

Conditions on Argumenthood in Turkish

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Abstract

This paper explores how predicative Noun Phrases (henceforth NPs) become syntactic arguments in Turkish and proposes that in the absence case marking, a functional head turns predicative NPs into syntactic arguments. Previous studies show that there are two requirements for syntactic argumenthood: (i) *case assignment* for visibility and (ii) *referentiality assignment* for type-shifting by way of certain functional categories. In Turkish, on the other hand, it is claimed that these two conditions are closely related to each other. It is argued that not only should predicative NPs be case marked for argumenthood, but case assignment is also necessary for referentiality assignment in Turkish. However, this argument predicts that NPs without case marking remain nonreferential and predicative with no syntactic argument status. This is in fact not the case since NPs can be syntactic arguments and referential in the absence of case marking. In order to account for the argumenthood of NPs in such cases I propose the presence of a covert existential operator, ‘ \exists ’, which assigns argumenthood and referentiality in the language.

Keywords: noun phrase, argumenthood, referentiality, case marking, existential operator, Turkish

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that there are two independent mechanisms for a predicative NP to become a syntactic argument. The first requirement is *case assignment* for visibility, as proposed by Chomsky (1995). The second condition is *referentiality assignment* for type shifting through functional elements such as overt and covert determiners, as suggested by Longobardi (1994). In other words, predicative NPs should be either case assigned or is assigned referentiality in order to turn into syntactic arguments. More recently, these two conditions are considered to be related even more closely in some

languages. For instance, Öztürk (2005) argues that not only should a predicative NP case marked to become a syntactic argument, but case assignment is also necessary for referentiality assignment in Turkish. In that sense these two conditions are strongly correlated as they both seem to require the presence of case marking. This idea is supported by the fact that non-case marked NPs are predicative whereas case-marked NPs are arguments and referential. In fact, the relationship between case marking and the referentiality of NPs is well-documented in the language. Consider the sentences below.

- (1) a. Ahmet kitap oku-du.
Ahmet.NOM book read-PAST
'Ahmet did book-reading.'
- b. Ahmet kitab-ı oku-du.
Ahmet.NOM book-ACC read-PAST
'Ahmet read the book.'

The only difference between the bare NP *kitap* 'book' in (1a) and *kitab-ı* 'book-ACC' in (1b) is that the former does not carry any case marking and is interpreted as predicative, being part of the verbal complex. On the other hand, the latter NP is a full syntactic argument and referential.

However, Öztürk's claim predicts that NPs with no case marking are always predicative with no argument status. This is in fact not the case since there are instances in which NPs are assigned a referential argument status without the presence of case marking in Turkish. This is shown in (2).

- (2) a. Ahmet bir kitap oku-du.
Ahmet one book read-PAST
'Ahmet read a book.'
- b. Selin bir araba al-di.
Selin one car buy-PAST
'Selin bought a car.'

The NP *bir kitap* 'a book' in (2a) does not carry any case marking but is still an argument of the verb and is referential. It could be used as an antecedent for a pronoun in the subsequent discourse just like any case-marked NP in the language. The same is also true for the NP *bir araba* 'a car' in (2b). The question that arises at this point is how the NPs in (2) are assigned their argument status and referentiality in the absence of case marking. In order to answer this question I argue that NPs turn into syntactic arguments and become referential by way of a functional element other than case marking. More

specifically, I propose an analysis in which the syntactic argumenthood and referentiality of NPs is assigned by a covert existential operator ‘ \exists ’ that is the head of a functional projection. Semantically speaking, I argue that only bare NPs are predicative and are of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ in Turkish. On the other hand, other NPs always have argument status and are of type e , whether they are case marked or co-occur with the existential operator.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In section 2 I provide a brief overview of earlier studies on argumenthood and referentiality assignment across languages. In Section 3, I look at previous studies done on case marking and referentiality in Turkish. In this section I also argue that a novel account is necessary in order to explain the argumenthood and referentiality of NPs. In section 4, I propose a new analysis and explain how NPs become syntactic arguments and referential in the absence of case marking. Section 5 briefly concludes the paper.

