Syntactic positions of Turkish bare NPs: The view from Aspect and Prosody

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Focusing on Turkish, we argue that internal arguments of verbs do not uniformly occur in the complement position of the verb (contra e.g. Perlmutter 1978). We propose that bare internal arguments of Turkish achievements are base-generated in SpecVP while those of accomplishments originate in the complement position of V.

Previous literature showed that, in Turkish, an indefinite bare NP never moves from VP/vP (Kornfilt 1984). Accordingly, 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:

(1) a. [VP adam gel-di]
man arrive-Past
‘A man arrived.’

b. [John [VP kitap oku-du]]
book read-Past
‘John read a book.’

This is also supported by phrasal stress facts: The indefinite subject of unaccusatives stays within the same phonological phrase (PPh) as the verb, just like the indefinite (bare) object of transitives (Özçelik & Nagai 2010) (PPh-level stress = boldface):

(2) a. [[[VP adam gel-di]PPh]I
man arrive-Past
‘A man arrived.’

book read-Past
‘John read a book.’

However, this does not ensure 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 VP. We hold that internal arguments of a certain class of verbs occur in the specifier position (cf. Hale & Keyser 2000), irrespective of the unaccusativity (or transitivity) of verbs.

Consider the behavior of the low adverb çabuk ‘quickly’ in (3a) and the corresponding prosodic structure in (3b):

(3) a. [John [VP çabuk [V’ kitap oku-du]]]
quickly book read-Past
‘John quickly read a book.’

b. [[John]PPh [VP çabuk kitap oku-du]PPh]I
quickly book read-Past
‘John quickly read a book.’

The adverb çabuk appears within the same phonological phrase as the verb (see (3b)). Following the standard view that low adverbs attach to VP (e.g. Miyagawa 1989), çabuk must stay, at least, within the VP.

The same adverb cannot appear in (4a, b), but it can in (5a, b):

(4) a. *[VP çabuk [VP adam gel-di]]
quickly man arrive-Past
‘A man quickly arrived.’

b. *[John [VP çabuk [VP para bul-du]]]
quickly money find-Past
‘John quickly found a coin.’

(5) a. [VP çabuk [V’ hastalık yayıl-di]]
quickly disease spread-Past
‘A disease quickly spread.’

b. [John [VP çabuk [V’ kitap oku-du]]]
quickly book read-Past
‘John quickly read a book.’
We argue that the VP structures of (4a, b) are different from the ones of (5a, b) in terms of aspectual properties (Vendler 1967). This can be determined by examining the telicity of the VP:

(6) a. *bir saat boyunca adam geldi 
    b. John *bir saat boyunca para bul-du
    ‘A man arrived *for an hour.’
    ‘John found a coin *for an hour.’

(7) a. bir saat boyunca hastalık yayıl-di
    b. John bir saat boyunca kitap oku-du
    ‘A disease spread for an hour.’
    ‘John read a book for an hour.’

In (6a, b), the VP is telic since it is incompatible with the durational PP (i.e. achievements), as opposed to (7a, b) (i.e. accomplishments). Achievement VPs do not allow low adverb modification whereas accomplishment VPs do. 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) – the single SpecVP available is already occupied, which yields the ungrammaticality of (8a, b):

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

Once the internal argument of achievements is scrambled away from VP to some higher position (see (9a, b)), getting the definite interpretation, and thus creating its own PPh (see (9a’, b’)), the low adverb can occur:

(9) a. [TP adam [vp çabuk [v-gel-di]]]
    b. [TP John [vp para-yı [v-vp çabuk [v-bul-du]]]]
    ‘The man quickly arrived.’
    ‘John quickly found the coin.’

a’. [[adam]PPh [vp çabuk gel-di]PPh \[I

On the other hand, SpecVP in the accomplishment construction is available for the adverb to occupy since the indefinite bare NP occurs in the position lower than SpecVP, as in (10) (compare with (8)):

(10) (=(5)) a. [[vp çabuk hastalık yayıl-di]PPh \[I
    b. [[John]PPh [vp çabuk kitap oku-du]PPh \[I

References