Geoffrey Haig (Kiel)
Yaron Matras (Manchester)

Kurdish linguistics: a brief overview

Abstract

A perennial problem for Kurdish linguistics is the fragmented nature of the field. There is a lack of reliable general introductory texts, and a lack of a common forum for exchanging research results. Linguists beginning work on Kurdish are obliged to stumble their way through a variety of sources, often of obscure origin and some of doubtful reliability. One of the aims of this contribution is to bring together a broad range of previously published scholarship in the hope that future researchers will be able to widen the relevance of their findings by relating them to existent material. We also provide a highly condensed account of what we believe are central issues in Kurdish linguistics, and offer some pointers for future research in the field.

1. What is Kurdish?

Kurdish is a cover term for a bundle of closely-related West Iranian dialects spoken across a large contiguous area spanning the intersection of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Smaller communities of Kurds also live in Syria, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and a sizeable exile community (at least 700,000) now live in Western Europe. Estimates of the total number of Kurdish speakers vary wildly, generally between 15 and 25 million. The Kurds lack a state of their own, and as a result, defining Kurdish identity and the precise demarcation of the language is not a simple matter (see Bruinessen 1997 for recent discussion). In practice, Kurds are generally defined as people who claim Kurdish identity for themselves. The majority of persons thus defined also speak Kurdish.

In terms of numbers of speakers and degree of standardisation, the two most important Kurdish dialects are Soranî (or Central Kurdish) and Kurmanji (or Northern Kurdish). Some scholars, e.g. Kreyenbroek (1992), have pointed out that the structural differences between Soranî and Kurmanji could justify treating them as two distinct languages. However, the traditional terminology, and the one favoured by most native speakers, is to consider them as dialects of a superordinate unit "Kurdish". This is the convention we adopt here.

While Soranî and Kurmanji are uncontroversially considered Kurdish, opinions on more peripheral languages such as Guranî and Zazakî (or Dimili) differ. Some scholars maintain that these languages are Kurdish dialects (e.g. Smirnova & Eyubi 1999), while others consider them distinct languages (e.g. MacKenzie). Most linguists now agree that Zazaki, spoken in central East Anatolia, is a separate language (see Selcan 1998 and Paul 1998a, 1998b). Nevertheless, it is an undeniable fact that many Zazaki speakers do consider themselves "Kurds". Furthermore, linguistic research on Zazaki has traditionally been under-

taken within the broader framework of Kurdish studies. The current volume continues this tradition by including a paper on Zazaki (PAUL, this volume), although we do not subscribe to the view that Zazaki is a "Kurdish dialect".

2. Efforts at standardisation of Kurdish

Kurdish literacy is often impeded by social and political factors.[1] A large proportion of the Kurdish population have only recently gained access to any form of education. State education is normally conducted in the state language and not in Kurdish, and in Turkey public use of Kurdish was until very recently directly oppressed by the government (see SKUTNABB-KANGAS & BUCAK 1995 on language policies in Turkey). Nonetheless, there is a tradition, or rather several traditions, of writing in Kurdish. The state of codification and standardisation of Kurdish is best described in terms of three main centres of activity. The oldest and most established is in the Soranî variety of the city of Suleymaniya in Iraqi Kurdistan. Prose in this dialect dates back to the nineteenth century. Under the British administration, a phonemic orthography was designed for the language on the basis of the Persian-Arabic script. The Suleymaniya dialect written in this alphabet was adopted as the official standard language of the short-lived Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, and has later served with various intervals as an officially recognised regional language of instruction, media and commerce in the Kurdish regions of Iraq, and unofficially also in the neighbouring Soranî-speaking regions of Iran.

Standardisation efforts in Kurmanji draw on even earlier literary traditions in the dialects of Hakkari and Botan, mainly late medieval poetry. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Kurdish nationalists in exile established a Kurmanji press in the closely-related varieties of Cizre and Botan of the Turkish-Syrian border area, written initially in Arabic script. In the 1930s, CELADET BEDIR-KHAN introduced a Latin-script Kurdish alphabet, inspired by the Turkish language reform and copying some of its features. The alphabet, along with a normative grammatical outline, was published in sequences in BEDIR-KHAN's journal *Hawar*, and later in the monograph by BEDIR-KHAN & LESCOT 1970, discussed below in § 4.4.

