

Kurmanji Grammar Series 16 — Prefixes and Suffixes (Pêşgir û Paşgir)

English and Kurmanji only.

Learning goals

Recognize productive grammatical prefixes and endings; distinguish derivation from inflection; understand why the same written sequence may have different grammatical functions. Examples follow broadly taught Northern Kurmanji forms; dialect variation exists.

1. What are prefixes and suffixes?

A prefix comes before a stem (di-xwîn-im); a suffix comes after a stem (xwîn-im). A derivational affix may create a new lexical word; an inflectional affix marks grammar such as person, number, case or comparison. A lexical preverb is not always a freely attachable productive prefix.

2. Verbal prefixes: indicative, subjunctive and negation

The present indicative di- and subjunctive bi- generally alternate with the relevant negative marker; do not simply stack na- + di- in standard present forms.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
di-	present indicative	di-xwîn-im	I read / am reading
di-	present indicative	di-nivîs-im	I write / am writing
di-	present indicative	di-ç-im	I go / am going
bi-	subjunctive	bi-xwîn-im	that I read / should read
bi-	subjunctive	bi-ç-im	that I go
bi-	imperative	bi-xwîn-e	Read! (singular)
bi-	imperative	bi-nivîs-e	Write! (singular)
na-	negative present	na-xwîn-im	I do not read
na-	negative present	na-ç-im	I do not go
ne-	negative past	ne-hat-im	I did not come
ne-	negative subjunctive	ne-ç-im	that I not go / do not go!
ni-	special negative	ni-zan-im	I do not know
ni-	special negative	ni-kar-im	I cannot

3. Verb agreement endings

Person endings depend on present versus past stems and on the clause construction. In past transitive clauses, agreement follows an ergative alignment pattern; the simple present table below must not be generalized to every past-tense sentence.

4. Present-person endings with xwendin (to read)

Segmentation is pedagogical; standard spelling normally joins the parts.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-(i)m	1st singular	Ez dixwînim.	I read.
-î	2nd singular	Tu dixwînî.	You read.
-e	3rd singular	Ew dixwîne.	He/she reads.
-(i)n	1st plural	Em dixwînin.	We read.
-(i)n	2nd plural	Hûn dixwînin.	You (plural) read.
-(i)n	3rd plural	Ew dixwînin.	They read.

5. Past-tense intransitive endings

Examples with hatin (to come); past transitive verbs follow a different agreement pattern.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-im	1st singular	Ez hatim.	I came.
-î	2nd singular	Tu hatî.	You came.
zero	3rd singular	Ew hat.	He/she came.
-in	1st plural	Em hatin.	We came.
-in	2nd plural	Hûn hatin.	You (plural) came.
-in	3rd plural	Ew hatin.	They came.

6. Lexical verbal preverbs

Learn these as complete verbs. Some preverbs affect placement of tense and negative prefixes.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
ve-	open / re- in lexical verbs	vekirin → ez vedikim	to open → I open
ra-	up / arise	rabûn → ez radibim	to get up → I get up
da-	down	daxistin → ez dadixim	to lower → I lower
hil-	up / take	hilgirtin → ez hildigirim	to lift → I lift
wer-	toward / receive	wergirtin → ez werdigirim	to receive → I receive
der-	out	derketin → ez derdikevim	to go out → I go out

7. Important distinction: prefix versus separate word

In “ji malê” (from home), ji is a separate preposition, not a prefix. In “bi min re” (with me), bi and re form an adpositional construction; do not confuse that bi with the subjunctive bi- attached to a verb.

8. Common nominal and adjectival derivation

These are attested word families, not a guarantee that each suffix can attach to any base.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-î	abstract noun / relation	azad → azadî	free → freedom
-î	quality	ciwan → ciwanî	young → youth
-î	quality	baş → başî	good → goodness

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-î	language / relation	Kurd → kurdî	Kurd → Kurdish
-dar	possessing / associated	pere → peredar	money → wealthy (regional/lexical)
-dar	possessing	mal → maldar	house/property → wealthy
-van	person / occupation	şivan	shepherd (lexical word)
-van	person / occupation	karwanvan	caravan driver
-geh	place	zanîn → zanîngeh	knowledge → university (lexicalized)
-geh	place	kar → kargeh	work → workplace/workshop
-xane	place (borrowed formative)	çay → çayxane	tea → teahouse
-istan	region / land	Kurd → Kurdistan	Kurd → Kurdistan

9. Derivation: use caution

Some suffixes have limited productivity, and several common words are historically complex or borrowed. The table illustrates recognizable patterns; it does not claim every word is formed by a fully productive rule. For instance, -dar and -van do not freely combine with all nouns.

