

Comparative Grammatical Analysis of the Case Category in Turkic Languages: Phonetic and Functional Changes of Case Suffixes

ASHUROVA MAKHBUBA
Karshi State University, Uzbekistan

ABSTRACT

The case category represents one of the most stable and structurally significant grammatical categories in Turkic languages. Despite the considerable typological and historical unity of the Turkic language family, case markers demonstrate substantial phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and functional variation across individual languages. The present study provides a comparative grammatical analysis of the case category in selected Turkic languages, with particular attention to Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Turkmen, Tatar, and Uyghur. The main objective is to identify the regular phonetic correspondences and functional changes observed in case suffixes and to determine the relationship between their historical forms and their modern grammatical functions. The research employs comparative-historical, descriptive, structural, and functional-semantic methods. The analysis demonstrates that the Turkic case system is based on a common agglutinative morphological foundation, while vowel harmony, consonant assimilation, phonetic reduction, language contact, and syntactic restructuring have contributed to divergent modern forms. The nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative cases reveal especially clear correspondences across Turkic languages. At the same time, the functional range of individual cases differs considerably. For example, the dative case can express direction, recipient, purpose, and certain experiencer meanings, whereas the locative and ablative cases may acquire temporal, causal, comparative, and source-related functions.

The study argues that phonetic variation should not be interpreted as random divergence; rather, it reflects regular historical sound changes operating on inherited morphological elements. Functional variation, in turn, is closely connected with changes in syntactic valency, lexicalization, grammaticalization, and language-specific semantic development. The results contribute to a more systematic understanding of Turkic grammatical typology and provide a comparative framework for further research into case morphology and historical linguistics.

Keywords: Turkic languages, case category, case suffixes, comparative grammar, phonetic variation, functional semantics, agglutination, vowel harmony, morphology, grammaticalization.

INTRODUCTION

The case category is one of the fundamental grammatical categories through which nouns and nominal groups establish syntactic and semantic relationships with other elements of a sentence. In agglutinative languages, case relations are generally expressed through suffixes attached to the nominal stem. Turkic languages are among the most prominent representatives of agglutinative morphology, and their case systems provide valuable material for comparative, typological, and historical investigation.

The Turkic language family comprises a large number of languages spoken across a geographically extensive area stretching from southeastern Europe and Anatolia to Central Asia, Siberia, and western China. Although these languages have undergone independent historical development and have experienced different contact situations, they preserve numerous structural similarities. The nominal case system is among the grammatical domains in which the common Turkic heritage can be observed particularly clearly (Johanson & Csató 1998).

A characteristic feature of Turkic morphology is the agglutinative organization of grammatical information. In an agglutinative language, grammatical meanings are normally

represented by distinct affixes, each of which tends to have a relatively stable function. Turkic languages conform broadly to this principle, although actual morphological structures demonstrate various degrees of fusion, phonetic alternation, and functional extension (Comrie 1989). Case suffixes usually follow a fixed order after the lexical stem and may be accompanied by possessive and plural markers.

The case systems of modern Turkic languages are not completely identical. Turkish, for instance, is traditionally described as having nominative, accusative, dative, locative, ablative, and genitive cases. Uzbek has a closely related system, although its phonetic realization differs considerably because modern Uzbek has largely lost the regular vowel harmony characteristic of many other Turkic languages (Kononov 1960; Bodrogligeti 2001). Kazakh and Kyrgyz preserve extensive vowel and consonant harmony, which results in multiple phonetic variants of the same case suffix (Johanson & Csató 1998). Azerbaijani and Turkmen also maintain systematic vowel harmony, although their specific suffixal forms differ from those of Anatolian Turkish.

The comparative study of case suffixes is therefore important for at least three reasons. First, it makes it possible to reconstruct historical correspondences among Turkic languages. Second, it demonstrates how general phonetic processes influence morphological forms. Third, it reveals that grammatical functions may expand or narrow during language development.

