Syntactic positions of bare NPs in Turkish: Some implications from Aspect and Prosody

Miho Nagai (CUNY Graduate Center) and Öner Özçelik (McGill University)

It has been argued in the literature that the subject of an unaccusative verb is an internal argument of the verb and occurs in the complement position. Such a subject, on this view, is just like the object of a transitive verb (Perlmutter 1978; 1989). In this paper, focusing on Turkish, we take a closer look at the syntactic positions of bare NPs, based on aspectual properties of verbs (e.g. Vendler 1967; Dowty 1979) and prosodic structure, and argue that internal arguments of verbs do not uniformly occur in the complement position of the verb. Looking at where low adverbs appear in Turkish, we propose that bare internal arguments of *achievements* are base-generated in SpecVP (a position higher than the sister of V) while those of *accomplishments* originate in the complement position of V.

Previous literature showed, for Turkish, that, in this language, an indefinite bare NP never moves from certain structural domains such as VP/*v*P (see (1)) (Kornfilt 1984). In light of this fact, both the position of *adam* 'man' in (1a) and that of *kitap* 'book' in (1b) have been assumed to be the same complement position of the verb. This claim also seems to be supported by certain prosodic facts: The indefinite subject of an unaccusative verb stays within the same phonological phrase (PPh) as the verb (see (2a)), just like the indefinite (bare) object of a transitive verb (see (2b)), as indicated by phrasal stress facts – the rightmost PPh corresponds to VP in Turkish (Özçelik & Nagai 2010). This should not, however, be taken to necessarily mean that the indefinite subject *adam* in (2a) must occur in the complement position of the verb; all (2) shows is that *adam* in (2a) should occur within the same (maximal) projection as the verb, i.e. within the VP. It does not make any predictions as to where exactly in the VP it should occur. We hold that internal arguments of a certain class of verbs occur in the specifier position (cf. Larson 1988; Hale & Keyser 2000; Alexiadou & Shäfer 2010), irrespective of the unaccusativity (or transitivity) of verbs.

Evidence for this comes from a consideration of the position of low adverbs in Turkish: Consider, for example, the behavior of the low adverb *çabuk* 'quickly' in (3a) and the corresponding prosodic structure in (3b). Under the standard view of the placement of low adverbs, one could assume that *çabuk* attaches to VP (e.g. Miyagawa 1989). The adverb *çabuk* occurs immediately before the indefinite object *kitap* and appears within the same phonological phrase as the verb, as in (3b). It is clear, then, that it must stay, at least, within the VP. Now, compare (4) with (5): The same adverb cannot appear in (4a, b), but it can in (5a, b). We argue that the VP structures of (4a, b) are different from the ones of (5a, b) in terms of *aspectual* properties (e.g. Vendler 1967). The aspectual classification of VPs can be determined by looking at the behavior of PP modifiers such as *x boyunca* 'for *x* time' (See (6) and (7)). In (6a, b), the VP denoting an instantaneous event is incompatible with the durational PP (i.e. the *achievement* class). In contrast, in (7a, b), the VP denoting a durative event is compatible with the durational PP (i.e. the *accomplishment* class). Achievement VPs do not allow low adverb modification (see (4)) whereas accomplishment VPs do (see (5)). Now, following the idea that multiple specifiers (or adjuncts) are not allowed in phrase structure (Kayne 1994), we predict here that low adverbs like *çabuk* occur in SpecVP in Turkish, and that the reason why *çabuk* cannot occur in SpecVP in (4a, b) - as opposed to (5a, b) - is because the indefinite bare NP and the low adverb compete for the single specifier position available in the sentence. The prosodic phrasing given in (8) reflects the syntactic structure in (4) – SpecVP in the achievement construction is *not* available for the adverb to occupy since the indefinite bare NP already occurs in that position, which yields the ungrammaticality of (8a, b). Notice that once the internal argument of achievements is scrambled away from VP to some higher position (Spec*v*P- a canonical accusative-case checking position), getting the definite interpretation (Kornfilt 1984), the low adverb can occur (See (9)). On the other hand, SpecVP in the accomplishment construction is available for the adverb to occupy since the indefinite bare NP occurs in the complement position (lower than SpecVP) (See (10)).

