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**ÖZGÜN ARAŞTIRMA ● ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

# Remarks on Vowels and Consonants in Kurmanji

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## Abstract

This study aims to contribute to the dialectology studies of Kurmanji Kurdish in broader sense by presenting some remarks on vowels and consonants in the variety spoken in Muş region of Turkey. Based on the articulation data, it is argued that Kurmanji has different sounds which haven't been mentioned so far. Investigating the vocalic and consonantal sounds in Muş Kurmanji, the current study has two claims: (i) Muş Kurmanji has ten vocalic sounds even though eight vowels are used in standard Kurdish orthography, and (ii) there are labial consonants in this language such as labiovelar /k$^{w}$/, /g$^{w}$/, /x$^{w}$/ labio-uvular /q$^{w}$/.

## Keywords

Kurmanji, Vowels and Consonants, Articulation, Alphabet

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# Kurmancideki Ünlü ve Ünsüzler Üzerine Bir Kaç Not

Öz

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin Muş ilinde konuşulmakta olan Kurmanci Kürtçesindeki ünlü ve ünsüz sesler üzerine bir kaç önemli not düşerek Kurmancinin lehçe/diyalekt çalışmalarına katkı sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu makalede sesletim çalışması ışığında Kurmanci'de şu ana kadar hiç belirtilmemiş farklı seslerin olduğu tartışılacaktır. Muş Kurmancisindeki ünlü ve ünsüz sesleri araştırarak iki yeni nokta iddia edilmektedir; (i) standart Kürtçe yazı dilinde sekiz ünlü harf kullanılmasına rağmen bu harfler Muş Kurmancisinde on ünlü sese karşılık gelmektedir ve (ii) bu dilde /kʷ/, /gʷ/, /xʷ/ ve /qʷ/ gibi dudaksıl ünsüzlerin varlığı saptanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kurmanci, Ünlüler ve Ünsüzler, Sesletim (boğumlama), Alfabe

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kurdish is classified as a member of the Western/Northwestern Iranian branch of Indo-European languages.[1] The Northern Group, which is also called as Kurmanji, is the largest group of Kurdish dialects in terms of the number of speakers, and it is mostly spoken especially in Turkey as well as comprising speakers live in North Iraq, parts of Syria, Iran and the ex-Soviet as stated by Bedirxan and Lescot (1997). Akin (2006) discusses that Kurdish was written exclusively in Arabic alphabet until the 1930s, but especially after the First World War, some scholars mentioned the inadequacy of the Arabic scripts for Kurdish and some attempts were made to adopt the Latin scripts for this language. For instance, Celadet Bedirxan with Süreyya and Kamuran Bedirxan developed a new alphabet with Latin scripts for Kurdish in 1931 and introduced its final form in the columns of the journal Hawar published in Damascus.[2] In the Latin alphabet posited by Bedirxan for Kurmanji, there are thirty one letters; eight for vowels < a, o, î, i, ê, e, û, u > and twenty-three for consonants < b, c, ç, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, q, t, v, w, x, y, z.>.

This study presents the vowels and consonants used in spoken Muş Kurmanji, and it discusses how much the phonological system of this Kurmanji variety is represented in the standard Kurdish alphabet. It should be noted that in the latest version of this alphabet with thirty-one letters, the distinction between some sounds (e.g. the aspirated vs. unaspirated voiceless stops like /p/ and /pʰ/ or flap /ɾ/ and thrill /r/) are not represented although they are preserved in the spoken language.

The data used in this study constitute individual words taken from three Kurmanji dictionaries; Ferhenga Khurdî-Tirkî by Anter (1967), Ferheng by İzoli (1992) and Ferhenge Zimane by Alptekin (2003). The phonetic transcription of vowels and consonants in these words is done via International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) based on the pronunciation of seven native speakers of Kurmanji living in Muş province in Turkey. Muş, located in the eastern part of Turkey, is one of the ethnically diverse cities where people from different ethnic groups such as Kurmancs, Turks, Armenians, Zazas, Arabs and Cherkess live as mentioned by Yuca (2011). According to the tentative classification of Kurmanji-internal variation into major regional dialects made by Öpengin and Haig (2014), Muş stands in the Northern dialect region (NK) where Serhed Kurdish variety is spoken. Their study is considerably important in terms of discussing the systematic lexical, phonological and morphosyntactic differences observed in Kurmanji spoken in different parts of Turkey. The current study in a sense is an attempt to delve into the phonological properties of the Northern dialect region in the context of Muş by providing the whole sound system of Kurmanji spoken here. This in turn will be a contribution to the dialectology studies of Kurdish in broader sense. Although the phonetic forms of the Kurmanji words in this article reflect Muş Kurmanji norms, it should be noted that most of them are also shared by other Kurmanji dialects.[3]

