

Accusative Case, Specificity, and Clause Structure: Comparing Turkish, Persian, and Korean

It is generally assumed that morphological accusative case in Turkish (and the *-ra* marking in Persian) mark an object NP as specific (Enc, 1991; Karimi, 2003) or presupposed (Diesing, 1992). It is also widely assumed that an object outside VP must be interpreted as presupposed, while an object within VP can be interpreted as existential (Diesing, 1992, 1994). Thus we are led to conclude that the accusative case-marked object in Turkish and Persian should move outside VP (maybe [Spec, vP]), while the caseless object remain inside VP. This conclusion seems to be supported by data from both Turkish and Korean, which are Altaic languages, and Persian, an Indo-Iranian language. Consider Turkish examples in (1) and Korean ones in (2). (1a) shows that the accusative case-marked direct object *kitab-i* ‘the book’ can be scrambled from VP in front of the adverb. On the other hand, the contrast between (1b) and (1c) shows that the caseless object *bir kitap* ‘a book’ cannot scramble over the adverb and must precede the verb immediately. The grammatical (2a) shows that the presupposed DP *chayk-un* ‘the book’ is scrambled outside VP and placed in front of the adverb *nail* ‘tomorrow,’ just like the Turkish (1a). The ungrammatical (2b) shows that it remains inside VP. (Important: (2b) is acceptable with contrastive reading, which is not our concern here.) As in Turkish, (2c-d) show that nonspecific *chayk-ul* ‘a book’ should remain inside VP, as in Turkish (1c). (Those who find (2c) acceptable tend to interpret the scrambled NP *chayk-ul* ‘a book’ as specific and definite, instead of interpreting it as nonspecific, indefinite.)

However, Moorcroft (1996) shows that not all accusative case-marked NPs are interpreted as specific or presupposed. For example, causatives in Turkish show that a caseless direct object must have accusative case, even though it cannot be interpreted as presupposed (Moorcroft, 1996:260). Further, the subject of a small clause must bear accusative case, even when it is most naturally interpreted as existential, as shown in (3). Considering the facts in (3), it is clear that not all accusative-marked elements are interpreted as specific or presupposed. Note that the difference between (1) and (3) is that the accusative marked elements in (1) are object, or the complements of the verb, while that in (3) is the subject of the small clause. Thus it is evident that while accusative case-marked objects of the verb are interpreted as specific or presupposed, being outside of VP, accusative case-marked subjects of the small clause are not interpreted as such. In this paper, we show that not only accusative case-marked NPs are specific but also nominative case-marked NPs are specific, presupposed, if they are placed outside of VP. Consider the examples in (4). The nonspecific NP *salam* ‘a person’ should remain inside VP. Otherwise, it is unacceptable, as shown in (4b). On the other hand, specific NPs should be scrambled out of VP. Otherwise, it is unnatural, as shown in (5). ((5a) would be acceptable if interpreted as contrastive focus, which is not relevant to our discussion.) Why then the specific NPs in Turkish and Persian are accusative case-marked, while nonspecific ones should not be assigned accusative case? We show that specificity is represented in two ways: either by morphological accusative case-marking (as in Turkish and Persian) or by being moved outside VP (scrambling as in Korean, Persian or Overt Object Shift as in Icelandic) (see Karimi, 2003 for Persian cases). We also show that Diesing’s (1994) claim that specific NPs should be outside VP, while nonspecific ones should remain inside VP is more supported by the facts in Altaic languages like Turkish and Korean as well as Indo-Iranian Persian.

Data and References

- (1) a. kitab-i yarin okuy-acag-im (Turkish)
book-acc tomorrow read-fut-1sg
'I will read the book tomorrow.'
- b. yarin bir kitap okuy-acag-im
tomorrow a book read-fut-1sg
'I will read a book tomorrow.'
- c. *bir kitap yarin okuy-acag-im
a book tomorrow read-fut-1sg
- (2) a. ku chayk-un nail ilkul kes-ita (specific) (Korean)
the book-top tomorrow read-fut-ind
'I will read the book tomorrow.'
- b. *nail ku chayk-un ilkul kes-ita (specific) (but contrastive is acceptable)
tomorrow the book-top read-fut-ind
- c. *chayk-ul nail ilkul kes-ita (nonspecific)
book-acc tomorrow read-fut-ind
'I will read a book tomorrow.'
- d. nail chayk-ul ilkul kes-ita (nonspecific)
tomorrow book-acc read-fut-ind
- (3) [_{sc} bir avukat-i/*avukat baskan] sec-e-lim (Turkish)
a lawyer-acc/lawyer-Ø chair elect-opt-1pl
'Let's elect a lawyer as chair.'
- (4) a. pang-ey salam-i issta (Korean)
room-in person-nom be-ind
'There is a person in the room.' (nonspecific)
- b. *salam-i pang-ey issta
person-nom room-in be-ind
- (5) a. *pang-ey salam-un issta (Korean)
room-in person-top be-ind
'*There is the person in the room.' (specific)
- b. salam-un pang-ey issta
person-top room-in be-ind

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