Areal patterns in the grammaticalization of Turkic postverbal constructions as markers of actionality and viewpoint aspect

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The paper deals with Turkic postverbal constructions, i.e. analytic constructions consisting of a lexical verb in converbial form and a following auxiliary verb. The label ‘postverb’ is used in analogy to Indo-European preverbs used as actional operators. Two types of converbs are involved: type (A), ending in a vowel, type (B), ending in a labial consonant. One and the same auxiliary verb may occur with both converb types.

Postverbal constructions typically function as actional operators, serving the expression of actionality (Aktionsart). They operate on various types of actional phrases, creating more specific actional contents.

The constructions are based on a limited number of auxiliary verbs with strongly generalized grammaticalized meaning. They go back to lexical verbs of various kinds, e.g. motion verbs meaning ‘to go’, ‘to come’, ‘to go away’, ‘to go out’, ‘to proceed’, postural verbs meaning ‘to stand’, ‘to remain’, ‘to sit’, ‘to lie’, etc., and transfer verbs meaning ‘to put’, ‘to seize’, ‘to place’, ‘to cast’, ‘to send’, etc. The constructions allow the expression of highly differentiated shades of meaning.

The use of postverbal constructions varies considerably across languages. The systems are well developed in the Northwestern, Northeastern and Southeastern branches of Turkic. Languages of the Northeastern branch make extensive use of them. The best developed systems are found in South Siberia, where the constructions are highly conventionalized and mostly preferred to simple verb forms. The Southwestern branch exhibits relatively poor systems. Varieties spoken in Iran and Azerbaijan employ restricted sets of constructions. Considerable differences between standard and non-standard dialects are often found. Standard Turkish is surprisingly poor in postverbal constructions, whereas some Anatolian dialects display rich systems. Gagauz and Karaim, which are both strongly influenced by Slavic, only possess rudimentary systems of postverbal constructions.

The semantic notions grammaticalized vary across languages and are not fully predictable from the original lexical meanings of the auxiliaries. Different languages employ different auxiliaries to grammaticalize similar notions, and the same constructions may have different meanings in different languages. The types of semantic notions are nevertheless mostly similar. Certain constructions follow identical patterns in many Northwestern, Southeastern and South Siberian languages.

Turkic postverbal constructions are typically used for phase specification, highlighting an inherent phase of the actional phrase. Some mark transformativity, others non-transformativity.

Transformativizers operate on actionally ambiguous actional phrases, highlighting a dynamic initial or final phase of the action and blocking non-transformative readings. They mean ‘to write down’ rather than ‘to write’, ‘to sit down’ rather than ‘to sit’, ‘to catch sight’ rather
than ‘to look’, ‘to catch fire’ or ‘to burn down’ rather than ‘to burn’. The corresponding auxiliary verbs have developed from source verbs with lexical meanings such as ‘to send’, ‘to move’, ‘to put’, ‘to throw’, ‘to go away’, ‘to come’, ‘to go out’, ‘to take’, ‘to reach’, ‘to enter’, ‘to strike’, ‘to fall’. They mostly combine with (B) converbs.

Non-transformativizers operate on transformative and actionally ambiguous actional phrases, specifying a nondynamic phase of the action and blocking limit-oriented readings. They mean ‘to be ill’ rather than ‘to fall ill’, ‘to look’ rather than ‘to catch sight’, ‘to eat’ rather than ‘to eat up’, and ‘to read’ rather than ‘to read and finish reading’. The auxiliary verbs have developed from postural or locomotive verbs meaning ‘to stand’, ‘to sit’, ‘to lie’, ‘to proceed’, ‘to move’, ‘to run’. Their choice may thus give additional information on the physical position in which the action is performed.

Postverbal constructions based on motion verbs meaning ‘to come’ and ‘to go away’ may express spatial orientation, specifying whether an action is directed towards or away from a deictic center. Cislocative orientation, direction towards a deictic center (‘to this place’) is expressed by constructions based on verbs meaning ‘to come’. Translocative orientation, direction from a deictic center (‘from this place’) is expressed by constructions based on verbs meaning ‘to go (away)’.

