

The Question Particle in Turkish: Consequences for the Interfaces

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1. Introduction

The Yes/No Question particle in Turkish, *-mI*, displays interesting properties with respect to its placement and interaction with sentence accent. I first show that the domain which is relevant for *-mI* placement is larger than a word, where *-mI* does not attach to the edge. What it does attach to, I argue, is the element that carries sentence accent. In this sense, it is more “stress-abiding” than “(pre-)stressing”, as it is conventionally labeled (Inkelas 1999, Kabak and Vogel 2001, among others).

Zooming into the phrasality involved in the placement of this particle, we find strictly syntactic requirements. After reviewing various environments *-mI* is and is not allowed in out-of-the-blue questions, I will argue that it is best characterized as a second position clitic in the vP domain, adjoining to Kahnemuyipour and Megerdooian’s (this volume) account of the Eastern Armenian aspectual auxiliary. The analysis outlined proposes to resolve both sentence accent distribution and clitic placement in the same domain, namely in syntax, and as such is capable of straightforwardly accounting for a correlation which is otherwise quite elusive in multiple domains.

The basic paradigm given below shows that in a wide focus Yes/No question, the Q particle *-mI* attaches to the object in Turkish. When it attaches to the verbal complex, either the object is Given, or predicate focus is involved.

- (1) a. Ali dün yemek yap-tı.¹
Ali yesterday dinner make-PAST
‘Ali cooked dinner yesterday.’
b. Ali dün yemek **mi** yaptı?
‘Did Ali cook dinner yesterday?’
c. Ali dün yemek YAPTI **mı**?
i. *Verum Focus*: ‘Did Ali cook yesterday, as discussed before/as assumed/as promised?’
ii. *Predicate Focus*: ‘Did Ali COOK the dinner this time?’

I will first show below that the placement in (1b) is the informationally and morphosyntactically unmarked placement of the Q particle in Turkish.

2. Default Placement

Questions of the sort illustrated in (1b) are the only ones that can felicitously follow a purely naive ‘what happened’ question, indicating wide focus. Final attachment of the Q particle is out in these instances, as the resulting question implies that the VP under question is Given. Compare (2a) and (2b). The resulting unacceptability is solely due to the placement of *-mI*.

(2) Hearing a sudden, loud noise in the next room, I run, open the door and ask:

Ne oldu? ‘What happened? ...’

* I would like to thank Michael Becker, Cedric Boeckx, Daniel Büring, Kerstin Schwabe, Hubert Truckenbrodt, Malte Zimmermann and audiences at WCCFL 28 for helpful comments and questions. All errors are my own.

¹ Underlining indicates default sentential prominence, and capitals indicate narrowly focused constituents. *-mI* is vowel-harmonic and has four alternants: *-mı*, *-mi*, *-mu*, *-mü*. These will be in boldface for reading convenience.

- a. ... Biri cam-ı **mı** kır-dı?
 someone window-acc Q break-PAST
 ‘Did someone break the window?’
- b. # ... Biri camı kırdı **mı**?
 ‘=Did someone remember to break the window?’

Secondly, observe that a *-mI* question can be felicitously conjoined with a wide focus question such as ‘... or is it how it appears’.

- (3) Rock ve alternatif çal-ın-an bar-lar sinek **mi** avlıyor yoksa ban-a **mı** öyle gel-iyor?
 rock and alternative play-PASS-REL bar-PL mosquito Q catch-PROG or I-dat Q so appear-PROG
 ‘Do the bars where Rock and Alternative is played hardly make any business (lit: catch mosquitoes), or is it how it appears to me?’
 Source: <http://www.studyo24.net/forum.asp?bid=44&mid=931&q=read>

Finally, notice that the predicative idiom chunk in (3) is broken off by the Q morpheme. To expand on this further, consider (4).