The relationship between form and function is especially important in the study of case. A case suffix cannot be adequately described only as a formal marker. Its syntactic distribution and semantic functions must also be considered. The dative, for example, can indicate movement toward a location, but it can also mark the recipient of an action, the addressee, purpose, or an experiencer in different Turkic languages. Similarly, the ablative can express physical separation but may also develop meanings of source, cause, comparison, material, and temporal starting point.

From a historical perspective, modern Turkic case suffixes are generally regarded as descendants of ancient Turkic

morphological forms. Old Turkic inscriptions and manuscripts provide evidence of case markers corresponding to many forms found in modern Turkic languages. The Orkhon inscriptions, for example, demonstrate the use of accusative, dative, locative, ablative, and genitive constructions that are structurally comparable to modern Turkic morphology (Tekin 1995). The continuity between Old Turkic and modern Turkic systems does not mean that all forms and functions have remained unchanged. On the contrary, historical phonological processes and semantic developments have produced significant differences.

Another important factor is language contact. Turkic languages have historically interacted with Mongolic, Iranian, Slavic, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and other languages. Contact has influenced vocabulary very strongly, but grammatical structures have also been affected in certain regions. Nevertheless, the core case system has generally remained distinctly Turkic, which demonstrates the relative stability of nominal morphology.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The grammatical structure of Turkic languages has been investigated from historical, descriptive, comparative, and typological perspectives. Early comparative studies established the existence of systematic correspondences between Turkic languages, while later research focused increasingly on the interaction of morphology, syntax, phonology, and semantics.

One of the foundational sources for understanding Turkic historical morphology is the study of Old Turkic. The inscriptions of the Orkhon-Yenisey tradition provide important evidence concerning the grammatical structure of early Turkic. According to Tekin, Old Turkic already possessed a relatively developed case system, including markers corresponding to the major cases found in modern Turkic languages (Tekin 1995). This historical continuity supports the reconstruction of common Turkic morphological patterns.

Modern comparative Turkology has emphasized the structural unity of the Turkic languages while recognizing

substantial differences among branches. Johanson and Csató note that Turkic languages share fundamental morphological characteristics, particularly agglutinative word formation and suffixal grammatical marking, but exhibit considerable phonological and morphosyntactic diversity (Johanson & Csató 1998).

The typological concept of agglutination is particularly relevant to the analysis of Turkic case morphology. In agglutinative systems, grammatical markers are attached sequentially to stems, and each marker generally corresponds to a specific grammatical function. However, agglutination does not exclude phonetic alternation. Case suffixes may change their vowel or consonant according to the phonological environment of the stem. This is particularly evident in languages with vowel harmony.

Comrie's typological work identifies Turkic languages as highly relevant examples of morphological organization in which grammatical relations are frequently expressed through suffixes rather than independent prepositions (Comrie 1989). The case system thus forms an important component of Turkic syntactic structure.

Turkish grammar has been described extensively in both traditional and modern linguistic scholarship. Lewis identifies six major cases in Turkish: nominative, accusative, dative, locative, ablative, and genitive (Lewis 2000). The accusative marker is particularly important because its use is associated with definite or specific objects, demonstrating the interaction between case marking and semantic-pragmatic interpretation.

Uzbek provides a particularly interesting comparative case because the modern language differs phonologically from many other Turkic languages. Uzbek has largely lost the productive vowel harmony characteristic of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkish, and several other Turkic languages. Nevertheless, its case system preserves clear historical correspondences with other Turkic languages. Uzbek grammatical descriptions traditionally identify nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative cases (Kononov 1960; Bodrogligeti 2001).

Kazakh morphology presents a different pattern. The language maintains strong vowel harmony, and case suffixes have several phonological variants. For example, the dative case may occur as -ға/-ге, while the locative and ablative markers similarly alternate according to vowel harmony and consonantal.

Azerbaijani and Turkmen also provide evidence for the persistence of vowel harmony in case morphology. Their case suffixes frequently exhibit front/back and rounded/unrounded vowel alternation. These forms may be compared with Turkish to identify both common historical elements and language-specific developments.

