

# COPULA IN TURKISH

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## 1 What is the Function of the Copula?

The copulas I will discuss in this paper are the verbs *i-* and *ol-*. The copula *i-* in Turkish has two cliticized forms: *-y* and a zero exponent (for a phonological reason, *-y* becomes null<sup>1</sup>) as shown in (1). In (1a) the copula *i-* is shown and in (1b) and (1c) the cliticized exponents of it are shown. The copula *ol-* is shown in (2)<sup>2</sup>.

- (1) a. öyle *i-miş*  
such.that COP-evidential  
'Apparently, it was such that.'
- b. hasta-*y-miş-im*  
sick-COP-evidential-1s  
'Apparently I was/am sick.'
- c. gid-ecek-0-ti-m  
go-future-COP-past-1s  
'I was going to go.'
- (2) hasta *ol-malı*  
sick COP-necessity  
'He must be sick.'

Keleşir (2003) states that the copula exists in clauses whose predicates are not a verbal form. Those predicates can be an adjective, a noun, or a participle. For example, in English the verb *to be* has the inflected verb role in such clauses, but it does not contribute any meaning to clause as in (3) below.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kornfilt (1996) for detailed explanation about the different exponents of the copula *i-*.

<sup>2</sup> Sağ (in press) claims that there are two different verbs as *ol-*. One is the copula *ol-*, and the other is a verb which denotes 'change of state' meaning 'to become.' In this paper, I will focus on the copula *ol-*.

- (3) John is a doctor.

She claims that the presence of *is* is not because of the semantic requirements but a result of a grammatical need. I agree in that the verb *to be* does not contribute any meaning to the clause, but one can claim that it has a stative meaning. However, I believe that the stative meaning comes from the predicate itself, denoting the property of the subject. The copula *to be* is present because English does not have a nominal person marker paradigm as opposed to Turkish, but only a verbal one. So, the person marker agreement needs to be done on a verb, which is *to be* in those clauses. The words *am/is/are* are the inflected forms of the copula *to be*. Thus, such verbs which do not contribute any semantic meaning but are present due to grammatical reasons are called copula as in Kelepir (2003).

I claim following Kelepir (2003) that *i-* in Turkish is present in the clause as a result of grammatical needs. For example, *i-* is semantically inactive in (4), it just fills a position where a verb is required. In this way, it is similar to what *to be* does in English. In (4), the requirement for the copula seems to be that the functional head T needs a verbal form to attach to, but in (4), T cannot attach to the word which ends with the aspect marker *-Iyor*, because the final word is not a verb anymore, but a participle (cf. Kornfilt (1996) and Enç (2004)). So, the requirement of T is undertaken by *-i*. I will discuss what kind of requirement it is that the copula satisfies in more detail in section 2.

- (4) gel-iyor-0-du-m  
 come-imperfective-COP-past-1s  
 ‘I was coming.’

## 2 The Requirement for a Copula

In the previous section, I concluded that the presence of a copula in the syntactic structure does not have any semantic role, but its occurrence is a result of a syntactic requirement. In order to show when and where such a requirement comes out, first I want to discuss Enç’s (2004) zones.

### 2.1 Enç’s Zones

Enç (2004) proposes three different zones of functional categories and the morphemes corresponding to them, which are in a hierarchical relation, for the verbal domain of Turkish. In Zone 1, which is the lowest zone, there is the negation morpheme *-mA* and the possibility modal *-Abil*. Zone 2, which is above Zone 1 includes the future *-AcAk*, the imperfective *-Iyor*, the perfect *-mİş*, the aorist *-Ir*, and the necessity modal *-mAlI*. Zone 3, the highest zone, contains the past tense *-DI*, and the evidential *-mİş*. When a verb is added one of the functional categories from Zone 1, the result is still a verb, but when a functional category from Zone 2 is attached to the verb, the result is not a verb anymore but a participle, namely a nominal element. All the Zones attach to a verbal complement. When the complement is a nominal element or a participle then a copula emerges between the functional category and its complement. The copula *ol-* is seen if this category is from Zone 1 or 2, and the copula *i-* is seen when it is from Zone 3. This can be summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Enç's Zones

Verb	< Zone 1	< Zone 2	< Zone 3
	permission./ability. (-A) negation (-mA) possibility (-AbII)	aorist (-Ir/-Er) future (-AcAK) imperfective (-Iyor) necessity (-mAlI) perfective (-mIş/-DI)	past (-DI) evidential (-mIş)
	+ <b>VERBAL</b>	- <b>VERBAL</b>	
		<i>ol-</i>	<i>i-</i>

According to this analysis, it can be suggested that the copula is the requirement of the functional categories in different zones if they have a nominal complement. This shows that they need a verbal element to attach to, and the copula satisfies this requirement. For example, in (5) for the past T head to be able to attach to the nominal complement *güzel* a verbal element, the copula *i-* occurs between T and its complement.