2. Previous Work

There are two important syntactic conditions proposed in previous studies that turn predicative NPs into syntactic arguments. The first condition is case assignment through which NPs become visible for theta role assignment via a functional category like T or v (cf. Chomsky 1995). That is, NPs need to be checked for case in order to become an argument. On the other hand, other researchers such as Szabolcsi (1983, 1987), Abney (1987), Ritter (1991), Cinque (1994) and Longobardi (1994) argue for a different mechanism, namely referentiality assignment by way of a functional category like an overt or covert (D)eterminer. The following sections give an overview of these arguments.

2.1. Case and Visibility

As noted above, case assignment is one of the formal requirements for predicative NPs to become an argument. This idea goes back as far as Chomsky (1980) who notes that phonologically overt NPs need to be case assigned. This requirement explains why NPs go through such syntactic operations as movement. This means that NPs undergo movement to be case assigned. In a later work, Chomsky (1981:49) proposes a requirement known as *Case Filter* which is formally defined as follows:

(3) Case Filter: *NP if NP has phonetic content and has no case.

The statement in (3) indicates that every overtly realized argument NP has to be case assigned or needs to be associated with a case position. It should, however, be noted that the idea of case assignment has gone through certain

modifications in recent studies. For instance, in the earlier stages of the Government and Binding Theory it was assumed that nominative case is assigned by Inflectional Phrase and accusative case is assigned by a lexical verb. It was then proposed that case assignment and agreement features are “checked” by a process called Agree (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001).

In Chomsky (1986) case filter is reduced to another condition which is known as the *Visibility Condition*. Case filter is subsumed under the requirement for visibility. It states that NPs need to be case assigned in order to become visible for theta role assignment. The conclusion then is that visibility is a requirement for NPs to become a syntactic argument. NPs with no case are not visible for theta role assignment and do not have argument status.

2.2. Referentiality

Another requirement for NPs to become syntactic arguments is referentiality assignment. It is generally accepted that NPs must be of argument type (i.e. type *e*) in order to occur in an argument position. Following Heim and Kratzer (1998), Öztürk (2005:6) argues that lexical categories like nouns, verbs and adjectives denote predicates in terms of their semantics. Thus nouns are considered to be predicative and need to be type-shifted in order to become syntactic arguments. However, the means languages employ for type-shifting show some variation. Specifically, they often use such overt or covert operators (i.e. type-shifters) as the indefinite operator ‘*t*’, the existential operator ‘ \exists ’ and the operator ‘ \cap ’ that co-occurs with kinds. For instance, English employs overt determiners to type-shift predicative NPs of type $\langle e, t \rangle$ into arguments of type *e*, as exemplified in (4).

- (4) a. I saw the / a cat.
b. *I saw cat.

The grammaticality of the sentence in (4a) as opposed to the ungrammaticality of the sentence in (4b) shows that NPs need overt type-shifters to become syntactic arguments in languages like English.

On the other hand, it is possible to do type-shifting using covert determiners. For instance, when we consider Slavic languages like Russian, we observe that phonologically null elements is used for type-shifting. The example in (5) is from Chierchia (1998:361).

- (5) V komnate byli *malčiki* I *devočka*. Ja obratilsja k *malčiku*.
In (the) room were (a) boy and (a) girl. I turned to (the) boy.

The structure in (5) shows that bare NPs in Russian can occur in argument positions and are interpreted as either indefinite or definite. Note that *malčik* ‘boy’ and *devočka* ‘girl’ are indefinite NPs in the first sentence. However, *malčik* is anaphoric and has a definite reading in the second sentence. Such examples are taken as indicating that languages like Russian use covert type-shifters in the absence of their overt counterparts.

The discussion above shows that one of the ways to type-shift predicate is used overt or covert determiners. This is often achieved by embedding an NP under a Determiner Phrase (henceforth DP). To conclude, NPs need to be introduced into argument positions as a complement of D(eterminer).

In her work, Öztürk (2005) raises the question why there are two independent requirements for predicative NPs to become arguments. Öztürk maintains that there is a strong correlation between the two seemingly independent conditions responsible for argumenthood and referentiality. She proposes an analysis in order to account for the argumenthood and referentiality assignment of NPs in Turkish. In the next section I will give an outline of Öztürk’s analysis.

