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Labile verbs in Turkish

In the literature, it is generally assumed that lability is lacking in Turkish. This research aims to show that lability exists also in modern Turkish and to classify the labile pairs in Turkish. In this research, it is claimed that both Agent preserving lability (A-lability) and Patient preserving lability (P-lability) is found in Turkish. *yaz-* “write”, *oku-* “read”, *yürü-* “walk” are some examples of A-lability:

1. a. Ali *yazıyor*.
Ali write.PROG
“Ali is writing.”
- b. Ali mektup *yazıyor*.
Ali letter write.PROG
“Ali is writing a letter.”

The verbs like *aç-* “open”, *düş-* “drop”, *gir-* “enter” are the examples of P-lability:

2. a. Vergi hesaptan *düştü*.
tax account.ABL drop.PST
“The tax is deducted from the account.”
- b. Banka, vergiyi hesaptan *düştü*.
bank tax.ACC account.ABL drop.PST
“The bank has deducted the tax from the account.”

Although, examples of labile verbs are given for both two groups, this research is focused on P-lability. The syntactic and semantic variance of the P-labile pairs are examined in given examples. The P-labile verb pairs in Turkish are classified into 3 main groups. In the first group of pairs, transitive use is much more frequent (*aç-* “open”, *sat-* “sell”, *sürt-* “rub”, *tut-* “hold”). The verbs in this group normally takes an anticausative marker (*aç-ıl-*, *sat-ıl-*, *sürt-ül-*, *tut-ul-*). But we found out that there is an occasional labile use of these verbs. Unexpectedly, these verbs have an anticausative meaning also without an anticausative marker.

3. a. Bu kitap iyi *satıyor*.
this book well sells
“This book sells well.”

In the second group of pairs, intransitive use is much more frequent. The verbs in this group are unaccusative motion verbs (*düş-* ‘drop’, *kaç-* “run away”, *gir-* “enter”, *çık-* “go out”, *gel-* “come”, *git-* “go”). Normally, transitive pairs of these verbs are lexical causatives with a different morphology (*düşür-*, *kaçır-*, *gider-*, *çıkart-*, *gider-*). On the other hand, they have also an occasional transitive use in which there is no change in their morphology. In their unexpected transitive use, the patient is always inanimate. The first two groups can be defined and categorized as “partially labiles” according to Letuchij’s classification. In the third group of pairs, transitive and intransitive use is balanced and there is only one verb in this group which seems totally labile: *çarp-* “slam”.

4. a. Kapı *çarptı*.
door slam.PST
“The door slammed shut.”
- b. Ali kapıyı *çarptı*.
Ali door slam.PST
“Ali slammed shut the door.”

The transitive use of *çarp-* “slam” has a causative meaning without causative marker. In the case of taking a causative marker, it acquires a double causative meaning (X cause Y to slam sth.) as in the example:

5. Hasan Ali'ye kapıyı *çarp-tır-dı*.
Hasan Ali. DAT door.ACC slam.CAUS.PST
“Hasan caused Ali to slam shut the door.”

These examples provide supportive evidence on the existence of labile verbs and the offered classification demonstrates their distribution in Turkish.

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