Postverbal constructions based on verbs meaning ‘to give’ and ‘to take’ express so-called version, indicating whether a given action is performed to the benefit or affliction (advantage or disadvantage) of the performer or of some other entity.

The patterns of the typical postverbal actional constructions have spread through contacts into other languages spoken in Turkic-dominated areas. The semantic and combinatory patterns have proven attractive for copying as long as they have preserved their initial analytic structure.

Postverbal constructions are found in several older Iranian languages, particularly in Khwarezmian as written until the 13th or 14th century. This is a result of the strong Turkic influence to which Khwarezm was exposed from the 8th century on.

The Central Asian Iranian language Tajik, a variety of Persian, has developed auxiliary constructions with functions similar to the Uzbek ones. The patterns of postverbal constructions are strongly represented in Northern Tajik, where they display clearly Turkic features. Here, participial forms based on the preterite stem + -ā are combined with a limited number of auxiliary verbs fulfilling various actional functions. The constructions are heavily represented in dialects spoken close to Turkic-speaking areas, whereas they occur less frequently or not at all in more distant dialects.

Mongolic languages exhibit similar patterns. Examples of contact-induced copying of postverbal constructions from Chuvash and Tatar are found in the Finno-Ugric language Mari (Cheremis), spoken in the Volga region in the eastern part of Russia proper. Anatolian Greek varieties have copied functions of Turkish postverbal constructions with <dur-> ‘to stand’ and <yat-> ‘to lie’ onto corresponding Greek verbs. Anatolian Kurmanji shows cases of Turkish influence.
In contrast, postverbal techniques have declined or vanished in Turkic varieties dominated by Persian. As a result of the loss of 〈B〉 converbs, the use of the typically Turkic postverbal constructions has eroded in favor of paratactic constructions. This is true of Khalaj, Kashkay and several other Turkic varieties of Iran.

Turkic languages make use of a number of grammaticalized viewpoint aspect markers expressing perspectives on events, i.e. different ways of envisaging events with respect to their limits.

Intraterminality envisages an event from an internal point of view, within its outer limits. This viewpoint aspect yields imperfective and progressive meanings, typical of present/imperfect categories. Postterminality envisages an event at a point where its relevant limit is already transcended, yielding meanings typical of resultative and perfect categories.

Intraterminals and postterminals display higher or lower focality degrees depending on the relative narrowness/breadth of the range of vision applied to the event at a given vantage point.

Intra- and postterminal items originally expressed high degrees of focality and later turned into items of lower focality, i.e. simple presents, imperfects, perfects, constatives. This led to renewals of the expression of high focality by periphrastic means.

Several Turkic postverbal constructions have served as the basis for grammaticalization of viewpoint aspect operators renewing the expression of focal intraterminality and postterminality. Originally actional properties have been reinterpreted in aspectual terms. The markers have generalized to occur with actional phrases of all semantic types.

Constructions with the verb tur- ‘to stand’, 〈A〉 tur- and 〈B〉 tur-, have played a major role. In most languages, 〈A〉 tur-ur came to renew focal intraterminality, e.g. Yaz-a tur-ur ‘X stands writing’ > ‘X is writing’, whereas 〈B〉 tur-ur renewed focal postterminality, e.g. Yaz-ıp tur-ur ‘X stands having written’ > ‘X has written’. The forms underwent formal erosion, first univerbation, i.e. fusion of the converb marker with the auxiliary, and then partial or total loss of tur-ur, e.g. Yaz-a tur-ur > Yaz-a, Yaz-ıp tur-ur > Yaz-ıp. After the defocalization of items of these types, further similar grammaticalization processes have taken place, leading to new periphrastic exponents of high focality, e.g. with other postural verbs such as yat- ‘to lie’. Most Turkic languages have undergone at least one renewal of this kind during their known history, Yakut being a remarkable exception.