The organization of the paper is as follows: The second section presents the vowels in Kurmanji through the relevant literature and discusses that Muş Kurmanji has ten vocalic sounds. Likewise, the third section reviews some certain consonants in this language and argues that there are some consonantal sounds which are not mentioned so far. Finally, concluding remarks and the points requiring further attention are presented in the last section.

## 2. VOWELS IN KURMANJI KURDISH

This section briefly presents vowels used in Kurmanji orthography with relevant data and provides their pronunciation with IPA equivalents of them. As mentioned before, there are eight letters for vowels in Kurmanji orthography; < a, o, î, i, ê, e, û, u >. The general view is to make a basic eight-vowel contrast for this language with a distinction between length (long/short) and height of vowels with three degrees of height. The following tables illustrate the vowel system of Kurmanji proposed by Bedir Xan (1989), Blau (1989) and Bali (1992).

**Table 1.** Vowel system of Kurmanji by Bedir Xan (1989)

| | |
|---|---|
| Long vowels: | <î, ê, û, o, a> |
| Short vowels: | <e, i, u> |

**Table 2.** Vowel system of Kurmanji by Blau (1989)

| | |
|---|---|
| Long vowels: | <î, ê, û, o, a> |
| Short vowels: | <a, i, u> |

**Table 3.** Vowel system of Kurmanji by Bali (1992)

| | |
|---|---|
| Long vowels: | <î, ê, û, o> |
| Short vowels: | <e, a, ı, u> |

They agreed on the number of the vowels and mostly on their length despite some differences. In contrast to Bedir Xan and Bali, Blau did not differentiate [e] sound in terms of length. Blau's vowel system is a bit different because she also posited a length distinction for [a] sound, thus there are one short [a] and one long [a:]. Most probably this difference stems from the symbolization they used and also from regional varieties. In their study, Haig and Öpengin (2015) also proposes that the basic vowel system of Kurmanji consists of eight vowels; five long (full) and three short (weak) vowels:

**Table 4.** Vowel system of Kurmanji by Haig and Öpengin (2015)

| | |
|---|---|
| Long vowels: | <a> /a/ , <î> /i/, <ê> /e/, <o> /o/ , <û> /u/ |
| Short vowels: | <e> /æ/, <u> /ʊ/, <i> /ɨ/ |

In their dialectology study, however, Öpengin and Haig (2014) already mention that some vowels display dialectal variation such as the front high rounded vowel [y] (like the vocalic sound in Turkish word gül 'rose') which exists in the Southeastern dialect region in contrast to other Kurmanji dialects. This study shows that there are indeed ten vocalic sounds in Muş Kurmanji because there are more than one short /e/ or /æ/ and /u/ sounds, respectively.

All the vocalic sounds of Kurmanji are provided through their IPA equivalents with the relevant data below. This study mostly agrees with the assumptions of other studies (Bedir Xan, 1989; Blau, 1989; Bali, 1992; Bedirxan and Lescot, 1997; Thackston 2006; Haig and Öpengin, 2015) on the six vowels namely /a, o, i, u, e, ɨ/ but it says more on the other two vowels which are known as short /e/ and short /ʊ/. Below, the letters used for vowels in standard Kurdish orthography are written in bold on the left and then their phonetic description and IPA symbol are provided.

**a** is like the 'a' sound in English word *father* and its IPA symbol is /ɑ/. Some examples are given in (1).

(1)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | av | [ɑv] | *'water'* | dar | [dɑr] | *'tree'* |
| | şahî | [ʃɑhi] | *'happiness'* | cîran | [dʒirɑn] | *'neighbor'* |

**o** corresponds to 'o' sound in Turkish word *yol* 'road' and its IPA symbol is /o/. Some words with this sound are provided in (2).

