Advanced Kurmanji Reader

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Acknowledgements

Preface

Publication of resources for the language learner who wants to study Kurmanji Kurdish has been expanding recently in Kurdistan and in the diaspora, a trend which corresponds both with increased linguistic and cultural freedom in the homeland and the overall process of globalization. A number of works produced are designed to teach Kurds literacy in their mother tongue, others are intended to be used in the event that Kurdish becomes a part of the formal education system, while still others are descriptive studies of a particular aspect of syntax or semantics. In the midst of this surge of interest however, resources which meet the needs of students learning Kurdish as a foreign language are few, particularly materials for students at an advanced level. The list of recommended resources at the end of this preface highlights some existing language learning publications which are useful in the acquisition of Kurdish. It is hoped that the addition of the *Advanced Kurmanji Reader* to this compendium will contribute a resource that guides a nonnative speaker into an advanced level of linguistic and cultural competence in Kurmanji.

With this purpose in mind, the *Advanced Kurmanji Reader* focuses on linguistic and cultural issues that convey aspects of both the contemporary situation and its historical emergence. This portrayal of the Kurmanji language is organized into five parts: (1) Issues of Advanced Grammar, (2) The Development of Kurdish Language and Literature, (3) Issues of Standardization, (4) Language, Identity, and Politics, and (5) Issues of Language Contact and Bilingualism. The introduction to each section is gathered primarily from Kurdish sources and serves to provide background information to enhance understanding of the texts in that section, with footnotes also used as needed to clarify specific statements. Reading selections following each section's introduction depict this area of the Kurmanji language, particularly as seen by Kurds themselves. English translations remain faithful to the author's claims, with information necessary for clarity of understanding inserted in brackets. The translation style is fairly literal, in some places sacrificing ease of reading to call the reader's attention to particularities of the Kurmanji language and style. Interspersed with the reading selections are anecdotes and comics, the goal of which is to increase the language learner's awareness of contemporary issues and society's use of humor in approaching them, given that an ability to understand humor is a characteristic of an advanced learner. This text concludes with a glossary that compiles all the vocabulary presented in the selections.

To address every issue pertinent to the Kurmanji language is impossible; indeed, the intention of this reader is not to be comprehensive. Rather it is to present potentially unfamiliar grammatical and cultural topics, or nuances thereof, the knowledge of which characterizes an advanced language learner. It is intended to supplement the foundation established in

the resources listed below. As such, language learners can expand their knowledge on a particular grammar topic by delving into the analyses here to the extent that satisfies their curiosity. Moreover, throughout the learner's exposure to Kurmanji, he or she will have noticed the syntactic, orthographic, and lexical variation that exists in the language. Though there are standardization processes underway, as discussed in Section Three, there are a number of unresolved issues, a fact reflected in the text selections. This reader approaches this issue of variation by helping students learn the currently promoted standard, thus participating in the process of its distribution. To this end, the conventions presented in the grammar section reflect this standard variety, and example sentences taken from the selections have been modified accordingly where necessary. However, in order to interact with the language represented by the broader Kurdish society, students must be familiar with variations that result from differences of region, education level, age, literacy, et cetera. Therefore, text selections have been reproduced here as they were originally published, though some of the constructions observed in the texts deviate from what is now presented as the standard variety. This decision mirrors the approach of the editors of many Kurmanji publications who acknowledge that variation "is normal because [Kurds] have still not attained a standard on the matter of Kurdish grammar and each person writes however he knows and wants, which is also in large part without scientific basis." In response, many editors make explicit disclaimers that a particular essay reflects that author's preferences and not their own.

A vocabulary list follows each selection and identifies potentially unfamiliar words or expressions that help the student understand the text and enrich his/her overall vocabulary. Lexical items found in Michael Chyet's *Kurdish-English Dictionary* (2003: Yale University Press) are not repeated in the glossary of this publication.

