

On the Turkish Mnemonic Past, an Evidential Category

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1. Compound verb forms with the distant copula particle

A prominent typological feature of Turkic languages is the richness of their verbal systems, in which a large number of categories are grammaticalized, such as negation, viewpoint aspects, moods, modality, and evidentiality. In addition to simple verb forms, built with suffixes or chains of suffixes, compound forms are constructed with different copula particles.

For instance, the copula particle <i|di>, the terminal form of the defective copula *i-* ← EOT *är-* ‘to be’, can be added to aorist bases, e.g. <gel|ir|di> ‘X used to come’; postterminal bases, e.g. <gel|miş|ti>, ‘X had come’; intraterminal bases, e.g. <gel|iyor|du> ‘X was coming’; prospective bases, e.g. <gel|ecek|ti> ‘X was to come’; and necessitative bases, e.g. <gel|meli|ydi> ‘X had to come’. In this article, we will discuss the compound verb form made up of the terminal base in {-Dİ} and the copula <i|di>.

The terminal form of the copula <i|di> < *är-di* is grammaticalized as a copula particle denoting temporal or non-temporal remoteness. It is used as a distant (anterior) particle in combination with various thematic bases.

In the following, it will be argued that the combination of the terminal base in {-Dİ} with the copula particle <i|di> has undergone a specific grammaticalization process resulting in a typologically rare type of evidential marker.

2. The Turkish mnemonic past evidential {-Dİ-ydİ}

The use of {-Dİ-ydİ} in Turkish mnemonic past sentences was dealt with by Lars Johanson (1971), who stated that {-Dİ-ydİ} does not express postterminality in the way the pluperfect marker {-mİş-tİ} does. Its use implies a supplementary meaning which can be paraphrased ‘as I may recall’ or ‘as far as I can remember’ (1971: 62).

When <i|di> attaches to postterminals, the resulting verb form transposes the postterminal view into the past, and it thereby corresponds to the English pluperfect,

e.g. Turkish <Gel|miş|ti> ‘X had come’, and conveys a ‘plusquamperfectum status’, i.e. a state in the past after the event is regarded to be completed.

The Turkish {-Dİ-ydİ} is a non-postterminal past, and the construction thus refers directly to the time when the event was carried out, e.g. <Gel|dİ|y|dİ|m> <come-TERM-DIST.COP-1SG> ‘I once came’. This is a mnemonic past referring to self-experienced events as remembered, e.g. <Duy|du|m|du> ‘I heard it (I remember)’ ← <duy-> ‘to hear’. It is clearly an evidential construction; the source is the speaker’s own memory of a self-experienced event. Both {-mİş-tİ} and {-Dİ-ydİ} are called pluperfects, though they differ considerably from each other. It is also true that {-Dİ-ydİ} cannot be compared to {-mİş-tİr} with respect to expressing a “subjective security” (Johanson 1974: 88, 309).

The form {-Dİ-ydİ} is a historical preterit, and it is the marked member of an opposition with {-Dİ} in the system. The terminal {-Dİ} has a broad functional extent and renders both recent and past events. It expresses terminality referring directly to the entire event described. Terminals are the least qualified members of Turkic aspect systems and are mostly used as preterital markers, e.g. Turkish <Gel|dİ> ‘X came/has come’.

The form {-Dİ-ydİ} is often used for temporally distant past events and mostly suggests a distance that stresses the historical reference. It can mark events called to mind by performing an act of evocation and seem to have a kind of legendary shimmer (Johanson 1971: 59–62, 307–309.)

The distinction does not, however, concern the temporal distance between the event referred to and the event of speaking, but the evidential dimension. {-Dİ-ydİ} signals that the speaker refers to the event on the basis of personal experience; the statement is based on memory evidence. <Ali bir mektup yaz|dİ|ydİ> does not mean ‘I’m sure Ali wrote a letter’, but rather ‘As I remember it, Ali wrote a letter’. Thus {-Dİ-ydİ} has a specific function and occupies a remarkable place in the Turkish aspect-temporal system.