In conclusion, an indefinite internal argument of an achievement verb (for both unaccusatives and transitives) occurs in SpecVP while that of a non-achievement verb is in a position lower than SpecVP (or in the complement position of V). Achievements and non-achievements (accomplishments) are syntactically different with regard to VP-structures. Syntactic and prosodic properties of sentences jointly support the hypothesis presented here about tree structure.

(1) a. [VP adam gel-di]   b. [John [VP kitap oku-du]]
        man   arrive-Past   book   read-Past
        'A man arrived.'   'John read a book.'

Note: PPh-level stress (which falls on the leftmost prosodic word in a PPh, Kabak & Vogel 2001) is indicated in bold.

(2) a. [[VP **adam** gel-di]PPh]I   b. [[**John**]PPh [VP **kitap** oku-du]PPh]I
        man   arrive-Past   book   read-Past
        'A man arrived.'   'John read a book.'

(3) a. [John [VP çabuk [V' kitap oku-du]]]   b. [[**John**]PPh [VP **çabuk** kitap oku-du]PPh]I
            quickly book read-Past
        'John quickly read a book.'

(4) a. *[VP çabuk [VP adam   gel-di]]   b. *[John [VP çabuk [VP para   bul-du]]]
           quickly   man   arrive-Past   quickly   money find-past
        'A man quickly arrived.'   'John quickly found a coin.'

(5) a. [VP çabuk [V' hastalık yayıl-dı]]   b. [John [VP çabuk [V' kitap oku-du]]]
           quickly disease spread-past   quickly   book read-Past
        'A disease quickly spread.'   'John quickly read a book.'

(6) a. *_bir saat boyunca_ adam geldi   b. John *_bir saat boyunca_ para   bul-du
          one hour for   man arrive-past   one hour for   money find-past
        'A man arrived *for an hour.'   'John found a coin *for an hour.'

(7) a. _bir saat boyunca_ hastalık yayıl-dı   b. John _bir saat boyunca_ kitap oku-du
          one hour for   disease spread-past   one hour for   book read-past
        'A disease spread for an hour.'   'John read a book for an hour.'

(8) (=(4)) a.*[[VP **çabuk** adam gel-di]PPh]I   b. *[[**John**]PPh [VP **çabuk** para bul-du]PPh]I

(9) a. [XP adam [VP çabuk [V' gel-di]]]   b. [XP John [vP **para-yı** [v' [VP çabuk [V' bul-du]]]]]
    a'. [[**adam**]PPh [VP **çabuk** gel-di]PPh]I   b'. [[**John**]PPh [**para-yı**]PPh [VP **çabuk** bul-du]PPh]I
            man   quickly arrive-past   money-acc   quickly find-past
        'The man quickly arrived.'   'John quickly found the coin.'

(10) (=(5)) a. [[VP **çabuk** hastalık yayil-di]PPh]I   b. [[**John**]PPh [VP **çabuk** kitap oku-du]PPh]I

SELECTED REFERENCES:
Alexiadou, A. & F. Shäfer. 2010. There-insertion: an unaccusativity mismatch at the syntax-semantics interface. WCCFL 28; **Hale, K. & S.J. Keyser.** 2000. There-insertion unaccusatives. Ms., MIT. **Kabak, B., & I.Vogel.** 2001. The phonological Word and Stress Assignment in Turkish. _Phonology 18_; **Kayne, R.** 1994. _The Antisymmetry of Syntax._ Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press; **Kornfilt, J.** 1984. _Case marking, agreement and empty categories in Turkish_. PhD diss., Harvard U; **Larson, R.** 1988. On the double object construction. _LI 19_; **Özçelik, Ö. & M. Nagai.** 2010. Possible syntactic subject positions in Turkish: Evidence from phonology. WAFL6; **Perlmutter, D.** 1978. Impersonal passives and the Unaccusative Hypothesis. In BLS4. UC Berkeley; **Vendler, Z.** 1967. Verbs and Times. In _Linguistics in Philosophy_, Cornell University Press.