

ACC as Topic Marker in Turkish

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Abstract

Turkish accusative case marking (an instance of DOM) follows a number of influences and their combinations, such as definiteness, specificity, scrambling, and the presence of possessive suffixes. This paper suggests that the direct object's information status may be an additional influence in that topicalized DOs are preferred to be case marked and even required to be so in responses to *wh*-questions about another constituent. I analyze this as movement of the DO out of the focus position into a (secondary) topic position, by which it receives ACC as topicalization marker. It falls nicely into this picture that ACC behaves similarly to indicate the availability of wide scope taking at LF. Data from Albanian, German, and Greek show a similar phenomenon of topichood marking, and evidence from Bantu languages, Hungarian, and Ostyak suggests that object marking may have evolved from topic marking in the first place.

1 Introduction

Modern Turkish displays a phenomenon that has been known as Differential Object Marking (DOM, Bossong 1985), which simply denotes that there is variation in the morphological marking of direct objects (DOs). The accusative suffix $-(y)I$ ¹ alternates with no overt marking — since unmarked DOs only occur immediately left of the verb (i.e. in base position, Turkish is an SOV language), a morpheme addition rule will be preferred over a deletion rule. The presence of the ACC morpheme typically indicates definiteness and/or specificity of the DO, as can be seen in (1) and (2).

¹ $\langle I \rangle$ indicates a vowel that changes accordingly to the 'big' Vowel Harmony rules (i, ι [u], u, \ddot{u} [y]), and the consonant in brackets is inserted to avoid hiatuses or omitted to avoid violations of the (C)V(C) pattern. Similarly, $\langle A \rangle$ denotes a vowel of the 'small' Vowel Harmony (a, e [ɛ]). I will also use capital consonants to indicate the alternation voiced/voiceless, namely $\langle B \rangle$ for b or p , $\langle D \rangle$ for d or t , and $\langle G \rangle$ for \check{g} [ɣ]/[j] or k . These alternations are determined by the preceding sound's voicing.

- (1) a. *Ali kitap oku-du.*
 Ali book read-PST
 ‘Ali read books/a book.’ (number unspecified)
- b. *Ali kitab-ı oku-du.*
 Ali book-ACC read-PST
 ‘Ali read the book.’
- (2) a. *Ali **bir** kitap oku-du.*
 Ali a/one book read-PST
 ‘Ali read a book.’
- b. *Ali **bir** kitab-ı oku-du.*
 Ali a/one book-ACC read-PST
 ‘Ali read a certain book.’

Apart from minor influences by animacy, the other relevant occurrences of ACC are (i) certain morphosyntactic environments, e.g. when the DO carries a referring possessive pronoun, and (ii) whenever the DO is separated from the verb by more than a clitic. See Laszakovits (2013) for a detailed discussion of the role and distribution of ACC (and GEN) in Turkish.

This paper is structured as follows: First (§2) I will discuss É. Kiss’s (2012) account of a possible historical development of topic marking in Ugric languages. Modern Hungarian has a special verbal inflection paradigm for definite objects, but she argues convincingly that this paradigm used to designate topicalized objects irrespectively of their definiteness.

In §3 I show that the Turkish ACC suffix relates to the DO’s scrambling at PF and LF. PF scrambling² is used to empty the focus position, which the DO occupies in unmarked sentences, for other constituents. By doing this, the DO becomes a topic, and it must bear ACC case. Similarly, LF scrambling (i.e. wide scopus over another quantifier) is only available for case-marked DOs. In both cases, the ACC suffix adds none of the semantic properties usually associated with ACC (cf. (2b) above). By putting the finite verb in focus position, ACC case obligatorily appears on the DO — again without adding to the DO’s meaning. I analyze this as invisible PF scrambling out of the focus position, whereby the DO becomes a topic.

§4 briefly discusses topicality marking on other languages with other kinds of DOM. Albanian and Greek (§4.1) mark topicalized DOs by clitic doubling and German (§4.2) by scrambling. §5 concludes the findings of this paper.

²This may be PF and LF scrambling simultaneously. I refer to it as ‘PF scrambling’ here to indicate that the DO’s interpretation is reflected by its surface position.