10. Comparison endings

Comparison is grammatical and is distinct from English adverbial -ly.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-tir	comparative	mezin → mezintir	big → bigger
-tir	comparative	biçûk → biçûktir	small → smaller
-tir	comparative	baş → baştir	good → better
herî + adjective	superlative phrase	herî mezin	biggest / largest
herî + adjective	superlative phrase	herî baş	best

11. Noun case, plural and indefinite markers

Forms vary with gender, number, syntactic context and regional variety. Do not interpret each ending in isolation.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-ek	indefinite singular	pirtûkek	a book
-ekî	masculine indefinite oblique	mirovêkî	a man/person (oblique)
-ekê	feminine indefinite oblique	pirtûkekê	a book (oblique)
-an	plural oblique	ji mirovan	from the people
-ê	feminine singular oblique	ji malê	from the house
-î	masculine singular oblique	ji kurî	from the boy (contextual form)
-ên	plural ezafe	pirtûkên nû	new books

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-a	feminine ezafe	mala mezin	the big house
-ê	masculine ezafe	kurê mezin	the big boy

12. Ezafe is not a general-purpose word-building suffix

Ezafe connects a noun with a modifier or possessor. Examples: kurê mezin (the big boy), mala mezin (the big house), pirtûkên nû (new books). Gender and number determine the linker; compare the previous noun lesson.

13. Ordinal suffixes

The spelling and realization of ordinal endings can vary by number and variety.

Affix / form	Function	Kurmanji example	English meaning
-em	ordinal	yekem	first
-em	ordinal	duyem	second
-em	ordinal	sêyem	third
-em	ordinal	çarem	fourth
-em	ordinal	pêncem	fifth
-em	ordinal	dehem	tenth

14. A word-building workshop

azad (free) → azadî (freedom); ciwan (young) → ciwanî (youth); mezin (big) → mezintir (bigger); Kurd (Kurd) → kurdî (Kurdish); kar (work) → kargeh (workplace). These demonstrate different grammatical and lexical processes.

15. Compare full sentences

Focus on the affix in each form.

Affix / form	Kurmanji example	English meaning	Function
di-	Ez dixwînim.	I am reading.	indicative
na-	Ez naxwînim.	I am not reading.	negative
bi-	Divê ez bixwînim.	I should read.	subjunctive
ne-	Ez nehatim.	I did not come.	past negative
ni-	Ez nizanim.	I do not know.	irregular negative
ve-	Ez derî vedikim.	I open the door.	lexical preverb
ra-	Ez radibim.	I get up.	lexical preverb
-tir	Ev mal mezintir e.	This house is bigger.	comparative
-ek	Min pirtûkek kirî.	I bought a book.	indefinite
-ên	Pirtûkên nû li vir in.	The new books are here.	plural ezafe
-î	Azadî girîng e.	Freedom is important.	abstract noun

16. Common mistakes

Do not add -ly to Kurmanji adjectives. Do not use na-di-xwînim for the ordinary present negative (use naxwînim). Do not treat ji or the preposition bi as verbal prefixes. Do not assume -î always means the same thing: it can occur in different derivational and inflectional categories. Learn the complete prefixed verb rather than freely inventing new verbs.

17. Exercises

1) Segment dixwînim. 2) Make “Ez dixwînim” negative. 3) Form the subjunctive of xwendin for ez. 4) Translate: I do not know. 5) Identify the lexical preverb in vekirin. 6) Give the comparative of mezin. 7) Translate azadî. 8) Identify the suffix in pirtûkek. 9) What is the function of -ên in pirtûkên nû? 10) Is ji in ji malê a prefix? 11) Translate “I get up.” 12) Explain why -î in azadî and -ê in kurê mezin have different grammatical functions.

18. Answer key

1) di- + xwîn- + -im. 2) Ez naxwînim. 3) bixwînim. 4) Ez nizanim. 5) ve-. 6) mezintir. 7) freedom. 8) -ek (indefinite). 9) plural ezafe linker. 10) No, a separate preposition. 11) Ez radibim. 12) -î in azadî derives an abstract noun, while -ê in kurê mezin is a masculine ezafe linker.

19. References and editorial note

Geoffrey Haig (2018), “Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji)”; Geoffrey Haig & Ergin Öpengin (2018), “Kurmanji Kurdish in Turkey: structure, varieties, and status”; Songül Gündoğdu (2015), “Negation in Kurmanji”; “The -î Morpheme in Kurmanji Word Formation” (Kurdiname). See also Haig & Öpengin’s discussion of agreement, negation, and ezafe. Educational examples may differ by dialect; independent native-speaker review is recommended.

20. Series closing note

This lesson closes the initial grammar series. For more advanced study, revisit case, ezafe, verb stems, past-tense alignment, and regional variation.