

It is a well-known observation that nouns cannot assign structural case. Interestingly, however, certain nouns in Turkish, that I will refer to as verbal nouns (VN), seem to have the peculiar ability to assign both structural (accusative) and inherent case (dative, locative and ablative) to their complements (see e.g. Sezer 1991:37-50 and Uzun 2000:196-199 for discussion about the status of each case). This phenomenon can be observed in the construction in (1), that I term the verbal noun construction (VNC), where the VN *istila* 'invasion' appears to be assigning accusative case to its complement. VNs do not appear to be derived and are typically borrowings, predominantly of Arabic origin.

In this study, I will, first, argue against what I dub the Abstract Light Verb Hypothesis, which attributes this case-assignment capability to a covert light verb in the VNC. The main representative of this approach is Sezer (1991:54), who proposes the derivation in (2). Another approach of the same kind, though not specifically focusing on the VNC in Turkish but on nominalizations in general, is that of Alexiadou (2001). I will present counter-arguments to this type of analysis from a number of domains.

The first counter-argument is derived from a comparison of the VNC and the light verb construction (LVC) in Turkish. Sezer (1991:54) claims that the VNC in (1) is derived from the LVC in (3). This predicts that every VN that takes part in an LVC should in principle be able to take part in a VNC, for the simple reason that every VN that can compound with a light verb should be able to compound with its covert counterpart. This is not the case. Furthermore, if we are ascribing the assignment of case to a covert light verb, why do we have a choice of four different object cases: accusative, dative, locative and ablative? In other words, this approach fails to account for the correlation between the choice of VN and the case assigned to the object.

One way out of the 'one light verb-four cases' problem, which is in fact consistent with the facts of Turkish, is the following: As dative, locative and ablative are inherent, they can be assumed to be assigned by a lexical category, namely the VN itself, so there need not be a light verb in those instance where inherent case is assigned to the object. After all, inherent case assignment by lexical categories is not unobserved: Turkish and German adjectives can assign inherent case, for instance. Such a step leads to a second counter-argument: A VN in the VNC can be modified by both adverbs and adjectives, as demonstrated by (4). The escape maneuver just mentioned predicts that in VNCs where inherent case is assigned to the object, the VN should be modified by an adjective only, because there is no light verb in the environment. This is not the case, as shown in (5).

A similar prediction holds for passivization, constituting the third counter-argument: When there is no accusative to be assigned, there need not be a light verb in the VNC and it should be possible to modify the VN by an adjective only. This again is not the case, as demonstrated in (6).

The fourth counter-argument is again derived from a comparison of the VNC and the LVC. If the structures of the VNC and the LVC are the same, this would mean that argument incorporation, a very productive phenomenon in Turkish, should be allowed in both constructions. However, only the LVC allows this, as shown in (7), where the fact that the object does not carry morphological case marking is one indication that it has been incorporated.

After leveling these counter-arguments, I will present the proposal that I think is essentially correct. The crux of the proposal is that it is nominal agreement (see the number agreement with the subject, marked on the VN in (1) for instance) that is responsible for structural case assignment to the object in the nominal domain. The relationship between subject agreement and case assignment to the subject, in both the nominal and the clausal domain, in Turkish is well-known since George and Kornfilt (1981). The current proposal extends this approach to cover structural case assignment to the object: Now, if structural case is associated with functional categories (see e.g. Chomsky 2000, 2001), it follows that a functional category is responsible for accusative case assignment in the nominal domain. I claim this category to be an abstract object agreement marker, analogous to the nominal subject agreement marker.

Examples

- (1) Ork-lar-in Rohan-ı istila-sı
ork-pl-Gen Rohan-Acc invasion-3.sg
'the orks' invasion of Rohan'
- (2) (x (y)) [[istila]_N Ø]_V + Acc
- (3) Ork-lar Rohan-ı istila et-ti.
ork-pl Rohan-Acc invasion do-Past.3.sg
'The orks invaded Rohan.'
- (4) Ork-lar-in Rohan-ı beklenmeyen/ansızın istila-sı
ork-pl-Gen Rohan-Acc unexpected/suddenly invasion-3.sg
'the orks' unexpected/sudden invasion of Rohan'
- (5) Ork-lar-in Rohan-a beklenmeyen/ansızın hücum-u
ork-pl-Gen Rohan-Dat unexpected/suddenly attack-3.sg
'the orks' unexpected/sudden attack on Rohan'
- (6) Rohan-in (ork-lar tarafından) beklenmeyen/ansızın istila-sı
Rohan-Gen (ork-pl by) unexpected/suddenly invasion-3.sg
'the unexpected/sudden invasion of Rohan by the orks'
- (7) a. Ork-lar köy işgal et-ti.
Ork-pl village occupation do-Past.3.sg
'The orks occupied a village.'
b. *Ork-lar-in köy işgal-i.
Ork-pl-Gen village occupation-3.sg
'the orks' occupation of a village'

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