(2)

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | doz | [doz] | *'case, cause'* | por | [p$^{h}$or] | *'hair'* |
| | ronahî | [ronɑhi] | *'light'* | zarok | [zɑrok] | *'child'* |

**î** is like 'i' sound in English word *heed* and its IPA symbol is /i/. (3) illustrates some words with this.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (3) | sîr | [sir] | *'garlic'* | îro | [iro] | *'today'* |
| | jiyan | [jiyɑn] | *'life'* | Kurdî | [$k^h$ʊrdi] | *'Kurdish'* |

**i** is close to 'ı' sound in Turkish word *kız* 'girl' but it is more central than the vowel in *kız* and its IPA symbol is /ɨ/. Some examples are given in (4).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (4) | pirs | [pɨrs] | *'question'* | dims | [dɨms] | *'pekmez'* |
| | hirç | [hɨrtʃ] | *'bear'* | gotin | [gotɨn] | *'saying'* |

**ê** is like 'e' sound in English word *bait* and its IPA symbol is /e/. Below are some examples with this sound (5).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (5) | hêk | [hek] | *'egg'* | êvar | [evɑr] | *'evening'* |
| | pêncî | [pendʒi] | *'fifty'* | tenê | [$t^h$ɛne] | *'alone'* |

**e** denotes to different sounds in Kurmanji. It is like 'æ' sound in English word *had* in some words (6a) and its IPA symbol is /æ/ whereas in some others it is pronounced as 'ɛ' sound in English word *bet* (6b) whose IPA symbol is /ɛ/.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (6a) | dew | [dæw] | *'ayran'* | germ | [gærm] | *'hot'* |
| | fersend | [færsænd] | *'opportunity'* | hezar | [ħæzɑr] | *'thousand'* |
| (6b) | genim | [gɛnɨm] | *'wheat'* | sed | [sɛd] | *'hundred'* |
| | yek | [jɛk] | *'one'* | em | [ɛm] | *'we'* |

**û** is like the 'u' sound in English word *boot* and its IPA symbol is /u/. Some words containing this sound are given in (7).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (7) | dûr | [dur] | *'far'* | gûz | [guz] | *'walnut'* |
| | cûtin | [dʒutɨn] | *'to chew'* | şûr | [ʃur] | *'sword'* |

**u** corresponds to two different sounds. I found out that in some words it is like the sound in English word *put*, the IPA symbol of which is /ʊ/ (8a). In some other words, it is pronounced as the sound in English word *bird*, IPA symbol of which is /ə/ (8b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (8a) | Kurd | [$k^h$ʊrd] | *'Kurdish'* | huner | [hʊnær] | *'talent'* |
| | kursî | [$k^h$ʊrsi] | *'chair'* | | | |
| (8b) | cuda | [dʒədɑ] | *'separate'* | du | [də] | *'two'* |
| | muzîk | [məzik$^h$] | *'music'* | tune | [$t^h$ənɛ] | *'not exist'* |

However, the articulation data shows that some words written with 'u' letter in Kurmanji orthography in fact contain neither /ʊ/ nor /ə/ sound but rather the vowel in those words is certainly the /ɨ/ sound that we hear in Kurmanji word *dims* 'pekmez'. Moreover, in all these words this vowel is preceded either by a labio-velar stop/fricative [$k^w$, $g^w$, $x^w$] or a labio-uvular stop /$q^w$/. It seems that the labial feature in these consonants spreads into the following vowel /ɨ/ and it sounds like a labial vowel (9). Note that in Kurmanji orthography, labio-velar stops/fricative

and labio-uvular stop do not have any distinct letter yet they are all indicated with the letters *k, g, x, q*, respectively.

| (9) | gul | [gʷɨl] | *'rose'* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | kul | [kʷɨl] | *'worry, grief'* |
| | xurt | [xʷɨrt] | *'fat'* |
| | qul | [qʷɨl] | *'hole'* |

The existence of such labial sounds implies that Kurmanji has labial counterparts of velar stops, velar fricative and uvular stop. The next section deals with this issue in detail.

It should be noted that Muş Kurmanji does not have front rounded vowel /y/. Of course the absence of this sound in Muş Kurmanji and even the absence of <ü> letter in Kurmanji orthography does not mean that other Kurmanji dialects do not have this sound, either. As mentioned by Öpengin and Haig (2014) in contrast to Northern dialect region (e.g., Muş), /u/ is fronted into /y/ (ü sound in Turkish *gül* 'rose') in Southeastern dialect region (e.g., Hakkari). For instance, the word *dûr* 'far' is pronounced with a back vowel in Muş Kurmanji as [dur] while it is said with its front counterpart in Hakkari as [dyr].