Uyghur occupies an especially interesting position because its modern phonological and morphological system has developed under prolonged contact with other languages and within a Central Asian linguistic environment. Although Uyghur retains the major Turkic cases, certain forms and syntactic functions demonstrate differences from Uzbek, Kazakh, and Turkish.

The literature therefore suggests that the Turkic case category should be investigated on several interconnected levels: historical morphology, phonological realization, morphosyntactic distribution, and semantic function.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research materials

The research material consists of grammatical data from eight modern Turkic languages:

1. Uzbek
2. Turkish
3. Azerbaijani
4. Kazakh
5. Kyrgyz
6. Turkmen
7. Tatar
8. Uyghur.

Old Turkic data are additionally used for historical comparison. The principal case categories examined are nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative.

The examples are based on descriptions found in major Turkological grammars and comparative studies (Johanson & Csató 1998; Lewis 2000; Bodrogligeti 2001). The analysis concentrates on productive case suffixes rather than marginal or lexicalized markers.

Research methods

Four principal methods were applied:

1. First, the comparative method was used to establish correspondences among case suffixes in different Turkic languages.
2. Second, the comparative-historical method was employed to relate modern forms to their older Turkic counterparts.
3. Third, the structural-descriptive method was used to describe the phonological and morphological properties of each case marker.
4. Fourth, the functional-semantic method was applied to determine how case forms express syntactic and semantic relations in different languages.

The research also considers phonological processes including vowel harmony, consonant assimilation, voicing, palatalization, and phonetic reduction.

RESULTS

1. General structure of the Turkic case system

The comparative analysis demonstrates that six case categories are particularly widespread across the examined Turkic languages: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative.

The following simplified correspondence can be established:

Case
 Uzbek
 Turkish
 Kazakh
 Kyrgyz
 Azerbaijani
 Nominative
 Ø
 Ø
 Ø
 Ø
 Ø
 Accusative
 -ni
 -(y)i/-ı/-u/-ü
 -ны/-ні
 -ны/-ни
 -ı/-i/-u/-ü
 Genitive
 -ning
 -(n)ın/-ın/-un/-ün
 -нын/-нің
 -нын/-нин
 -ın/-in/-un/-ün
 Dative
 -ga/-ka/-qa
 -(y)e/-a
 -ға/-ге/-қа/-ке
 -га/-ге/-ка/-ке
 -a/-ə
 Locative
 -da/-ta
 -de/-da/-te/-ta
 -да/-де/-та/-те
 -да/-де/-та/-те
 -da/-də/-ta/-tə
 Ablative
 -dan/-tan
 -den/-dan/-ten/-tan
 -дан/-ден/-тан/-тен
 -дан/-ден/-тан/-тен
 -dan/-dən

The table reveals that the correspondence between languages is especially strong in the dative, locative, and ablative cases. Although the phonetic forms differ, their historical and functional relationships remain transparent.

The nominative case is normally unmarked. This zero-marking strategy is a characteristic feature of Turkic nominal morphology. The absence of an overt suffix does not mean that the nominative lacks grammatical significance. Rather, it functions as the basic form of the noun and is associated with subject and citation functions.

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that the Turkic case category represents a combination of considerable historical stability and substantial language-specific variation. The most important observation is that phonetic variation and functional variation operate at different but interconnected levels. Phonetic variation is largely systematic. Vowel harmony determines the vowel quality of suffixes in many Turkic languages. Consonant assimilation determines whether certain case markers contain voiced or voiceless consonants. Buffer consonants may appear to prevent hiatus when suffixes are attached to vowel-final stems.