As a target variety for standard, the *Hawar*-norm has continued to serve the exile community of Kurdish intellectuals from Turkish and Syrian Kurdistan ever since, primarily in the political press but also in literary works. More recently, it has been used as the basis for native language instruction in immigrant communities in western Europe, as well as in Kurdish-language mass media based in Europe. Within the general framework of the *Hawar*-norm, contemporary exile publications in Kurmanji show some variation, but the choice of dialect and orthographic conventions are on the whole compatible (see MATRAS 1989), and can be considered an evolving, dynamic literary standard. In the Soviet Union, Kurdish was included among the Central Asian languages for which Roman-script alphabets were designed in the 1920s, later to be converted into Cyrillic scripts during the 1940s. The latter have been employed in a series of lexicographic works as well as in a number of popular publications, based mainly on the Kurmanji variety of Jerevan in Armenia.

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[1]   See HASSANPOUR 1992 for book-length treatment of the standardisation of Kurdish.

Kurds have been quick to grasp the opportunities afforded by satellite broadcasting and the internet. Over the past decade, a number of companies operating from Europe have sprung up, probably the best known being MED-TV (see HASSANPOUR 1997). There is a burgeoning network of websites on and in Kurdish and several Kurdish language publications are also available on the internet (e.g. *Azadiya Welat*). The new media offer stateless cultures unprecedented opportunities to disseminate material across national borders. The developments in this area will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences for the emergent Kurdish standard language, though it is too early to predict the direction of those developments yet.

3. Brief overview of structural properties of Kurdish

This brief overview presents features common to Soranî and Kurmanji, but notes significant differences where relevant. The principal features of the sound system include fluctuation in the rounding of the short closed vowels /i/ and /u/, as well as frequently interchanging articulations in closed vowels between front, back, and central, and a tendency toward syllable reduction around unstressed short closed vowels. The vowel system is relatively simple (see SHOKRI, this volume for Bahdinani, the southernmost variety of Kurmanji) though there is considerable variation in vowel qualities across dialects. Characteristic of the Kurdish system of consonants is the trill/flap opposition /r:ɾ/, and in Soranî also of dental and velar /l:ɫ/. Also typical is borrowing of phonemes from the contact languages. The velar fricative /ɣ/ and the uvular stop /q/ are shared with other Iranian and Turkic languages as well as with Arabic, while the glottal stop /ʔ/ and pharyngeal /ħ/ are borrowed from Arabic, as are pharyngealised versions of the consonants /d/, /t/ and /s/ (cf. KAHN 1976). A characteristic feature of Kurmanji, but lacking in most varieties of Soranî, is phonemic aspiration in the voiceless stops (including the affricate /tʃʰ/). Some authors have pointed out that this is an areal feature shared with Armenian and other languages. Some of the borrowed consonant phonemes have diffused into the inherited (Iranian) component of the lexicon, e.g. the numeral '7' /ħæft/ with pharyngeal /ħ/. Syllable structure for Bahdinani is treated by SHOKRI (this volume).

Like other West Iranian languages (e.g. Persian), Kurdish is typologically non-harmonic in its constituent order: it has modifier-head order in the clause (i.e. verb-final), but head-modifier order in the noun phrase. One of the most conspicuous features of the noun phrase is the Iranian Izafe construction, a synthesised relativiser that follows the head and mediates between it and its modifiers (genitive or adjectival dependents). A typologically unusual feature of Izafe constructions is that they constitute islands as far as nominal case is concerned: within an Izafe, case cannot be expressed on the head noun, i.e. the feature [case] is neutralised in the Izafe construction (with the exception of case marking on pre-head determiners).[2]