In sum, although most studies agree that the vowel inventory of Kurmanji consists of eight vocalic sounds and also there are eight letters for Kurmanji vowels **<a, o, û, u, î, i, ê, e>** in the alphabet, I have shown that Muş Kurmanji has indeed ten vocalic sounds; **/ɑ, o, u, ʊ, ə, e, ɛ, æ, i, ɨ/**. Therefore, eight vowels in orthography correspond to ten vowels in the spoken form of Muş Kurmanji. The vowels in Muş Kurmanji are provided in the table below (the vowels corresponding to more than one sound are put together):

**Table 5.** The phonetic equivalents of the vowels in Muş Kurmanji

| Letter | IPA Symbols | Phonetic Description |
|---|---|---|
| a | [ɑ] | open, back, unrounded vowel |
| o | [o] | close-mid, back, rounded vowel |
| î | [i] | close, front, unrounded vowel |
| i | [ɨ] | short, central, unrounded vowel |
| û | [u] | close, back, rounded vowel |
| u | [ʊ] | near-close, slightly centralized rounded vowel |
| | [ə] | mid central unrounded vowel |
| ê | [e] | close-mid, front, unrounded vowel |
| e | [æ] | near-open, front, unrounded vowel |
| | [ɛ] | open-mid, front, unrounded vowel |

## 3. CONSONANTS IN KURMANJI KURDISH

### 3.1. Aspirated vs. Unaspirated Consonants in Kurmanji

As it is mentioned in earlier studies such as Blau (1989), Özsoy and Türkyılmaz (2006), Thackston (2006), Öpengin and Haig (2014), the stops and affricates in Kurmanji exhibit a three-way contrast between aspirated and unaspirated voiceless stop and a voiced stop, e.g., aspirated voiceless velar stop /k$^{h}$/, unaspirated voiceless velar stop /k/ and voiced velar stop /g/. It has been observed that aspiration also makes a distinction in Muş Kurmanji. Aspirated and unaspirated voiceless consonants are exemplified below:

**p** conforms to two different sounds in Kurmanji. The first one is like the aspirated voiceless bilabial stop in English word *put* and its IPA symbol is /p$^{h}$/. The second sound it corresponds to is the unaspirated bilabial stop as in English word *spoon* and the IPA symbol we suggest is /p/. The relevant examples are provided in (10a/b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (10a) | pal | [p$^{h}$ɑl] | *'hill, slope'* | pel | [p$^{h}$æl] | *'leaf'* |
| | pir | [p$^{h}$ɨr] | *'very, a lot'* | pûş | [p$^{h}$uʃ] | *'bush'* |
| (10b) | paş | [pɑʃ] | *'back'* | pênç | [pentʃ] | *'back'* |
| | pîr | [pir] | *'old woman'* | pung | [pʊŋ] | *'pennyroyal'* |

**t** is like the aspirated voiceless alveo-dental stop in English word *till* and its IPA symbol is /t$^{h}$/, (11a). It is also pronounced as an unaspirated voiceless alveo-dental stop (even more back than it in some words) /t/ as illustrated in (11b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (11a) | teşt | [t$^{h}$æʃt] | *'basin'* | têr | [t$^{h}$er] | *'full'* |
| | tî | [t$^{h}$i] | *'thirsty'* | tor | [t$^{h}$or] | *'net'* |
| (11b) | tam | [tɑm] | *'taste'* | ter | [tær] | *'raw'* |
| | tîr | [tir] | *'dense'* | tûj | [tuʒ] | *'hot'* |

**k** in (12a) is like the aspirated velar stop as in English *kill* and its IPA symbol is /k$^{h}$/. On the other hand, in examples (12b) it is pronounced as the unaspirated velar sound in English *skill* but it is even more back than this sound, and its IPA symbol is /k/.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (12a) | ker | [k$^{h}$ær] | *'donkey'* | kûr | [k$^{h}$ur] | *'deep'* |
| | kêr | [k$^{h}$er] | *'knife'* | kal | [k$^{h}$ɑl] | *'unripe'* |
| (12b) | ker | [kær] | *'deaf'* | kor | [kor] | *'blind'* |
| | kêr | [ker] | *'useful'* | kal | [kɑl] | *'old man'* |

