

# **Kurdish Language Issue and a Divisive Approach**

## **Kurdish National Congress of North America**

**Inquiries:** 805-402-6440

**Contact:** Luqman Barwari

*California-USA, (June 27, 2008). Recently, a group of 53 Kurdish intellectuals proposed to the Kurdistan Parliament to make the "central dialect" the official language of Kurdistan. Their proposal was echoed in the interview that the minister of education gave to a local Kurdish newspaper. Below is the KNC position on the proposal:*

The Kurdish language, like any other language in the world, consists of many dialects and sub-dialects. Each dialect/sub-dialect is locally nurtured and used for communication. The natural residency of individuals in any region is premised on the "de facto" law. Human beings learn language/dialect from the family in which they grow. This is societal natural law and the demographical decree that a group or groups of people speak their local dialect in the country in which they reside.

A dialect could become the national language without involving the legal system. For the most part it is a natural phenomenon. It is very rare that a nation had to use its legal system to determine which dialect should become the national language. Early America had multiple ethnic groups including, English, Germans, French, and Hispanics with no common language. Later, in 1795 when German and English were the only two remaining languages the U. S. Congress interfered to resolve the language issue. When the Congress voted, German lost to English by one vote, 41-42. Since then English has been the only formal language of the United States. The U. S. Congress interfered to resolve the complex language issue not dialectical problem!

On the other hand, how the Parisian dialect became the French language was not in the wake of a legal action by the French judicial system. Paris was the main trade center where the French economy was flourishing. The economic status of Paris promoted the Parisian dialect over other French dialects without the interference of the judicial system. A national assembly of a country would see it as inappropriate to select a dialect over other nation's dialects because it would polarize the nation. Therefore, for a nation like ours divided among four nations it is awkward to explore such a divisive element.

Unfortunately, since the mid-1970s, the delicate issue of the two main Kurdish dialects has been creating unnecessary acrimonious debate among segments of the Kurdish society. Irresponsible individuals from either side have been trying to promote their dialect at the expense of the other, where it has created deep psychological wounds in the Kurdish society and threatened Kurdish unity further.

Recently, the issue has resurfaced among a group of individuals who have advocated widespread adoption of their preferred dialect. Linguistically speaking, since their dialect is confined to a restricted locale, they are not in the position to entertain such a mandate which would be proved unpopular and unrealistic. Kurdish intellectuals, including writers, and poets are expected to be more responsible and, via their intellectual work, should try to educate people by promoting the Kurdish national culture. They should not be part of the societal perplexity rather they ought to be a guiding beacon toward more national cohesiveness.

This group of the Kurdish intellectuals, instead of launching such a proposal, should have a proposition that would create a common ground to establish a foundation for the common Kurdish language by using the common Kurdish words. This can be a starting point. It is feasible at the elementary levels.

When they say, "The dialect of central Kurdistan," it is believed that they refer to the geographical area of greater Kurdistan. Just taking what they say at face value, it can be concluded that this geographical region includes parts of Duhok, and on the other side of the border in Kurdistan under Iranian occupation it encompasses the "Shikak region."

In retrospect, the Kurdish literature for the first time was written in the northern dialect when in 1692, Ehmede Xane wrote "Mem u Zin," and later, the Bedrxanis printed the first Kurdish newspaper in Cairo on April 22, 1898. This version of the Kurdish language was used until after the WWI. In the wake of the Lausanne Agreement on July 23, 1923, the Turkish state took ownership of northern Kurdistan, and when in 1924, the Turks outlawed the use of the Kurdish language it negatively impacted the entire Kurdish language, particularly the northern dialect.

After annexing the Vilayat of Mosul (Kurdistan-Iraq) to Iraq and the subsequent decision by the British on the cultural right to the Kurds in Iraq gave new hope for reviving the forbidden Kurdish language. Since the majority of the people of this part of Kurdistan were speakers of the southern dialect they practiced their culture using their dialect. This new opportunity allowed the Kurdish language in general and the southern dialect in particular to replenish.

Historically speaking, the terms "Badinani and Sorani" have no linguistic root. Sorani emanates from "Sorani Emirate," which was located in Rawanduz; and Badinani stems from "Badinan Emirate," which was situated in Amedi, and both were political entities. Sorani only includes Hawler, its vicinity and Rawanduz; and, Badinan includes Amedi, only. Even Kirkuk and Slemani dialects are not sorani, and Duhok dialect is not part of the badinani. We have northern kurmanji and Zazaki (Dimly); and southern kurmanji and Hawrami. The so-called sorani and badini issue was created by our occupiers and due to our naivete it has lingered over local mentalities!

The language issue doesn't have a political context. It is not a political issue; therefore, a KRG minister should not see himself in a position where he should allow himself to entertain such a very sensitive idea. While the top KRG officials are promoting both

dialects equally, they need to use the resources available to them to define a format and begin the journey of creating a foundation for a common Kurdish language. Ignoring such a hypersensitive issue allows irresponsible individuals to contemplate the idea of "living nationally and thinking locally," which would only disunite the sweet Kurdish language. It should be reminded that, at this delicate time that our people are experiencing, we must be more vigilant. We should distance ourselves from using such an unrealistic approach.

Date published: Friday, June 27, 2008