The Izafe inflection in Kurmanji is inflected for gender, number, and definiteness. Kurmanji is, on the whole, more conservative in retaining both case and gender opposition (masculine:feminine). In Soranî, case and gender distinctions have largely been lost, and in some

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[2]   Zazaki differs from Kurmanji and Soranî in this respect because in Zazaki, the Izafe is sensitive to case distinctions (see PAUL 1998: 30–49 for details).

varieties of Kurmanji, there is also evidence of gender distinctions weakening (see HAIG, forthcoming a). The two-way case opposition absolute:oblique draws on the historical Old Iranian genitive and dative forms. In Kurmanji dialects of Turkey, oblique case marking of feminine nouns is via a regular high-front vocalic suffix (orthographically rendered -*ê*). For masculine singular nouns, however, suffixal oblique marking is restricted to determined nouns (i.e. after demonstratives or interrogatives) or after the indefinite suffix -*ek*. Elsewhere it is either unmarked, i.e. absolute and oblique forms are identical, or it is expressed stem-internally via historical umlaut (*bajar* 'town', obl. *bajêr* < *bajar-î). Gender and number are expressed through case endings, as well as through the Izafe possessive inflection, though in Soranî only number is indicated. Definiteness is marked by suffixes, which can be inflected for case, and in Kurmanji also for gender and case. In the North (Kurmanji), this set of suffixes generally mark indefinite nouns, while definites are unmarked. In the South (Sorani), the cognates of these suffixes mark definite nouns.

The expression of local relations relies primarily on prepositions, as well as on a closed set of usually three postpositions with more abstract semantics. In most Kurdish dialects, the two sets often combine to form circumpositions, while in the northernmost Kurmanji varieties they tend partly at least to be complementary. The set of postposed markers are clitics; they tend to appear at the very end of the noun phrase, and their scope may include complex noun phrases as well. In the northernmost Kurmanji dialects these postclitics closely resemble incipient case markers, and some grammarians do treat them as such (e.g. KURDOEV).

Verb morphology tends to be rather uniform in its system of tense-aspect-modality (TAM) as well as person marking, while there are different types of agreement patterns. The core of the TAM-system is the opposition between perfective and non-perfective aspect, which is expressed in the verb stem (so-called "past" and "present" stem), conforming to the general formation in Indo-Iranian languages. The perfective stem derives from the Old Iranian participle in -*t*- (for instance *gir-/girt-* 'to take'). Suppletion is marginal and limited to a small set of verbs – most notably 'come', 'go', 'see', 'say' – though historical phonological changes have given rise to a substantial number of quasi-suppletive stems, such as *k-/kir(d)-* 'to do'. The progressive and non-indicative categories are expressed by prefixes that can attach to either stem, while suffixes may express contextual anchoring (perfect tense or inferentiality), distance (pluperfect and irrealis) as well as modality/counterfactuality. The concord markers themselves derive from the set of copula markers, and are generalised for both verb stems. In Kurmanji their position is fixed, immediately following the verb stem, while in Soranî they are clitics, and their position is sensitive to factors such as negation, use of auxiliaries, valency and thematic roles. The lack of such clitics in Kurmanji constitutes a major difference between the two dialects. However, in some of the Kurmanji dialects bordering on Soranî, a much more complex system of clausal particles is found, constituting a major isogloss within Kurmanji itself. The complexities of this system still await adequate description. Passives and causatives are analytical categories in Kurmanji, formed with the verbs *hatin* 'come' and *dan* 'give' respectively. In Soranî, passives and causatives can be created via verb morphology.