2 A historic development of object marking

DOM is a widely diverse phenomenon that can appear in various shapes (case marking, clitic doubling, verb agreement, ...) and in languages all across the world. Despite the variety in languages and marking strategies, general principles can be found, which Aissen (2003) has tried to capture in an Optimality Theory (OT) framework. One of the principles she discovered is that when a language makes a distinction in marking along the category definiteness, it is definite objects that are marked while indefinite objects are not marked. Another cross-linguistic principle is that if the relevant category is animacy, animate objects receive marking, but inanimate ones do not. Aissen has argued that this is so because speakers mark untypical objects, and that objects are typically indefinite and inanimate.³

There are, however, languages where the/a determining factor is the DO's discourse properties such as its information structural interactions. This is clearly not predicted by Aissen (2003) in this form, but may follow partly in that topics are typically definite while foci are typically indefinite. It is more difficult to imagine a relation between topicality and animacy, though. Let us take a look at the historical connection between topicality and definiteness and their syntactic marking.

2.1 From topic marking to definiteness marking

In Hungarian, the DO's definiteness is marked on the verb by switching to a different conjugation paradigm. In this section, I will present É. Kiss's (2012) account on the historical development of DOM according to definiteness from the DO's topic status.

Givón (1976) emphasizes the importance of topics for subject-verb agreement and object-verb agreement, because he shows with data from Bantu as well as pidgin and creole languages that these agreements go back to topic-verb agreement and that object clitics, once established, can be reinterpreted as definitivizers.

This idea has been formulated for Proto-Hungarian by Marcantonio (1985) in the following three-stage diachronic process (cited after É. Kiss, 2012):

1. Mark the object's topicality by a suffix on the object. Later, extend this suffix to all objects.
2. Mark the object's topicality on the verb.
3. Develop a topic position, thereby rendering the verbal agreement redundant. Reinterpret verbal agreement as marking the object's definiteness.

³ Furthermore, Aissen argues that the exact reverse holds for Differential Subject Marking (DSM): subjects are inherently definite and animate (the more the better), and are marked if they lack a typical property. This prediction does not hold for Turkish data (cf. Laszakovits, 2013).

2.2 Ugric languages

Evidence for these stages can be found in Ugric dialects such as Vogul and Ostyak, which did not all reach stage 3, and also in 14th/15th century Hungarian, where the verb is observed to carry the ‘indefinite’ conjugation for non-topic objects and the ‘definite’ conjugation for topic-objects irrespective of their definiteness. Interestingly, there seem to be remains in Modern Hungarian, too: in (3), the direct object is indefinite, but topicalized, and the verb carries ‘definite’ conjugation (example by Peredy, 2009, (13c), cited after É. Kiss, 2012, (28a)).

- (3) *Bizonyos gyerekeket a társasjátékok lekötik.* (Modern Hungarian)
 certain kids.ACC the board-games absorb.DEF.3PL
 ‘Certain kids are absorbed by board-games.’

In Ostyak, as Nikolaeva (1999, 2001) shows (cited after É. Kiss, 2012), the importance of topic-status becomes even clearer. Ostyak has a strict SOV sentence structure, and the syntactic subject obligatorily coincides with the topic. If the subject is indefinite or cannot be the topic for other reasons, passivization is applied. Ostyak also has object-verb agreement and uses it to indicate that the object is a secondary topic, which Nikolaeva defines as “an entity such that the utterance is construed to be about the relationship between it and the primary topic”. It seems that the relevant sentence types in Ostyak are the following (although it is not clear to me whether she intends for the verb morphology in (4b) and (4d) to be identical).

- (4) a. [TOP Agent] Patient Verb-∅ if P is focalized
 b. [TOP Patient] Agent Verb-PASS if A is not topicalizable
 c. [TOP Agent Patient] Verb-‘DEF’ if A is a better-suited topic than P
 d. [TOP Patient Agent] Verb-PASS if P is a better-suited topic than A

In Ostyak, object-verb agreement (the ‘definite’ conjugation) cannot appear in all-focus utterances (5), and always appears if the object is part of the presupposition (6); examples via É. Kiss (2012, (35–36)).

- (5) a. What happened?
 b. *ma tam kalaŋ { we:l-s-əŋ / *we:l-s-e:m }*. (Ostyak)
 I this reindeer kill-PST-1SG / kill-PST-DEF.1SG
 ‘I killed this reindeer.’
- (6) *ma ta:ləx ta:ta { *a:kət-l-əŋ / a:kət-l-e:m } anta to:ta.* (Ostyak)
 I mushroom here collect-PRES-1SG / collect-PRES-DEF.1SG not there
 ‘I collect mushrooms HERE, not THERE.’

2.3 Relics in Modern Hungarian

Marcantonio's (1985) stages are supported by the following data from 14th/15th century Hungarian (examples via É. Kiss 2012, (27a,b)), which had not yet completely reached stage 3. In (7), the DO (marked by square brackets) is semantically indefinite, but appears in topic position, and the verb shows 'definite' agreement. In (8), the DO is definite and in focus position, and the verb has 'indefinite' morphology.

