

Turkish cares about people-hood

Using one relative clause (RC) form in Turkish as a diagnostic, there seems to be evidence that +human subjects are generated in a different structural position than -human subjects. I propose that the combination of Agent theta-role and a null CAUS projection (Pesetsky, 1995) conspire to ensure the maximal prominence of +human subjects. A further implication of this study is that a semantic notion such as +human has tangible consequences for syntax.

It has been assumed that Turkish RCs display a subject/non-subject asymmetry (1-2). In fact, the generalization is that whenever the EPP of T is satisfied by a +Wh DP, the subject relative (SR) form is licensed. Because non-specific arguments do not raise to functional case-assigning positions, in RCs with non-specific subjects, T's EPP must be satisfied by a non-subject DP.

Thus, the SR form is required trivially when relativizing the subject. It is also required in impersonal passives where there is no external argument. Furthermore, the SR is acceptable in non-subject RCs with non-specific subjects. In all these cases, a Wh-DP has moved to [Spec, TP], and then to the CP domain.

Interestingly, we see minimality effects in raising to T: the SR form is licensed in RCs with non-specific subjects in unaccusatives (3) but not in unergatives (4). The subject in unaccusatives is presumed to be the verbal complement, and as such does not block the raising of a locative or other inherently case-marked DP to [Spec, TP]. Unergative subjects, on the other hand, are generated in a specifier position and so intervene between T and lower Wh-expressions.

The SR form is unacceptable in a transitive construction when extracting a DO (5a) or other non-subject DP (5b). This is presumably because the subject (in [Spec, vP]) will block the raising of a locative from VP, and the ACC DO, which has raised to [Spec, vP] for case, is barred from moving into another structural case-marking position. An element from within the ACC DO, however, is free to move to [Spec, TP] without intervention effects from the subject (5c).

Of interest are the near-minimal examples in (6) through (8). In each case, relativizing the possessor of the ACC DO using the SR form is acceptable when the subject is non-human but not acceptable when the subject is human. Particularly noteworthy are the pair in (8) where both subjects are animate: the +human subject renders the SR form ungrammatical. I assume that +human subjects are in a structurally higher position than the DO and so induce intervention effects similar to what we see in unergatives. One way of accounting for this structural asymmetry of subjects is to assume that certain verbs and +human subjects require a null CAUS projection as proposed by Pesetsky but that crucially this projection must be above vP in order to account for the intervention effects. Agentive arguments that are +human must merge in the specifier of CAUS. Further support for this line of reasoning comes from Turkish psych verbs. The psych verb in (9) does not permit extraction of the possessor of an ACC DO using the SR form whereas a verb with an overt Causative morpheme does (10). Even though the subject in (9) is non-human, I assume there is a CAUS projection in this psych verb that is higher than vP where the subject must pick up its theta role.

Examples

- 1) a. [\emptyset_i divan-da otur-an] adam_i b. * [\emptyset_i divan-da otur-duğ -u] adam_i
 \emptyset sofa-DAT sit-SR man \emptyset sofa-DAT sit-NSR-3s man
 ‘the man who is sitting on the sofa’
- 2) a. [adam -ın \emptyset_i otur-duğ-u] divan_i b. *[adam \emptyset_i otur-an] divan_i
 man-GEN \emptyset sit-NSR-3s sofa man \emptyset sit-SR sofa
 ‘the sofa that the man is/was sitting on’
- 3) [gemi yanaş-an] liman
 ship sidle-SR harbor
 ‘the harbor that a ship is sidling up to’
- 4) *[atlet-ler koş-an] saha
 athlete-pl run-SR track
 Intended: ‘the track where athletes run’
- 5) a. * [\emptyset_1 arı sok-an] kız₁
 \emptyset bee sting-SR girl
 Intended: ‘the girl a bee/bees stung’
 b. * [\emptyset_1 çocuklar-ı arı sok-an] orman₁
 \emptyset children-ACC bee sting-SR woods
 ‘the woods where a bee/bees sting children’
 c. [[\emptyset_1 bacağ-ın-ı] arı sok-an] kız₁
 leg-POSS-ACC bee sting-SR girl
 ‘the girl whose leg a bee/bees stung’
- 6) a. [[\emptyset_1 kayığ-ı-nı] nehir sürükley-en] balıkçı₁
 boat-AGR-ACC river drag-SR fisherman
 ‘the fisherman whose boat the river dragged’
 b. * [[\emptyset_1 kayığ-ı-nı] köylüler kıyı-ya sürükley-en] balıkçı₁
 boat-AGR-ACC villagers shore-DAT drag-SR fisherman
 ‘the fisherman whose boat villagers dragged onto the shore’
- 7) a. [[\emptyset_1 ev-i-ni] fırtına yık-an] aile₁
 house-AGR-ACC tornado raze-SR family
 ‘the family whose house a tornado razed’
 b. [[\emptyset_1 evler-i-ni] belediye yık-an] aile-ler₁
 houses-AGR-ACC municipality raze-SR family-pl
 ‘the families whose houses a municipality razed’
 c. * [[\emptyset_1 ev-i-ni] işçi/askerler yık-an] aile₁
 house-AGR-ACC worker/soldiers raze-SR family
 ‘the family whose house (a) worker(s)/soldiers razed’
- 8) a. [[\emptyset_1 çocuğ-u-nu] arslan yiy-en] anne₁
 child-AGR-ACC lion eat-SR mother
 ‘the mother whose child a lion/lions ate’
 b. * [[\emptyset_1 yavru-su-nu] avcı/avcılar yiy-en] geyik₁
 fawn-AGR-ACC hunter(s) eat-SR deer
 ‘the deer whose fawn a hunter/hunters ate’
- 9) * [[t_1 ebeveynler-i-ni]₂ Osmanlı sanatı t_2 büyüle-yen] sanatseverler₁
 parents-POSS-ACC Ottoman art fascinate-SR art-lovers
 Intended: ‘the art lovers that Ottoman art fascinates parents (of)’
- 10) [[\emptyset_1 oğullar-ı-nı] erkeklik hormonu çıldırt-an] anne₁
 sons-POSS-ACC male hormones go.mad-CAUS-SR mother
 ‘the mother whose sons male hormones drove crazy’