Verbal agreement and alignment patterns vary considerably across the varieties of Kurdish. In general, agreement in the Kurdish verb is subject to a transitive-intransitive as well as past-present split. Specifically, agreement patterns are distinct for past-tense transitive verbs, where in many dialects ergative alignment, or at least a variant of it, is found. In all other clause types accusative alignment is found, with the verb agreeing with the actor (in some terminologies the "agent"), which then takes the unmarked or absolutive case. In ergative alignment, the actor takes the oblique case and verbal agreement is with the undergoer. The details of the ergative construction, however, differ among the dialects. Many dialects of Kurmanji have preserved the canonical ergative construction mentioned above that emerged during the Middle Iranian period, and this has largely been adopted for written Kurmanji. Within the ergative system, it is verbal agreement which is most prone to deviate from the norm, while the oblique case of the actor appears to be stable across most dialects (see HAIG, in preparation). Many dialects actually have an impersonal form of the verb, i.e. verbal agreement is no longer with the undergoer. Furthermore, in almost all Kurmanji dialects verbal agreement may also be with the actor if it is plural (cf. PIREJKO 1963, MATRAS 1992/1993), though the details remain to be worked out. Southern varieties of Kurmanji appear to be in a stage of transition, with variation in agreement patterns. Typical of this transitional phase is the high frequency of the double oblique construction in past-tense transitive clauses, i.e. where both actor and undergoer are oblique marked (DORLEIJN 1996, MATRAS 1997). In Soranî, alignment is generally nominative-accusative, though past-tense transitive clauses stand out in showing an impersonal form of the past-tense verb and clitics representing subject/agent-concord attaching to the direct object rather to the verb (cf. BYNON 1980).

In the structure of the clause, Kurdish is closely related to Persian and other Iranian languages. The default word order is OV, while indirect objects and goals of verbs of motion generally follow the verb. Demonstratives and numerals precede the head, while attributes, possessors, and relative clauses follow it. The inventory of conjunctions consists of interrogatives, grammaticalised nominal and local expressions, as well as borrowings deriving ultimately from Arabic, which tend to form part of a pool of conjunctions shared by a number of languages of the Middle East and Western and Central Asia (cf. MATRAS 2000: 279, HAIG, 2001). The most conspicuous is the multifunctional *ku/ko* which figures as a general subordinator introducing complement, relative, temporal adverbial and conditional clauses, and supporting other semantically more specialised conjunctions. Kurdish lacks non-finite clausal complements; the infinitive is a nominal category, while modal complements and purpose clauses are always finite, with the verb appearing in the subjunctive (see MATRAS, this volume).

Derivational morphology is relatively impoverished, and in the case of noun-to-verb derivations, completely lacking. A transitivising suffix -*and* derives transitive verbs from regular intransitive verbs. The suffix -*î/-tî* is used widely to form abstract nouns from adjectives and nouns. Erstwhile prepositions also grammaticalise to prefixes. A relatively complex system of preverbs, characteristic of the Iranian languages generally, is also evident, but most of the preverbs are neither fully productive nor semantically transparent. As in Persian, Kurdish relies heavily on combinations of nouns/adjectives plus one of a small number of light verbs (e.g. Kurmanji *kirin* 'do'; *bûn* 'be, become'; *ketin* 'fall' and their etymological equivalents in other varieties of Kurdish) for creating new verbal expressions (see HAIG, this volume).

4. The history of Kurdish linguistics

4.1. European descriptive and dialectal studies

The scholarly investigation of the Kurdish language dates back at least as far as 1787 with the publication Maurizio Garzoni's *Grammatica e vocabulario della lingua kurda* (see Galletti 1995: 106–108 for discussion of Garzoni's work). But the heyday of early Kurdish linguistics began in the nineteenth century when European scholars, particularly Germans, encouraged by close economic and military ties between Germany and the Ottoman Empire, undertook extensive field research in Kurdistan. The emphasis in this phase was on documenting Kurdish dialects and relating the results to the burgeoning field of Iranian philology. Among the more important studies produced in this period are Prym & Socin 1890, Socin 1898–1901, Lerch 1857–1858, Le Coq 1903, Makas 1897–1926 [1979]; Makas 1900 [1979]. In a similar tradition are the later works of Barr 1939 and Hadank 1938. Along with the text collections just mentioned some early grammars were also produced, e.g. Fossum 1919, Justi 1880, Soane 1913 and Soane 1919. The sheer volume of material gathered by these pioneers is impressive, and its value for dialect studies, comparative and historical linguistics, language contact and many other areas is immense. However, there has been as yet little systematic evaluation of it outside of Iranian philology (see Blau 1989 and Blau 1975: 12–19 for surveys of the earlier literature). A re-evaluation of these studies in the light of more recent linguistic theory would be a potentially very fruitful area for future research.

