Impersonal acts of speaking and thinking in a parallel corpus of Turkish and Kurmanji Kurdish academic writings

Based on an aligned parallel corpus of academic writings published simultaneously in Turkish and Kurmanji Kurdish, this paper looks at passivisation and nominalisation as two of several strategies used to achieve effects of impersonality in academic writing.

Turkish and Kurdish, which are in close contact through the bilingualism of the Kurdish speakers, belong to different language families (Turkic versus Iranian) and are typologically quite distant from each other. Turkish uses nominalised verbs both derivationally and inflectionally, the latter to build semi-finite subordinate clauses. Kurdish subordination is finite, but it uses verbal nouns in nominal style. Turkish nominalised verbs carry voice and person information; this is not the case in Kurmanji Kurdish. Therefore Kurdish nominalised verbs lend themselves to use for effects of impersonalisation, where Turkish uses other strategies, often passivisation.

In contemporary academic writing, actants at the level of knowledge and text creation (observers and authors) tend to be backgrounded in an otherwise specific situation in order to achieve stylistic effects of objectivisation and abstraction (Hohenstein 2012, Kameyama 2012), at the expense of subjective intentionality or volitionality. Crosslinguistically, there are various ways of doing this (Malchukov & Siewierska 2011, Malchukov & Ogawa 2011; Akar 2011, Csató 2010 for Turkish, Jahani & Viberg 2010, Jahani, Axenov, Delforooz & Nourzaei 2010, Jahani, Delforooz & Nourzaei 2012 for Iranian). Relevant functional concepts referred to in this connection are subject- and agenthood (Siewierska 2008a, b), actant representation (Johanson 1990), agent demotion (Blevins 2003), and specificity (Johanson 2006).

The present study approaches the data from two sides: looking at impersonal passives in the Turkish version in oder to see how they were rendered in the Kurmanji Kurdish translation and looking at impersonal verbal nouns in the Kurdish versions in order to see which strategy was used in the Turkish original. Example (1) illustrates one instance of verbal noun use in the Kurdish version (1b) where a passive was used in the Turkish version (1a):

(1a) *Çalışmanın üçüncü ve dördüncü bölümünde, bir saha çalışması ve bunun **değerlendirilmesi** yer almaktadır* 'Chapters three and four contain a field study and its evaluation' (evaluate-PAS-VN-PSS3)

(1b) *Beşên sêyem û çarem ên xebatê hatine terxankirin ji bo lêkolîneke meydanî û **nirxandineke** li ser vê lêkolînê* 'Chapters three and four contain a field study and its evaluation' (evaluate-VN)

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