Definiteness vs. Indefiniteness in the Turkish language*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the lack of an element comparable to the “definite article” found in major western languages, which is alien to its structure, Turkish is often able to indicate whether a noun phrase is definite or indefinite through morphological, syntactic and suprasegmental resources. This paper examines in detail how an agglutinative synthetic language like Turkish uses these various strategies.

KEYWORDS

Turkish, definiteness, indefiniteness.

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“Definiteness” and ‘indefiniteness” are the two values of an important grammatical category, which basically allow the distinguishing between entities/referents that are identifiable in a given context and entities/referents that are not. Speakers of western languages like English, French or Italian immediately associate these features with the “(definite/indefinite) article”:

Noun phrases with the and a and their semantic equivalents (or near-equivalents) in other languages can be thought of as the basic instantiations of definite and indefinite noun phrases, in that the definiteness or indefiniteness stem from the presence of the article, which has its essential semantic function to express this category (Lyons 1999: 2).

Scholars have devoted many studies to this category, which is rather complex and actually results from the overlapping of quantification (totality/partiality) and textual reference (known/unknown). This means that (in)definiteness is necessarily connected to further concepts such as uniqueness, specificity, familiarity, inclusiveness. Since these issues cannot be dealt with here, it is sufficient to mention two classic reference books, Hawkins (1978) and Lyons (1999), where this topic is thoroughly analysed.

This paper focuses on the way in which Turkish expresses this category. As is well known, Turkish is one of the best examples of agglutinative synthetic language and something like our “definite article” is totally alien to its structure. Nevertheless, this language is often able to mark definiteness (and indefiniteness) by using various (morphological, syntactic, suprasegmental) strategies, as will be explained in the following pages. My study aims also to sketch a contrastive analysis between Turkish and English (in certain cases, Italian too).

1. **Turkish marking of indefiniteness**

Turkish makes an overt distinction between specific/referential (S/R) indefiniteness and nonspecific/nonreferential (NS/NR) indefiniteness. While S/R indefiniteness is morphologically marked, NS/NR indefiniteness usually remains unmarked (see 2.1.1.2, 2.1.1.2.1, 2.1.1.3, 2.1.1.3.1, 2.1.1.4, 2.1.1.5.1).
1.1  

**S/R indefiniteness markers**

1.1.1  

**Singular nouns**

A singular countable noun is marked for S/R indefiniteness by the free morph *bir*, i.e. the Turkish numeral for ‘one’, which means the indefinite determiner if unstressed:\(^1\):

\[
\begin{array}{c}
1 \quad \text{bir} \quad \text{adam} \quad \text{geldi} \\
\text{one} \quad \text{NUM/IND} \quad \text{man} \quad \text{ABS} \quad \text{came} \quad \text{PAST-3sg}
\end{array}
\]

‘one [stressed]/a [unstressed] man came’.

Note, however, that a noun marked with *bir* can also have a NS/NR indefinite status especially when it indicates a singular object in the absolute case, see (40) b, (41)b, (57)a, (58)a, (59)a.

The position of *bir* in a noun phrase formed by adjective + substantive is different according to its meaning. When it functions as a numeral it must precede the adjective, when it functions as an indefinite determiner it is usually placed between the two elements of the phrase:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
2 \quad \text{bir} \quad \text{güzels} \quad \text{kız} \quad \text{geldi} \\
\text{one} \quad \text{NUM/IND} \quad \text{beautiful} \quad \text{ABS} \quad \text{girl} \quad \text{ABS} \quad \text{came} \quad \text{PAST-3sg}
\end{array}
\]

‘one beautiful girl came’.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
2a \quad \text{güzels} \quad \text{bir} \quad \text{kız} \quad \text{geldi} \\
\text{beautiful} \quad \text{ABS} \quad \text{one} \quad \text{NUM/IND} \quad \text{girl} \quad \text{ABS} \quad \text{came} \quad \text{PAST-3sg}
\end{array}
\]

‘a beautiful girl came’.