The most influential descriptive work on Kurdish since the Second World War is undoubtedly MacKenzie 1961a and 1962, which systematically documents extensive fieldwork on Soranî and Kurmanji dialects of Iraq. MacKenzie's work can be seen as a continuation of the dialect documentations of earlier Iranian scholars, but with significant technical and theoretical improvements. First, MacKenzie based his transcriptions on tape recordings, and second, MacKenzie undertook a phonemic analysis of each dialect and based his transcriptions on a phonemic script, as opposed to the modified "orientalist transcription" used by many of his predecessors. Although MacKenzie gathered extensive texts, his ultimate aim was not simply documentation; rather, he was concerned with a genetic classification of the dialects. The dialect classification he proposes is certainly the most sophisticated to date within Kurdish linguistics. Regrettably, MacKenzie was not granted permission to pursue his research in Turkey so that only a small proportion of Kurmanji dialects is represented.

Among the more recent data sources on spoken Kurdish we should mention the studies by Blau 1975 and Ritter 1971 and 1976. Ritter's texts are of particular importance because they represent the only extensive text material on Kurdish from Turkey published during the past 60 years (over 160 pages of text and translation). Unfortunately they are somewhat marred by an unsystematic and overly complicated transcription, and the lack of any accompanying critical apparatus relating the material to extant work on Kurdish.

4.2. Kurdish studies in the Soviet tradition

In the Soviet Union, Kurdish was given attention by linguists as part of a centralised effort to complete descriptions of the numerous smaller languages of the country. Kurdish-speaking communities were dispersed within the territory of the former Soviet Union, with population centres in the various republics, most notably Armenia and Azerbaijan. The work

carried out by Soviet Kurdologists was essentially descriptive in nature, and formed part of the Iranianist school of Oranskij, Edel'man, Grunberg, and others, based primarily in Leningrad. Its principal achievement could be seen as training native speakers of the language, such as Kurdoev, Bakaev, or Evdal, who became leading scholarly authorities on Kurdish from the 1950s through the 1970s, as well as the publication of a series of standard reference works on Kurdish. Perhaps the most widely-cited Soviet Kurdologist works are the Kurmanji grammars by Kurdoev 1957 and Bakaev 1973, the comparative Kurmanji-Soranî grammar by Kurdoev 1978 and the Kurmanji-Russian dictionary by Kurdoev 1960. Another valuable source is the two-volume collection of folk material in Džalîl & Džalîl 1978. While these works focus on the Kurmanji variety of Armenia, Soviet Kurdologists have also covered other dialects in Turkmenistan (Bakaev 1962), Azerbaijan (Bakaev 1965), Khorasan (Cukerman 1986), and the Mukri dialect (Ejubi & Smirnova 1968). Especially noteworthy is the Soviet contribution to Kurdish lexicography, which includes, apart from Kurdoev 1960, also a series of other dictionaries (Bakaev 1957, E'vdal 1958, Farizov 1957, Orbeli 1957). Specialised investigations cover phonetics and morphology (Cabolov 1976, 1978) and especially verb morphology (Avliani 1962, Cukerman 1962), as well as sociolinguistic aspects of language contact (Bakaev 1977), applied research on orthography (Bakaev 1983) and Kurdish literature (Chaznadar 1967, Kurdo 1983, 1985). A synthesis of much Soviet literature on Kurdish has recently been published by Smirnova & Eyubi 1999.

4.3. Work within a structuralist linguistic framework

Outside the Soviet literature mentioned in the previous section, probably the earliest attempts at a structuralist account of any variety of Kurdish is McCarus 1958, a grammar of Soranî written in the American distributionalist framework. Building on this, pedagogical works such as Abdullah & McCarus 1966 were also published, and McCarus 1997 gives a brief account of Soranî phonology. More recently, a number of scholars have treated aspects of Soranî within a generative framework (e.g. Sarwat 1997), and there are now several scholars based at the Kurdish universities of North Iraq working in a generative framework (see Fattah 1997 for references).