- (4) A: Ali’nin bankaya bir sürü borcu varmış.
 ‘I heard Ali owes a lot of money to the bank.’
- B: Hala sinek **mi** avlı-yor?
 still mosquito Q catch-PROG
- i. # *Literal narrow*: ‘Is it mosquitoes that Ali is still catching?’
 - ii. # *Literal wide*: ‘Is it catching mosquitoes that Ali is still doing?’
 - iii. ✓ *Idiomatic wide*: ‘Is Ali’s business still not going well?’
 - iv. *[No such thing as idiomatic narrow]

Here, A’s initial comment serves to provide context to ensure that B’s question is out of the blue. The literal readings (4i) and (4ii) are out due to context. Given the categorical absence of a narrow focus reading in idioms, we can conclude that the only possible reading, namely (iii), is not related to narrow focus, but to default attachment.

To sum up, in wide focus contexts, the placement of the particle is after the object. We have exemplified this point with a bare noun object (1), a non-D-linked accusative-marked object (in the sense of Üntak-Tarhan 2006) (2), and an object in an idiom chunk (4). In this sense, *-mI* is clearly a phrasal particle. Sentence and VP focus questions are marked on the VP, inside the VP. This is the default attachment and does not necessarily invoke narrow focus (contra Ladd 1996). This distribution is unlike any other particle that takes sentential scope such as Tense, Aspect and Negation in Turkish, which attach to the verb.

3. Q Particle Placement Follows Sentence Accent

In this section I will show that not only objects but also low non-derived adverbs, subjects of unaccusatives, negated verbs and narrowly focused elements are canonical Q particle hosts. I will argue that at first approximation the common denominator of all these is the sentence accent carried by the element in question in a declarative.

3.1. Low Adverbs

Turkish has a class of low adverbs that receive sentence accent, first described by Erguvanlı-Taylan (1984) under the rubric of ‘non-derived adverbs’ in reference to their form, which is identical to that of an adjective. These are default bearers of sentence accent (Üntak-Tarhan 2006, Kamali 2008) (5a); and also are default Q particle hosts (5b).

- (5) a. Ali hızlı yemek yap-ar.
Ali fast food make-PRES
'Ali cooks fast.'
- b. Ali hızlı **mı** yemek yapar?
'Does Ali cook fast?'
- c. Ali hızlı yemek YAPAR **mı**?
'Does Ali cook fast as mentioned/expected?'

(5c) is a proper question in a job interview for a cook, where cooking fast is a known/mentioned predicate. In the default attachment (5b), the Q morpheme attaches to the adverb, following sentence accent as given in (5a).

A derived adverb, in comparison, is outside of the sentential stress domain in default intonation (6a), and cannot host the question suffix unless it is narrowly focused (6b, c).

- (6) a. Ali hızlı-ca yemek yap-ıyor.
Ali fast-ADV food make-PROG
'Ali is cooking hurriedly.'
- b. Ali hızlıca yemek mi yapıyor?
'Is Ali hurriedly cooking?'
- c. Ali HIZLICA mı yemek yapıyor?
'Is it hurriedly that Ali is cooking?'

3.2. *Subjects of Unaccusatives*

Extending the paradigm further, we can see that subjects of unaccusatives, which receive default sentence accent in declaratives, also constitute an unmarked attachment site for the Q particle.

- (7) a. Ocak-ta sü kaynı-yor.
stove-LOC water boil-PROG
'There's water boiling on the stove.'
- b. Ocak-ta su **mu** kaynıyor?
'(What's this roll?) Is there water boiling on the stove?'

In comparison, the subject of an unergative is not a canonical sentence accent bearer, nor is it a host of the Q particle under wide focus (8b). As with the adverb in (6c), it can only become the host of the particle under narrow focus.

- (8) a. Pazarları çocuk-lar yüz-üyor.
Sundays kid-PL swim-PROG
'The kids swim on Sundays.'
- b. Pazarları çocuklar yüzüyor **mu**?
'Do the kids swim on Sundays?'
- c. Pazarları **ÇOCUKLAR mı** yüzüyor?
'Is it the kids that swim on Sundays?'

3.3. *Negative Question*

Negation in Turkish has the property of disrupting the phonological constituency of the sentence forcing the sentence accent to be on the verb. If *-mI* is attached to the bearer of sentence accent as we have been claiming, we would expect it to not attach to the object but to the verb under negation in the default case. This is indeed what we find. *-mI* does not attach to the object in unmarked negative questions. When it does, narrow focus has to be involved.

