

Studies in Turkish Linguistics

*edited by Dan I. Slobin
and Karl Zimmer*

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Volume 8

Dan I. Slobin & Karl Zimmer (eds.)

STUDIES IN TURKISH LINGUISTICS

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TURKISH LINGUISTICS

edited by

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University of California, Berkeley

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INTRODUCTION

We present this book as a case study of a particular type of language. What follows is a collection of diagnoses of various aspects of the Turkish language — morphological and syntactic, semantic and discourse-based, synchronic and diachronic. Taken together, they present a rich picture of linguistic and psycholinguistic issues that arise when current scholarship is turned to this language. In order to render such a contribution explicitly “typological,” of course, it would be necessary to have companion volumes dealing with different types of languages. It is our hope, however, that careful study of this collection of papers will reveal something of what it is like to speak, understand, and learn one particular language, with an eye to other languages in the background.

On the developmental plane, such an attempt has recently been undertaken. Aksu-Koç and Slobin (1985) have summarized the facts of Turkish acquisition and related them to a general crosslinguistic theoretical framework in an anthology of papers examining the acquisition of 15 different languages (Slobin, 1985). On the level of universals, Comrie (1981) has devoted a book to general issues of “language universals and linguistic typology.” Lehmann (1978) explicitly compares several languages and language types within a framework of “syntactic typology.” Another useful approach to typology can be sought in in-depth studies of various aspects of individual languages, with the ultimate goal of comparing and contrasting these descriptions. It is with this goal in mind that we offer the following anthology of conference papers.

Under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of the University of California at Berkeley, a “Conference on the Turkish Language and Linguistics in Atatürk’s Turkey” was held in Berkeley, May 15-16, 1982. On the invitation of Mr. Talât Sait Halman, then Turkish Ambassador for Cultural Affairs to the United Nations, the two of us undertook to organize a conference in honor of the centenary of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Kemal Atatürk. Most of the papers originally presented at that conference are published in this volume.

THE TURKISH LANGUAGE

The great linguist Edward Sapir once characterized Turkish as exhibiting a “sober logic” (1921:124). What he had in mind were, no doubt, the crystal-line strings of agglutinated morphemes, regular and exceptionless in their arrangements. Textbook writers have long had recourse to Turkish inflectional paradigms as prototypical examples of agglutination, and, more recently, typologically-minded linguists have pointed to the collection of co-occurring characteristics of Turkish as an SOV language: exclusively suffixing, postpositional, preposed relative clauses along with general modifier-head order, and the like. The introductory chapter by Underhill gives a brief sketch of Turkish grammar. More detailed grammars have been published by Banguoğlu (1975), Kononov (1956), Lewis (1967), Underhill (1976), and others. Underhill’s bibliographical chapter in this volume presents a detailed, annotated survey of research published in English on Turkish linguistics.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Several principal topics emerge in the array of papers presented to the conference. Although an interest in morphosyntactic issues pervades the entire collection, we can group the contributions in terms of relative attention to (1) syntax, (2) semantics and discourse, and (3) acquisition.

Syntax

Biktimir and Özkaragöz, working within a relational grammar framework, deal with the impersonal passive construction which is a special characteristic of Turkish. These papers suggest that some revisions are in order in regard to the definitions of passive constructions both in Turkish and in the universalistic framework proposed for relational grammar. Knecht argues against derivation of causatives in terms of syntactic rules and gives evidence that the properties of causative constructions can best be accounted for by assuming causativization to be a lexical rule. Sezer points out that Turkish, like Japanese (another SOV language), does not obey the sentential subject constraint first noted by Ross, and goes on to formulate the exact conditions under which it is possible to relativize out of sentential subjects in Turkish.

Semantics and discourse

Several papers play close attention to the semantic and discourse functions of grammatical phenomena. Their authors investigate the morphological and syntactic reflexes of some general conceptual categories in Turkish. In a detailed analysis of uses of the aorist, Savaşır suggests that it functions to ascribe abilities to a human subject. Dede and Sansa Tura address themselves to the semantics of noun-phrases. They present careful analyses of such universal parameters as definite-indefinite and referential-nonreferential in the system of Turkish nominals, noting the sensitivity of these parameters to various discourse phenomena such as word order, stress, and modality.

