

REFLEXIVIZATION VIA MOVEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM TURKISH VERBAL REFLEXIVES

A central question for syntactic approaches to the argument structure of verbal reflexives (e.g. Embick 2004, Wood 2014; cp. e.g. Grimshaw 1982, Reinhart & Siloni 2005) concerns how a single syntactic argument can receive the interpretive properties associated with two different theta-roles. Focusing on Turkish verbal reflexives (TVR; glossed as REFL), we argue for a movement-based approach to construal as an answer to this question, applying to both figure and ground reflexives (Key 2021). We first show that these verbs are syntactically intransitive and semantically monadic, with a single DP argument in their structure. Diagnosing the position of this sole argument, we find a striking mixed behavior: the sole argument behaves as internal for some syntactic diagnostics, and as external for others. We argue that this mixed behavior follows from a movement process *of a single argument from one thematic position to another*, thus deriving the assignment of two thematic roles to the sole argument (see e.g. Hornstein 1999, 2001 for the same idea in control and binding; Deal 2013, 2017 for external possession).

INTRANSITIVITY Reflexive verbs behave as intransitives compared to their *bona fide* transitive counterparts, i.e. verbs taking the anaphor *kendi-* ‘self’ as an object; they thus resist a ‘transitive’ analysis of reflexivization of the type widely proposed for Romance *se/si* (e.g. Kayne 1988, Pesetsky 1995). (i) **proxy readings** (e.g. Jackendoff 1992, Lidz 2001): in (1a), the pronominal reflexive refers to a contextually salient proxy of its antecedent yielding a marked but felicitous reading which is impossible with the verbal reflexive (1b).

(1) *Context: Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ sees that his wax statue is about to be destroyed by the rain, and decides to cover it.*

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| a. Kıvanç kendi-ni ört-tü.
Kıvanç self-ACC cover-PST
‘Kıvanç covered himself.’ | b. #Kıvanç ört-ün-dü.
Kıvanç cover-REFL-PST
‘Kıvanç covered.’ |
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(ii) Only pronominal reflexives yield **strict/sloppy ambiguities under VP ellipsis**: in (2), the elided structure can signify either that *Ayşe* covered herself or that she covered *Ali*; the second (strict) reading is impossible with the verbal reflexive (3). Parallel facts obtain with **comparative ellipsis** (Sells et al. 1987), not shown.

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| (2) Ali kendi-ni ört-tü, Ayşe de (öyle yap-tı).
Ali self-ACC cover-PST Ayşe too so do-PST
‘Ali covered himself & Ayşe did too.’ ✓strict ✓sloppy | (3) Ali ört-ün-dü, Ayşe de (öyle yap-tı).
Ali cover-REFL-PST Ayşe too so do-PST
‘Ali covered, and Ayşe did so too.’ ✗strict ✓sloppy |
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(iii) **de dicto** contexts: in (4a), the pronominal reflexive can effectively be interpreted outside the scope of *want* (see Heim 1991, Charlow 2010, Sportiche 2014), thus being felicitous in the given context where Ali does not realize that the person who he plans to weigh is himself. But the verbal reflexive is infelicitous in the same context (4b), which, as Sportiche (2014) argues, is precisely what we expect if the verbal reflexive is monadic.

(4) [*Ali, the leader of a cult, must once a year ceremonially weigh the oldest member of the community using what is considered holy water. He hasn’t realized that, as of this year, he himself is the oldest member. On the day, he announces: ‘I must now weigh the oldest member of the community!’*]

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| a. Ali kendi-ni tart-mak isti-yor.
Ali self-ACC weigh-INF want-PROG
‘Ali wants to weigh himself.’ | b. #Ali tart-ıl-mak isti-yor.
Ali weigh-REFL-INF want-PROG
‘Ali wants to weigh.’ |
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(iv) Prenominal and verbal reflexivity behave differently wrt **bound/free readings under focus**, as brought out by denials of an *only*-focussed assertion (cf. Sportiche 2013). An *only*-assertion with the pronominal reflexive licenses two different denials, each denying a different (free vs. bound) construal of the basic assertion. With TVRs, only one denial is ever possible (examples not shown). (v) causativization is another intransitivity diagnostic (see below for examples).