However, it should be noted that *bir* placed before the adjective can sometimes express the indefinite determiner too. In this case, it has been pointed out that the adjective has a purely qualifying, not distinctive value (Krámský 1972: 111-112, Lewis 2000: 51). A similar distinction is made by a Romance language like Italian, which can place the adjective before or after the noun for this purpose; so the Italian translation of (2) is ‘è venuta una bella ragazza’, that of (2)a would rather be ‘è venuta una ragazza bella’ (as distinct from a less beautiful girl).

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\(^1\) Examples are mostly quoted from Jansky (1949), Underhill (1976), Dede (1986), Tura (1986), Kornfilt (1997), Lewis (2000), sometimes with adaptations; a few are mine.
1.1.2 **Plural Nouns**

The status of S/R indefinite in plural nouns is marked by indefinite quantifiers like *bazi, kimi* 'some':

(3)  
\[
\text{bazi/kimi adamlar geldiler}  \\
\text{some IND men ABS-PL came PAST-3pl}  \\
\text{some men came.}
\]

1.2 **Indefiniteness Markers for Mass Nouns**

NS/NR indefiniteness with mass nouns can be indicated by using expressions like *biraz* 'a little, some', *belli bir miktar* 'a certain amount (of)':

(4)  
\[
\text{biraz ekmek yetmez}  \\
\text{a little IND bread ABS suffice-not NEG-AOR-3sg}  \\
\text{a little bread is not enough}. 
\]

(5)  
\[
\text{Hasan her zaman yemekte belli bir miktar şarap}  \\
\text{Hasan ABS each DIST time ABS in-meal LOC a certain amount IND wine}  \\
\text{ABS}  \\
\text{içer}  \\
\text{drinks AOR-3sg}  \\
\text{Hasan always drinks a certain amount of wine at (his) meals'.}
\]

The phrase *belli bir* 'a certain' is useful to give mass nouns the status of S/R indefinite:

(6)  
\[
\text{lokantada her zaman belli bir şarabı içelim}  \\
\text{at-restaurant LOC each DIST time ABS a certain IND wine ACC drink}  \\
\text{AOR-1sg}  \\
\text{at the restaurant I always drink a certain wine'.}
\]

2. **Turkish Marking of Definiteness**

An element comparable to the “definite article” does not exist in Turkish. Nevertheless, there are various ways of indicating definiteness, namely a) an inflectional case (especially the accusative and the genitive); b) the grammatical function of the nominal; c) modifiers placed before the head noun; d) word order; e) stress. Furthermore, the third-person possessive suffix can sometimes function as definiteness marker.
2.1 Cases as definiteness markers

2.1.1 Absolute

The first case of the Turkish noun inflection, characterised by the suffix -Ø, i.e. by the lack of any morphological mark, is called *yalın durum* 'simple state' by modern Turkish grammarians (Korkmaz 2007: 267). Western scholars use different names for indicating this case: some, bound to the Indo-European tradition, call it *nominative*, others *absolute* (name we will use too), others *casus generalis*. The absolute is neutral with respect to the category we are dealing with, namely it can express either definiteness or indefiniteness on the basis of its grammatical function (subject, predicate, object, first member of izafet/tamlama) and/or its modifiers.

2.1.1.1 Grammatical functions of the absolute case

2.1.1.2 Subject

The subject usually has the status of definite when it is topicalized, i.e. in initial position, and is not expressly marked as S/R indefinite:

(7) *adam* geldi
man ABS came PAST-3sg
*the man came*.

(8) *adam* Türk değil
man ABS Turk ABS is-not NEGCP
*the man is not a Turk*.

(9) güzel kız gitti
beautiful ABS girl ABS went PAST-3sg
*the beautiful girl went away*.

In some contexts, the subject without modifiers can indicate genericness as well:

(10) *adam*ölümlü
man ABS mortal ABS
*man is mortal*.

