

Helping Learners with Common English Difficulties

سۆرانی کوردی

Kurdish Sorani

Introduction & Background

This guide is designed to support ESOL tutors, volunteers, and staff working with **Kurdish Sorani**-speaking learners. It outlines the most common challenges these learners face when learning English and offers practical examples, explanations, and exercises to support more effective communication. The aim is to build understanding, patience, and confidence in supporting **Kurdish Sorani** speakers on their learning journey.

Kurdish Sorani

Sorani is classified as a Northwestern Iranian language and is one of the two main dialects of Kurdish, the other being Kurmanji. It is spoken by approximately 9 million people, primarily in Iraq and Iran.

Kurdish Sorani and English differ in **phonology, grammar, writing system, and vocabulary**, so Sorani speakers often face predictable challenges when learning English.

Pronunciation & Phonology

1. Sounds not in Sorani

- /θ/ (“think”) → often replaced with /s/ or /t/
 - “think” → “tink” or “sink”
- /ð/ (“this”) → often replaced with /d/
 - “this” → “dis”
- /v/ → sometimes pronounced as /w/
 - “very” → “wery”
- /ʒ/ (as in measure) → may be unfamiliar, sometimes replaced with /z/ or /j/
- /ŋ/ (as in sing) → replaced with /n/

2. Consonant clusters

- Sorani words usually avoid complex clusters; learners may insert vowels:
 - “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “eskool.”

3. Final consonants

- Learners may add a vowel after a final consonant:
 - “cat” → “cata”

4. Vowel differences

- English has more vowels than Sorani. Learners may confuse:
 - /ɪ/ vs /i:/ (“ship” vs “sheep”)
 - /ʌ/ vs /ɑ:/ (“luck” vs “lock”)



Grammar & Syntax

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Sorani does not have definite/indefinite articles. Learners often omit them:
 - “*I bought book*” → “*I bought a book.*”

2. Verb tenses

- Sorani verbs are less tense-focused and rely more on aspect. English perfect and continuous tenses are tricky:
 - “*I have eaten*” or “*I am eating*” may be confused.

3. Word order

- Sorani generally uses SOV (Subject-Object-Verb). English is SVO, leading to:
 - “*I the book read*” instead of “*I read the book.*”

4. Plural forms

- Irregular English plurals (child → children, foot → feet) can be confusing.

5. Prepositions

- Sorani postpositions differ from English prepositions, leading to mistakes:
 - “*I am waiting you*” → “*I am waiting for you.*”

Vocabulary & Expression

1. Literal translation

- Learners may translate idioms word-for-word, producing unnatural expressions:
 - *“I am feeling bored”* → *“I feel boredom”*

2. Politeness & register

- Sorani speakers may overuse formal expressions due to cultural norms, sounding too formal in casual English.

Writing System

1. Sorani uses Perso-Arabic script

- Switching to Latin alphabet for English can slow reading and writing fluency.

2. Direction

- Sorani is written right-to-left, while English is left-to-right, which can confuse beginners.

Sociolinguistic Factors

- Sorani speakers' exposure to English varies: some learn through schools, media, or online resources.
- Regional accents or dialectal differences in Kurdish may slightly influence English pronunciation.

Summary

Kurdish Sorani speakers usually struggle with:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, left-to-right orientation

Common mistakes Kurdish Sorani speakers make in English

Pronunciation Mistakes

1. /θ/ → /t/ or /s/

- “*think*” → “*tink*” or “*sink*”

2. /ð/ → /d/

- “*this*” → “*dis*”

3. /v/ → /w/

- “*very*” → “*wery*”

4. /ʒ/ → /z/ or /j/

- “*measure*” → “*mezure*”

5. Consonant clusters

- “*street*” → “*istreet*”, “*school*” → “*eskool*”

6. Final consonant vowels added

- “*cat*” → “*cata*”, “*desk*” → “*desku*”

7. Vowel confusion

- “*ship*” vs “*sheep*”, “*luck*” vs “*lock*”