Both Enç and Erguvanlı-Taylan look at aspects of the functioning of full pronouns versus person-marking expressed solely on the verb (“zero-marking”). They deal with an area in which discourse and pragmatic issues are intimately interwoven with syntactic constraints—the area of pronominal reference. Enç argues that an overt pronominal subject indicates topic change, whereas null subjects comment on previous topics. She suggests that this topic switching function of subject pronouns is part of a general function that they have in Turkish, namely that of indicating contrast. Erguvanlı-Taylan argues that, in addition to purely syntactic constraints, inferability from context is a crucial consideration determining when overt pronouns are omitted in cases of intrasentential and intersentential anaphora. She also presents evidence that the linear order of elements in a sentence is an indispensable parameter for the description of certain aspects of pronominal reference in Turkish.

Kuruoğlu investigates the interaction of syntax and semantic interpretation with respect to some differences in word order in complex sentences, and in particular concludes that different opacity effects are associated with preverbal, or focus, position for a nominalized sentence functioning as sentential object than are found when the same nominalized sentence appears post-verbally, and is thereby backgrounded.

Acquisition

Aksu-Koç presents a broad survey of the development of means of reference to the past in Turkish child language. She bases herself on issues of both cognitive and linguistic development, and draws implications for historical language change as well. Ekmekçi examines early uses of word

order in the child, concluding that both pragmatic variability and syntactically fixed word order patterns are commanded from a very early age. Slobin finds that Turkish relative clause constructions, in contrast with those of numerous Indo-European languages, are acquired late by children and are often remodeled historically in Turkic languages. He suggests psycholinguistic processing explanations to account for both ontogenetic and diachronic patterns of change.

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HABITS AND ABILITIES IN TURKISH

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1.0 The function of the morpheme *-(y)Ebil* is one of those dark spots in the sober grammar of Turkish about which grammarians equivocate. While they are agreed that it is used sometimes to ascribe ability to the subject of the sentence, sometimes to express the possibility of the truth of the sentence, they won't tell us when it does one rather than the other, let alone explain why it should do both or either. Underhill (1976) does however point to a direction that may be fruitful to investigate by suggesting that there may be "a special connection" between this puzzling morpheme and another inflection whose obscurity is not sufficiently appreciated, namely the present tense (or the aorist as some writers prefer to call it).

1.1 But before proceeding, let me briefly clarify the way in which I will be using the terms ability and possibility. Possibility, as I will be using the term, is an expression of the speaker's opinion about the possibility of the truth of the sentence (the epistemic possibility) or the acceptability of the action described by the sentence (deontic possibility). In both cases, what is important is the fact that the term 'possibility' refers back to the attitudes the speaker takes towards the content of his utterance. Whereas ability always belongs to the subject of the sentence; even when abilitative morphemes refer to external opportunities rather than intrinsic abilities, they refer to the opportunities that are open to the subject of the sentence, not to what the speaker thinks the subject of the sentence might or should do.

1.2 The special connection between *-(y)Ebil* and the present tense reveals itself in a variety of ways. First, in the majority of the cases in which the *-(y)Ebil* is followed by the present morpheme, it expresses possibility rather than ability. Moreover, it is only in the context of the present tense morpheme that *-(y)Ebil* expresses possibility; elsewhere it uniformly behaves like

an abilitative morpheme covering a variety of nuances ranging from internal abilities to external opportunities as we would expect an abilitative morpheme to do.

Whereas in the present tense even in the first person, where the difference between ability and possibility is difficult to discern, the interrogative contexts make it clear that the possibility meaning is preferred over that of ability. For example, one of the most typical ways of requesting permission in Turkish is through questions like *yapabilir miyim?* (do-abilitative-aorist-interrogative-1st person sg) where the abilitative morpheme followed by the present morpheme is used to question whether the action is allowed, that is, whether there are any social constraints that render the performance of action impossible. When the present is replaced by any other tense-aspect suffix the question becomes a genuine expression of uncertainty with respect to one's abilities. Thus, *yapabiliyor muyum?* (do-abilitative-progressive-interrogative-1st person sg) may be used in a context where one's performance is being judged against a criterion of competence.