(11) at binicisini tanır
horse ABS its-rider Px3sg-ACC knows AOR-3sg
*a horse knows its rider*.

The subject of a verbal sentence, though in initial position, sometimes does not function as a topic, but as a simple attributive, with neutral stress on it. In other
words, it is ‘incorporated’ into the verb (Dede 1986: 153). In such cases, it obviously has a NS/NR indefinite status:

(12) köpek havlıyor
dog ABS is-barking PROGR-3sg
‘a dog/dogs is/are barking’ [the same sentence could mean ‘the dog is barking’ if the stress is shifted on the verb].

When the subject is in non-initial position and therefore non-topicalized, it has to be interpreted as NS/NR indefinite, unless it carries contrastive stress as in (14)b or is marked by defining modifiers as in (17):

(13)a para Ali’de
money ABS in-Ali LOC
‘Ali has the money’.
(13)b Ali’de para var
in-Ali LOC money ABS existent EXIST
‘Ali has money’.
(14)a yerde çocuk yatıyordu
on-ground LOC child ABS was-lying PROGPAST-3sg
‘children were lying on the ground’.
(14)b yerde çocuk yatıyordu, annesi
on-ground LOC child ABS was-lying PROGPAST-3sg his/her-mother ABS-Px3sg
değil is-not NEGCOP
‘it was the child [with contrastive stress] who was lying on the ground, not his/her mother’.

The subject is overtly marked as definite when its modifiers are a) demonstrative pronouns, b) possessive suffixes, c) clauses ending in a participial form:

(15) bu ev çok küçük
this DEM house ABS very ADV small ABS
‘this house is very small’.
(16) evim büyük değil
my-house ABS-Px1sg large ABS is-not NEGCOP
‘my house is not large’.
(17) seni arkadaşın bekliyor
you PERS2sg-ACC your-friend ABS-Px2sg is-waiting PROGR-3sg
‘your friend is waiting for you’.
(18) okula giden çocuk kardeşimdir
to-school DAT going SBJPART child ABS my-brother is ABS-Px1sg-COP
‘the child who goes/is going to school is my brother’.
(19) **çocuğun** **gittiği** **okul** uzak
child's GEN (pertaining-to-)his-going OBJ-PART-Px3sg school ABS far ABS
‘the school that the child goes/is going to is far-off’.

Modifiers of the (b)-(c) types are also possible with subjects marked as S/R indefinite:

(20) **bir** **arkadaşım** **geldi**
one/a NUM/IND my-friend ABS-Px1sg came PAST-3g
‘a friend of mine came’.

(21) **okula** **giden** **bir** **çocuk** **görüldü**
to-school DAT going SBJ-PART one/a NUM/IND child ABS was-seen PASS-PAST-3sg
‘a child who went/was going to school was seen’.

2.1.1.2.1 **Plural subject**

A plural subject usually neutralises the opposition definite vs. indefinite:

(22) **adamlar** **geldiler**
men ABS-PL came PAST-3pl
‘men/the men came’.

(23) **güzel** **kızlar** **gittiler**
beautiful ABS girls ABS-PL went PAST-3pl
‘beautiful girls/the beautiful girls went away’.

Word order can distinguish between definiteness and indefiniteness in the same way as for singular nouns:

(24)a **çocuklar** **yerde** **yattıordu**
children ABS-PL on-ground LOC was-lying PROG-PAST-3sg
‘the children were lying on the ground’.

(24)b **yerde** **çocuklar** **yattıordu**
on-ground LOC children ABS-PL was-lying PROG-PAST-3sg
‘there were children lying on the ground’.

According to Underhill (1976: 33) a copular sentence marks the plural subject as generic, while the lack of the copula marks it as definite. This distinction is not pointed out by Tura (1986):

(25)a **atlar** **tembeldir**
horses ABS-PL lazy-is ABS-COP
‘horses are lazy’.

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A plural subject that is the head noun of a noun phrase is marked for definiteness exactly like a singular subject:

(27) bu evler çok küçük
this DEM houses ABS-PL very ADV small ABS
‘these houses are very small’.

