

Two distinct mechanisms for Turkish genitive across nominalizations

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Overview. Genitive case in Turkish and other Turkic languages surfaces on embedded subjects and is typically analyzed as a reflex of nominal structure. Previous accounts derive genitive from a single case-assignment mechanism tied to nominal architecture, either via a spec-head configuration (Chomsky 1986) or through AGREE with a nominal functional head, with variation attributed to clausal size or properties of the case-assigning head (e.g., Kornfilt 2003; Miyagawa 2011; Predolac 2017). I argue instead that genitive is realized through two distinct mechanisms. In one class of nominalizations, it reflects the spell-out of unmarked case within a DP-domain under configurational case assignment (Marantz 1991). In another, it is structural case assigned under AGREE, parallel to possessive DPs (Kornfilt 2003). I provide evidence from case (dis)connectivity in sluicing and the distribution of the pronominal *ki* particle for such distinction. The analysis supports the view that morphological case identity does not entail a uniform syntactic source.

Genitive across nominalizations. Subjects of nominalizations bear genitive case and trigger possessive agreement in complement clauses. These nominal properties are introduced by nominal functional heads (e.g., *n*, *D*) embedding a clausal projection and in all such structures, *D* assigns ϕ -features (Kornfilt 1984; Borsley & Kornfilt 2000). Nominalizations thus fall into two structurally distinct classes. *-DIK* and *-AcAK* clauses (*full clausal nominalizations*) exhibit stronger clausal properties: they resist adjectival modification and pluralization but allow higher operators, suggesting projection of a defective TP and CP (Borsley & Kornfilt 2000; Kornfilt 2003; Kornfilt & Whitman, a.o.), as in (1). In contrast, *-mA* clauses (*partially clausal nominalizations*) contain less clausal spine: they permit adjectival modification and plural morphology (Kornfilt 2003). I adopt the structure in (2), in which a lower nominal licensing head, an *nP*, embeds VoiceP as the highest clausal projection. This makes them more nominal, though not fully nominal (pace Kornfilt 2003).

- (1) $[_{DP} [_{CP} [_{TP} [_{VoiceP} DP \dots v \dots] T] C] D]$ (2) $[_{DP} [_{nP} [_{VoiceP} DP \dots v \dots] n] D]$

I argue that nominalizations with *-İş* patterns with partially clausal nominalizations. They also allow pluralization and nominal modification, as in (3), and cannot host higher operators (not shown), consistent with a lower *nP* structure.

- (3) Çayan'ın son parkur-da koş- $\{ *tuk/*acak/ma/uş \}$ -lar-1 bun-lar.
Çayan.GEN last track-LOC run-NML-PL-3POSS this-PL
Int. 'These are Çayan's last runnings at the track'

Two kinds of genitive. A single case-assignment mechanism for embedded subjects cannot capture the contrast between full and partially clausal nominalizations. I provide two empirical diagnostics. First, in sluicing constructions where the *wh*-remnant bears case, copula (not glossed, null in examples), and tense, case connectivity is degraded with full clause nominalizations but fully acceptable with possessive DPs and with partially clausal nominalizations (4)–(5) (Kiper 2025).

- (4) *Biri-nin gel- $\{ diğ/eceğ \}$ -i-ni duy-du-m ama kim-in-di bil-mi-yor-um.
somebody-GEN come-NML-3POSS-ACC hear-PST-1SG but who-GEN-PST know-NEG-IMPF-1SG
Int. 'I heard that someone came/would come, but I don't know who.'

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- (5) Biri-nin {koşu/koş-{ma/uş}}-(s)I-nI izle-di-m ama kim-in-di bil-mi-yor-um.
 sb.-GEN run/run-NML-3POSS-ACC watch-PST-1SG but who-GEN-PST know-NEG-IMPF-1SG
 ‘I watched someone/someone’s running but I don’t know who.’

A parallel contrast emerges with the pronominal particle *ki*, which replaces possessive complements (Kornfilt 1997; Hankamer 2004). While *ki*-replacement is available with possessive DPs and with partially clausal nominalizations, it is systematically unavailable with full clausal ones (6)–(7).