Recommended Resources
Blau, Joyce. 1999. Manuel de Kurde: Kurmanji. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan. (English translation forthcoming)
Ekici, Deniz. 2007. *Kurmanji Kurdish Reader.* Maryland: Dunwoody Press.
Ekici, Deniz. 2009. *Beginning Kurmanji Kurdish DVD-ROM*. Arizona: University of Arizona Critical Languages Program.
Onen, Ronayî. Samî Tan, Mevlut Aykoç, Sadik Varli. 2009. *Hînker*. Istanbul: Enstîtuya Kurdî ya Stenbolê.
Thackston, W.M. 2006. *Kurmanji Kurdish: A Reference Grammar with Selected Readings:* http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~iranian/Kurmanji/index.html.

Introduction

Kurmanji, one of the two main Kurdish varieties, is spoken in what is considered the North Kurdistan region, including areas within the political boundaries of Turkey, Syria, Armenia, and small parts of Iran and Iraq. It is distinct from the Sorani variety, which is written in Arabic script and used most in the areas within the political boundaries of Iran and Iraq, areas considered to be South Kurdistan. Kurdish is part of the Indo-Iranian language family and a close connection is seen between the varieties, as well as some relationship with Persian. Moreover, in large part as a result of their geopolitical situation, Kurds and their language have often been influenced by other populations around them, most notably the Turks, Arabs, and Iranians. The population of Kurds is difficult to quantify, with estimates ranging up to thirty million.

Reflective of its historical, geographical, and sociopolitical context, Kurdish is a language rich in vocabulary with priority given to eloquence in oral expression. Literary tradition is more recent to develop and, though limited in scope, has become a source of language revitalization. Indeed, for many Kurds, their language is inextricably tied with their identity and integral to their national pride. The following poem, entitled *Ziman û Girêdayî* "Language and Connection" by Seyid Feysel Muctevî, illustrates this connection and references many of the defining figures and issues in the history of the Kurdish language, many of which will be discussed in this reader.

Çi bela mi ser te dîtin	What troubles I saw on your behalf
Ez û tu bi hevre girtin	They caught me and you together
Birin em kirin bi hebsê	They brought us, put us in jail
Ji me rojekî nexvş bû	For us it was a bad day
Sitema şeva sitembar	The oppression of the suffering night
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Ezm,ez Èrb Şemo me	It is I, I am Ereb Şemo
Ji mi sirgonî nivîsîn	I write about exile
Mi ji te uomir fidakir	I gave my life for you
Tu ji lêvê min coda kir	I distanced you from my lips
Mi tu pê qelem nivîsî	By pen I wrote with you
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Ezm,ev Havara kurdî	It is I, this Kurdish *Hawar*
Nivîsa Emîr Celadet	Ruler Celadet's writing
Ku bi tîpê nû nivîsîn	That written with new letters
Qiseyên zimanê dayê	Established the words of the language

Bi tenê bi dike xûnîn	Just make [them] read
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Te ji bîre Apo Sebrî	I remember you Uncle Sebrî
Tu Qenati qet dinsaî	Do you know Qanat?
Tu ji Qedrcan dipisî	Do you converse with Qedrican?
Û ji nûridîn ji zaza	And Nureddin Zaza?
Se te dil dibin cigerxûn	Hearts bleed for you
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Serkê şehîdê kudan	Leaders of the Kurdish martyrs
Ji Riza û Şêx û Qazî	Riza and Şêx and Qazî
Serê darê hilbijartin	Were hanged on a tree
Ku tu mandigar bimînî	So that you remain
Bikevî serê zimanan	Be used in speech
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Hemî şêr û qehermanan	All the warriors and heroes
Tu bi can û dil bijartin	Sincerely chose [to speak] with you
Ku nebî tu asimîle	So that you are not assimilated
Ketin hindirê çiya da	They fought for you
Û şehîdketin kirîne	And were martyred
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Çi bi qîmetek giranî	What weighty worth
Mi guher bi dest anî	I brought about change
Dibe muft û merhaba ez	It is free and welcome
Te bidim bi kerke nanî?	I will not sell you short
Ne,tu heybeta xudayî	No, you are God's gift
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Bavirim nîne tu kurdek	I do not think there is any Kurd
Ku ziman bêxe mezatê	Who would sell his language
Û zimanên di xeberdet	And speak in other languages
Eve fêlek dine nûye	This is another new operation
Disepînit bi gelê me	Infringing on our people
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?
Ezê tev bav diyan bim	I will join with the fathers and mothers
Ku bibit cejn mubarek	That the blessed day comes
Hemî dê kurdî bixvînin	When all will speak Kurdish
Heya cûckên serê daran	Even the birds on the tree
Eve dê cejna ziman bit	That will be the celebration of language
Neveye zimanê kurdî?	Is it not thus, Kurdish language?