1.3 Moreover, the class of verbs whose subject are non-agents, like *korkmak* 'to fear', *düşmek* 'to fall', *üzülmek* 'to feel sorry', *açılmak* 'to get hungry', *susamak* 'to get thirsty', etc., usually may not take the suffix *-(y)Ebil*. Even if one were to imagine a sufficiently strange context in which it wouldn't be odd to say *korkabildi* (fear-abilitative-past) 'He was able to be afraid', under those circumstances one would have to interpret *korkmak* a volitional act, (and consequently its subject as an agent). But these verbs can take the suffix, *-(y)Ebil*, in the present tense, without imposing such a marked agentive interpretation on their subject, since in such cases, all the *-(y)Ebil* is indicating is that the event of someone's fearing is possible, and not that someone is able to be afraid.

1.4 Given these facts, we may call the morpheme *-(y)Ebil* the abilitative morpheme and indicate in our grammars that it shifts its meaning to that of possibility under the influence of the present tense. But of course all this does is to reformulate the question in terms of the present tense; that is, what is it about the present that it has such an influence on the meaning of the abilitative morpheme? It would seem that the present tense itself incorporates something akin enough to the kind of ability typically ascribed by *-(y)Ebil* to render the 'abilitative' interpretation of that morpheme superfluous when it occurs in the context of the present tense. Therefore, any account of the

semantics of the present has to articulate the nature of the ability-competence that is ascribed to the subject of the sentence in the present tense.

2.0 Now, some of you may be thinking that it is in virtue of also being a habitual aspect marker that the present implies an ability on the part of the subject. However, if from habituality what you understand is something like frequency of occurrence or even being “characteristic of a time period,” in short a variety of imperfective aspect, you must conclude that the following sentence are as “habitual” as any sentence marked by the present tense morpheme:

- (1) *Ahmet şiir yaza-dur-ur.*
Ahmet poem write ITERATIVE AOR
'Ahmet keeps on writing poems.'
- (2) *Ahmet bugünlerde şiir yaz-ıyor.*
Ahmet these days poem write PROG
'Ahmet is writing poetry these days.'

However, notice that none of these sentences imply that Ahmet can write poetry. To the contrary, as would be expected of a sentence in an imperfective aspect, (1) seems to contain a sneer about Ahmet's skills in writing poetry. In contrast the present tense (aorist) sentence *Ahmet şiir yazar* 'Ahmet writes poetry' does imply that Ahmet is a poet. (Notice that it would be almost a nonsequitur to say *Şairdir* 'He is a poet' after (1) or (2); whereas after *Ahmet şiir yazar* it would be only redundant in that *Şairdir* articulates what was already implied by the preceding sentence.)

The moral of this short digression is that sentences which describe habitual occurrences do not necessarily imply ability on anybody's part, whereas sentences in the present tense do. Therefore, we can't derive the abilitative implication of the present from a more basic habitual sense, for sentences (1) and (2) have shown us that habituality need not imply ability.

2.1 By now, I am sure you must be getting impatient to hear something positive about the meaning of the present which may explain why it should displace the *-(y)Ebil* as an abilitative marker. Feryal Yavaş, on whose dissertation much of the following account is based writes “the aorist characterizes what is typical, normal, or even what is inherent to an entity” (Yavaş 1980: 104). This is excellent, in that it enables us to relate both the habituality and the ability the present implies to the subject of the sentence. Thus, the events

which are going to be described in the present must be characteristic not “of a time period,” but of their subject. And of course the subject of a sentence in the present tense is interpreted as having the ability to bring about the event designated by the verb because the point of sentence is to claim that bringing about that event is one of the essential characteristics that makes the subject that particular subject.

