism to minimize, maximize or close the window. It also has menu and tool bars.

The video window features volume control buttons. Thus, sound level can be increased or decreased according to the individual needs of the learners. The problem is, however, that this feature is not available for audio clips. If learners want to alter volume of audio clips in the program, they need to adjust the speakers or on screen volume controls. This might be considered a serious shortcoming, as it can distract learners.

The appearance of the screen is commendably simple, uncluttered and consistent. This is a positive aspect of the software since it creates positive attitudes towards language software, particularly with software intended for autonomous learners (Hoffman, 1996; Rimar, 1996; Watts, 1997). All navigational menus and icons are consistently placed and sized. The icons and the menus that represent functions such as '*Back*,' '*Print*,' '*Help*,' '*File*,' '*Pron*,' '*Cloze*' and so on are internationally standard. Additionally, all icons (except the video icon) have captions to make them more meaningful and helpful, which is a commendable design principle (see Figure 2) (Lonfils & Vanparys, 2001). Moreover, the related ones are grouped together and consistently placed such as exercise buttons/icons. This helps learners with navigation, which is a useful design principle, where visual appearance is so important to learners (Schlotter, 2009).

Figure 2
A sample of consistent icons



ACTIVITIES (PROCEDURE)

Activities progress gradually from easy to more difficult. At the same time, they allow learners the freedom to move around as desired. This type of flexibility matches what learners want (e.g., Trinder, 2002). Activities do not limit the time of exposure, so learners can complete them at their own pace and speed, and this is also seen as being more useful in comparison with program controlled approaches (Dunkel, 1991). One item is seen on screen at a time (with the exception of the *Fill-in-the-blank/cloze exercise*), which is helpful because it avoids confusion and can help learners to feel more confident and relaxed (Brett, 1997). The activities require that learners respond with answers. Such interactivity is particularly important with materials intended for self-study (Little, 1995; Mangiafico, 1996; Trinder, 2002). Moreover, expected answers are clear and short. The activities (as well as the texts) are suitable for the target learners. Additionally, this reviewer thinks that the *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish* software is also appropriate for pre-intermediate learners, while some parts of the software, such as the alphabet and pronouns are almost exclusively for beginners. Ample opportunity is also provided for review and self-testing. Activities provide the learners with the opportunity to record their own voices and compare them with that of the native Kurdish speakers.

A wide range of exercises are provided, which helps meet the needs of language learners with diverse learning styles. For example, typing words in the *Fill-in-the-blank/cloze* and *listening dictation* exercises, and recording and comparing voices with that of the native speakers are for tactile and kinesthetic learners. Likewise, the *listening dictation* and the *pronunciation* exercises are for auditory oriented learners. Some are for both auditory and visual learners in that they require learners to focus on what they hear as well as what they type. In spite of this, providing a wider range of activities types, such as drag & drop, typing a letter/number, matching, ordering and so on, would provide more motivation.

Feedback, which is informative and instantaneous, is provided in footnotes about certain words, phrases, grammatical structures or expressions. This is extremely useful. The necessity and positive effects of feedback are agreed on by many researchers (Bada & Okan, 2000; Gillespie & McKee, 1999; Nicholas, Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Moreover, feedback is considered useful by language learners (Radecki & Swales, 1988) and is also useful for conscious FLL (Krashen, 1984), as it facilitates the negotiation of meaning and forces learners to focus attention on certain aspects of the input. To be able to make use of the footnotes, the learners need to click on the *Footnote* button first and then click on the underlined word(s), phrases or expressions.

Feedback is also provided with activities. It is, however, sometimes restricted to simple *Correct/Incorrect* with the correct answer indicated such as in *Multiple Choice*, *Fill-in-the-blank/cloze* and *Dictation* exercises (see Figure 1 above). In the *Listening Dictation* exercises, correct answers are awarded ten points. Answers with mistakes have points deducted and show indicators where the mistakes have occurred. Moreover, when learners exit the exercises, they can see a transcript of their responses and the correct answers, which are tremendously useful for a review later. In the *Fill-in-the-blank/cloze exercise*, learners' cor-

rect answers are highlighted in blue and incorrect answers have a red stripe through with the correct answers next to them, which is excellent. Empty answers are noted with red bars, and such a design encourages the learners to leave no activity unanswered.

In many cases more information needs to be provided to learners as feedback, whether grammatical, lexical, or cultural depends upon the context and relevant features of the text or activity. Feedback should be used to 1) help diagnose problems, 2) assist learners in appropriate strategy use, 3) focus attention on certain features of the text, such as syntax, lexis, or culture, and 4) complements, explain or explicitly instruct learners (Turel, 2004, 2010).