Indeed, the remainder of this reader can be considered an elaboration on this poem, presenting through Kurdish eyes the contemporary state of the

Kurmanji language in society. As such, the intention of this text is to deepen readers' understanding of the Kurdish situation with the added benefit that those desiring to increase Kurmanji language ability are also provided with a compedium of texts guiding them in this process.

LIST OF SOURCES OF SELECTIONS

Part One: Notes and Discussion of Advanced Grammar Issues
Narrative Discourse:
Vesek, Emer. 2001. *Çîroka xwediyê şûrê giran, Hemzeyê Pêlewan*. In *The corpus of contemporary Kurdish newspaper texts*. 259-263. compiled by Geoffrey Haig. 2001. Germany: Universität Kiel. http://ikarus. pclab-phil.uni-kiel.de/daten/Sprachwiss/CCKNT.htm. Originally published in *Azadiya Welat*, May 22-28, 1999.
Procedural Discourse:
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Nûman, Selam. 2001. Hinek lîstikên gelerî. *KurmancÎ*, no. 29 (Spring), http://www.institutkurde.org/publications/kurmanci/ telechargement/ku29.pdf.
Expository Discourse:
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Behavioral Discourse:
Berbang, Samî. Têkoşîna zimên bi têkoşerên zimên bi pêş dikeve. Tevgera Ziman û Perwerdehiya Kurdî. http://www.tzpkurdi. com/modules.php?name=KoseYazilari&file=yazi_oku&sid=143.
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   Zinar, Zeynelabidîn. Qey MAÇ û RAMÛSAN ne du tiştên cuda ne? Amîda Kurd. http://www.amidakurd.com/index2.php? option=vengcontent&task=view&id=2055.

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Part Three: Issues of Standardization

16. Nakokiya kurmancî-soranî mezin dibe: Bi zaravayekî yekitî nabe. Roja Kurdistan. http://rojakurdistan.com/index.php?mod=article&cat=ÇandûHuner&article=145

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Abbreviations

*	(unacceptable)
[…]	author insertion, not found in original text
1SG	first person singular
2SG	second person singular
3SG	third person singular
1PL	first person plural
2PL	second person plural
3PL	third person plural
adj.	adjective
adv.	adverb
Ar	Arabic
AUX	auxiliary verb
excl.	exclamation
expr.	expression
f.	feminine
indf.	indefinite
IMPER	imperative
ling.	linguistic term
lit.	literally
m.	masculine
n.	noun
NEG	negative
NOM	nominative case
NON-PST	non-past tense
O	object
OBL	oblique
PART	participle
PC1	past conditional 1
PC2a	past conditional 2a
PC2b	past conditional 2b
Pl	plural
PREP	preposition
prov.	proverb
PS	past subjunctive
PST	past
PST PRF	past perfect
REL	relative clause
S	subject
Sg	singular
Sor	Sorani
Tk	Turkish
V	verb
v.i.	intransitive verb
v.n.	verbal noun
v.t.	transitive verb

PART One:

Notes and Discussion of Advanced Grammar Issues

Introduction

The selections chosen for this reader help the language learner to develop an advanced understanding of grammatical structure and concepts. It is assumed that to have reached the present level, the learner has a grasp of the structural system of Kurmanji; basic concepts and those readily available in other resources are not repeated in detail here. The goal of the grammar presented here is to highlight particularities not addressed elsewhere so as to refine the language learner's accuracy in the target language and his/her awareness of the Kurdish logic upon which the language is built. The way in which grammatical choices manipulate the meaning conveyed can only be understood through close examination on the level of the clause-internal structure as well as on the broader discourse level. The grammar topics presented in this section therefore prioritize attentiveness to nuance and the interaction of semantics and syntax, an understanding of which results in more accurate comprehension of meaning. Wherever possible, examples used to illustrate the grammar topics are taken from the selections themselves with the goal that the learner will investigate how the topics presented in this section are realized throughout the entire body of selections, thus resulting in the most thorough apprehension of these advanced grammar concepts.