- (9) a. Ali iskambil oyna-mı-yor-**mu**?
 Ali cards play-NEG-PRES-Q
 ‘Doesn’t Ali play cards?’
 b. Ali ISKAMBIL **mi** oynamıyor?
 ‘Is it cards that Ali doesn’t play?’

That Narrow Focus has to be involved in (9b) can again be illustrated by the use of an idiom. If Q is inserted after the object of an idiom in a negative question, only the literal reading is available.

- (10) a. Ali sinek avla-mı-yor-**mu**?
 Ali mosquito catch-NEG-PRES -Q
 i. *Literal*: ‘Isn’t Ali catching mosquitoes?’
 ii. *Idiomatic*: ‘Isn’t Ali’s business going well?’
 b. Ali SİNEK **mi** avlamıyor?
Only Literal Narrow: ‘Is it mosquitoes that Ali doesn’t catch?’

The negative question constitutes a striking instance of accent-abidance of the Q particle placement as it provides an example of accent-driven verb-attachment, whereas all the other examples we have discussed so far demonstrated accent-driven object-attachment.

3.4. Q Attachment in Narrow Focus

As we have been observing, *-mI* attaches to sentence-level constituents under narrow focus, such as a high adverbial (11b) or a subject (11c). The position in the sentence does not matter as long as it is a position preceding the verb, as the linearly unmodified variations on (11) illustrates.

- (11) a. Ali dün iskambil oynadı. (=1a)
 ‘Ali played cards yesterday.’
 b. Ali DÜN **mü** iskambil oynadı?
 ‘Is/was it yesterday that Ali played cards?’
 c. ALİ **mi** dün iskambil oynadı?
 ‘Is/was it Ali who played cards yesterday?’

In this respect, re-consider when Q attachment on the verb complex is allowed. It is only allowed under verum focus or predicate focus.

- (12) Ali dün iskambil OYNADI **mı**? (cf. 1c)
 i. *Verum Focus*: ‘Did Ali play cards yesterday, as discussed before/as is commonly assumed?’
 ii. *Predicate Focus*: ‘Did Ali PLAY this time?’

In these informationally marked instances, too, Q attaches to the element which would bear the most prominent accent in the corresponding declarative.

- (13) a. Ali DÜN iskambil oynadı. (cf. 11b)
 ‘It was yesterday that Ali played cards.’
 b. ALİ dün iskambil oynadı. (cf. 11c)
 ‘It was Ali who played cards yesterday.’
 c. Ali dün iskambil OYNADI. (cf. 12)
 ‘Ali did play cards yesterday.’

In the presence of narrow focus, the particle has to attach to the constituent marked as such, as in (11). Alternatively, when everything else fails to carry such marking or default sentence accent due to givenness, it attaches to the verb (12). These cases present an additional dimension to the picture of Q Particle placement in that wide focus- and narrow focus-induced accents behave similarly.

3.5. Interim discussion

The preceding subsections established a well-motivated correlation between sentence accent and Q particle placement in Turkish. The attachment site is non-uniform across such dimensions as argument structure, negative versus affirmative, and the presence or absence of a non-derived adverb, as well as the non-default attachment in narrow focus questions.

Following Truckenbrodt's (1995) Focus Prominence, (narrow) focus receives the highest prominence. If Q placement follows the greatest sentential prominence as in unmarked sentential stress, it is expected that it attaches to a narrowly focused constituent when there is one, and to the element that receives default accent when there isn't. Therefore, the common denominator of Q particle placement across such diverse dimensions is the sentence accent normally carried by the host of the particle in a declarative.

(14) *Question Particle Placement Generalization, Version 1*: The Question particle attaches to the constituent that would carry the sentence accent in a declarative.