(28) evlerim büyük değil
my-houses ABS-PL-Px1sg large ABS is-not NEGCOP
‘my houses are not large’.

(29) okula giden çocuklar kardeşlerimdir
to-school DAT going SBJPART children ABS-PL my-brothers-are ABS-PL-Px1sg-COP
‘the children who go/are going to school are my brothers’.

(30) çocukların gittikleri okullar uzak
children’s PL-GEN (pertaining-to-)their-going OBJPART-Px3pl schools
far ABS
‘the schools that the children go/are going to are far-off’.

2.1.1.3 Predicate

The predicate is neutral with respect to definiteness, even if it may be assigned an indefinite status in qualitative statements and a definite status in equative statements:

(31) bir zamanlar ben de çocuktum
one ABS times ABS-PL I PERS1sg also CONJ child-was ABS-PAST-1sg
‘once I too was a child’.

(32) bizim dekanımız matematikçi
of-us PERS1pl-GEN our-dean ABS-Px1pl mathematician ABS
‘our dean is a [qualitative]/the [equative] mathematician’.
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The use of the indefinite determiner bir gives a S/R indefinite status to the predicate placing more emphasis on the statement:

(33)a Mehmət kasaptır
Mehmet ABS butcher-is ABS-COP
‘Mehmet is a [qualitative]/the [equative] butcher’.

(33)b Mehmət bir kasaptır
Mehmet ABS one/a NUM/IND butcher-is ABS-COP
‘Mehmet is (just) a butcher’.

(34)a ben adamım
I PERS1sg man-am ABS-1sg
‘I am a man’.

(34)b ben bir adamım
I PERS1sg one/a NUM/IND man-am ABS-1sg
‘I am a man [and not an animal]’.

However, if the predicate is a noun phrase including an adjective it is normal to place bir between adjective and noun to mark indefiniteness:

(35) ben büyük bir adamım
I PERS1sg big ABS one/a NUM/IND man-am ABS-1sg
‘I am a big man’.

2.1.1.3.1 Plural predicate

The distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness is overt in the case of plural predicates without modifiers, as the morphological mark of the plural +lAr is taken only by predicates with a definite status, which have to show number agreement with the subject:

(36)a tanıştığımız adamlar mühendisleri
(characterised-by-)our-meeting OBJPART-Px1pl men ABS-PL engineer-were
ABS-PAST-3pl
‘the men whom we met were engineers’.

(36)b tanıştığımız adamlar mühendislerdi
(characterised-by-)our-meeting OBJPART-Px1pl men ABS-PL engineers-was
ABS-PL-PAST-3sg
‘the men whom we met were the engineers’.

(37)a mahkemeye girenler yargıç değil
to-court DAT entering(-persons) SBJPART-PL judge ABS are-not NEGCOP-3pl ‘those entering the court are not judges’.

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Note however the following sentence (from Jansky 1949: 32) where an indefinite noun phrase functioning as predicate shows number agreement with a plural subject:

(38) Ahmet ve Mehmet çalişkan çocuklardır
Ahmet ABS and CONJ Mehmet ABS hardworking ABS boys-is ABS-PL-COP ‘Ahmet and Mehmet are hardworking boys’.

2.1.1.4 Object

The (direct) object in the absolute case without modifiers marks NS/NR indefiniteness and neutralisation of the opposition singular vs. plural. It is said to be ‘incorporated’ into the verb:

(39) kitap okumayı severim

(40)a Mehmet mektup yazdı
Mehmet ABS letter ABS wrote PAST-3sg ‘Mehmet wrote a letter/letters’.
(41)a ekmek aldım
bread ABS I-bought PAST-1sg ‘I bought bread’.