Following the descriptive grammar topics presented, there are several selections by Kurdish writers which show how native speakers conceive of their own language's syntax. Though the content itself sometimes reflects an inaccurate linguistic analysis or a regional focus, the authors' explanations nonetheless give insight into the logical structure of the language. Excerpts from Husein Muhammed's work, *Kurtenerînek li Hin Beşên Rêzimana Kurdî* "A Short Look at Some Parts of Kurdish Grammar," present an explanation of clause-internal word order and some of the movement allowed, illustrate compound and complex sentence construction, and take a stance on the hotly debated ergativity issue. Samî Berbang's article, *Di Kurdî de Cotepeyv* "Word Pairs in Kurdish," gives examples of phrases commonly joined together for certain discourse functions. In his essay *Ergatîvî Mohra Kurmanciyê Ye* "Ergativity Is the Trademark of Kurmanji," Hirorî presents his understanding of this concept in an attempt to show Kurdish speakers how the prototypical ergative construction is formed.

The Reflexive Pronoun *Xwe*

As the advanced learner knows, *xwe* is the reflexive pronoun which in Kurdish is used both in the genitive and oblique cases when its antecedent is the subject of the sentence. A more obscure usage of *xwe* is its occurrence within a noun phrase. That is, the reflexive pronoun is also used when a noun in the phrase is linked to the head noun, for example:

*Şêro got: "Keça min, tu û birayê **xwe** herin malê, de ka hûn tiştên me yên ji bîr kirî nayînin."*
  Şêro said: "My daughter, you and your brother go home, come now why don't you bring our forgotten things?"
*Bû êvar, Şêro û pîreka **xwe** û Xecê bi rê ketin hatin koçka xwe.*
  It became evening, Şêro and his old woman and Xecê set off and came to their dwelling.

In these examples, the *xwe* that occurs in the subject phrase refers to the head noun, "you" in the first, "Şêro" in the second. The second example refers to the destination as "their dwelling." The reflexive *xwe* modifying "dwelling" refers to the entire subject noun phrase, i.e. their shared dwelling.

The way in which *xwe* functions produces an interesting distinction in the following context:

*Apê Îdan û zarokên **xwe** bêndera xwe ba dikin.*
*Apê Îdan û zarokên **wî** bêndera xwe ba dikin.*
  Uncle Îdan and his children winnow their harvest.

In the first example, the *xwe* in the subject noun phrase refers to the head noun (Uncle Îdan), the sentence conveying the meaning that Îdan and his sons are together planting one field. Use of the third person possessive in the second sentence, however, gives the idea of separation, with Îdan and his sons each working in his own field.

2

Compound Prepositions

There are three basic Kurdish prepositions which combine with postpositions to further specify the meaning of a clause. Though the basic prepositions are not complicated and can be understood early in the language learning process, compound prepositions can be more difficult to define and exhibit a wide variation between dialects. Moreover, these prepositions may combine with other constituents to form an idiom with the meaning of the preposition only understood in the context of the expression.

It is important to note that it is not possible to give a single translation equivalent which will always hold true for a particular preposition. However, through application of the semantic idea given in the pre- and postpositions, one can ascertain the function that it has in the sentence. The table below indicates the role of the basic prepositions that are used in conjunction with postpositions.

bi marks accompaniment; association between participants and/ or props
di marks closed location
ji marks place of origin

Unlike prepositions, postpositions cannot independently form a prepositional phrase, though in some spoken varieties this is acceptable. The following postpositions can combine with any of the above-listed basic prepositions, in which case they add a nuance of meaning:

de indicates motionlessness with regard to the stability of an ongoing condition or an anticipated outcome
re indicates motion whose process has associated participants, time, or space
ve indicates motion with reference to its specific goal of time or space