3.0 This interpretation of the present as the inflection which describes the “essential characteristics” of the subject of the sentence may, I believe, account for the specialized function it acquires in the so-called impersonal passives. But first let us refresh our memories about some of the properties of these passive sentences. It has been observed that, while at some level it is possible to describe these passives as “subjectless,” it must, nevertheless, be recognized that these sentences invariably describe states of affairs that pertain to people. This fact may lead us to posit an underlying subject for these sentences which is non-specific except for the feature of “humanness.” Here, I am not concerned with what the syntactic status of such a constituent would be. Rather, what interests me is how this idea of “humanity” of the subject enters into passive predications when they are inflected for different tense-aspects. Let us consider some examples:

- (3) a. *İstanbul'a bur-dan gid-il-iyor.*
 İstanbul DAT here ABL go PASS PROG
 ‘It is being gone to İstanbul from here (= this way).’
 (‘This is the way one is going to İstanbul.’)
- b. *İstanbul'a bur-dan gid-il-ecek.*
 İstanbul DAT here ABL go PASS FUT
 ‘It will be gone to İstanbul from here (=this way).’

Both these sentences assert the existence of an indefinite number of people who do or will take this way to İstanbul. In contrast, the present tense version of the same statement (*İstanbul'a burdan gidilir*) makes no such assertions; rather it states the norm; it is an injunction for anyone who may wish to go to İstanbul, telling them that this is the road they should take. The point doesn’t need to be belabored; in every single case the present when used in a passive sentence lends a normative quality to the statement that is being made. This is striking especially in virtue of the fact that in similar active sentences the present tense does not have such a normative, injunctive quality. Why should the present passive sentences in contrast to present active sen-

tences on the one hand and to passive sentences inflected for other tense-aspects on the other have such a normative character?

On the basis of Feryal Yavaş's characterization of the present tense which was cited above, the function of the subjectless passive sentences in the present should be to define the essential characteristic of non-specific subjects whose only characteristic is "being human." Thus, in the subjectless passives the present tense stands in sharp contrast for example to the *-Iyor* (the progressive aspect) in that the sentence in *-Iyor* (3a above) simply states what an indefinitely large number of people usually do. Whereas the present, to reiterate, describes the verb as an essential characteristic of a subject whose only specific feature is being human. In other words whenever we use a subjectless passive in the present tense we are making an assertion about what it means to be human. Hence the normative character of such sentences.

4.0 Let us now proceed to examine the future uses of the present tense in light of this characterization. Of course to fully realize what is involved in the future uses of the present tense we must contrast them with future reference that is achieved through future tense. However, since intuitions are notoriously hazy and fallible, we need a context which by imposing different restrictions on the present and the future tense highlights what is involved in the use of both forms. The conditionals provide such a context:

- (4) *Yarın İstanbul'a gid-ecek-se-m*
 Tomorrow İstanbul DAT go FUT COND 1SG
 'If I will go to İstanbul tomorrow'
 a. **kardeş-in-e telefon ed-eceğ-im.*
 brother 2S:POSS DAT telephone make FUT 1SG
 'I will call your brother.'
 b. **kardeşine telefon ed-er-im.*
 make AOR 1SG
 'I call your brother.'
 c. *bavulumu şimdiden hazırla-malı-yım.*
 my suitcase now ready NECESS 1SG
 'I should pack my suitcase now.'
- (5) *Yarın İstanbul'a gid-er-se-m*
 Tomorrow İstanbul DAT go AOR COND 1SG
 'If I go to İstanbul tomorrow'

- a. *kardeşine telefon edeceğim.*
'I will call your brother.'
- b. *kardeşine telefon ederim.*
'I call your brother.'
- c. **bavulumu şimdiden hazırlamalıyım.*
'I should pack my suitcase now.'

The patterns of grammaticality exemplified in (4) and (5) turn out to be quite general. That is, in a conditional sentence whenever the antecedent is in the future tense, the consequent must refer to an event which is temporally prior to the event referred to by the antecedent; whereas if the antecedent is in the present tense, a consequent that refers to an event that is prior to the antecedent yields an ungrammatical sentence.¹ Why should this be the case?