- (5) güzel *i-di-m*  
beautiful COP-past-1s  
'I was beautiful.'

However, the copula may not always occur whenever past T attaches to a nominal complement. For example, let us examine the structure in (6).

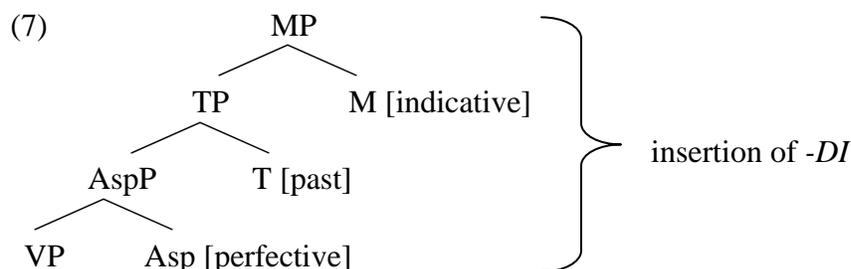
- (6) gel-*di-m*  
come-past-1s  
'I came.'

I claim following Cinque (1999)<sup>3</sup> that there is a functional sequence, and (6) has a syntactic structure which includes the perfective Asp, past T, and indicative M in a hierarchical relation respectively, and the morpheme *-DI* corresponds to all the three functional heads as shown in (7). The reason why I claim that (6) includes Asp and M besides T is that it has a perfective, indicative and past readings and it contrasts with the structure in (8) below. (8) has the same structure with (7) except that the feature of M is [evidential] in (8). So, (7) needs to have Asp and T, because it denotes a perfective past event, and an M head which separates it from the structure in (8), because it denotes an indicative event, not evidential. Similarly, (8) needs to have Asp and T, because it denotes a perfective past event, and an M head because it denotes an evidential event.

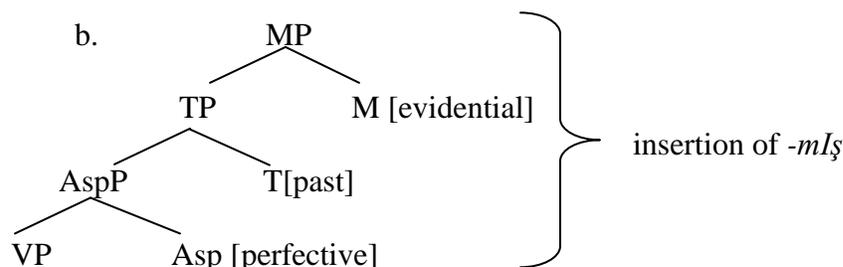
According to realizational theories like Distributed Morphology (e.g. Halle & Marantz (1993)) and Nanosyntax (e.g. Starke (2009)) a morpheme can spell out more than one feature at once if it contains the same morpho-syntactic features as the ones in the syntactic structure.<sup>4</sup> Here, I suppose that *-DI* has [perfective], [past] and [indicative] features and *-mIş* has [perfective], [past] and [evidential] features so they can spell out Asp-T-M heads of the structures in (7) and (8) respectively.

<sup>3</sup> See Cinque (1999) for further detail about the universal functional categories.

<sup>4</sup> Nanosyntax assumes that the morphemes stored in the lexicon have an internal syntactic structure, and they are mapped on the syntax if their syntactic structure corresponds to the one built in syntax. In Distributed Morphology, on the other hand, morphemes may have a bundle of features and they are inserted in syntax if the features of the morpheme correspond to the ones in the syntactic structure. See Halle & Marantz (1993) and Starke (2009).



- (8) a. gel-miş-sin.  
 come-evidential.2s  
 ‘Apparently, you came.’



Note that T takes AspP as its complement, and AspP is not a verbal element anymore but a participle. However, when T takes it as its complement, no copula insertion occurs between T and AspP as opposed to (5), where the copula *i-* appears between T and its nominal complement. This shows that copula does not necessarily occur whenever a specific functional head from Zone 2 and 3 needs to take a nominal complement. There must be another story behind why the copula is inserted in the syntactic structure.

## 2.2 Complex Predication and High and Low Copulas

I claim that a requirement for a copula occurs when the syntactic structure has more than one complex predicate. Adopting Svenonius’s (2008) analysis on complex predicate structures, I propose that a predicate can be composed of two complex predicates; the first is the low and the second is the high predicate. For example, the structure in (9) is the combination of two complex predicates. The hierarchically lower part is the low predicate and the higher part is the high predicate. The role of the copula in the structure is to carry the new (high) predicate started by the functional categories, if those categories need to take a nominal complement.