The distinctions between these meanings are subtle. For example, though *re* and *ve* both express movement in the clause, prepositions occurring with *re* have more of an emphasis on manner while those with *ve* emphasize the expanse of the movement in time or space. Further clarification can be seen in the following examples:

_bi…re_ indicates togetherness of action, whether it be association of participants or time[1]. *Bi…re* is distinct from *bi…ve* in that the

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[1] When used to indicate participant accompaniment, the object of the preposition must be an animate noun, specifically, a person. For example, while **Mirov bi kûçikê xwe re diçe bajêr* "The man goes with his dog to the city" is incorrect, *Kûçik bi mirov re diçe bajêr* "The dog goes with the man to the city" is correct.

3

former highlights an association of two items that maintain a degree of physical separation between them even as they may do the same action.

Bi destpêka Newrozê re dinya germ dibe.
   With the new year the world gets warm.
Werin em "Bi gur re nekujin, bi şivan re nexwin, bi xwedî re negirîn!"
   Come let's "not be two-faced!" [lit. not kill with the wolf, eat with the shepherd, cry with the owner.]

<u>bi…ve</u>   defines the target of a motion as it relates to another object. Unlike *bi…re*, there is no space between the items linked together; in some way they have contact with each other. *Bi…ve* can also be the shortened form of *ber bi…ve*, which varies according to dialect with *(ber) bi…de* and is used to indicate movement in the direction of a target (see examples three and four).

Dibe mîna tu ku bi dareke tirî ve ne tirî, xiyaran bibînî.
   It is like you see cucumbers, not grapes, on a grapevine.
Leqeba Feqiyê Teyran çawan pê ve bûye?
   How was the nickname "Feqê Teyran" assigned to this poet?
Gur bi daristanê de reviya û careke din xuya nebû.
   The wolf fled toward the forest and did not appear again.
Niha em li gorî vê rêzîkê bi mijara xwe de herin.
   Now let's proceed toward our topic according to this principle.

<u>di…de</u>   indicates location within time or space
Divê bikaribin hebûna xwe bi kurdî biqîrin da ku bikarin di neynikê de li bejna siyaseta xwe jî binêrin.
   They should be able to scream their existence in Kurdish so that they can evaluate the stature of their politics [lit.: look at … in the mirror].
Di destê me de hew zimanê me dimîne.
   Only our language remains in our hands.
Em niha dîsa berê xwe bidine Mewlûda Bateyî ya ku Ebdulbasid Muhemmed Ebdussemed amade kirî li Stenbolê di îlona 2003yê de.
   We now again turn our attention to Bateyî's *Ceremony*, which Ebdulbasid Muhemmed Ebdussemed prepared in Istanbul in September of 2003.

<u>di…re</u>   defines the location of a motion, with the idea that the location is a passage rather than a stopping point.[2]

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[2] Chyet cites the existence of a combination *di…ve*. However, examples of this compound in real text are few if any, and consultants found this compound unlikely. Given Chyet's example sentence *Min bizmar di diwêr ve kir* "I put a nail into the wall," consultants said that perhaps its distinction from *di…re* was that it implies the object has not emerged from the other side. The evidence for *di…ve* is tenuous.

Gur di daristanê re derbas bû û careke din xuya nebû.
  The wolf fled through the forest and did not appear again.
Ev şîrê min ji dayîka xwe mêtî, di dev û difnên min re hat
  I have suffered greatly in doing this task [lit: This milk that I sucked from my mother came out through my mouth and nose.]

_ji…de_   defines the time or space from which a resultant state originates. It is comparable to *ji…ve*.
Ez ji hal de ketibûm.
  I had lost consciousness.
Hêja Jîr jî baş dizane ku ji qalûbelayê de ziman zimanê desthilatê ye.
  As for dear Jîr, he knows well that since ancient times the [recognized] language is the language of the ruling group.

_ji…re_   indicates the beneficiary of an action; the one on whose behalf the action originates.
Ew tim bûye armanc ji hêrîşên dagirkerên welatê Kurdan re.
  It has always been the target of the attacks of the invaders of the Kurds' country.
Kurd jî têgeha duzimaniyê ji tiralî û kurdînezanîna xwe re dixin pîneyeke keskesor.
  Kurds also take from the concept of bilingualism an excuse for their laziness.

