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CASE MARKING IN TURKISH INDEFINITE OBJECT CONSTRUCTIONS

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In terms of the parameters of definiteness and specificity, we can distinguish four different direct object constructions in Turkish:

1) definite direct objects (henceforth DOs), as in (1), where the head noun of the object NP is marked with the accusative suffix $-(y)I$ ¹

- (1) Ali her gün gazeteyi okuyor.
every day newspaper he reads
'Ali reads the newspaper every day.'

2) indefinite DOs with the indefinite article *bir* (homophonous with the numeral 'one') and with accusative marking on the head noun, as in (2)

- (2) Ali her gün bir gazeteyi okuyor.
'Ali reads a newspaper everyday.'

3) indefinite DOs with the indefinite article *bir* and no case marking on the head noun, as in (3)

- (3) Ali her gün bir gazete okuyor.
'Ali reads a newspaper every day.'

4) indefinite DOs with neither an indefinite article nor any case marking on the head noun, as in (4). Such DOs, which obligatorily appear in immediately pre-verbal position, are often referred to as incorporated objects. For count nouns the singular/plural distinction is neutralized in this construction.

- (4) Ali her gün gazete okuyor.
'Ali reads a newspaper/newspapers everyday.'

In what follows we shall be principally concerned with the distinction between types 2) and 3).²

What appears to us to be the primary factor in favoring the appearance of the accusative suffix is what we shall call 'individuation', without attempting at this point a precise definition of the term.³ Rather imprecisely, we can characterize it as a focussing on a particular entity as such rather than on its being primarily of interest as a member of such-and-such a class. Some cases in point are the following:

Specific indefinites almost invariably are case-marked. Thus (5) implies that I am looking for a specific doctor, whereas (6) conveys that I am looking for anyone who is a member of the class of doctors.

(5) Bir doktoru arıyorum.
a doctor I am seeking
'I'm looking for a doctor.'

(6) Bir doktor arıyorum.
'I'm looking for a doctor.' (i.e. any doctor)

(2) above might be understood as implying that Ali reads the daily edition of the same paper every day (cf. Lewis 1967:248), or that he reads a paper from beginning to end every day, or that the paper is going to be topical in the continuation of the discourse, while (3) has no such implications.

An indefinite DO modified by *bütün* will generally be case-marked, while the corresponding DO without *bütün* may preferentially not be marked, as in (7) and (8):

(7) Kahvaltıdan sonra bütün bir karpuzu yedim.
breakfast after whole a watermelon I ate
'I ate a whole watermelon after breakfast.'

(8) Kahvaltıdan sonra bir karpuz yedim.
'I ate a watermelon after breakfast.'

There can be little doubt that the great majority of indefinite DOs that one comes across in Turkish are not case-marked. Nilsson notes that in a text sample taken from a collection of short stories the ratio of accusative-marked indefinite DOs to non-marked ones is about 1:8 (Nilsson 1985:55). In spite of this fact it appears that in certain instances the case-marked alternative is the preferred one. We shall attempt to give some explanations for this, and for contrary instances--i.e. cases where, given our hypothesis that individuation correlates with the use of the accusative suffix, one might have expected case-marking, but speakers prefer *bir Noun-Ø* DOs. Our focus in doing so will be upon subclasses of transitive verbs. We should note that in most instances the speaker judgments we shall be discussing involve preferred versions in what seem like the least presuppositionally loaded contexts versus dispreferred versions, rather than anything one would be tempted to call grammatical vs. ungrammatical contrasts; the dispreferred versions can usually be made more acceptable by specifying one or another feature of the context. To keep as many potentially confusing parameters as possible out of the picture, we are confining our presentation principally to affirmative statements involving DOs that refer to individuals (for some observations on generic objects, see in particular Nilsson 1979 and 1985).

One class of verbs that has a preference for case-marked DOs is that of causatives formed from intransitive bases. With such causatives the grammatical subject represents the causer, the grammatical DO the causee:

(9) Hasan güldü. 'Hasan laughed.'

(10) Ali Hasan-₁ gül-dür- dü. 'Ali made Hasan laugh.'
ACC CAUS PAST

in neutral situations, i.e. in the absence of any contextual feature that favors case-marking. We find furthermore that with what may be the prototypical high-transitivity verb, *öldür-* 'to kill' (the causative form of *öl-* 'to die') the situation is similar; (15) is the preferred way of reporting that our neighbor killed a child:

- (15) Komşumuz bir çocuk öldürdü.
our neighbor a child he killed

(We attribute the un-causative-like behavior of *öldür-* to the fact that it is lexicalized.) What seems to be happening here is that there is a tendency in the case of many transitive verbs to treat the object not as a figure, but as part of the ground (cf. Jackendoff 1983), so that (15) can be regarded as an assertion that our neighbor engaged in an act of child-killing (notice that *çocuk* can easily be treated as a formal incorporated object of *öldür-*, as in (16):

- (16) Çocuk öldürmek günahtır.
child to kill is a sin
'To kill a child is a sin.'