Functional variation, on the other hand, develops through semantic extension and syntactic reorganization. The dative is an illustrative example. Its original spatial meaning of direction toward a goal has expanded into recipient, addressee, purpose, and experiencer functions. Such development can be understood in terms of semantic networks in which spatial orientation serves as a conceptual basis for abstract relations. The ablative demonstrates a similar process. The spatial meaning “from” develops into source, cause, comparison, and temporal origin. This semantic extension is cross-linguistically common and reflects the tendency of grammatical markers to expand their functions through metaphorical and syntactic reanalysis. The locative also illustrates this phenomenon. Its primary spatial function has been extended to temporal and abstract domains. Expressions such as “at five o'clock” are conceptually related to

spatial location because a temporal point is construed as a location on a temporal axis. The accusative is particularly important because its use often intersects with definiteness and specificity. In Turkish, for example, the opposition between an overtly marked object and an unmarked object is closely associated with the interpretation of the object as specific or non-specific (Lewis 2000). Similar tendencies can be observed in other Turkic languages, although the exact distribution differs. Another important issue is the relationship between morphology and phonology. The case suffix cannot be treated as a completely invariant sequence of phonemes. Instead, it is better analyzed as an abstract morpheme with several context-dependent realizations. For example, the Turkish accusative can be represented abstractly as a vowel-harmonic morpheme whose surface realizations are -ı, -i, -u, -ü. Similarly, the locative can be analyzed as an abstract LOC morpheme realized as -da, -de, -ta, -te. This approach is particularly useful in comparative linguistics because it allows researchers to distinguish between morphological identity and phonetic difference. From a historical perspective, the comparison also reveals that modern Uzbek occupies an important position within the Turkic family. Its case suffixes preserve clear Turkic characteristics while simultaneously demonstrating phonological developments associated with its own history and contact environment.

The loss or reduction of vowel harmony in Uzbek has not resulted in the disappearance of the case category. Instead, morphological marking has become relatively more invariant phonologically. This provides evidence that grammatical categories may remain stable even when their phonological realization changes substantially.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the case category constitutes one of the most stable and historically informative components of Turkic grammar. Uzbek, Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Tatar, and Uyghur preserve a common structural foundation, although individual languages

differ in the phonetic realization and functional distribution of case suffixes.

The principal findings can be summarized as follows:

1. First, the major Turkic case categories – nominative, accusative, genitive, dative, locative, and ablative – show clear historical and structural correspondences across the language family.
2. Second, phonetic variation in case suffixes is largely systematic. Vowel harmony, consonant assimilation, and phonological adaptation account for many differences between surface forms.
3. Third, languages that preserve productive vowel harmony, such as Turkish, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Azerbaijani, and Turkmen, display a greater number of phonetic variants of case suffixes. Uzbek, which has largely lost productive vowel harmony, demonstrates comparatively stable suffixal forms.
4. Fourth, functional variation is equally important. The dative, locative, and ablative cases have developed semantic functions extending beyond their basic spatial meanings. These include recipient, purpose, experiencer, temporal location, cause, comparison, and source.
5. Fifth, the accusative case demonstrates an important relationship between grammatical marking and definiteness or specificity. This is particularly visible in Turkish and is also relevant to the interpretation of object marking in other Turkic languages.
6. Sixth, modern case suffixes demonstrate considerable historical continuity with Old Turkic forms. The differences among modern languages are therefore best interpreted as results of regular phonological evolution, morphological adaptation, and functional-semantic development.

REFERENCES

1. Baitursynov, A. 1992. *Til Taǵylymy* [Language Studies]. Almaty: Ana Tili.

2. Bodrogligeti, A. J. E. 2001. *An Academic Grammar of Modern Uzbek*. Munich: LINCOM Europa.
3. Comrie, B. 1989. *Language Universals and Linguistic Typology: Syntax and Morphology*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
4. Johanson, L. & Csató, É. Á. (Eds.) 1998. *The Turkic Languages*. London and New York: Routledge.
5. Kara, M. 2002. *Türk Lehçeleri Grameri* [Grammar of the Turkic Dialects]. Ankara: Akçağ.
6. Kononov, A. N. 1960. *Grammatika sovremennogo uzbekskogo literaturnogo yazyka* [Grammar of the Modern Uzbek Literary Language]. Moscow and Leningrad: Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Sciences.
7. Lewis, G. 2000. *Turkish Grammar*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8. Tekin, T. 1995. *OrhonYazıtları* [Orkhon Inscriptions]. Istanbul: Simurg.

ASHUROVA MAKHBUBA

PHD STUDENT,
KARSHI STATE UNIVERSITY,
UZBEKISTAN.