- (6) Çayan’ın {koşu/koş-ma/koş-uş}-(s)I-nI izle-di-m, Figen’in-ki-ni de.
 Çayan.GEN run/run-NML-3POSS-ACC watch-PST-1SG Figen.GEN-PRT-ACC too
 ‘I watched Çayan/Çayan’s running, and Figen’s too.’
- (7) *Çayan’ın {gel-diğ-i-ni/gel-eceğ-i-ni} duy-du-m, Figen’in-ki-ni de.
 Çayan.GEN come-NML-3POSS-ACC hear-PST-1SG Figen.GEN-PRT-ACC too
 Int. ‘I heard that Çayan came/would come, and Figen’s too.’

These diagnostics show that partially clausal nominalizations pattern with possessive DPs, whereas full clausal ones retain clausal properties despite their nominal morphology.

Proposal. I propose that genitive morphology in Turkish is realized through two distinct mechanisms, rooted in differences in nominal architecture. In possessive DPs and in partially clausal nominalizations, genitive is structurally assigned by a lower nominal head, *n*. This head enters into AGREE with the possessor or embedded subject and licenses it as genitive; the same nominal Agree relation is also responsible for the possessive agreement morphology realized in the nominal extended projection as shown in (8). In this sense, case and agreement operate in tandem in these domains (Chomsky 2000, Chomsky 2003, Kornfilt 2004, Baker & Vinokurova 2010 a.o.). Partially clausal nominalizations instantiate this configuration because their highest clausal layer is VoiceP, which is directly embedded under *n*. The embedded subject is therefore accessible to the lower nominal licensing head and receives structural genitive in the same way as possessors in ordinary possessive DPs as in (9).

- (8) [DP [_{NP} [NP Possessor^{iφ; uCase[]} ... N_{possessee}] n^{uφ; uCase[]}] D] POSSESSIVE DPS

- (9) [DP [_{NP} [VoiceP DP^{iφ; uCase[]} ... v ...] n^{uφ; uCase[]}] D] PARTIALLY CLAUSAL NOMINALIZATIONS

Full clausal nominalizations differ in that they contain a larger clausal spine, including TP and CP, and lack the lower nominal head that mediates structural genitive assignment. In these structures, possessive agreement is introduced by a probe on the higher D head (following Kornfilt 2003). However, D does not assign structural genitive to the embedded subject in the way that low *n* does. Instead, the subject receives unmarked case within the embedded clause, which is morphologically realized as genitive in the larger DP-domain, yielding the configuration in (10). Thus, the surface identity between genitive subjects nominalizations masks a structural difference: in partially clausal nominalizations, genitive is assigned by nominal AGREE; in full clausal nominalizations, genitive is the spell-out of unmarked case within a DP-domain.

- (10) [DP [CP [TP [VoiceP DP^{UNM} ... v ...] T] C] D] FULL CLAUSAL NOMINALIZATIONS

Theoretical implications. Genitive morphology in Turkish does not diagnose a uniform syntactic source. What matters is the nominal architecture: when a lower nominal head is present, genitive is structurally assigned through nominal AGREE; when it is absent, genitive reflects the DP-domain spell-out of unmarked case. The analysis therefore preserves the connection between genitive case and nominal structure while allowing the same morphology to arise from distinct mechanisms.

Conclusion. I have argued that Turkish nominalizations divide into two classes. Partially clausal nominalizations pattern with possessive DPs because they contain a lower nominal head that licenses structural genitive. Full clausal nominalizations, by contrast, lack this head and realize the embedded subject's unmarked case as genitive. This split accounts for the asymmetries in case connectivity and *ki*-distribution and motivates a reclassification of Turkish nominalizations by their underlying architecture.

Selected References. Borsley & Kornfilt (2000). *Mixed extended projections*. • Kiper (2025). *Ellipsis as leverage for dependent case theory*. • Kornfilt (2003). *Subject case in Turkish nominalized clauses*. • Pesetsky & Torrego (2007). *Syntax of valuation and the interpretability of features*.