

Pronouns in Kurmanji Kurdish

Cînavk di Kurmancî de

An illustrated, bilingual-terminology grammar guide and practice workbook

PUBLISHED EDITION

English explanations · Kurmanji examples · Visual paradigms · Practice and answer key

DIRECT	OBLIQUE	FUNCTION
ez	min	I / me
tu	te	you (singular)
ew	wî / wê	he / she / it
em	me	we / us
hûn	we	you (plural)
ew	wan	they / them

Learning objectives — Armançên fêrbûnê

After this lesson you should be able to (1) recognize the seven person/number rows in direct and oblique paradigms, (2) explain why English “I/me” is not a reliable model for Kurmanji case, (3) form possessive noun phrases with Ezafe, (4) use xwe for reflexive reference and hev/hevdû for reciprocal meaning, (5) distinguish proximal and distal demonstratives, and (6) identify typical errors in past-tense transitive clauses.

1. What are pronouns? — Cînavk çî ne?

Pronouns are words used to refer to participants, things or previously mentioned expressions. In Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish), many pronouns have a DIRECT form and an OBLIQUE form. Their distribution depends on the grammatical construction, not simply on whether English translates them as “subject” or “object”. The spelling used here is a standard-oriented Latin (Hawar) orthography; spoken regional varieties may differ.

2. Personal pronouns — Cînavkên kesane

The standard teaching paradigm is shown below. Ew can refer to “he”, “she”, “it” or “they”; context and agreement matter. Gender is distinguished in the singular oblique third person: wî (masculine) versus wê (feminine). Wan is plural oblique.

Person	Direct	Oblique
1 singular	ez	min
2 singular	tu	te
3 singular	ew	wî / wê
1 plural	em	me
2 plural	hûn	we
3 plural	ew	wan

3. Direct and oblique — Rewşa rasterast û tewandî

In a simple present-tense transitive clause, the agent is usually direct and the object oblique: Ez te dibînim. (“I see you.”) In a canonical past-tense transitive clause the pattern reverses: Min tu dîtî. (“I saw you.”) Here min is oblique, tu is direct, and the verb agrees with the direct object. Compare Min ew dît. (“I saw him/her.”) This split alignment is often described as past-tense ergativity. The system is more complex than the English subject/object distinction and varies in regional speech.

4. Prepositions and oblique forms — Daçek û cînavkên tewandî

A preposition or circumposition commonly takes an oblique pronoun. Compare *ji min* (“from me”), *ji te* (“from you”), *bi min re* (“with me”), and *ji wan re* (“to/for them”). Learners should memorize the entire construction: *bi ... re* is a circumposition, not simply a word-for-word translation of English “with”.

5. Possession and Ezafe — Xwedîtî û îzafe

Kurmanji often expresses possession as NOUN + EZAFE LINKER + OBLIQUE POSSESSOR. *Bavê min* (“my father”), *dayika te* (“your mother”), and *kitêbên wan* (“their books”) illustrate masculine singular -ê, feminine singular -a, and plural -ên in common definite Ezafe patterns. The linker depends on the head noun, not the gender of the possessor. Do not translate “my” with *ez*: **bavê ez* is incorrect in this construction.

6. Reflexive pronoun — Cînavka vegerok: xwe

Xwe is a largely invariant reflexive form used for all persons and numbers. *Ez xwe dibînim*. (“I see myself.”) *Ew xwe dibîne*. (“He/she sees himself/herself.”) It also marks possession coreferential with the clause’s relevant subject: *Ez kitêba xwe dixwînim*. (“I read my own book.”) Compare *Ez kitêba wî dixwînim*. (“I read his book.”) The latter normally points to a different male referent, not the current subject. The precise binding domain and regional variation deserve separate advanced study.

7. Reciprocal pronouns — Cînavkên hevduyî: hev / hevdû

Hev and *hevdû* express mutual relationships: *Em hev dibînin*. (“We see one another.”) *Ew hevdû nas dikin*. (“They know one another.”) A reciprocal requires two or more participants in the relevant interpretation. Do not confuse *xwe* (“self”) with *hev* (“each other”).