It has been discussed whether {-Dİ-ydİ} refers to events that occurred a long time ago. It can actually refer to a recent past, e.g. <Bunu sev|dİ|y|dim> ‘I liked it’.

In some varieties, the personal marker can attach to either the lexical verb or the copula (Banguoğlu 2007: 449). The verb *gel-* ‘to come’ can be inflected in different ways: either *gel-di-y-di-m*, *gel-di-y-di-n*, *gel-di-y-di*, *gel-di-y-di-k*, *gel-di-y-di-niz*, and *gel-di-y-di-ler* or *gel-di-m-di*, *gel-di-n-di*, *gel-di-i-di*, *gel-di-k-ti*, *gel-di-niz-di*, or *gel-di-ler-di*. Margareta I. Ersen-Rasch proposes that, in response to the utterance *You have not returned my money*, using the form <Geri ver|dİ|ydİ|m> ‘I remember I returned it’ places the former event in the foreground. Another option is to say <Geri ver|dİ|m|dİ> ‘I remember that I returned it’, to report what the subject has done (2001: 154–156), a topic which should be further studied.

3. Differences between {-Dİ-ydİ} and {-mİŝ-tİ}

The suffixes {-mİŝ-tİ} and {-Dİ-ydİ} are mostly handled as pluperfect markers in Turkish grammars, e.g. by Aslı Göksel and Celia Kerslake (2005: 85). A few researchers state their functional differences. Hasan Tahsin Banguođlu, who was born as early as in 1904, writes that the {-Dİ-ydİ} form implies remembering “Daha ziyade hatırlama üslubunda kullanılır” (2000: 459).

One basic difference can be explained by the postterminal meaning of {-mİŝ-tİ}, namely that something had been done before a reference time in the past. The terminal form {-Dİ-ydİ} refers to the whole event (Johanson 1971: 58–62. 307–309).

4. The frequency of {-Dİ-ydİ}

The suffix {-mİŝ-tİ} is frequent in the written language. İmdat Demir (2015), who compared the frequency of {-mİŝ-tİ} and {-Dİ-ydİ}, shows that {-Dİ-ydİ} is far less used than {-mİŝ-tİ} in the standard written language, assessing the difference to about 98% to 2%. This low frequency of {-Dİ-ydİ} explains why only a few grammars pay attention to this form (Johanson 1971: 309).

The form {-Dİ-ydİ} is often classified as substandard, but it is used in literary works, even by authors in Istanbul, when marking spoken registers. The actual difference is thus between written and spoken language.

5. {-Dİ-ydİ} in dialects

According to Nurettin Demir (personal communication), the form {-Dİ-ydİ} occurs in the dialects of, for instance, Adana, Gaziantep, Mersin, Antalya, Konya, and Ankara. Faruk Yıldırım’s study of Adana and Osmaniye dialects (2006) demonstrates that this form is frequently used in these dialects. It is similar in Antep, Alanya, and Ankara, e.g. ‹Bizim gelin de dur-du-ydu orda› ‘And, as I remember it, our daughter-in-law stood there’, ‹O zaman uña gitdiydik› ‘As I remember it, we then went there’. The use of {-mİŝ-tİ} is very limited in these dialects. It is possible to use it, but it is regarded as an influence of standard Turkish.

The function of a verb form depends on its position in the verbal system. Thus, for each dialect, an analysis must be made of which other forms {-Dİ-ydİ} competes with. The same applies to discourse types, which employ only a selection of possible verb forms. Thus the role of the individual verb forms is redefined in them (Johanson 1971).

As an example, we here demonstrate how {-Dİ-ydİ} is used in the Aliefendi (Alanya) dialect, in a narrative published by Nurettin Demir (1993: 164–169). The following text shows the use of {-Dİ-ydİ} and competing anterior forms (Demir 1993:

156, in Demir's transcription). The German translation was made by Demir, who is a native speaker of the dialect (1993: 165). An English translation is added.