The construction 〈A〉 ār-ūr ← ār- ‘to be’ was once spread over wide areas in the western parts of the Turkic-speaking world, serving to renew focal intraterminality in numerous Oghuz and Kipchak varieties. The marker is preserved in various more or less contracted shapes in the Ponto-Caspian area, the Balkans, East Anatolia, the Azeri area, the South Oghuz area, Iraq, etc. Kipchak varieties of Southern Russia and the Volga region preserve clear traces of it.

This type was abandoned in many languages and replaced by 〈A〉 tur-ur ← tur- ‘to stand’, which came to renew intraterminality at an early stage in the Northwestern, Southeastern and Northeastern branches. Its source was the continuative postverbal construction 〈A〉 tur- rather than 〈B〉 tur-. As mentioned, the combination underwent univerbation and partial or total loss
of tur-ur. This focal intraterminal type may have been influenced by Persian constructions based on ‘to stand’.

A construction (A) yori- ← yori- ‘to move’ led to a late Ottoman innovation that was not firmly established until the 18th century. The marker {-(Ø)Iyor} is today the most frequent Turkish intraterminal marker. Cypriot Turkish originally lacked {-(Ø)Iyor} since this form became established after the Turkish immigration to Cyprus. The Turkish-speaking groups settled here by the Ottoman government in the 16th century mostly came from the Konya-Adana-Antalya area and spoke dialects that lacked the marker in question.

There are further items renewing focal intraterminality, products of relatively recent developments. In the Southeastern branch of Turkic they are similar to Persian constructions.

Turkic postterminals are mostly evidential, signaling that the event is not stated directly, but in an indirect way, by reference to its reception by a conscious subject. They imply that the utterance is based on a source of information such as hearsay, inference and perception (‘evidently’, ‘obviously, ‘as it turns out’, etc.). The expression varies across languages. Postterminals in {−mIš}, {−GAn} and {−(V)p-tI(r)} tend to get indirective interpretations, e.g. Turkish ‹Yaz-miş›, Bashkir ‹Yaz-yan›, Uzbek ‹Yaz-ip-ti› ‘X has reportedly/apparently/obviously written’.

The oldest known postterminal marker is {−mIš}. It is still used as a finite item in modern West Oghuz, South Oghuz, Khorasan Oghuz varieties, Khalaj, Salar and North Siberian. Lexicalized forms with {−mIš} have survived in some Kipchak languages. The Azeri finite item in {−mIš} differs from its Turkish counterpart by displaying more perfect-like functions without evidential connotations. This usage is clearly influenced by the Persian perfect. The Yakut marker {−BIt}, an archaic feature etymologically corresponding to {−mIš}, forms a postterminal with evidential connotations.

The finite type {−GAn} came to be used as a postterminal marker in most Turkic languages, replacing the old suffix {−mIš}. It is now used in the Northwestern and Southeastern branches as well as in the West and South Siberian languages. In West Kipchak, {−GAn} expresses past events of current relevance, often on the basis of results or indirect evidence. The {−GAn} perfects of Tatar and Bashkir have evidential connotations. In many languages, e.g. Kirghiz, Kazakh, Uzbek, Uyghur, {−GAn} has perfect, resultative, experiential and constative (summarizing) functions.

The expression of postterminality has also been renewed with constructions of the type (B) tur-ur ← tur- ‘to stand’. This has led to the formation of postterminals in a variety of Turkic languages. The Persian perfect has certainly corroborated this type as the usual perfect among the Turks of Iran. Turkmen possesses the indirective postterminal marker {−Ib-dIr} // {−b-dIr} < (B) dur-ur. Its functions are similar to those of the finite Turkish item {−mIš}, e.g. ‹Gel-miş› ‘X has obviously come’. Many Kipchak items going back to (B) tur-ur have been strongly defocalized. Several languages possess low-focal indirective postterminal markers of the type {−(I)p-tI(r)}, e.g. Uyghur {−(I)p-ti}. 
The paper will sketch some basic areal patterns in the grammaticalization of Turkic postverbial constructions as markers of both actionality and viewpoint aspect.