Next, I move on to a proposal that derives this effect. One immediate hypothesis would postulate a particle placement mechanism in the prosody, whereby prosodic prominence somehow "attracts" the particle. As straightforward as this solution would be, I will follow a different path. Apart from an argument of simplicity with respect to assumptions regarding the number and nature of interfaces between different linguistic domains (morphosyntax and prosody in this case), several empirical arguments militate against a prosodic account.²

4. Challenges to the Accent-Based Generalization

In this section, we will see that neither accent, nor focus can be the sole determining factor in the placement of the Q particle in Turkish. Rather, we will see that focus and accent are only part of the conspiracy that regulates the placement, with syntax being at the heart of the conspiracy.

4.1. Accent without Q

A substantial argument comes from the case of accent without Q attachment. Our generalization in (14) would predict that the Q particle would accompany all types of prominent accents, but this prediction is not borne out. Even when *-mI* attaches to the verb, a preceding element can be accented, contrary to what a prosodic account predicts.

- (15) Ali İSKAMBİL oynadı mı?
Ali cards play-PAST Q
'Did Ali play CARDS?'
'=Is cards one if the things Ali played?'

This occurrence is not special to objects. Other constituents such as a subject can bear this accent and fail to attract the Q particle. *-mI* still attaches to the verb in these cases and the question uniformly invokes a non-exhaustive reading. Consider (6).

- (16) a. ALİ iskambil oynadı mı?
'Did ALİ play cards?'
'=Is/was Ali one of the people who play cards?'
b. ALİ mi iskambil oynadı? (cf. 11c)
'Is/was it Ali who played cards?'

² For a case in point, the reader is referred to the rich literature on the complex prosody/syntax interplay in the placement of South Slavic question clitic in Halpern (1995), Bošković (2001), among others.

These data provide the crucial test that dissociates accent from Q particle placement in the cases in question. Accent does not necessarily attract the Q particle.

4.2. Phrasal Constituents under Question

Thus far it has appeared as if the Q particle can be inserted anywhere in the sentence as long as the primary accent requirement is met, but we have not yet discussed larger phrases. In fact, Q placement is restricted to a few syntactically determined slots within DP and the PP. In the DP, it may attach to the whole DP (17b) or a possessor (17c), but not to an adjective (17d). The problem persists regardless of whether the adjective may be narrowly focused.

- (17) a. Emre Ali'nin beyaz araba-sı-nı aldı.
Emre Ali-GEN white car-POSS-ACC bought
'Emre bought Ali's white car.'
b. Emre Ali'nin beyaz arabasını **mı** aldı?
'Did Emre buy Ali's white car?'
c. Emre ALİ'NİN **mı** beyaz arabasını aldı?
'Is/was it Ali_i who Emre bought his_i white car from?'
d. *Emre Ali'nin BEYAZ **mı** arabasını aldı?
Intended: 'Is/was it his_i WHITE car that Emre bought from Ali_i?'

To attain the meaning (17d) is not capable of expressing, we would have to stick with DP-final attachment while accenting the adjective.

- (18) Emre Ali'nin BEYAZ arabasını **mı** aldı?
'Was it his_i WHITE car that Emre bought from Ali_i?'

A similar pattern emerges in the PP. The Q particle is not allowed after the DP within the PP, even though the DP may be narrowly focused.

- (19) a. Araba-ya doğru yürü-yor-uz.³
car-dat towards walk-PROG-1pl
'We are walking towards the car.'
b. ARABAYA doğru **mu** yürüyoruz?
'Is it the car that we are walking towards?'
c. *ARABAYA **mı** doğru yürüyoruz?
Intended: 'Is it the car that we are walking towards?'

The failure of DP- and PP-internal constituents, even when they are narrowly focused, to host the Q particle goes against a prosodic generalization that relates Q placement to accent.

One could try to salvage the Q placement-accent correlation by postulating prosodic phrases that treat the DPs and PPs as wholes. But this attempt also runs into problems, first in the face of the possibility of separating the possessor from the rest of the DP (17c), and secondly in the face of the fact that the VP, which prosodically looks very much like the DP and PP, is systematically torn off by the Q particle as we have seen in the previous section.