TEACHER FIT (DESIGN)

The lessons focus on providing the learners with a solid foundation in Kurmanji-Kurdish for both oral and written expressions. This practical course will help learners to become more confident in communicating in Kurmanji-Kurdish with a wide range of topics in a variety of formal and informal everyday settings. They include aural and written comprehension skills along with cultural content. The lessons outline more complex grammar structures, which focus on sentence structures and types of phrases within these complex sentences. Also, some tenses, conjunctions, compound verbs and nouns, pronouns, question tags (*na wisan*) and so on are covered. The underlying theoretical framework of this software seems to be structuralist and the interactionist SLA model: – input – apperception – comprehension – intake – integration – output (Chapelle, 1998). The same text is repeated / presented for the learners in different versions such as *text only*, *text + audio word mode*, *text + audio sentence mode*, *text + audio AllPlay mode*, and *text + video mode*, and the learners' attention is drawn to different aspects of the language to help them to comprehend it. The translation of the text is also available. The activities aim to help learners comprehend the text. Attempts are made to contextualize vocabulary, phrases, grammatical structures and cultural aspects. Surprisingly, given this software's pedagogical approach, the learners' attention is not drawn to cognates at all, which can play a vital role in learning new words in the target language (Hammer & Monod, 1978).

The software clearly lacks preparation/pre-listening tasks or activities, which are vitally important for preparing learners to listen/watch. The aim of this stage should solely be to prepare and accustom the learners cognitively and affectively for the texts they are going to read or view. In other words, to provide the learners with information native speakers might have in real life situations, before a task learners might be better served if they were provided some grammar instruction, strategy suggestions, or even told similarities between English and Kurdish cultures. Without more scaffolding before the introduction of texts there is the potential for much learner frustration if they must click to translate every word just to get a basic sense of the text.

The socio-cultural aspects of the software are generally accurate and it contains detailed information about cultural aspects. For example, when phrases — such as "*Destê te ter be*" or "*destê te sax be*" (idioms to compliment the person who prepared and cooked the food), *Ser çavan!* (idiom, literally "on my eyes," said to express pleasure), and "*Xêra Xwedê li te be*" (God's blessing be upon you, said in reply to "*bi xêr hatî*" [welcome]) — are clicked in the *Footnote mode*, detailed information is displayed at the bottom of the page. It is very important such cultural aspects are included in the software. They really need to be emphasized in language teaching materials, otherwise learners cannot be familiar with such aspects, which might result in frustration at later stages or in real life interactions.

LEARNER FIT (DESIGN)

The *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish* software is directed to self-learners. It is responsive to individual needs and adapts to different learning style preferences. Learners are given full control of the software so that they can pause, repeat, record their voice and listen as many times as they want. In the software, pictures, texts, video segments and phrases meet the needs of the learners who are visual, which is considered the most common learning style preference (Dunn & Dunn, 1979; Reid, 1987). Voice-over reading of the texts in *AllPlay mode*, pronunciations of the single words and phrases in *Word mode*, voice-over reading of the sentences in *Sent mode* meet the needs of auditory learners. Being able to (1) record their own voice, (2) click on and discard words/phrases, and (3) dictate what they hear corresponds to the needs of those who are kinesthetic and tactile. Such activities require learners to review what they have already comprehended (although the types of activities are limited), which is important as repetition can effectively lead to.

The software can also be incorporated by language teachers into their curriculum. In fact, all parts could be used in class as a whole. Similarly, different parts can be used for different purposes in a classroom environment. For example, the written text of each lesson can be used for reading, while audio and video segments can be used for listening. Moreover, new pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening tasks can be prepared to be used with audio and video segments according to the needs of the target learners in a classroom environment.

SUMMARY

Although there are, as indicated above, some shortages of the program, the software could be beneficial and effective for expanding learners' knowledge of Kurdish language and culture. Since it (1) is responsive to individual needs, (2) adapts to different learning-style preferences, and (3) features written texts, audio and video segments on a wide range of topics, it can motivate and help learners in expressing themselves in a variety of formal and informal settings as well as enhancing their mostly aural and less written comprehension skills along with cultural content.

It would be lovely to see versions of the software with the instruction language in Turkish, Arabic or Persian so that it can also be used by Kurds who currently have to have their education in those languages. Moreover, it would be lovely to see *Dimilî (Zazaki)-Kurdish* and *Sorani-Kurdish* versions of the software.

**SCALED RATING
(1 is low; 5 is high)**

Implementation possibilities (for self-study): 5
Pedagogical features: 4
Socio-linguistic accuracy: 5
Use of computer capabilities: 4.5
Ease of Use: 4
Over-all evaluation: 4.5
Value for money: 4.5

PRODUCER DETAILS

The UA Critical Languages Program
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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REVIEWER'S BIODATA

Asst. Prof. Dr. Vehbi Turel has a First Class Degree in Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, M.Ed. in Educational Technology and TESOL, and a Ph.D. on Design of Interactive Multimedia Language Software. He is a professional software developer and is mainly interested in teaching, research and creating CALL materials in English, Kurdish and Turkish. He has twenty three years teaching experience and worked as a co-editor of two journals: Graduate Educational Journal, and The Researcher. He teaches and publishes internationally.

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