**ç** is like the aspirated voiceless palatal affricate in English word *change* and its IPA symbol is /tʃ$^{h}$/. However, in some words, it is pronounced as

unaspirated voiceless palatal affricate, even more back than that and the IPA symbol is /tʃ/. Relevant examples for both sounds are in (13a/b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (13a) | çar | [tʃʰɑr] | *'four'* | çend | [tʃʰænd] | *'how many'* |
| | çil | [tʃʰɨl] | *'forty'* | çûn | [tʃʰun] | *'to go'* |
| (13b) | çep | [tʃɛp] | *'reverse'* | çerm | [tʃærm] | *'skin'* |
| | çil | [tʃɨl] | *'rapacious'* | çûr | [tʃur] | *'blond'* |

In this sense, there is no way to mark the phonemic distinction carried by aspirated sounds in some words such as *ker* 'donkey' and *ker* 'deaf' (<k> letter) or *tî* 'thirsty' and *tîr* 'deep, dense' (<t> letter) in Kurmanji orthography. The person should know the word itself otherwise the mispronunciation of words changes the meaning of the word or makes it sound odd.

This study further claims that there is a set of labial consonants in Muş Kurmanji, as well, which in turn makes another way of distinction in the sound system of this variety.

## 3.2. Labial Consonants in Kurmanji

The articulation data shows that some words written with <u> in orthography in fact do not contain either /ʊ/ or /ə/ sound but rather the vowel in those words certainly sounds like /ɨ/ that we hear in the word *dims* 'pekmez'. Therefore, I propose that the labial feature that we perceive in those words do not come from the vowel but it spreads from the consonant itself. Hence there are labial consonants in Kurmanji. In contrast to previous studies, the current study argues that in addition to aspiration, labiality also makes a distinction among consonantal sounds.

**k** in addition to aspirated /kʰ/ and its unaspirated /k/ correspondents, there is a labio-velar voiceless /kʷ/ sound in the following words.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (14c) | kur | [kʷɨr] | *'son'* | kurmi | [kʷɨrmi] | *'itchy'* |
| | kul | [kʷɨl] | *'worry'* | kuştin | [kʷɨʃtɨn] | *'to kill'* |

**g** corresponds to voiced velar stop as in English word *gill*, /g/ whereas in (15b) it is a labio-velar voiced consonant /gʷ/ as mentioned in the previous section.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (15a) | gav | [gɑv] | *'step'* | gel | [gæl] | *'folk'* |
| | gir | [gɨr] | *'big, huge'* | goşt | [goʃt] | *'meat'* |
| (15b) | gul | [gʷɨl] | *'rose'* | gustîlk | [gʷɨstilk] | *'ring'* |
| | gund | [gʷɨnd] | *'village'* | gur | [gʷɨr] | *'wolf'* |

**q** corresponds to two different sounds in Kurmanji. It is like 'qaf (ق)' sound in Arabic – voiceless uvular stop and its IPA symbol is /q/ as illustrated with words in (16a). It also sounds as a labio-uvular sound whose IPA symbol I suggest is /qʷ/, (16b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (16a) | qet | [qætʰ] | *'piece'* | qelş | [qælʃ ] | *'torn'* |
| | qoç | [qotʃ ] | *'wood'* | qîr | [qir ] | *'asphalt'* |
| (16b) | qul | [qʷɨl] | *'hole'* | qunc | [qʷɨndʒ] | *'nook'* |
| | qurre | [qʷər:ɛ] | *'bigheaded'* | qupçe | [qʷɨptʃɛ] | *'button'* |

**x** denotes to two different sounds; one is voiceless velar fricative /x/ whereas the other one is its labial counterpart /xʷ/. Relevant examples for both sounds are given in (17a/b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (17a) | xal | [xɑl] | *'uncle'* | xew | [xæw] | *'sleep'* |
| | xîzar | [xizɑr] | *'saw'* | xêr | [xer] | *'charity'* |
| (17b) | xurme | [xʷɨrmɛ] | *'betel nut'* | xulam | [xʷɨlɑm] | *'slave'* |
| | xurç | [xʷɨrtʃh] | *'kit bag'* | xurt | [xʷɨrt] | *'fat* |