4.1 First, let us examine the conditional sentences where the antecedent is in the future tense a bit more closely. In sentence (4c) the consequent is contingent not upon the occurrence of the event referred to in the antecedent but rather upon the intention to bring about the event. Notice that the sentence is best translated into English with the verb “want” or another equivalent mental state verb: “If I want to go to İstanbul, I should pack my suitcase now.”

Thus, it would seem that the future tense sentences which are within the scope of the conditional do not individuate events; rather they refer to the future directed mental states of their subjects. That is, in the words of Kenny, the subjects of conditional future sentences are identified as loci of “current decisions, intentions, choices and desires” (Kenny, 1975).

This should not come as a surprise. Many writers have claimed that the *-E* of *-EcEk* is historically identical with the *-E* of the Optative whose main function is to indicate wishes, desires etc. (cf. Hatiboğlu, 1972)

4.2 However, if this analysis is correct, future conditional sentences should not accept a third person subject which refers to an entity which is known to lack desires, intentions, etc. It seems that when the subject of the antecedent in a future conditional sentence is an inanimate entity, while the interpretation of intentionality is obviously suppressed, some sense of the “presentness” of the event which is predicated of the future lingers on. This interpretation is supported by the unacceptableness, in my dialect, of (6) where a punctual beginning (which will be present only at the moment when it occurs) is predicated of the future.

- (6) ?*Eğer film saat sekiz-de başla-yacak-sa*
 If film o'clock eight LOC begin FUT COND
 'If the movie will start at eight'
 a. *akşam yemeğini saat altı buçuk-ta yi-ye-lim.*
 dinner o'clock six half LOC eat OPT 1PL
 'let's eat dinner at half past six.'
 b. *ev-e geceyarısın-dan önce dön-ebil-ir-iz.*
 home DAT midnight ABL before return ABIL AOR 1PL
 'we can return home before midnight.'

But of course if the beginning can be seen as the culmination of a series of related events, and if the event it ushers in is sufficiently significant to cast its shadow back on to what led to it, the future tense becomes acceptable; hence *Eğer savaş çıkacaksa ...* 'If war will start...' is fine; because the beginning of a war is felt to be present in the events that led to the beginning of the war. Consider (7):

- (7) *Eğer kiralar gelecek yaz-a art-acak-sa*
 If rents next summer DAT increase FUT COND
şimdiden yeni bir ev ara-may-a başlı-ya-lım.
 now new one house search INF DAT begin OPT 1PL
 'If the rents are going to increase by next summer let's start looking for a new house now.'

Again what I think the preceding sentence does is to represent the increase in the rents which is expected by next summer as the outcome of a trend which is already underway. Again on a rainy day, when talk of floods is already in the air, to say *Eğer evimizi sel basacaksa...* (If house-1st.pl.poss.-acc. flood strike-fut.-cond) 'If our house is going to be flooded...' would be appropriate, otherwise, if floods are being considered just as another one of God's eventualities, *Eğer evimizi sel basarsa...* (If house-1st.pl.poss.-acc. flood strike-aorist-cond.) 'If our house is flooded...' would be preferred. But I am not sure if in all the acceptable cases of inanimate third person future conditional there can be found such a suggestion of a trend already underway. Therefore, from now on I will restrict my claims to the first and second persons.

4.3 Having decreed third person counterexamples that might come up to be irrelevant, let us go back to our example (4c), this time to look at the relationship between the antecedent and the consequent. Notice that the consequent

is a modalized verb. While a modalized verb is not required in the consequents of all such sentences, a mood which has a “World-to-Word direction of fit” (in the sense of Searle 1979) is required (which can be satisfied either by a modalized verb, interpreted deontically, or a verb in the optative mood). In other words, the consequent of a future conditional is governed not by belief, but by desire; it may describe what is hoped for, what should be the case but not what is or what will be.