The use of the indefinite determiner bir indicates that only one thing is involved:

(40)b Mehmet bir mektup yazdı
Mehmet ABS one/a NUM/IND letter ABS wrote PAST-3sg ‘Mehmet wrote a/one letter’.
(41)b bir ekmek aldım
one/a NUM/IND bread ABS I-bought PAST-1sg ‘I bought a loaf of bread’.

An indefinite quantity greater than a single unit is marked by the plural, preceded or not by quantifiers like bazı ‘some’:
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(42) Mehmet (bazı) mektuplar yazdı
Mehmet ABS (some IND) letters ABS-PL wrote PAST-3sg
'Mehmet wrote (some) letters'.

The same rules apply when the object is a noun phrase:

(43)a yeni kitap aldım
new ABS book ABS I-bought PAST-1sg
'I bought a new book/new books'.
(43)b yeni bir kitap aldım
new ABS one/a NUM/IND book ABS I-bought PAST-1sg
'I bought a new book'.
(43)c yeni kitaplar aldım
new ABS books ABS-PL I-bought PAST-1sg
'I bought new books'.

For the marking of an indefinite object with the accusative see 2.1.2.

2.1.1.5 First member of izafet/tamlama

The word of Arabic origin izafet, literally ‘annexation’, was traditionally used by grammarians to indicate the Turkish (possessive) noun phrase. Though this name is still kept in some modern grammars (e.g. Lewis 2000: 40), it has been replaced by the neologism tamlama in the current Turkish linguistic terminology (Korkmaz 1992: 145). The izafet/tamlama structure is - as a common feature of the Turkic syntax - regressive, namely the determiner always precedes the head noun, which usually takes the third-person possessive suffix. There are basically two types of this structure, the one with the first member, i.e. the determiner, in the absolute case, the other with the determiner in the genitive case. The former marks an exclusively NS/NR indefiniteness of the determiner, which has therefore a merely qualificatory value:

(44)a üniversite profesöri seni bekliyor
university ABS its-professor ABS-Px3sg you PERS2sg-ACC is-waiting PROGPR-3sg
'the university professor is waiting for you'.
(45)a çocuk kitabı aldım
child ABS his-book ABS-Px3sg I-bought PAST-1sg
'I bought the children’s book'.
(46)açoğan kızı koyuna bakar
shepherd ABS his-girl ABS-Px3sg to-sheep DAT looks AOR-3sg
'the shepherd-girl minds the sheep'.

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Any modifier that precedes a determiner in the absolute case necessarily refers to the head noun:

(44)b bir üniversite profesörü seni
one/a NUM/IND university ABS its-professor ABS-Px3sg you PERS2sg-ACC
is-waiting PROGPR-3sg
‘a university professor is waiting for you’.

(45)b yeni çocuk kitabı aldım
new ABS child ABS his-book ABS-Px3sg I-bought PAST-1sg
‘I bought the new children’s book’.

(46)b gördüğüm çoban kızı
(characterised-by-)my-seeing OBJPART-Px1sg shepherd ABS his-girl
ABS-Px3sg
koyuna bakar
to-sheep DAT looks AOR-3sg
‘the shepherd-girl whom I see/saw minds the sheep’.

2.1.1.5.1 Subject of nominalized clauses

The Turkish subordinate nominalized clauses are constructed like an izafet/ tamlama group with the determiner acting as subject and the head noun acting as predicate. An important type of nominalized clause is the noun clause, term which Kornfilt 1997: 49 uses as referring to clauses that have the same distribution as regular noun phrases. The subject of a noun clause is put into different cases according to definiteness: the absolute marks it as indefinite, while the genitive marks it as definite:

(47)a sulh yapıldığı rivayeti
peace ABS (the-fact-of-)its-being-made PASS-FNOM- Px3g its-rumour
ABS-Px3sg
çıktı
went-out PAST-3sg
‘rumour has it that peace has been made’.

(47)b vapurun battığı bildiriliyor
ship’s GEN (the-fact-of-)its-sinking FNOM-Px3sg is-being-made-known
CAUS-PASS-PROGPR-3sg
‘it has been reported that the ship has sunk’.