4.3. NCI Licensing and the Q Particle

A striking instance where nothing other than syntax constrains the Q attachment site is with Negative Concord Items. NCIs need to be in a specific configuration with the licensing question, namely a configuration in which *-mI* attaches to the verb (Besler 2000). Let us first show how NCIs

³ Sentence accent is not found on adjuncts other than low adverbs in Turkish unless they are narrowly focused.

work alongside negation. The negative morpheme *-mA* licenses the NCI, therefore it is obligatory.

- (20) a. Ali hiç iskambil oyna-*(ma)z.
Ali never cards play-NEG.PRES
'Ali doesn't ever plays cards.'
b. Hiçkimse iskambil oyna-*(ma)z.
Noone cards play-NEG.PRES
'Noone plays cards.'

Similarly to NPIs and NCIs crosslinguistically, not only negative, but also question licenses the use of NCIs.

- (21) a. Ali hiç iskambil oyna-r **mı**?
Ali never cards play-PRES Q
'Does Ali ever play cards?'
b. Hiçkimse iskambil oyna-r **mı**?
Noone cards play-PRES Q
'Does anyone play cards?'

However, in these instances, the position of the Q-particle is fixed. It can be attached to the verb as in (21), but to nothing else, narrow focus and accent distribution being completely irrelevant (22).

- (22) a. *Ali **mi** hiç iskambil oynar?
b. *Ali hiç **mi** iskambil oynar?
c. *Ali hiç iskambil **mi** oynar?

In these cases, matrix negation is required to license the NCI alongside the narrow focus-indicating Q particle (23).

- (23) a. ALİ **mi** hiç iskambil oyna-*(ma)z?
'Is it Ali who never plays cards?'
b. Ali HİÇ **mi** iskambil oyna*(ma)z?
'Does Ali never ever play cards?'
c. Ali hiç İSKAMBİL **mi** oyna*(ma)z?
'Is it cards that Ali never plays?'

Based on Q placement within larger constituents and in NCI licensing contexts, we conclude that the relation between Q attachment and focus/accent is necessarily represented in the syntax. How, then, is this phenomenon both accent-abiding and syntax-abiding? A straightforward solution is to ascribe accent assignment to syntax, so that both effects follow from the same source.

5. Analysis

Even though a prosodic account initially seems to derive the accent-abiding nature of the Q particle directly, we have seen that it fails to account for syntactic restrictions on its placement and non-accent-adjacent placement in non-exhaustive questions and larger constituents.

Recall that objects of transitives, subjects of unaccusatives and low adverbs uniformly take the Q particle in Yes/No questions. These are all elements at the left edge of the VP. Now assume that sentence accent is a consequence of cyclic spell-out (Kahnemuyipour 2004, Kratzer and Selkirk 2007, following on Chomsky 2001), whereby the highest in the complement domain of vP is later on realized with sentence accent at PF (Kahnemuyipour 2004). Let us also assume, following Kahnemuyipour and Megerdooian (this volume), that second position clitics are also found in this initial syntactic phase akin to the widely recognized CP-level second position clitics.

In Yes/No questions, the head *-mI* is merged after VP. *-mI* is a clitic, therefore needs a specifier to

lean on to. It attracts the closest element to this position due to the Minimal Link Condition, which is the exact phrase that would be the accent bearer in the declarative. With *-mI* Phrase in the structure, the highest in the spell-out domain is spec, *mIP*, therefore in a question it will surface as the accent bearer. This is why Q particle follows sentence accent in informationally unmarked questions.

We are now in a position to restate our generalization relying on structural notions underlying accent rather than accent itself, avoiding the drawbacks of a strictly prosodic analysis.