- (7) [*kit*] *Amasias kiral auag pap gakorta getrette* (15th cent. Hungarian)
 whom Amasias king or priest often torture.PST.DEF.3SG
 'whom king or priest Amasias often tortured'
- (8) *es ottan ven* [*ysteny malaztnak latasatt*] (14th cent. Hungarian)
 and there take.INDEF.3SG divine grace.GEN sight.ACC
 'and there he took the sight of God's grace'

Relics from this historical development of topic marking can also be found in Modern Hungarian pronominal forms. There are irregularities in the paradigm of verbal morphology for pronominal subjects and pronominal objects, namely unexpected 'indefinite' forms for 3rd person subject with 1st or 2nd person object; 2nd person subject with 1st person object; and 1st person plural subject with 2nd person object. É. Kiss (2012) suggests that these forms are fossilized from a time when Hungarian behaved like Ostyak and had a hierarchy between topics. She suggests the animacy hierarchy in (9), which together with the constraint that higher animacy corresponds to greater topicality (cf. Comrie's (1980) Inverse Agreement Constraint) accounts for the distribution of 'indefinite' morphology: it appears where the DO is equally or more animate than the subject.

- (9) Animacy hierarchy for Hungarian: 1SG > 1PL = 2SG = 2PL > 3SG = 3PL

		subject			
		1SG	1PL	2SG/2PL	3SG/3PL
object	1SG	refl ⁴	def ⁵	indef	indef
	1PL	def ⁶	refl	indef	indef
	2SG/2PL	suppl ⁷	indef	refl	indef
	3SG/3PL	def	def	def	refl / def

Table 1: Hungarian verb conjugation paradigm for pronominal subjects and objects, extracted from the examples in É. Kiss (2012).

When Hungarian reached stage 3, agreement between the primary topic and the verb grammaticalized as subject-verb agreement, whereas agreement between the secondary topic and the verb became definite object-verb agreement. Note that the cases in which the unexpected indefinite verbal suffixes appear correspond exactly to those configurations where the object is more animate than the subject. Since primary topics must be higher in the animacy hierarchy than secondary topics, the more animate direct object would have become the primary topic, leaving the secondary topic position to the subject. This explains the absence of the definite conjugation for the exceptional pronominal constructions in Modern Hungarian.

3 Turkish ACC marking is sensitive to the DO's topichood

There are a number of reasons for ACC marking in Turkish to appear on a DO, respectively for it to be left out. The most prominent reasons are definiteness, specificity, scrambling away from the immediately preverbal position, and the presence of certain morphosyntactic elements (see Laszakovits (2013) and references cited therein for a detailed discussion). This paper presents evidence that topichood has to be considered as an additional factor for ACC marking.

3.1 ACC is obligatory with V^0 *wh*-answer focus

Turkish is an SOV language with clear information structural roles. Topics are sentence-initial, the focus position is immediately preverbal, and backgrounded constituents can appear in postverbal position. Thereby a sentence in basic word order will lead to an interpretation of the subject as topic and the object as focus. Turkish is also a pro-drop language, which in combination with its scrambling properties allows for many possibilities to express a DO's information status.

Consider (10) and (11). In (10), the DO appears in focus position and receives a generic interpretation that makes the type of entity salient rather than the single referents.⁸ ACC marking in (10) would add definiteness and singularity to the DO's interpretation (recall (1a) versus (1b)).

⁴ Reflexive pronouns are possessive constructions of the form 'my body' etc., which always trigger definite agreement (É. Kiss, 2012, p. 2 and fn. 1).

⁵ Not mentioned in É. Kiss (2012), but presumed to be definite since it is not listed as an exception to the definiteness paradigm. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for confirming this. The Inverse Agreement Constraint predicts this form to be indefinite, though, which É. Kiss does not comment on.

⁶ An alternative construction with a 1PL reflexive pronoun instead of a personal pronoun is preferred, but the definite paradigm is clearly preferred over the indefinite one (cf. É. Kiss, 2012, (7a-c)).

⁷ The suffix for 1SG-subject/2SG-object is suppletive and falls out of both paradigms. É. Kiss (2012) analyzes it as allomorphs of indefinite paradigms, but does not explain the unexpectedness of indefinite suffixes since the Inverse Agreement Constraint is fulfilled. The suppletive form is *-le-k* '2SG.INDEF-1SG.INDEF'.