(48)a çocuğunu arı soktuğunu duydum
child ACC bee ABS (the fact-of-)its-stinging FNOM-Px3sg-ACC I-heard
PAST-1sg
‘I heard that bees/a bee stung the child’.
Another kind of nominalized clause is the ‘gerund-equivalent’ (as Lewis 2000: 184 calls it), i.e. a clause equivalent in meaning to one of the many adverbial forms of the Turkish verb called ‘converbs’ by most western scholars and zarf-filer by Turkish ones. Its subject is always put into the absolute, whether it is definite or not:

(49)a **soyadı** kanunu çıkacağı
surname ABS its-law ABS-Px3sg (pertaining-to-)its-future-going-out
FOBJ

zaman ben Avrupaya gitmiştim
Px3sg time ABS I PERS1sg to-Europe DAT had-gone PPART-PAST-1sg

‘when the surname law was about to be promulgated, I had gone to Europe’.

(49)b **insan** vasiyetnamesini yazacağı
man ABS his-will Px3sg-ACC (pertaining-to-)his-future-writing FOBJ
PART-Px3sg

zaman avukatını çağırmalı
time ABS his-lawyer Px3sg-ACC call-must NEC-3sg

‘when a man is about to write his will he should call his lawyer’.

2.1.2 **ACCUSATIVE**

The accusative, called belirtme durumu (TS 2005: 240) or yükleme durumu (Korkmaz 2007: 277) by Turkish grammarians, takes the suffix -(y)I as case marker and is tightly bound to the category of definiteness as it usually indicates the definite object:

(50) **kitabı** aldım
book ACC I-bought PAST-1sg

‘I bought the book’.

(51) **yeni** evleri gördüm
new ABS houses PL-ACC I-saw PAST-1sg

‘I saw the new houses’.

Lexemes that are definite by their nature like proper nouns and pronouns must have accusative marking when they have the function of object:

(52) **Ankara’yı** gezdik
Ankara ACC we-toured PAST-1pl

‘we toured Ankara’.
The object must be accusative-marked also when it is already made definite by some modifier:

(54) şu kitabi aldım
that DEM book ACC I-bought PAST-1sg
'I bought that book'.

(55) evimizi kiraladı
our-house Px1pl-ACC he/she-rented PAST-3sg
'he/she rented our house'.

(56) okula giden kızları gördük
to-school DAT going SBJPART girls PL-ACC we-saw PAST-1pl
'we saw the girls who went/were going to school'.

If bir precedes a noun in the accusative it may mean the numeral 'one', but, with different stress, it indicates also S/R indefiniteness, see (58)b, (59)b:

(57)a bir kitap okudum
one/a NUM/IND book ABS I-read PAST-1sg
'I read a book'.

(57)b bir kitabı okudum
one/a NUM/IND book ACC I-read PAST-1sg
'I read (only/just) one book'.

An indefinite object can also take the accusative case marker in the following cases:

a) If it expresses S/R indefiniteness:

(58)a her gün bir gazete okuyorum
every DIST day ABS one/a NUM/IND newspaper ABS I-am-reading
PROGPR-1sg
'every day I read a newspaper'.

(58)b her gün bir gazeteyi okuyorum
every DIST day ABS one/a NUM/IND newspaper ACC I-am-reading
PROGPR-1sg 'every day I read a (particular) newspaper'.

(59)a bir öğrenci anyorum.
Bulamıyorum
one/a NUM/IND student ABS I-am-looking-for PROGPR-1sg I-can-not-find
ABIL-NEG-PROGPR-1sg
'I am looking for a student. I can't find one'.

b) If ı precedes a noun in the dative it indicates a numerical value:

(51) bir subsequent nesne verdim
one/a NUM/IND object DAT I-gave PAST-1sg
'I gave one object'.