3. Case Marking and Referentiality in Turkish

It is well-known that there are no overt morphological determiners in Turkish. There is no element that would correspond to the definite determiner *the* in English or its counterpart in other languages. Moreover, the indefinite article *bir* ‘one’ is homophonous with the numeral *one*. It always precedes the noun it modifies and therefore cannot be thought of a head of Determiner since Turkish is a strictly head-final language.

The question that arises is how referentiality is assigned to NPs in Turkish in the absence of determiners. In order to answer this question Öztürk (2005) proposes that the case system interacts with the referentiality status of NPs in Turkish. She argues that the fact that case interacts with referentiality suggests a direct relationship between the two independent requirements for argumenthood. This means that since case and referentiality are correlated in terms of establishing argumenthood, functional projections that assign case are also responsible for referentiality assignment in the language. In the next section I will consider these arguments in detail.

3.1. No Determiner as a Functional Projection

Öztürk (2005) argues that Turkish is a language with a rich case system but it does not have any determiners. This presents a challenge for the analyses of referentiality assignment. That is, there is no syntactic evidence to argue for an abstract DP in the language. Firstly, as noted above, there is no definite

determiner that would correspond to *the* in English. Secondly, bare nouns occur in argument positions and are interpreted as definite expressions without overt determiners in the language. Consider (6).

- (6) a. *Hırsız ev-e gir-di.*¹
 thief house-DATenter-PAST
 ‘The thief entered the house.’
- b. Ahmet *araba-yı sür-dü.*
 Ahmet car-ACC drive-PAST
 ‘Ahmet drove the car.’

The subject NP in (6a) and the object NP in (6b) have definite reading even though there are no phonologically realized determiners in the structure.

Öztürk also considers the possibility that in the absence of determiners in languages like Japanese, certain elements such as demonstratives can function as determiners. However, this is not a plausible option in Turkish since only functional heads close projections (cf. Fukui 1995). In other words, nothing can appear before functional heads. Demonstratives behave like functional heads (i.e. determiners) in that they can close projections and do not let anything appear before them, as shown in (7) and (8).

- (7) a. the cat
 b. *Mary’s the cat
- (8) a. that cat
 b. *Mary’s that cat

When we consider the counterparts of these structures in Turkish, we observe that demonstratives do not necessarily close projections. This is illustrated in (9).

- (9) a. *bu kedi*
 this cat
- b. Ahmet-in *bu kedi-si*
 Ahmet-GEN this cat-POSS
 ‘This cat of Ahmet’s’

¹ The NP *hırsız* ‘thief’ is in fact not bare in this structure and carries a phonologically null nominative case, as do all definite subject NPs in the language.

- c. Ahmet-in hırçın bu kedi-si
 Ahmet-GEN vicious this cat-POSS
 ‘This vicious cat of Ahmet’s’

The examples in (9b) and (9c) show that demonstratives do not have the property of closing projections in Turkish. Their behavior resembles that of prenominal modifiers rather than functional categories.

The question then is whether there is an indefinite determiner in Turkish. The numeral ‘bir’ *one* is generally considered to be the indefinite article in the language (cf. Lewis 1967, 2000; Tura-Sansa 1973, Schroeder 1999). Consider the sentences below.

- (10) a. *Bir adam* sen-i ara-dı.
 one man you-ACC call-PAST
 ‘A man called you.’

- b. Ahmet *bir araba* al-dı.
 Ahmet one car buy-PAST
 ‘Ahmet bought a car.’

Öztürk (2005:19-20) provides a number of arguments against the idea that ‘bir’ would in fact be a determiner in Turkish. One of them comes from the claim made by Crisma (1997) and Longobardi (2001) who argue that there are no languages that lack a definite determiner but have an indefinite determiner. Therefore, arguing for the existence of an indefinite determiner would not be reasonable with respect to language typology. Moreover, ‘bir’ patterns with demonstratives since it cannot close projections, as exemplified in (11).