Grammar Mistakes

1. Articles omitted

- Incorrect: “*I bought book.*”
- Correct: “*I bought a book.*”

2. Verb tense errors

- Incorrect: “*I go school yesterday.*”
- Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have eat lunch.*”
- Correct: “*I have eaten lunch.*”

3. Word order (SOV → SVO)

- Incorrect: “*I the book read.*”
- Correct: “*I read the book.*”

4. Plural errors

- Incorrect: “*Childs are playing.*”
- Correct: “*Children are playing.*”

5. Preposition mistakes

- Incorrect: “*I am waiting you.*”
- Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”
- Incorrect: “*I go to home.*”
- Correct: “*I go home.*”

Vocabulary & Expression Mistakes

1. Literal translation from Sorani

- Incorrect: “*I have hunger.*”
- Correct: “*I am hungry.*”
- Incorrect: “*I have thirst.*”
- Correct: “*I am thirsty.*”

2. Over-formal expressions in casual conversation

- “*I request you to help me in this matter.*” → better: “*Can you help me?*”

3. Idioms / fixed phrases

- Literal translation issues: “*It rains heavily*” may be translated word-for-word and sound unnatural.



Writing Mistakes

1. Spelling influenced by phonetics

- “wery” for “very”
- “eskool” for “school”

2. Word order issues

- Literal SOV structure from Sorani: “*I homework did yesterday*” → “*I did homework yesterday.*”

3. Direction adjustment

- Beginners may mix left-to-right (English) and right-to-left (Sorani) writing

Examples in Conversation

- **Sorani speaker:** “*I go school yesterday.*”
 - → Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- **Sorani speaker:** “*This book very interesting.*”
 - → Correct: “*This book is very interesting.*”
- **Sorani speaker:** “*I am waiting you.*”
 - → Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”

Summary

Kurdish Sorani speakers’ most common mistakes are:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, spelling, left-to-right orientation

🎓 Teaching Strategies for Kurdish Sorani Speakers Learning English

🔊 Pronunciation Strategies

Challenges: /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /ʒ/, vowel distinctions,
consonant clusters, final consonants

1. Minimal Pairs Drills

- /θ/ vs /t/: *think – tink, three – tree*
- /ð/ vs /d/: *this – dis, that – dat*
- /v/ vs /w/: *very – wery, visit – wist*
- /ʒ/ vs /z/: *measure – mezure, pleasure – plezure*
- /ɪ/ vs /i:/: *ship – sheep, sit – seat*

2. Consonant Cluster Practice

- Begin with added vowels: *eskool → skool → school*
- Gradually reduce inserted vowels: *istreet → street*

3. Final Consonant Awareness

- Drill words ending in consonants: *cat, desk, lamp*
- Emphasize not adding extra vowels: *cat ≠ cata*

4. Recording & Playback

- Students record themselves reading sentences, then compare with native speakers



Grammar Strategies

Challenges: Articles, tenses, word order, plurals, prepositions

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Visual aids: a cat (any cat) vs. the cat (specific cat)
- Fill-in-the-blank exercises: *I saw ___ apple, ___ sun, ___ cat*

2. Verb Tense Awareness

- Use timelines for past, present, future
- Storytelling activities to practice past tense: “What did you do yesterday?”
- Practice perfect and continuous tenses using real-life examples

3. Word Order (SOV → SVO)

- Sentence rearrangement exercises: *I the book read → I read the book*
- Pair work to build correct sentence structures

4. Plural Forms

- Drill irregular plurals: *child → children, man → men*
- Classroom games: memory match, “plural hunt”

5. Preposition Practice

- Teach prepositions in chunks: wait for someone, go to school, sit on the chair
- Role-playing exercises for reinforcement

Vocabulary & Expression Strategies

Challenges: Literal translation, idioms, over-formality

1. Idioms & Fixed Expressions

- Introduce gradually, with visuals or stories
- Encourage learners to use simplified equivalents initially: “*It’s raining heavily*”