(52) bir subsequent adj nesne verdim
one/a NUM/IND ADJ object DAT I-gave PAST-1sg
'I gave (an) ADJ object'.
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(59)b bir öğrenciyi anyorum. Bulamıyorum
one/a NUM/IND student ACC I-am-looking-for PROGPR-1sg I-can-not-find
ABIL-NEG-PROGPR-1sg
'I am looking for a student. I can’t find him'.

(60)a dün Hasanın tavsiye etti
yesterday ADV Hasan’s GEN recommendation ABS (pertaining-to-)his-doing
birkaç kitabı okudum
OBJPART-Px3sg a few IND book ACC I-read PAST-1sg
'yesterday I read some books that Hasan recommended'.

(60)b dün Hasanın tavsiye etti
yesterday ADV Hasan’s GEN recommendation ABS (pertaining-to-)his-doing
birkaç kitabı okudum
OBJPART-Px3sg a few IND book ACC I-read PAST-1sg
'yesterday I read some (specific) books that Hasan recommended'.

In (60)a “the speaker does not presume that the hearer knows that Hasan recommended any books at all. Furthermore, it is likely that Hasan recommended more books than the speaker read” (Kornfilt 1997: 278). An Italian translation of this sentence could be ‘Ieri ho letto dei libri che Hasan ha raccomandato’. In (60)b the speaker read a certain number of books that Hasan recommended; s/he is thinking of specific books and is presuming that the hearer knows that Hasan did recommend certain books, if not the identity of those books. Furthermore, the speaker exhausted the list of books recommended by Hasan (Kornfilt 1997: 278).

An Italian translation of this sentence could be ‘Ieri ho letto quei libri che Hasan ha raccomandato’.

b) If the object is removed from its unmarked position - immediately before the verb - for topicalizing or other reasons:

(61)a sabahlari kahve severim
in-the-morning ADV coffee ABS I-like AOR-1sg
'I like coffee in the morning'.

(61)b kahveyi sabahlari severim
coffee ACC in-the-morning ADV I-like AOR-1sg
'It is coffee that I like in the morning'.

c) If the object is generic, its marking through the accusative is optional:

(62) çocuklar çikolata(yı) sever
children ABS-PL chocolate ABS ~ ACC likes AOR-3sg
‘children like chocolate’.
However, when the generic object is plural, the accusative case marker is obligatory:

(63) bir öğretmen öğretmenleri sevmeli
one/a NUM/IND teacher ABS students PL-ACC like-must NEC-3sg
‘a teacher must like students’.

2.1.3 Genitive

The genitive, called tamlayan durumu (TS 2005: 1898) or ilgi durumu (Korkmaz 2007: 268) by Turkish grammarians, takes the suffix -(y)In and, as already mentioned, serves to mark the definite status of the first element of an izafet/tamlama group (Lewis 2000: 41):

(64) çocuğun kitabı ilginç
child’s GEN his/her-book ABS-Px3sg interesting ABS
‘the child’s book is interesting’.

(65) çocukların kitapları ilginç
children’s PL-GEN their-books ABS-Pxpl interesting ABS
‘the books of the children are interesting’.

The genitive also marks S/R indefiniteness:

(66) bir çocuğun kitabı ilginç
one/a NUM/IND child’s GEN his/her-book ABS-Px3sg interesting ABS
‘the book of a child [with different stress the noun phrase could mean ‘the book of one child’] is interesting’.

(67) küçük bir çocuğun kitabı ilginç
small ABS one/a NUM/IND child’s GEN his/her-book ABS-Px3sg interesting ABS
‘the book of a small child is interesting’.

(68) bazı kitapların sayfalarını okudum
some IND of-books PL-GEN their-pages ABS-Px3pl-ACC I-read PAST-1sg
‘I read the pages of some books’.