Kurmanji received comparatively little attention from structuralist linguists, partly due to the ban on the language on Turkey. A notable early contribution is the sketch of Kurmanji phonology in Jastrow 1977. MacKenzie 1961a, 1962 gives a reliable and systematic account of the phonology and morphology of several Kurmanji dialects, but says little on the syntax. Finally, we should mention the short structuralist grammar of Zazaki by Todd 1985, since superseded by Paul 1998b. Since the 1990s, a number of studies on specific aspects of Kurmanji linguistics have appeared, some of which are discussed in § 5 below.

4.4. Recent descriptive and pedagogical works

Undoubtedly the most influential is Bedir Khan & Lescot 1970, published posthumously after Bedir Khan's death. It has been translated into German (Bedir Khan & Lescot 1986) and an extended and somewhat revised edition is also available in Turkish (Bedir Khan & Lescot 1997). The book is a hybrid between a descriptive and a prescriptive grammar; it notes some dialectal variation, but generally opts for one particular variant as "correct".

Essentially, it attempts to create a cross-dialect consensus and in doing so provides the basis for a modern literary standard (cf. § 2).

Most grammars and pedagogical works on Kurmanji Kurdish explicitly or implicitly adopt the rules laid down by BEDIR KHAN and LESCOT (cf. for instance BIÇÛK 1997); an exception is the short and idiosyncratic grammar of BADILLI 1992. Recently some very useful Kurdish textbooks have been published for Kurmanji: RIZGAR 1996, WURZEL 1997 and BLAU & BARAK 1999. Finally, we should mention that Kurdish is well-served with dictionaries. Along with the Kurdish-Russian dictionaries mentioned above there also exist several Kurdish-English, Kurdish-German and Kurdish-Turkish dictionaries. An overview of Kurdish lexicography is given in CHYET 1998.

5. Selected issues in recent Kurdish linguistics

5.1. Language contact

Kurds have lived for centuries in a multi-lingual environment, engaging in close contact with speakers of Arabic, Armenian, Persian, New Aramaic and Turkish. Not surprisingly, these contacts have left their mark on the Kurdish language. Language contact has generally not been a central issue for scholars of Iranian philology, but it has been taken up by a number of linguists recently. Probably the first person to look at the effects of language contact in its own right was KAHN 1976. Her thesis not only provides a detailed and reliable sketch of the phonology of a variety of Kurmanji spoken in Iran but also contains highly innovative discussion on language contact in the Kurdish context. She concludes that variation is not simply a matter of performance, which can be abstracted away from in phonemic analysis. Rather, deployment of different phonetic variants is part and parcel of a specific Kurdish type of competence which has evolved in an environment where multi-lingualism is the norm (see also BAKAEV 1977 for a more traditional Soviet perspective).

More recently language contact has become a major area for research into Kurdish. DORLEIJN 1996 is the first book-length treatment of contact effects on syntactic phenomena and as such is of considerable importance. Specifically, she examines the effects of Turkish influence on the Kurmanji ergative construction. In doing so, she reveals that for many variants spoken in Turkey, the canonical ergative construction espoused in most grammars and pedagogical works is something of a myth. In particular, she suggests that in the variant spoken around the town of Diyarbakır, the canonical ergative construction has been almost entirely abandoned in favour of other types of construction, especially the double-oblique construction familiar from PAYNE 1980. The question as to just how Turkish influence may have contributed to this development remains, however, ultimately unresolved.