2. Politeness & Register

- Teach casual vs. formal English:
 - Casual: “*Can you help me?*”
 - Formal: “*I request your assistance*”
- Role-play everyday situations: asking directions, ordering food, shopping

3. Avoid Direct Translation

- Encourage thinking in English structures rather than translating word-for-word from Sorani

Writing Strategies

Challenges: Latin alphabet, spelling, SOV → SVO transfer

1. Spelling Practice

- Focus on tricky consonants and vowels: very, school, desk
- Dictation exercises using minimal pairs

2. Guided Writing

- Start with sentence frames: *I went to _____ yesterday*
- Build up to paragraphs with word banks

3. Direction Awareness

- Highlight left-to-right writing orientation
- Use lined paper to guide placement of letters

Speaking & Listening Strategies

1. Dialogues & Role Play

- Everyday scenarios: shopping, traveling, asking questions
- Encourage peer correction and self-correction

2. Stress & Intonation

- Clap or tap syllables to practice stress patterns
- Show meaning differences through stress: / *didn't say he stole the money*

3. Listening Exposure

- Short videos, songs, or podcasts with repetition
- Shadowing exercises: repeat immediately after native speaker

Cultural & Confidence-Building

1. Acknowledge Dialect Influence

- Regional Kurdish variations may affect pronunciation
- Use familiar vocabulary to ease learning

2. Safe Speaking Environment

- Peer groups, pair work, and games reduce anxiety
- Correct gently, focusing on communication first

3. Celebrate Multilingual Skills

- Sorani speakers often juggle Sorani, Kurmanji, and sometimes Arabic or Persian – emphasize this advantage

Summary

For Kurdish Sorani speakers, focus on:

- **Pronunciation:** /θ/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, vowels, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** idioms, literal translations, register
- **Writing:** spelling, Latin alphabet, direction
- **Interactive practice** is key – role-play, drills, and listening exercises are essential.

Common mistakes Kurdish Sorani speakers make in English

Greetings & Basics

- **سلاو** (Slaw) → Hello / Hi
- **چۆنیت؟** (Chonit?) → How are you? (informal)
- **چۆنیتان؟** (Chonitan?) → How are you? (formal or plural)
- **باشم، سوپاس** (Basham, supas) → I'm fine, thank you
- **خۆت باش بیّت** (Xot bash bet) → Goodbye / Take care

Greetings & Basics

- **ناوت چییه؟** (Nawt chie?) → What is your name?
- **ناوهکهه ... یه** (Nawakem ... ye) → My name is ...
- **خۆشحالم له دیدنت** (Xoshhalim la didint) → Nice to meet you



Politeness

- سوپاس (Supas) → Thank you
- زۆر سوپاس (Zor supas) → Thank you very much
- تکایه (Takaya) → Please
- ببوره (Bebore) → Excuse me / Sorry



Food & Drink

- ئاو (Aw) → Water
- چای (Chay) → Tea
- قههوه (Qahwa) → Coffee
- من بیزارم / من بیوهرم (Men bezarim / men bewerm) → I'm hungry
- من تهنه ووشکم / من تهنه شتیکم دهخوایم (Men تنها wushkem / men تنها shtekem dexwaym) → I'm thirsty

Getting Around

- له کوی...؟ (La koy ...?) → Where is ...?
- نرخه کهی چهنده؟ (Nrxakay chand?) → How much does it cost?
- راست (Rast) → Right
- چال (Chal) → Left

Polite Closings

- خوت باش بیت (Xot bash bet) → Goodbye / Take care
- روژی خوش (Roji xosh) → Have a good day
- بهیانی باش (Beyani bash) → Good morning
- ئیواره باش (Eware bash) → Good evening
- شهو باش (Shaw bash) → Good night



Notes:

- Sorani is written in **Perso-Arabic script** and is read right-to-left.
- Politeness words like “**Takaya**” (**please**) and “**Bebore**” (**sorry/excuse me**) are frequently used in daily conversation.
- Pronunciation may vary slightly across different regions in Kurdistan.