Example 1. Narrative in the Aliefendi dialect

D	<i>O bükä gonaridiq ışdä şöylä.</i>	Na ja, wir ließen uns ja gewöhnlich auf diesem Feld im Tal nieder.	Well, so we used to settle down on this field in the valley.
O	<i>Bildim, bildim.</i>	Jetzt weiß ich es, jetzt weiß ich es.	I have understood it. I have understood it.
A	<i>Şindi girdi:dik, orta yerdä saban çaqılı. Ora ğadar sürmüslär gayri. Sabanıla sökällärimiş.</i>	Wir sind nun hingegangen, der Pflug steckt in der Mitte [des Feldes]. Sie haben also bis dahin gepflügt. Sie gruben [die Erdnüsse] mit dem Pflug aus.	I recall we went there, in the middle (of the field) there is a plow. They have apparently plowed up to that place. They obviously used to break up the land with the plow blade.
O	<i>Onnar başlamişimiş sökmyä yä:ni?</i>	Das heißt, sie hatten schon angefangen zu pflügen?	You mean, they had begun to break up the land?
A	<i>Onnar başlamişimiş. Ora varınca bu, čükürdän vazgeşdi dä nä: čükürülä o:rašaca:z, bu sabaniñ bi bildi: var dedi bu. Nä var dedim bän. Bunuñ öküzlärini bir aryalim dedi, nerdä? Yamaçci:nda bi fisdäq dami variđi ufaciq, yamaniñ yüzündä. Ora do:ru vardi:däq, öküzlär ba:li orda.</i>	Sie hatten schon angefangen. Als wir hierkamen, verzichtete der da auf die kleine Hacke und sagte: »Warum sollen wir uns denn mit der kleinen Hacke herumschlagen. Dieser Pflug da hat wohl etwas zu bedeuten sagte der da. Was ist denn?« sagte ich Laß uns doch mal«, sagte er, »die Ochsen, die diesen Pflug ziehen, suchen, wo sind sie? Genau auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite, am Berghang, gab es eine kleine Hütte für die Erdnüsse. Wir kamen hin, die Ochsen waren dort angebunden.	They had apparently begun. When we arrived there this (person) gave up the idea to use the little hoe and said "Why should we toil using the hoe? This plow can do something". I said "So what?" He said, "Let us look for the oxen. Where are they?" On the slope of the hill there was a cottage for the peanuts, a tiny one, on this side of the slope. I recall that we arrived there; the oxen were tied.

<p>Öküzləri çezdik gäldik, goşduq mu, ayıñaydıñi. Şindi bu bireyi sürü'bduru, biz dä gayrı, ay a: sabanıla da gözäl sökülürümüş, inäk sa:r gibi yolarız poçularımıza.</p>	<p>Wir brachten die Ochsen herbei, spannten sie vor den Pflug, es war taghell. Nun pflügt er in Seelenruhe, und wir – o Mann, es läßt sich ja mit dem Pflug gut ausreißen – füllen dabei unsere Tücher, als würden wir eine Kuh melken.</p>	<p>We drove the oxen here, as soon as we started to work it was daylight. Now they kept plowing on their own; we too; it was clearly as easy to break up the land with the plow and to fill our bags as it would be to milk a cow.</p>
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Table 1. The verb forms marking anteriority

Morpheme	Function	Example in standard orthography	
{-DI}	Terminal	⟨bil di m⟩	'I know', i.e. 'I have learned about it'
⟨i di⟩	Distant copula particle	⟨var i di⟩	'It was existing'
{(V)r} ⟨i di⟩	Intraterminal aorist + <i>i-dî</i>	⟨kon ar ı dı k⟩	'We used to settle down here'
{-mİŞ} ⟨i mış⟩	Pluperfect evidential	⟨başla mış ı mış⟩	'They had obviously begun'
{-DI} ⟨i di⟩/ {-DI-ydI}	Mnemonic evidential	⟨gir di y dik⟩	'I recall that we entered'
		⟨var dı y dı k⟩	'I remember that we arrived'
{-mİŞ}	Postterminal evidential	⟨sür müş ler⟩	'They obviously plowed'