The subject of subordinate nominalized clauses, whose predicate is both participles in -AcAk, -dk/-dUk and a verbal noun in -mA, always takes the genitive marker when it has a definite or S/R indefinite status except for cases mentioned in 2.1.1.5.1:

(69) çocukların oynadıkları park çok
children’s PL-GEN (pertaining-to-)their-playing OBJPART-Px3pl park ABS very
ADV large-is ABS-COP
‘the park where the children play is very large’.
Definiteness vs. Indefiniteness in the Turkish language

(70) bir arkadasimn gelecegini
one/a NUM/IND my-friend’s Px1sg-GEN (the-fact-of-)his-future-coming
söyledim
Px3sg-ACC I-said PAST-1sg
'I said that a friend of mine would come'.

(71) bu mektubun açılmasını istiyorum
this DEM letter’s GEN its-(action-of-)being-opened PASS-ANOM-Px3sg-ACC
I-am-wanting PROGPR-1sg
'I want this letter to be opened'.

For other examples see (19), (30), (47)b, (48)b.

3. The third-person possessive suffix as ‘definite article’

According to the great turcologist K. Grønbech, the third-person possessive suffix of the Turkic languages originally had the function of a veritable definite article:

Im folgenden gebrauche ich für das genannte Suffix [scil. das Possessivsufix 3. Person] die Benennung Artikel, nicht nur weil die uns an erster Stelle interessierende grammatische Funktion dieser Form sich mit der unseres bestimmten Artikels vielfach deckt, sondern auch deshalb weil ich diese Funktion als die ursprüngliche ansehe; die sonst übliche Benennung, Possessivsuffix, bezieht sich auf eine spezielle, mit der Zeit immer wichtiger gewordene Auswirkung der ursprünglichen und umfassenderen Bedeutung (Grönbech 1936: 92).

This viewpoint has often been criticised by later scholars (see Johanson 1990: 177), but it is a matter of fact that “the possessive significance of the suffix of the 3rd person can completely recede when it defines or determines a noun, or, more often, a pronoun” (Menges 1968: 113) in all Turkic languages. Consequently, this suffix has a substantivizing and defining force in Turkish too, by virtue of which an adjective can become a (definite) noun or pronoun:

(72) zengini aynı şeyi söylüyor, fakiri
its-rich ABS-Px3sg same ABS thing ACC says PROGPR-3sg its-poor ABS-Px3sg
aynı şeyi söylüyor
same ABS thing ACC is-saying PROGPR-3sg
'the rich man says the same thing, the poor man says the same thing'.

(73) sizden akılışı yok
(compared-to-)you PERS2pl-ABL its-clever ABS-Px3sg non-existent
NEGEXIST
'there is none cleverer than you'.

Definiteness vs. Indefiniteness in the Turkish language
The third-person possessive suffix serves as definiteness marker of Turkish nouns in the case of the so-called ‘Janus construction’ (Lewis 2000: 46). This term refers to a third-person linking in one sentence between two related or closely connected people, who are both defined by the suffix in question:

(74) bunu bana birisi verdi
this ACC to-me PERS1sg-DAT its-one NUM/IND-Px3sg gave PAST-3sg
‘someone gave me this’.

(75) bazıısı bu gazeteyi sever
its-some IND-Px3sg this ABS newspaper ACC likes AOR-3sg
‘some people like this newspaper’.

(76) kaldır bunu, başkasını getir
take-away IMP-2sg this ACC its-other IND-Px3sg-ACC bring IMP-2sg
‘take this away, bring another’.

(77) hangisi geldi?
its-which INT-Px3sg came PAST-3sg
‘which of them came’?

(78) oğlu babasına bir mektup yazdı
his-son ABS-Px3sg to-his-father Px3sg-DAT one/a NUM/IND letter ABS wrote
PAST-3sg
‘the son wrote a letter to the father’.

(79) hastası doktorunu arıyor
his-patient ABS-Px3sg his-doctor Px3sg-ACC is-seeking PROGPR-3sg
‘the patient is seeking the doctor’.

(80) hocası talebesine bakar
his-teacher ABS-Px3sg to-his-pupil Px3sg-DAT looks-after AOR-3sg
‘the teacher looks after the pupil’.
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