- (11) a. bir yeşil araba
 one green car
 ‘a green car’

- b. yeşil bir araba
 green one car
 ‘a green car’

The NP in (11b) clearly shows that ‘bir’ does not necessarily close projections as there is a preceding element. Furthermore, it is well-attested that Turkish is a head-final language. Therefore, the conclusion is that there is no overt grammatical element that would function as a determiner that would head a functional projection in the language.

Another possibility for predicative NPs to turn into syntactic arguments is through covert or abstract DP projection in the language. In other words, one would argue that subject and object NPs could be introduced by covert determiners. Longobardi (1994) argues that there is strong evidence for the existence of an abstract DP projection in Italian. The evidence comes from the N-to-D movement in the language, as shown in (12).

(12) a. *il mio Gianni*
 the my Gianni

 b. *Gianni_i mio t_i*
 Gianni my

In (12b) the noun ‘Gianni’ undergoes head-to-head movement from the head NP position to head DP. This movement is possible since there is a D projection above the NP in Italian. On the other hand, this sort of movement that would suggest the presence of an abstract D node is not possible in Turkish. Öztürk (2005) argues that since Turkish is a head-final language, testing whether there is such a movement is not possible as it would not make any change in word order. The only case where there is movement at the NP level is possessor postposing, as shown in (13).

(13) a. *ben-im baba-m*
 my-GEN father-1POSS
 ‘my father’

 b. *baba-m ben-im*
 father-1POSS my-GEN
 ‘my father’

What is important here is that since Turkish is a head-final language, it is impossible to claim that there is N-to-D raising in (13b). There is no head position to the right of the possessor ‘benim’ *my* the head noun can move.

In addition to the arguments above, one could also argue that ‘bir’ cannot assign referentiality since it co-occurs with predicative NPs that are inherently non-referential, as shown in (14).

(14) a. *Ahmet avukat-tır.*
 Ahmet lawyer-COP
 ‘Ahmet is (a) lawyer.’

- b. Ahmet bir avukat-tır.
 Ahmet one lawyer-COP
 ‘Ahmet is a lawyer.’

The conclusion then is that there is no evidence to argue for an abstract DP as a syntactic category in the language and Turkish displays a serious challenge for the standard analyses of referentiality. She goes on to say that given the fact that there are no classifiers and no overt or covert determiners, the question is what assigns referentiality to NPs in Turkish. As referentiality requirement holds across languages, it needs to be available for Turkish nouns too. That is, predicative NPs need to be type-shifted to occur in argument positions in Turkish. Öztürk suggests that since there are no overt or covert type-shifters that could be applied to bare nouns, there must be covert a functional category responsible for type-shifting of bare nouns into arguments in the language. In the next section, I will have a close look at Öztürk’s arguments about referentiality assignment in Turkish.

3.2. *The Interaction between Case and Referentiality*

Öztürk (2005) observes that in those languages where there are no morphological determiners, case marking interacts with referentiality of NPs. Consider (15) and (16).

Finnish (van Geenhoven, 1998:113)

- (15) a. Ostin leipää.
 buy-1SG bread-PART
 ‘I buy bread.’

- b. Ostin leivän.
 buy-1SG bread-ACC
 ‘I buy the bread.’

West Greenlandic (van Geenhoven, 1998:13-14)

- (16) a. Angunguaq aalisakka-mik neri-v-u-q.
 Angunguu.ABS fish-INST.SG eat-IND-[-TR]-3SG
 ‘Angunguuq ate fish.’
- b. Angunguu-p aalisagaq neri-v-a-a.
 Angunguu-ERG fish.ABS eat-IND-[+TR]-3SG.3SG
 ‘Angunguuq ate the/a particular fish.’

The presence of the accusative marker in (15b) is necessary for the NP to be interpreted as definite in Finnish. Similarly, in West Greenlandic the presence of the absolutive case in (16b) has an effect on the reading of the NP as either definite or specific indefinite. Öztürk notes that Turkish is also known as a language in which overt case marking has a direct effect on how NPs are interpreted (c.f. Sezer 1972, 1991, Nilsson 1985, 1986, Enç 1991, Kornfilt 1984, 1999, Kelepir 2001, Ketrez 2003). Consider (17).