Before proceeding to discuss the future uses of the present tense, we may cite the oddness of the phrase *isteyeceksem* (Want-fut.-cond.-1st.sg.) ‘If I will want...’ as one final piece of evidence for the relation between the future conditional and the mental states of the subject of the sentence. What *isteyeceksem* does is to assert the existence in the speaker of a distinct desire already formulated and hence underway, while at the same time implying that the experiencing of that desire is dependent upon some yet unfulfilled condition. While the satisfaction of our desires are usually dependent upon unfulfilled conditions, we presumably do not think of the experiencing of the desires as being similarly contingent.

4.4 In contrast conditionals whose antecedents are in the present tense simply establish a relationship of contingency between two events, without carrying any implications about the mental states of the subject of the conditional sentence. However, the two suffixes have one characteristic in common. Both of them, over and above stating that such and such an event will befall the subject at some future date, convey specific information about how the subject is related to that event. Admittedly, the two suffixes relate the subject to the future event in very different ways. The future tense represents the subject as being (partially) responsible and already inclined towards bringing about the event. Whereas all the present tense does is to state that given the characteristics of the subject, the event is one that would be expected of the subject, in short, that it is possible for the subject, without saying anything of the subject’s inclinations. Thus, where the subject of the future tense sentences is seen in terms of future directed mental states, the subject of the present tense refers to a determinate entity whose characteristics enable us to foretell its future behavior. As such, present tense sentences which refer to the future are beset by the uncertainty that is typical of all predictions; hence the impression of “tentativeness” that is usually associated with the future uses of the present tense.

5.0 It is about time we returned to our initial question, namely, “what is the nature of the ability ascribed to a subject by the use of the present tense morpheme?” We have provisionally answered this question by saying that the present tense describes those essential characteristics of the subject that constitute his “nature” (or quiddity), and as has been frequently observed “the notions of nature and abilities are conceptually linked” (Kenny, 1975).

But the question we haven’t answered yet is the following: “Is the ability ascribed by the present tense the same sort of ability as the ability ascribed by the abilitative morpheme, *-(y)Ebil?*” In more specific terms the question boils down to whether *yapabiliyor* (do-abil.-progressive) ‘He is (being) able to do it’ and *yapar* (do-aorist) ‘He does it’ are synonymous; of course posing the question in such specific terms is answering it. Any Turkish speaker would be outraged at the suggestion of synonymy. How, then, should we conceptualize their difference from each other?

The answer I suggest, I suggest very tentatively and with much trepidation. It goes like this: the ability we ascribe to the subjects of sentences may be relative to the way in which the subject has been conceptualized. We have seen that one way of envisaging the subject, the way which informs the use of future tense sentences, is as a locus of current intentions, desires, decisions and choices. Now, there is one notion of ability which has been extensively analyzed since Austin’s masterpiece on *Ifs and Cans* according to which the phrase “He will if he tries” plays a central part in the analysis of the meaning of the sentence “He can” (Austin, 1978). Notice that the concepts of “willing” and “trying” play a central part in this analysis, suggesting that the kind of subject that is being talked about here is the same kind of subject we have seen when scrutinizing the future tense sentences.

However, the proponents of this view of abilities have mistakenly believed that this is the whole story about personal powers. For example Kenny writes that “wanting is a phenomenon to explain action” and the ability to act “in some circumstances and not in others.” But I am inclined to say that for a sub-class of the things that I do and can do, the concepts of “wanting” and “trying” are curiously irrelevant. I do these things just in virtue of being the kind of subject that I am. Let me illustrate what I mean with an example that is typically given as the paradigmatic example of human abilities, namely the ability to speak a language. Curiously enough when this example is considered, what people have in mind is usually a foreign language. However, even though it is true that I can speak German if I want to

and if I try, I feel very uncomfortable, when speaking Turkish, to say that I am speaking Turkish because I want to speak Turkish or because I am trying to speak Turkish. No, I speak Turkish because I am Turkish. "Speaking Turkish" is not an ability I have in virtue of being a locus of "Intentional States" but rather it is an ability that I have in virtue of being the particular kind of determinate subject with certain characteristics that I am. To conclude: it is this latter variety of powers and abilities that the present describes.

NOTES

- 1) The difference in interpretation between (5a) and (5b) is beyond the scope of this paper.

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