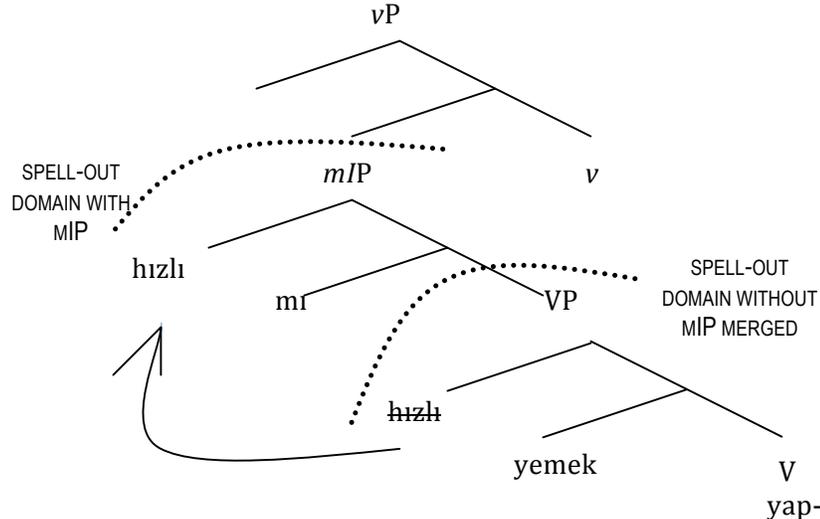
(24) *Question Particle Placement Generalization, Final Version*: The Question particle is a second position clitic in the vP domain.

I illustrate the workings of this account with an example with a low adverb below (cf. 5b). The low adverb *hızlı* is adjoined to the VP (Üntak-Tarhan 2006), making it the highest in the spell-out domain in the declarative. When *mIP* is merged, the adverb moves to the specifier position, remaining the highest in the domain.⁴

(25) a. Ali hızlı **mı** yemek yap-ar. (=5b)

Ali fast Q food make-PRES
‘Ali cooks fast.’

b.



The simpler example without the low adverb, (1b), does not have this node. Instead the complement *yemek* undergoes the same procedure. Following standard assumptions, subjects of unaccusatives (7b) are as low in the structure and they follow a similar path. Accented case-marked objects (2a) move through an AspP in between VP and *mIP* (Üntak-Tarhan 2006).⁵

This account straightforwardly captures the parallelism between sentence accent and Q placement without recourse to a prosodic mechanism that can move affixes around. It has one drawback, however; namely the loss of the nice generalization over default accent and Narrow Focus accent. I would like to suggest that this may be just what is needed to account for Q placement in the larger DP and PPs.

Recall the failure of the Q particle to intervene between DP and PP. The relevant examples are repeated below.

⁴ Note that Kahnemuyipour and Megerdorian’s implementation is slightly different. I do not see any way of deciding between the two at the moment.

⁵ Q placement in negative sentences and the possibly related NCI licensing configuration is too complex to be addressed here. This will be taken up in future work.

- (26) a. Emre [_{DP} Ali'nin <mi> beyaz *<mı> arabası]nı <mı> aldı?
 'Did Emre buy Ali's white car?'
 b. [_{PP} Arabaya *<mı> doğru] <mu> yürüyoruz?
 'Is it the car that we are walking towards?'

This is in sharp contrast with the vP-level default attachment of Q, where it necessarily intervenes between the vP. This asymmetry between vP-level attachment and constituent-level attachment can be argued to arise from syntactic versus base-generated attachment.

Note that as much as this move seems to take away from the strength of the current proposal, it only seems natural given the mystery surrounding (narrow) focus-in-situ itself. If we are allowing any constituent to merge in with features that in the phonologized end result enforce narrow focus accent, we may as well allow them to merge with an affix that is associated with narrow focus prosody.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that the default Q particle placement in Turkish parallels sentential main accent exactly because it relies on the same syntactic configuration spelling out the sentence accent. This analysis has the advantage of deriving default Q placement, along with accompanying accent, in one domain only, without evoking division of labor problems. It was suggested that narrow focus occurrences do not pose an empirical challenge to this claim if these do not operate under the same syntactic conditions but are rather base-generated.

Given this analysis, *-mI* is not a “pre-stressing” particle any more. Neither do we need to ascribe a “focusing” function to account for the accent seemingly enforced by it. The causality is reverse. Accent is assigned by the syntactic frame, Q duly follows.

Finally, I provided crosslinguistic support to the claim by Kahnemuyipour and Megerdooimian (this volume) that Wackernagel clitics are also found in the other phasal domain, vP, which has interesting parametric and theoretical consequences.

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