Interestingly, we seem more likely to get case-marking if some more restricted (and non-biological?) subclass of humans is involved, as in (17) and (18):

- (17) Komşumuz bir doktoru öldürdü.
'Our neighbor killed a doctor.'
- (18) Komşumuz bir İngiliz'i öldürdü.
'Our neighbor killed an Englishman.'

Presumably *doktor* and *İngiliz* are not as readily absorbable into the ground as *çocuk*, *adam* 'man, person', *kadın* 'woman', etc. We note further that not all violent activities are treated similarly in this respect. Thus if our neighbor had merely stabbed or wounded the child instead of killing him, the patient noun would preferentially be case-marked, as in (19):

- (19) Komşumuz bir çocuğu bıçakladı (yaraladı).
he stabbed he wounded
'Our neighbor stabbed (wounded) a child.'

We confess that we do not have a very convincing explanation for this state of affairs. We suspect that specificity (in the sense that *stab* is more specific than *kill* in terms of instrumentality) and/or newsworthiness counteracts the tendency to absorb the object into the ground (a tendency which might be regarded as a kind of quasi-compound formation), but we are far from convinced that we can thereby account for the behavior of *yarala-*.

We would finally like to discuss briefly the case-marking propensities of the verbs *öv-* 'to praise' and *eleştir-* 'to criticize'. They both show a strong preference for case-marked indefinite DOs; thus (20) is judged far more acceptable than a counterpart with an accusative-less DO:

- (20) Ali geçenlerde bir filmi övdü, ama ismini hatırlamıyorum.
 recently a film he praised but its name I don't remember
 'Ali recently praised a film, but I can't remember its name.'

Can we make sense of this in terms of our explanation of case-marking as related to individuation? It seems to us that such an explanation is in fact possible; verbs like *praise* appear to focus on individual properties of the object being praised which render it praiseworthy in ways in which many other transitive verbs do not.

To sum up: there exists, in the Turkish treatment of direct objects, an intermediate area between the highest degree of specificity, represented by definite objects as in (1), and complete lack of specificity, represented by incorporated objects as in (4). In this intermediate area, where NPs with the indefinite article *bir* appear, case-marking or the lack of it indicate where on the specificity scale a particular object falls. In our view individuation is the parameter that most appropriately describes the contrasts that are expressed formally by the device of case-marking, and we find that the use of this formal device provides intriguing insights into verb semantics.

We are fully aware that much work remains to be done in this area. More verbs need to be looked at, and other constructions (e.g. negatives, generics) need to be investigated. It would also be interesting to study the phenomena we have described from the point of view of acquisition; it has frequently struck the second co-author of the present paper, whose Turkish is fluent but by no means native-like, that his tentative judgments on some of the examples discussed here differed widely from those of native speakers, who, although they did not always agree with each other completely, nevertheless exhibited general consensus. The only explanation for this that we have been able to come up with is that the ability to form 'correct' judgments on these matters is innate, but that it requires for its appropriate development exposure to relevant data at a critical period (a critical period which had passed for KZ when he began to learn Turkish), but we have been persuaded by a number of more cautious colleagues that we should probably abandon this hypothesis.

¹The values of the archiphoneme /I/ in a given context-- namely i, ü, ı (=i), u-- are determined by the rules of vowel harmony which refer to the relevant features of the preceding vowel. The /-yI/ allomorph of the accusative appears after an immediately preceding vowel, the /-I/ allomorph after a consonant. The accusative suffix is underlined in all the examples.

The examples are given in a close-to-phonemic transcription, which differs minimally from standard Turkish orthography. The symbol \bar{g} , the so called 'soft g', can be considered to correspond to phonetic zero in our examples, except that it indicates length on a preceding vowel in the context V_C; it appears in our transcription for morphophonemic reasons only.

²For relevant discussions see Tura (1973), Johanson (1977), and especially Nilsson (1979) and Nilsson (1985). The latter is the most thoroughgoing discussion we are familiar with; we have profited from it greatly. Nilsson discusses the role of such factors as specificity, individuation, and topicality, and reaches the general conclusion that case-marked DOs are in a number of ways more independent of the predicate than ones without case-marking, a conclusion with which our analysis in the present paper is fully compatible.

³We note that what we refer to as *individuation* is intended to be scalar, and is not identical with the property called *Individualität* ([IND]) in Johanson (1977). Johanson characterizes both indefinites with *bir* and plurals as [+IND], and bare-stem nouns as [-IND].

⁴There is some evidence that an animacy hierarchy may also play a role here: some speakers find no case-marking for non-human objects (causees), e.g. *bir arslan* 'a lion' ('He's going to have a lion ride on the elephant'), as acceptable as or more acceptable than the case-marked version (*bir arslanı*).

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