INTERNAL ARGUMENTHOOD Various tests show that the single argument originates as an internal argument. **Stative passive formation** with the suffix *-ik* is only possible with verbs having an internal argument (5), and thus impossible with unergatives (6) (cf. Bhatt and Embick, 2004/2017). The opposite pattern is seen with **agent nominals** (Nakipoğlu-Demiralp, 1998; Acartürk, 2005; Neu, 2023), which are possible with unergatives and transitives (7), but not unaccusatives, which can only be agent-nominalized once they have been transitivized, (8). Wrt these two diagnostics, reflexive-forming Roots consistently pattern with unaccusatives: they admit stativization and resist agent nominalization, (9)-(10). This conclusion is reinforced by the behavior of a distinct type of stative in *-mİş* (not shown here), which also classes verbal reflexives as unaccusative in requiring a deep/direct object.

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| (5) bit-ik pil
finish-ADJ battery
‘finished battery’ | (6) *koş-uk adam
run-NMLZR man
Intended: ‘run man’ | (7) koş-ucu
run-NMLZR
‘runner’ | (8) bit-*(ir)-ici
finish-VBLZ-NMLZR
‘finisher’ |
| (9) a. giy-in{-ik/*-ici}
dress-REFL-{-ADJ/-NMLZ}
‘dressed/*dresser’ | b. yıka-n{-ik/*-ici}
wash-REFL-{-ADJ/-NMLZ}
‘washed/*washer’ | (10) koltuk-ta 1-2 saat uza-n-ik dur-mak...
couch-LOC 1-2 hour lie.down-REFL-ADJ remain-INF
‘To stay lying down on the couch for 1-2 hours.’ | |

Resultatives serve as another strong indicator of the syntactic presence of a deep object in Turkish (Turgay 2013), as in English. Strikingly, TVRs can be formed on the basis of reflexive verbs, see (11)-(12).

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| (11) a. Kendi-m-i tertemiz yıka-dı-m.
self-1SG.POSS-ACC clean wash-PST-1SG
‘I washed myself clean.’ | b. Tertemiz yıka-n-dı-m.
clean wash-REFL-PST-1SG
‘I washed myself clean.’ (Gürkan 2019:(24)) |
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- (12) a. Kendi-m-i mavi-ye boya-dı-m. self-1SG.POSS-ACC blue-DAT paint-PST-1SG
‘I painted myself blue.’
b. Sen-in için mavi-ye boya-n-dı-m. YOU-GEN for blue-DAT paint-REFL-PST-1SG
‘I painted myself (my whole body) blue for you.’

EXTERNAL ARGUMENTHOOD A range of observations suggest that the single, internal argument of Turkish reflexives also passes through the external argument position. (i) **Verbal gerundives** in *-ArAk* disallow mismatches of unergative-unaccusative (see e.g. Özkaragoz 1980, Biktimir 1986, Nakipoğlu 2002, Legate et al. 2020). Strikingly, verbal reflexives count as unergative for the purposes of the *-ArAk* diagnostic (13)-(14).

- (13) a. Kız [söyle-n-erek] yürü-dü. girl say-REFL-ARAK walk-PST
‘The girl walked (while) complaining.’
b. Adam [gül-erek] yıka-n-dı. man laugh-ARAK wash-REFL-PST
‘The man washed (while) laughing.’
(14) a. *Kız [söyle-n-erek] düş-tü. girl say-REFL-ARAK fall-PST
‘The girl fell (while) complaining.’
b. *Adam [buna-yarak] yıka-n-dı. man go.senile-ARAK wash-REFL-PST
‘The man washed (while) going senile.’