Although, there are words written by <xw> letters in Kurmanji (which is considered to be a diphthong), I do not find any word in which <xw> precedes 'u', but instead <xw> is generally followed by an unrounded vowel such as /ɑ, i, ɨ, ɛ/ as in the words *xwarin* 'to eat', *xwe* 'self', *xwîn* 'blood', and *xwişk* 'sister'. I propose that the initial sound in words like *xurme* 'betel nut', *xulam* 'slave', *xurç* 'kit bag', *xurt* 'fat, etc.' is totally like the sound represented by 'xw' in Kurmanji orthography because the labial sound that we hear in these words does not come from the vowel but in fact it is consonant-inherent. Therefore, the phonetic form of the <x> in those words is in fact equal to phonetic form of <xw> and it is labio-velar voiceless fricative /xʷ/.

It should be pointed out that the tentative articulation experiment done with the students in the Kurdish Language and Literature Department (who come from different Kurmanji dialect regions in Turkey) at Muş Alparslan University showed that these labial consonantal sounds exist in other Kurmanji dialects, which implies that the labial consonantal sounds are a part of Kurmanji phonology in general. However, more detailed dialectal studies are necessary to make a stronger claim on the existence of these sounds, thus this issue is left for further studies at this point.

### 3.3. Other Three Consonants: <h> and <r>

In addition to the consonants discussed so far, Muş Kurmanji also makes a distinction between two different /h/ and /r/ sounds, respectively:

**h** stands for two different sounds; it is like the glottal fricative in English word *hill* and its IPA symbol is /h/ in (18a). In some words, on the other hand, it is pronounced as the ح sound in Arabic as illustrated in (18b). The IPA symbol for it is the voiceless pharyngeal fricative /ħ/.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (18a) | har | [hɑr] | *'irritable'* | her | [hær] | *'every'* |
| | hûr | [hur] | *'small'* | hiş | [hɨʃ] | *'mind'* |
| (18b) | heşt | [ħæʃt] | *'eight'* | behr | [bæħr ] | *'sea'* |
| | hevşî | [ħævʃi] | *'sheep pen'* | heb | [ħɛb] | *'piece'* |

**r** has two different alveolar correspondents in this variety (also other dialects). The one is flap /ɾ/ as illustrated in (19a). Thackston (2006) states that this sound does not appear word initially, which is borne out in our articulation data, as well. The other one is thrill /r/ (19b).

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (19a) | pir | [pɨɾ] | *'bridge'* | giran | [gɨɾan] | *'heavy'* |
| (19b) | pir | [pɨr] | *'much'* | rê | [re] | *'road, way'* |
| | kêr | [k$^{h}$er] | *'knife'* | tarî | [tari] | *'dark'* |

As a last note, we should mention that the voiced pharyngeal fricative ('ayn' sound in Arabic) is quite common in Muş Kurmanji. Kurmanji dictionaries use the diacritic (') before 'e' to indicate the Arabic 'ayn' (ع) sound as illustrated in (20). This sound is totally similar to 'ayn' sound in Arabic, which is considered to be a voiced pharyngeal fricative /ʕ/.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (20) | 'erebe | [ʕræbɛ] | *'car'* | 'ezman | [ʕzmɑn] | *'sky'* |
| | 'elî | [ʕli] | *'Ali'* | 'erd | [ʕrd] | *'ground'* |

The results show that there are thirty-three consonantal sounds in Muş Kurmanji, in other words, the 23 consonant letters used in Kurmanji orthography correspond to 33 consonantal sounds in this dialect (Northern dialect region). If we also add the pharyngeal fricative sound /ʕ/ that the vowel <'> corresponds to in some words (see the examples in (20)), Muş Kurmanji has 34 consonantal sounds. All the consonantal sounds are provided with their IPA symbols and relevant examples in the following table.