Turkish: (Enç, 1991:4-5)

(17) a. Ali bir piyano kirala-mak ist-iyor.

Ali one piano rent-INF want-PROG
'Ali wants to rent a (nonspecific) piano.'

b. Ali bir piyano-yu kirala-mak ist-iyor.

Ali one piano-ACC rent-INF want-PROG
'Ali wants to rent a certain piano.'

The question that arises is whether case can function as the counterpart of determiners in other languages given that it shows close interaction with referentiality. It is well-attested that accusative case indicates definiteness on object NPs in Turkish. This can be captured by the contrast in (18a) and (18b).

(18) a. Ali *kitap* oku-du.

Ali book read-PAST
'Ali did book-reading.'

b. Ali *kitap-ı* oku-du.

Ali book read-PAST
'Ali read the book.'

The NP 'kitap' in (18a) is bare and non-referential. It is interpreted as part of the action denoted by the verb. More specifically, it is predicative and forms a complex predicate with the verbal head. On the other hand, the NP in (18b) has accusative case marking and is interpreted as definite.

Öztürk also notes that another important difference between the NPs in (18) is that only accusative case marked NPs can be used referentially. More specifically, only case marked NPs introduce a discourse referent which can act as an antecedent for a pronoun in the subsequent discourse. Consider the examples below.²

² I argue below that creating a discourse entity that may be referred to in the subsequent discourse is not limited to case-marked NPs.

(19) a. *Ali kitap oku-du. Reng-i kırmızı-ydı.
 Ali book read-PAST color-3SG red-PAST
 ‘Ali did book reading. It was red.’

b. Ali kitab-ı oku-du. Reng-i kırmızı-ydı.
 Ali book-ACC read-PAST color-3SG red-PAST
 ‘Ali read the book. It was red.’

In (19a) it is not possible for the bare NP ‘*kitap*’ *book* to be used anaphorically as it does not create a discourse referent (i.e. it is non-referential). On the other hand, a case marked NP such as ‘*kitab-ı*’ *book-ACC* in (19b) may be an antecedent for a pronoun. Thus there is evidence to argue that case interacts with the referentiality interpretation of NPs in Turkish. The conclusion is case is in fact used as the only type-shifter in Turkish given the fact that there is no morpho-syntactic evidence for the existence of a DP and it is not possible for NPs to be associated with covert type-shifters.

However, it is also true that there are NPs that are caseless but are still functioning as syntactic arguments and are referential. It does not seem possible how they become arguments and referential under Öztürk’s analysis since there are no case markers that would assign argumenthood and referentiality. Therefore, I argue for an alternative analysis in the next section that uniformly captures the facts in Turkish.

4. The Proposal

It was shown above that one of the claims that Öztürk (2005:60) makes is that unless NPs are assigned both case and referentiality in Turkish, they do not have a syntactic argument status. Given the argument that referentiality assignment is achieved through case marking in the language, NPs without case should be predicative and non-referential. However, it was also shown that there are certain cases in which NPs are fully referential in the absence of case-marking. This clearly indicates that case is not the only mechanism that is available for type-shifting in Turkish. It also indicates that there must be some other mechanism that is responsible for type-shifting. Therefore, I propose that referentiality is assigned by way of a covert operator in Turkish just like in languages with inherently predicative NPs. I argue that this covert operator is a phonologically null existential quantifier ‘ \exists ’ and could be construed as a D(eterminer) head. Consider the structures in (20).

(20) a. Ahmet dün [_{NP}*kitap*] oku-du.
 Ahmet yesterday book read-PAST
 ‘Yesterday Ahmet did book-reading.’

- b. Ahmet dün [NP *bir kitap*] oku-du.
 Ahmet yesterday one book read-PAST
 ‘Yesterday Ahmet read a book.’