8. Demonstratives — Cînavkên nîşandanê

Ev generally points to something near (“this/these”); *ew* to something more distant (“that/those”). Direct demonstratives are not gender-distinguished. In oblique contexts, singular masculine and feminine forms differ, as shown in the chart. The same *ew/wî/wê/wan* forms overlap with third-person personal pronouns. Some dialects attach additional markers to demonstrative noun phrases; this lesson focuses on the core paradigm.

Distance	Direct	Oblique masculine	Oblique feminine	Oblique plural
Near	<i>ev</i>	<i>vî</i>	<i>vê</i>	<i>van</i>
Far	<i>ew</i>	<i>wî</i>	<i>wê</i>	<i>wan</i>

9. Interrogative pronouns — Cînavkên pirsê

Common question words include *kî* (“who?”), *çi* (“what?”), and *kîjan* (“which?”). Case-sensitive and extended forms occur in context. Compare *Ev kî ye?* (“Who is this?”), *Ev çi ye?* (“What is this?”), and *Kîjan kitêb?* (“Which book?”). More complex interrogative constructions should be checked against the verb and case frame rather than inferred mechanically from English.

10. Indefinite and quantifying expressions — Cînavkên nediya

Common referential expressions include *kes* (“person/someone” in context), *tu kes* (“anybody/no one”, depending on polarity), *tiştek* (“something”), *her kes* (“everyone”), and *hin* (“some”). Their interpretation depends on negation, focus, and sentence structure. These expressions are not all morphologically the same type of pronoun; grouping them here is a pedagogical convenience.

11. Contrast map — Four important distinctions

Direct versus oblique: *ez* / *min*. Gender in third-person oblique: *wî* / *wê*. Reflexive versus non-reflexive possession: *xwe* / *wî*. Reflexive versus reciprocal: *xwe* / *hev*. A learner who masters these four contrasts can avoid many high-frequency errors.

Distinction	Example A	Example B
Case	<i>ez</i>	<i>min</i>
Gender	<i>wî</i>	<i>wê</i>
Possession	<i>xwe</i>	<i>wî</i>
Reciprocity	<i>xwe</i>	<i>hev</i>

12. Practice — Rahênan

A. Supply the oblique forms: *ez* → __; *tu* → __; *em* → __; *hûn* → __; *ew* (plural) → __. B. Choose *wî* or *wê* for a masculine/feminine singular oblique referent. C. Translate into English: *Bavê min*; *dayika te*; *ji wan*; *bi min re*; *em hev dibînin*. D. Explain why “*Ez te dibînim*” and “*Min tu dîtî*” use different case patterns. E. Translate: “my father”, “their books”, “I see myself”, “we see one another”. F. Identify whether the intended meaning is reflexive or reciprocal: “each other”; “herself”; “my own book”.

13. Answer key — Bersiv

A. *min*; *te*; *me*; *we*; *wan*. B. *wî* = masculine; *wê* = feminine. C. my father; your mother; from them; with me; we see one another. D. Present transitive: direct agent and oblique object; canonical past transitive: oblique agent and direct object, with agreement aligned to the direct object. E. *bavê min*; *kitêbên wan*; *ez xwe dibînim*; *em hev dibînin*. F. reciprocal; reflexive; reflexive possessive. Note that acceptable regional word choices and contextual readings can vary.

14. Source notes — Çavkanî

Main reference: Geoffrey Haig & Ergin Öpengin, “Introduction to Special Issue: Kurdish — A Critical Research Overview” / descriptive account of Kurmanji Kurdish (2018), University of Bamberg PDF: https://www.uni-bamberg.de/fileadmin/aspra/06_Team/Publications_and_CV/HaigOepengin2018_Kurmanji_Kurdish_.pdf . Geoffrey Haig, “Northern Kurdish (Kurmanjî): An Areal Perspective”, University of Bamberg: https://multicast.aspra.uni-bamberg.de/data/pubs/Haig2018_Northern-Kurdish_Kurmanji.pdf . University of Arizona Iranian Languages, Kurmanji Kurdish: <https://iranian-languages.arizona.edu/node/7> . Examples are pedagogical and have been checked against the paradigms; they are not presented as quotations from those sources.