**Table 6.** Consonants in Muş Kurmanji

| Letter | IPA | Phonetic Description | Example | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| b | [b] | bilabial voiced stop | *baran* | 'rain' |
| c | [dʒ] | palatal voiced affricate | *cutin* | 'to chew' |
| ç | [tʃ] | palatal voiceless unaspirated affricate | *çerm* | 'skin' |
| | [tʃ$^{h}$] | palatal voiceless aspirated affricate | *çil* | 'forty' |
| d | [d] | alveo-dental voiced stop | *diran* | 'tooth' |
| f | [f] | labiodental voiceless fricative | *firotin* | 'to sell' |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| g | [g] | velar voiced stop | *giran* | 'heavy' |
| | [$g^w$] | labio-velar voiced stop | *gul* | 'rose' |
| h | [h] | glottal fricative | *hatin* | 'to come' |
| | [ħ] | pharyngeal fricative | *hezar* | 'thousand' |
| j | [ʒ] | post-alveolar voiced fricative | *jin* | 'woman' |
| k | [k] | velar voiceless unaspirated stop | *ker* | 'deaf' |
| | [$k^h$] | velar voiceless aspirated stop | *kêr* | 'knife' |
| | [$k^w$] | labio-velar voiceless stop | *kur* | 'son' |
| q | [q] | uvular voiceless stop | *qet* | 'never' |
| | [$q^w$] | labio-uvular voiceless stop | *qurre* | 'bigheaded' |
| l | [l] | alveo-dental lateral | *lêv* | 'lip' |
| m | [m] | bilabial nasal stop | *mezin* | 'big' |
| n | [n] | alveo-dental nasal stop | *nan* | 'bread' |
| r | [r] | alveolar trill | *pir* | *'much'* |
| | [ɾ] | alveolar flap | *pir* | *'bridge'* |
| p | [p] | bilabial voiceless unaspirated stop | *pîr* | 'old' |
| | [$p^h$] | bilabial voiceless aspirated stop | *pel* | 'leaf' |
| s | [s] | alveolar voiceless fricative | *sar* | 'cold' |
| ş | [ʃ] | post-alveolar voiceless fricative | *şêr* | 'lion' |
| t | [t] | alveo-dental voiceless unaspirated stop | *tazî* | 'naked' |
| | [$t^h$] | alveo-dental voiceless aspirated stop | *têr* | 'full' |
| v | [v] | labiodental voiced fricative | *vala* | 'empty' |
| y | [j] | palatal approximant | *yek* | 'one' |
| w | [w] | bilabial approximant | *welat* | 'homeland' |
| z | [z] | alveolar voiced fricative | *zelal* | 'clear' |
| x | [x] | velar voiceless fricative | *xew* | 'sleep' |
| x/xw | [$x^w$] | labio-velar voiceless fricative | *xweş* | 'nice' |
| | | | *xurt* | 'fat' |
| ' | [ʕ] | voiced pharyngeal fricative | *'erd* | 'ground' |

## 4. CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to investigate the vowels and consonants in Muş Kurmanji (Northern dialect region) presenting their distinctive phonemic features based on the articulation data elicited in the Muş. It has also mentioned that the letters used in the Kurmanji orthography do not represent the whole sounds in Muş Kurmanji. It has been showed that the thirty-one letters (eight for vowels and twenty-three for consonants) in the Kurmanji alphabet correspond to forty-four sounds in Muş Kurmanji. It has been asserted that <e> and <u> vowels correspond to more than one sound in this dialect such that <e> may denote to /ɛ/ and /æ/ and likewise <u> may sound as /ʊ/, /ə/ and /ɨ/. Most importantly, it has been proposed that there are also four labial consonantal sounds like /$k^w$, $g^w$, $x^w$, $q^w$/ in this dialect. This in turn argues that in addition to aspiration, labiality also makes a distinction between some consonantal sounds in Kurmanji. However, there are some points which are left for further studies. For instance, we need further research to decide whether the labial consonantal sounds exist in all Kurmanji dialects or which one

of them has those sounds. Lastly, some phonetic studies from other Kurmanji dialect regions are necessary to see Kurmanji internal phonetic variation and its implications for the phonological system of this language.

## NOTES

[1]As discussed by Haig (2008), the position of Kurdish among West Iranian languages is to some extent controversial because the northwestern/southwestern distinction depending on the historical phonology and sound changes is not accepted by all scholars.

[2] See *L'alphabet Kurde Adapte Aux Caracteres Latins* by Akın (2006) for detailed information (socio-political, linguistic and historical developments) about the use of Latin characters for Kurdish.

[3] Being the first professional research in Kurdish dialectology, Öpengin and Haig's study on dialect regions of Kurmanji spoken in Turkey is invaluable. The results of the current study would be more meaningful if they are interpreted and compared with other Kurmanji dialects mentioned in Öpengin and Haig (2014). Also, the morphosyntactic properties of Muş Kurmanji are investigated in comparison to the Standard Kurmanji in an earlier study so see Gündoğdu (2011) for a detailed analysis.

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