The bare NP ‘*kitap*’ *book* in (20a) is predicative (i.e. type $\langle e, t \rangle$) and is interpreted as part of the action denoted by the verb. The sentence would be true in cases where (half of) a book, multiple books or only a few pages of a book were read. Recall that the NP does not have a syntactic argument status in (20a). It does not carry a theta role. Moreover, it is non-referential and therefore, cannot act as an antecedent for a pronominal. On the other hand, the NP ‘*bir kitap*’ *a book* in (20b) is different in the sense that it is not predicative any more. It is a fully syntactic argument and referential. Semantically speaking, it is of type *e*. It is assigned a theta role and may be referred back to by a pronominal, as shown in (21).

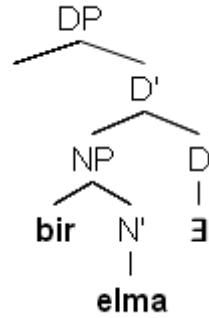
- (21) Ahmet [NP *bir kitap*] oku-du. Sonra *o-nu* Ayşe-ye ver-di.
 Ahmet one book read-PAST then it-ACC Ayşe-DAT give-PAST
 ‘Ahmet read a book and then gave it to Ayşe.’

This raises the question of how the NP in (20b) becomes a syntactic argument. Put differently, what kind of mechanism is at work in cases where predicative NPs are type-shifted to arguments? Note that there are no case markers in these structures. Also, it is difficult to argue for null or default case marking in these instances since case markers are generally associated with definiteness and specificity. In the absence of case marking and any other overt functional element, I propose that the NPs in (22) below are assigned referentiality through a covert Determiner that is realized as the existential operator.

- (22) a. Ahmet [DP [[NP *bir elma*] \exists D]] ye-di.
 Ahmet one apple eat-PAST
 ‘Ahmet ate an apple.’
- b. Ayşe [DP [[NP *bir ev*] \exists D]] al-di.
 Ayşe one house buy-PAST
 ‘Ayşe bought a house.’

The tree structure of the DP in (22a) is represented in (23) below.

(23)



What (23) shows is that the NP *bir elma* ‘an apple’ which is a syntactic argument and referential is dominated by a functional projection, namely a DP. If we assume that there is a phonologically null existential operator that is the head of the DP and acts as a type-shifter and assigns referentiality, we can account for how the predicate NP turns into an argument and becomes referential. Note that the presence of the covert existential operator in such cases is crucial since it is the only element that is responsible for type-shifting whose absence would suggest that the NP is predicative and not an argument. The analysis also indicates that in order to turn into a syntactic argument an NP is only assigned referentiality in the language. The fact that it is done by the existential operator is not surprising since the entity denoted by the NP has an existential status in terms of referentiality.

It should also be noted that the analysis presented here is in line with the proposals stating that a nominal expression is an argument only if it is introduced by a category D(eterminer). This means that nouns in fact do not denote individuals but properties (cf. Szabolcsi 1987, Stowell 1989, 1991, Longobardi 1994, 1996, 2008). The difference between the covert existential operator and case marking is that the former is associated with only argumenthood and referentiality while the latter are associated with notions such as definiteness and specificity. If we assume that this analysis is on the right track, then it provides a unified analysis of nominal structure in Turkish. Predicative nouns are headed by NPs and there is no functional projection that would otherwise function as type-shifters. While argument NPs are dominated by functional elements this is not the case for predicative NPs.

5. Conclusion

In this paper I argued that it is possible for a predicative NP to become a syntactic argument without the need to co-occur with case marking in Turkish. This is in contrast with the claim that only case markers function as type

shifters, turning predicative NPs into arguments in the language. The fact that there are NPs that do not carry case marking but are still syntactic arguments and therefore referential warranted a new analysis in which their argumenthood status should be accounted for. Therefore, I argued that there must be some other mechanism that is responsible for the assignment of argumenthood and referentiality in the absence of case marking. To this end, I proposed the existence of a covert existential operator ‘ \exists ’ that assigns argumenthood to NPs. The combination of the head noun with the indefinite article *bir* ‘one’ is embedded under the DP which is headed by the covert existential operator in the NP. This explains how caseless NPs that are not part of the verbal domain and thus not predicative NPs turn into arguments and become referential.

If the arguments made in this paper are on the right track, one would argue that previous claims that there is no determiner as a functional category in the nominal domain in Turkish need to be readdressed. Further research will shed light on this issue.

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