Table 2. Non-anterior forms

{(V)r}	Intraterminal	⟨yol ar ız⟩	'We pluck'
{(V)r} ⟨i mış⟩	Intraterminal evidential	⟨sök är är i mış⟩	'Obviously they dig/dug'

The {-DI-ydI} forms, ⟨gir|di|y|dik⟩ and ⟨var|dı|y|dı|k⟩, are used instead of simple {-DI-} terminal forms in order to indicate that the speaker recalls the situation to mind.

6. The discourse function

Johanson (1971: 77–87) describes the function of verb forms to mark different discourse types. A verb form can be used to introduce a narrative and define the discourse type of the whole text. Another possibility is that a discourse type can be based on a verb form, i.e. the given verb form is used repeatedly in the text.

In Example 1 above, the {-Dİ-ydİ} forms *girdi:dik* and *vardi:diq* introduce the narrated episodes. They are used as encompassing markers to signal that the following narration is based on the evidence of a self-experienced event.

In the second example the entire episode is based on repeatedly used {-Dİ-ydİ} forms.

Example 2.

Benim hayatım Mehmet'in köye gelişi ile değişti.

*İlk köy kahvesinde **gördüydüm** Mehmet'i, elinde gazete ile yola yakın bir masada oturuyordu.*

Bakıştydık.

*Ne yalan söyleyeyim çok **beğendiydim** onu.*

***Gülümsedi**di bana.*

*Ben de ona **gülümsedi**dim.*

My life changed when Mehmet came to the village.

I recall that I first *saw* Mehmet in the village coffeehouse; he was sitting with a newspaper in his hand at a table close to the road.

We *looked at each other*.

I will not lie, I *liked* him.

He *smiled* at me.

And I also *smiled* at him.

(Serra Menekay: *İğne Oyası: Bir 12 Eylül Romanı*. 2019)

This possibility, namely repeated marking of the discourse type, is not possible if the marker is an adverb denoting an evidential meaning, such as *obviously* in English. Therefore in an English translation, such grammaticalized meanings can be expressed only on a limited scale. For a comparison of means of expressing evidential meanings in Turkish and Swedish, see Csató (2009).

7. The decline of {-Dİ-ydİ}

The form {-Dİ-ydİ} is old and occurs in historical texts. It is frequently used in literary works by Fakir Baykurt, Orhan Kemal, Yaşar Kemal, and other village literary writers, and also authors from Istanbul, e.g. Hüseyin Rahmi Gürpınar.

{-DI-ydI} is the remainder of an old vital form. Its decline has affected the development of the true pluperfect {-mİŝ-tI}, which today can also be used without referring to a time before a localization point in the past; in other words, it can be used to mean ‘It was done’ rather than ‘It had been done’ (Johanson 1971: 58–59).

East Old Turkic displays {-DI} *är-di* as opposed to {-mİŝ} *är-di*, e.g. *Kör-dü-m är-di* ‘I once saw’, *Öğ-dün sözlä-đi är-di* ‘X once spoke’. Several other Turkic languages display constructions of this kind, e.g. Gagauz *Al-dı-y-dı-m*, Crimean Tatar *Al-dı-m ä-dı* ‘I once bought it’. Other modern languages exhibit similar constructions. The similarities between these forms should be investigated.

8. Conclusion

This article deals with the position of {-DI-ydI} forms in the Turkish verbal system. Arguments have been presented in favor of analyzing this verb form as an evidential anterior form referring to a self-experienced event as remembered or as recalled to mind. The source is the speaker’s memory. To our knowledge, this is a typologically non-attested type of evidential marker.

Notations and abbreviations

Examples in italics are given in a Turcological transcription. Examples in Turkish orthography are between < >, and morpheme analysis is marked with |. Morphemes are in { } brackets. High lax vowels are marked by a dot under the vowel sign.

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