Deviations from the canonical ergative construction are not new, and certainly not limited to the Kurdish of Diyarbakır – see especially the seminal paper by PIREJKO 1963. Examples of the double-oblique construction may also be found in the written prose of Kurdish authors from Turkey: (a) *Gundiyan wan bizor ji hev kir* 'the **villagers**(OBLIQUE) separated **them**(OBLIQUE) with difficulty'; or (b) *Min wê dît û navê wê Xecê ye* 'I(OBLIQUE) saw her(OBLIQUE) and her name is Xecê'.[3] Clearly then the precise distribution of the dou-

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[3]   Example (a) is from MAHMUT BAKSI's novel *Gundikê Dono*. Istanbul: Gökyüzü (1992), p. 31; (b) is from ZEYNELABIDÎN ZINAR's book *Siyabend û Xecê*. Stockholm: Pencînar (1992), p. 103.

ble-oblique construction has yet to be established. More recent work on language contact has extended the data base to languages other than Turkish (CHYET 1995, MATRAS 1998, MATRAS, this volume) and examines the issue of whether East Anatolia qualifies as a linguistic area (HAIG, 2001). BULUT 2000 explores the issue of whether Kurdish has adopted evidentiality as a verbal category, while HAIG (forthcoming b) presents data from one highly contact-affected variety of Kurdish from the periphery of the Kurdish speech zone.

5.2. Assorted topics in recent Kurdish linguistics

Recent work on the structure of the noun phrase and the Izafe construction in Kurmanji from a typological perspective is SCHROEDER 1999 and BOEDER & SCHROEDER 1998. The gender system is treated from a historical perspective by MACKENZIE 1954 and from a structural perspective by HAIG (forthcoming a). UNGER 1996 is, despite the limited data base, an interesting contribution to discourse structure. A major focus of recent work has been the ergative construction, beginning with historical developments sketched by BYNON (1979 and 1980). More recently, typological aspects of Kurdish ergativity have been treated in MATRAS 1992/1993, MATRAS 1997, and HAIG 1998, while DORLEIJN 1996 assesses Kurdish ergativity in the light of proposals put forward in Government and Binding theory.

5.3. Future prospects

Kurdish linguistics is an expanding field offering exciting prospects for linguists of all persuasions. Given the large numbers of exile Kurds in many of the major European and North American metropoles, conditions for research on Kurdish have probably never been better. Apart from issues in mainstream structuralist linguistics, Kurdish offers vast and as yet largely untapped potential for research in sociolinguistics, language contact, language planning, and language change; there is much to be done.

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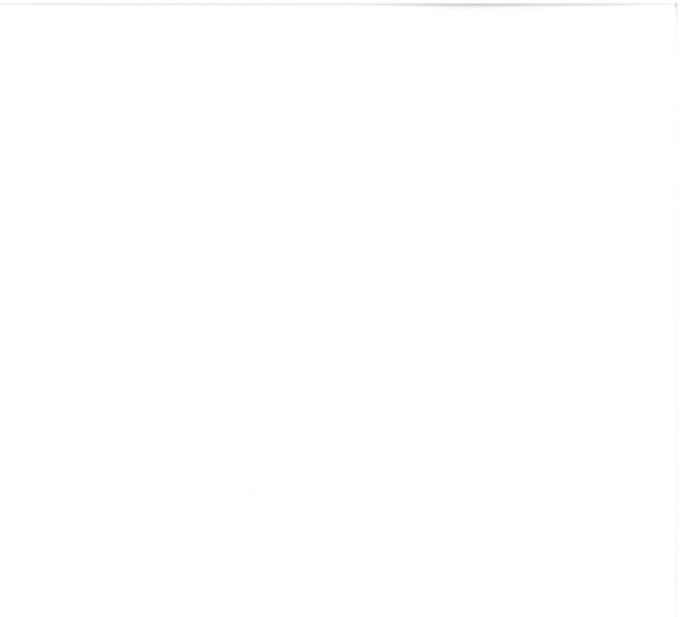
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YARON MATRAS
Department of Linguistics
University of Manchester
Manchester M13 9PL, UK
y.matras@man.ac.uk

GEOFFREY HAIG
Seminar für Allgemeine und Vergleichende
Sprachwissenschaft
Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel
Olshausenstraße 40
D-24098 Kiel
haig@email.uni-kiel.de