⁸ An interpretation of (10) where only *kitap* in focus position (e.g. when *aldı* is given) is also possible, but not relevant for this discussion. The bracketing in (10) is the most salient interpretation in an out-of-the-blue context.

In (11) on the other hand, the DO has scrambled away to leave the focus position to another constituent. This makes ACC marking obligatory without implying a definite reading.

- (10) [*Dün*]_{TOP} [*Oya*]_{TOP} [*kitap al-dı*]_{FOC} .
 yesterday Oya book buy-PST
 ‘Yesterday Oya bought books/a book.’
- (11) [*Dün*]_{TOP} [*kitaB-*(1)*]_{TOP} [*Oya*]_{FOC} *al-dı*.
 yesterday book-ACC Oya buy-PST
 ‘(It was) Oya (who) bought books yesterday.’
 ‘(It was) Oya (who) bought the book yesterday.’

This semantically unmotivated appearance of ACC is mostly attributed to scrambling in the literature (Erguvanlı 1984; Kornfilt 1997; von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005; a.o.). By providing a context which makes the DO topical and only the finite verb focal, scrambling does not change the order of constituents, yet ACC marking obligatorily appears. This is demonstrated in (12)⁹.

- (12) a. *Oya dün kitap iş-in-i ne yap-tı?*
 Oya yesterday book matter-CMPD-ACC what do-PST
 ‘What did Oya do regarding a book/books?’
- b. *Oya dün kitaB-#(1) al-dı.*
 Oya yesterday book-(ACC) buy-PST
 ‘Oya bought a book/books yesterday.’

I propose to analyze this construction as invisible scrambling of the DO out of the focus position to a topic position (here a ‘secondary’ topic position in Nikolaeva’s terminology) and to treat the ACC marking as indication of this otherwise invisible topicality. My analysis is depicted in (13).

- (13) [*Oya*]_{TOP} [*dün*]_{TOP} [*kitab-1*]_{TOP} [*al-dı*]_{FOC} .
 Oya yesterday book-ACC buy-PST
 ‘Oya bought a book/books yesterday.’

This correlation between ACC and topichood is crucially not a two-way implication, as there are other reasons to trigger ACC marking which can also apply to a DO in focus position (definiteness, specificity, etc.).

⁹Note that the DOs in both (12a) and (12b) are clearly not definite. (12a) contains a compound *kitap iş-i* ‘book-matter’ whose first component is indefinite since it does not bear GEN (cp. *kitab-in iş-i* ‘the matter of the book’). The ACC suffix on *kitap iş-in-i* appears solely due to the morphosyntactic presence of the possessive suffix *-(s)I(n)*, which is used for compounding (cf. Laszakovits, 2013).

3.2 The role of ACC for LF scrambling

Additional evidence comes from quantificational data. A quantified DO with the quantifier *bir* ‘a’ has the ability to take scope over other quantifiers such as negation in (14) and (15), but can only do so if it carries ACC marking.

- (14) *Ali bir hata-∅ gör-me-di.*
 Ali a/one mistake see-NEG-PST
 ‘Ali didn’t see a mistake.’

- a. narrow scope: *not* > *a*
 b. #wide scope: *a* > *not*

- (15) *Ali bir hata-yı gör-me-di.*
 Ali a/one mistake-ACC see-NEG-PST
 ‘Ali didn’t see a mistake.’

- a. narrow scope: *not* > *a*
 b. wide scope: *a* > *not*

In (15), the DO does not become definite, but it does introduce a salient discourse referent that is expected to become important later on in the discourse. This is very reminiscent of the properties of indefinite specific DPs if one follows Fodor & Sag (1982) in their claim that specific indefinites are always referential. Their main reason for assuming this view on specificity are unexpected scoping possibilities of existentially quantified constituents such as taking scope out of scope-islands, but their two-way distinction between quantificational and referential indefinites fails to account for intermediate scope readings (see also King, 1988).

In (16) and (17), intermediate scope sentences for Turkish are given. Like in the previous examples, scoping for the DO is only possible if it carries ACC, but if it does, all LF landing positions are available.

- (16) [*Çoğu dilbilimci*] [*önemli bir problem-∅*] *çöz-en* [*her makale-yi*]
 most linguist important a problem solve-REL every article-ACC
oku-muş-tur.
 read-RPST-COP
 ‘Most linguists have read every article that solves an important problem.’