(ii) **Episodic impersonals**: Unergatives, but not unaccusatives, can form impersonals in episodic contexts (15) (Nakipoğlu 2001, Acartürk 2005, Legate et al 2020). Reflexives pattern like unergatives in allowing episodic impersonals, (16).

- (15) Dün burada {uyu-n-du / *öl-ün-dü}. yesterday here sleep-IMPERS-PST die-IMPERS-PST
‘People/one {slept/*died} here yesterday.’
(16) Dün bu nehir-de yıka-n-ıl-mış. yesterday this river-LOC wash-REFL-IMPERS-PST
‘Yesterday people/one washed in this river.’

(iii) **Indirect causatives** require a thematic VoiceP (Akkuş 2021), and causees of causativized transitives are Dative, while those of unergatives are Accusative. Causativized predicates with pronominal reflexives, (17), pattern as transitive, with DAT causees (18); verbal reflexives, (19), pattern as unergative, with ACC causees, (20) (cp. French; Kayne 1975).

- (17) Çocuk kendi-ni besle-di. child self-ACC feed-PST
‘The child fed himself.’
(18) Ebeveynler-i {çocuğ-a / *çocuğ-u} kendi-ni besle-t-ti. parents-3POSS {child-DAT / *child-ACC} self-ACC feed-CAUS-PST
‘His parents made the child feed himself.’
(19) Bu ara berbat besle-n-iyor-um. this while terrible feed-REFL-PROG-1SG
‘I feed (myself) terribly these days.’
(20) [Speaker says that his wife doesn't cook, so he gets take-out:]
Merve {ben-i / *ban-a} bu ara berbat besle-n-dir-iyor. Merve {I-ACC / *I-DAT} this while terrible feed-REFL-CAUS-PROG
‘Merve is making me feed (myself) terribly these days.’

Two more observations receive a straightforward explanation if the sole argument passes through an intermediate landing site, Spec, VoiceP. (iv) **Passives**: TVRs may not be passivized in Turkish, (21), instead resulting in impersonals (Legate et al. 2020). (v) **Long Object Movement**: An argument that originates in embedded object position can undergo LOM to become the matrix grammatical subject (Göksu 2023). In TVRs as well, the DP starts out in object position, but it cannot undergo LOM: (22) has only a passive reading, but not a reflexive one – unlike its non-LOM counterpart (not shown), which is ambiguous between these two readings.

- (21) Dün dere-de (*adamlar tarafından) yıka-n-ıl-dı. yesterday river-LOC men by wash-REFL-PASS-PST
‘People/one washed in the river yesterday (*by some men).’
(22) Çocuk yıka-n-ma-ya çalış-ıl-dı. child wash-NACT-INF-DAT try-PASS-PST
YES: ‘The child was tried [to be washed].’
NO: ‘The child was tried [to self-wash].’

ANALYSIS We propose (23) for the derivation of verbal reflexives in Turkish: the sole argument originates ‘low’ in the internal argument position, being assigned the Figure (\approx Theme) or Ground θ -role (collapsing potential differences for exposition). Crucially, this argument moves to another *thematic position*, Spec, Voice_{REFL}P (cf. Labelle 2008, Ahn 2015, Paparounas & Akkuş to appear), where it is assigned a second θ -role, Agent. This movement to another thematic position is what enables a single argument to exhibit both agentive and theme-like properties. This can be contrasted, e.g., with passives, where the sole argument is also merged low but moves directly to a non-thematic position, Spec, TP, thus bearing a single θ -role. Turkish thus offers a novel perspective on the long-standing controversy between unergative and unaccusative analyses of reflexive verbs: aspects of both are applicable to this language, as Turkish reflexives instantiate a single-argument structure where the argument originates internally, but that same argument passes through the specifier of VoiceP. We will additionally discuss why some tests the way they do, and provide a semantic derivation where movement is crucially implicated in enforcing reflexivization via the Voice_{REFL} head, while respecting the semantic monadicity of TVRs.