- (9) gel-miş-*0*-ti-m.  
 come-perfective-COP-past-indicative-1s  
 ‘I had come.’

In (9) the VP+ AspP is the low predicate part because it is lower in the structure than the copula and TP+MP, the combination of which is the high predicate. In (9) two complex predicates are combined because a perfective-past event is carried to an earlier past. The difference between (6) and (9) is that the former expresses a perfective past event while the latter expresses an earlier perfective past event.

The copula *i-* is merged in the structure when one of the functional categories from Zone 3, namely the highest Zone in the verbal domain of Turkish starts a high predicate in a complex predicate structure. That is why I call the copula *i-* ‘high copula’. The copula *ol-* is merged when one of the functional categories from Zone 1 and 2 starts a high predicate. Because Zone 1 and 2 are lower than Zone 3, I call the copula *ol-* ‘low copula’.

A crucial question to be answered is the following. When and on which conditions does a predicate consist of two complex predicates? In order to discuss this question I want to show the difference between (6), repeated here as (10), and (11).

- (10) gel-**di**-m  
 come-**perfective-past-indicative-1s**  
 ‘I came.’
- (11) gel-**iyor-0-du**-m  
 come-**imperfective-COP-past-indicative-1s**  
 ‘I was coming.’

The structure in (10) has an Asp with [perfective] feature, T with [past] feature and M with [indicative] feature, and it is a single predicate. However, the one in (11) includes an Asp with [imperfective] feature, T with [past] feature and M with [indicative] feature, but differently from the former there is the high copula between Asp and T. Why are those structures different in terms of the complexity of their predicates although their difference is just what feature the Asp bears; [perfective] or [imperfective]? I suggest as an answer to this question that complex predicate combination occurs when the functional categories already present in the structure must be repeated in a higher position. In (11), this happens because the default T denotation of a structure with Asp needs to be realized in a different T. In Turkish the structure with a perfective Asp has a default past T denotation and the one with an imperfective Asp has a default present T denotation. (10) is a single predicate because the T of the structure is past and there is no need for a higher predicate which would carry the default T to a different one. Nevertheless, in (11) the default T of the structure with the imperfective Asp is present, but the higher predicate carries it to past T. That is why we see different predicate structures in (10) and (11)<sup>5</sup>. Note that in (9) two complex predicates combine because T needs to be repeated in a higher position because it expresses earlier past of a past event.

What would define the default T denotation in the structures with the imperfective and perfective Aspects? The traditional view about Viewpoint Aspect differentiates perfective and imperfective as the following (e.g., Comrie 1976), similarly Smith (1997)):

Perfective: “looking at the event from the outside”

Imperfective: “looking at the event from the inside”

I suggest that the difference between the default T denotation of the structures with the two aspects results from this. Because perfective means looking at the event from the outside, it should denote a finished event, so by default, its T denotation should be past. However, because imperfective means looking at the event from the inside, it should denote present T by default. Assigning a non-default value on T is possible by combining two complex predicate structures.

<sup>5</sup> This is not the only condition on why two complex predicates combine to form a new complex predicate in Turkish. However, for the issue of space limitation, I will not be able to go into further details.

The copula fulfils the requirement of the functional heads when they start a higher predicate, resulting in the combination of two complex predicate structures. Namely, when the functional head such as T as in (11) hosts a high predicate, if the low predicate that it needs to attach to is a nominal phrase, the high copula *i-* is inserted because T requires a verbal complement. Because the copula is a verbal element, it satisfies the requirement of T. However, which copula is inserted depends on where on the structure it is inserted. In other words, the high copula *i-* is inserted when it needs to fulfill the requirement of one of the functional categories from Zone 3 (the highest Zone) and the low copula *ol-* is inserted when it requires to satisfy the verbal complement need of one of the functional categories from Zone 1 or 2 (lower Zones).

### 3 Conclusion

In conclusion, I claim that the copula in Turkish does not have a semantic function, but it is a result of a syntactic requirement of the functional heads when they are at the edge of a high predicate in the combination of two complex predicate structures. Turkish has two different copulas; *i-* and *ol-*. Their place in the syntactic structure is different. The copula *i-* occurs when one of the functional categories from Zone 3 (the highest zone) is at the edge of the high predicate, and the copula *ol-* is merged when one of the functional categories from Zone 1 or 2 (lower Zones) is in this position. I call the copula *i-* as ‘high copula’, because its position in syntactic structure is higher than the copula *ol-* which I call ‘low copula’.

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