_ji…ve_   defines the time or space from which a resultant state originates
Ku derî ji hundir ve girtî be, wê di ku ve derkeve?
  If the door is locked from the inside through where will he emerge?
Ji wê demê û pê ve ez pê re neaxivîm.
  From that time on I have not talked to him
Ew di wê hestê de ye, ya ku ji xwezayê ve di dilê her mirovekî de heye.
  It is in that feeling, that which naturally exists in the heart of every person.

As with basic prepositions, these circumpositions can also be combined with other locative words to give more specific indications of meaning.

*Xwezayê kirasê gewr ê cemidî **bi ser** singa xwe **de** berdabû.*
  Nature had clothed itself with gray, cold clothes on its breast.
*Wan traktoran gundê me **ji bin de** xera kirin.*
  Those tractors destroyed our village from the bottom up.
*Pir kêfa min hat ku ez xwe **di ser** keviran **re** hol bikim.*
  I was very happy to jump over the rocks.
*Li çiyê **di bin** zinaran **re** diherikî.*
  At the mountain it runs under the rocks.
*Heman pirsê ez jî dubare dikim. Û **bi ser ve** zêde dikim.*
  As for me, I repeat the same question. And I add onto it.

5

As noted above, *ji…de* and *ji…ve* are similar in meaning. Apart from *ji ber…de*, which does not seem to ever occur, in most other cases, the *ji…de* and *ji…ve* combinations are interchangeable, e.g. *Ew ji jor de hate xwar; Ew ji jor ve hate xwar,* "He came down from above."

The role of the word *ber* in prepositional phrases is also worth noting. It can have many meanings, two of which are "front" and "cause." When used with the meaning of "front," *ber* further specifies the location of that preposition. Particularly in the case of pairing with *bi…ve*, *ber* may be implicit.

Xwarin di ber me de ma.
  Food remained in front of us.
Ez ji ber te ve fîraxan dişom.
  I am washing dishes in your stead.
*Bi xêra vê partiyê dê bêyî civîn mivîn **'Yekîtiya Kurdan'** jî ji ber xwe de ava bibe.*
  On account of this party, the "Kurds' Unity" in turn will automatically be established without meetings.
Sînor di ber wilayeta Îranê ya Ezirbêcanê re dipere.
  The border passes over the Iranian province of Azerbaican.
Mîr Celadet di ber herdû kovarên xwe re pirtûkxaneyek vekir.
  By way of both of his journals, Prince Celadet opened a library.
Min temenek di ber te de borand.
  I spent a lifetime for you.

In some cases, phrases that are circumpositions in their standard form may occur without either the preposition or postposition. One example is when these prepositions occur with compound verbs, e.g. *bi pêş ve çûn* "to move forward, develop," which often occurs as a simplification without the preposition *bi*: *Cîvak pêş ve diçe* "Society develops." Moreover, in some dialects, such as those in the area of Caucasus, Malatya, and Sivas, in most cases the preposition has been lost completely, e.g. *Wî min re got…* "He told me…." In the regions of Cizre and Botân, a postposition often occurs independently where other dialects would not use one, e.g. *Wî pirtûk daxist wir **de*** "He put the book down there." Another common regional variation eliminates the postposition in the *di…de* combination, e.g. *Livîn di min nema* "Movement [strength] did not remain in me." Prepositional phrases can also be used to indicate distinctions in meaning or emphasis, as shown in the following two grammatically correct sentences.

Di sala 1980î, 1992yan, û 2001ê de ez çûm Kurdistanê.
  I went to Kurdistan in 1980, 1992, and 2001.
Di sala 1980î, 1992yan, û 2001ê de ez çûm Kurdistanê.
  I went to Kurdistan in 1980, in 1992, and in 2001.

The inclusion of the three time periods within the same prepositional phrase, as in the first sentence, serves simply to enumerate the times this trip was made. However, an emphasis on the exact years in which the trips occurred is added in the second example through separation of the years into different prepositional phrases.