

Passive and Impersonal Constructions in Turkish

The current analysis investigates passives of passives and passives of unaccusatives in standard Istanbul Turkish. I propose that there is an impersonal pronoun that surfaces as a passive morpheme in all Turkish impersonal constructions (IPs) and in the case of double passives, it appears together with passive Voice. The current analysis implements Sigurdsson's (2011) Voice heads to account for the different IPs. Namely, I propose that different verb types (unergative versus unaccusative) use different Voice heads, some of which may or may not license the IP construction, thus differentiating between a canonical passive and an impersonal one.

Turkish IPs may be derived from unaccusative verbs and even already passive sentences. This is contrary to the predictions of the Unaccusative Hypothesis (Perlmutter, 1978). Example (1) illustrates an active sentence, and its canonical passive counterpart is shown in (2). Example (3) demonstrates the Turkish IP with the unaccusative verb 'die'. Note that the covert subject is a patient, not an agent. Example (4) demonstrates two passive morphemes on the verb 'shoot'.

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| <p>(1) <i>Bahçıvan çiçek-ler-i sula-di</i>
Gardener flower-PL-ACC water-PAST
'The gardener watered the flowers.'</p> | <p>(2) <i>Çiçek-ler (bahçıvan tarafından) sula-n-di</i>
flower-PL (gardener by) water-PASS-PAST
'The flowers were watered (by the gardener).'</p> |
| <p>(3) <i>Bu soğuk-ta ölü-n-ür.</i>
this cold-LOC die-PASS-AOR.3
'One dies of this cold.'</p> | <p>(4) <i>Harp-te vur-ul-un-ur.</i>
war-LOC shoot-PASS-PASS-AOR.3
'One is shot in war.' (Özkaragöz 1986)</p> |

Legate et al. (2020) analyze these IP constructions in Turkish as having an impersonal pronominal argument that surfaces as a passive morpheme. Thus, (2) is a passive with passive voice, (3) is an active sentence with an implicit argument, and (4) is an impersonal of a passive with passive voice *and* an implicit argument. They further propose a separate functional projection Imp that licenses the pronoun. Dikmen et al. (2022) argue that, if these IPs are indeed active sentences with an implicit argument, then we would expect to see transitive active impersonal constructions. However, Turkish does not exhibit these. Furthermore, Dikmen et al. (2022) point out that the unavailability of *by*-phrases in IPs (one of the diagnostics for the IP construction) is not as ungrammatical as Legate et al. (2020) claim. Crucially, it seems that *by*-phrases are available if no bare adverbs are present in the structure.

I propose that there is, in fact, an impersonal pronoun present in Turkish IPs, based on several diagnostics from Legate et al. (2020), and comparisons between impersonal constructions in Romance languages and Turkish. I further propose that incorporating various Voice heads from Sigurdsson (2011) can explain the unattested transitive active IPs. If Voice licenses this impersonal pronoun, instead of an Imp projection, then certain Voice heads, specifically those used with active transitive clauses, cannot license this implicit argument. Furthermore, the availability of *by*-phrases in Dikmen et al.'s (2022) examples could be explained by passive Voice structure in transitive clauses, and how and when case is assigned.

Much of the literature on this topic seeks to explain this phenomenon through Relational Grammar (Perlmutter, 1978; Biktimir, 1986; Özkaragöz, 1986, etc.) and there has been little work on this issue in Minimalism (Legate et al., 2020; Dikmen et al., 2022). The advantage of working within the Distributed Morphology framework (Halle & Marantz, 1993) is that it allows for a more flexible morpheme interpretation.

This analysis contributes to the ongoing Minimalist debate about Turkish impersonal passives and to the overall literature on passive formation cross-linguistically.

References

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