- a. narrow scope: *most* > *every* > *a*
 b. #intermediate scope: *most* > *a* > *every*
 c. #wide scope: *a* > *most* > *every*

- (17) [*Çoğu dilbilimci*] [*önemli bir problem-i*] *çöz-en* [*her makale-yi*]
 most linguist important a problem-ACC solve-REL every article-ACC
oku-muş-tur.
 read-RPST-COP
 ‘Most linguists have read every article that solves an important problem.’
- a. narrow scope: *most > every > a*
 b. intermediate scope: *most > a > every*
 c. wide scope: *a > most > every*

Summarizing, we can conclude that additionally to its semantic properties, ACC marking enables DOs to scramble on PF and LF and relatedly (Rizzi, 1997; Sportiche, 1996) has to appear on topics of *wh*-answer focus sentences¹⁰.

4 Object marking as topic marking in other languages

4.1 Albanian & Greek

Additionally to the facts about object agreement as verb morphology in Ostyak and Hungarian, and to the case marking properties of direct objects in Turkish, Albanian and Greek display object marking by clitic doubling. Interestingly and in parallel to the languages discussed above, the appearance of the clitic seems to coincide with the DO’s topicality status: In (18) the DO is focused and the clitic may not appear. In (19), V⁰ is in focus position rendering the DO a topic, and the clitic becomes obligatory (only preferred in Greek). (Examples from Kallulli (2000, 222f.)).

- (18) a. *Jan-i (*e) piu madje një birra para se të shkonte.* (Albanian)
 Jan-the it.CL drank even a beer before that SUBJ went
 ‘John drank even [a beer]_{FOC} before he left.’
- b. *O Yánnis (*tin) ipje akoma ke mja bira prin na fighi.* (Greek)
 the Yannis her.CL drank still and a beer(F) before SUBJ went
 ‘John drank even [a beer]_{FOC} before he left.’
- (19) a. *Jan-i *(e) piu madje një birra para se të shkonte.* (Albanian)
 Jan-the it.CL drank even a beer before that SUBJ went
 ‘John even [drank]_{FOC} a beer before he left (not only did he order it).’
- b. *O Yánnis ?(tin) IPJE mja bira prin na fighi.* (Greek)
 the Yannis her.CL drank a beer(F) before SUBJ went
 ‘John [did drink]_{FOC} a beer before he left (not only did he order it).’

¹⁰The data are not so clear with other kinds of foci. Further investigation is necessary to draw more general conclusions.

4.2 German

German is an SOV language that is famous for scrambling in the ‘Mittelfeld’, i.e. below TP. When taking a closer look, scrambling of DOs seems to follow similar information structural principles as clitic doubling in Albanian and Greek (cf. §4.1). In fact, Sportiche (1996) suggests that scrambling in German and Dutch is triggered by movement to the specifier of a CliticP that happens to be headed by a covert head. The data below are from Kallulli (2000), who discusses their relation to the clitic doubling phenomena above.

In (20), the out-of-the-blue context introduced by (20a) forces a focal reading of the direct object (a.o.). This precludes the DO from scrambling. Compare (20) to (18) above where the appearance of a DO-clitic is prohibited.

- (20) a. What happened?
 b. *Hans hat #〈 ein-en Teller 〉 heute 〈 ein-en Teller 〉 zerbrochen.*
 Hans has a-ACC plate today a-ACC plate broken
 ‘Hans broke a plate today.’

In (21), the yes/no-question forces the DO into topic position. This makes scrambling obligatory in German, which parallels the obligatory clitic doubling in (19) and ACC marking in Turkish in (12).

- (21) a. Did the Pope finally visit Tirana?
 b. *Der Papst hat 〈 Tirana 〉 noch immer nicht #〈 Tirana 〉 besucht.*
 the Pope has Tirana yet always not Tirana visited.
 ‘The Pope has not visited Tirana yet.’

5 Conclusion

In this paper I have compared topichood marking of direct objects in Turkish to that of five other languages: Albanian, German, Greek, Hungarian, and Ostyak. While these languages differ in the kind of marking that they attribute to direct objects that are topics (verb morphology vs. case vs. clitic doubling), they share the commonalities (i) that the DO’s informational status contributes to the presence of marking, and (ii) that it is topicalized objects that receive marking rather than focalized ones (cp. Aissen, 2003). Furthermore, data from Ostyak and older stages of Hungarian (É. Kiss, 2012) as well as Bantu languages (Givón, 1976) suggest that object marking is universally likely to have evolved from topic marking. The strict correlation of clitic doubling in Albanian and Greek to the DO’s topicality confirms this, and Turkish differential object marking, which has a number of influences, may also belong in this paradigm.

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