Annette Herkenrath

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/Ogawa 2011; Akar 2011 for Turkish; Jahani/Viberg 2010 for Iranian). Relevant functional concepts referred to in this connection are subject- and agenthood (Siewierska 2008), actant representation (Johanson 1990), agent demotion (Blevins 2003), and specificity (Johanson 2006).

Data analysis so far suggests that the preferred strategy for impersonalisation in Turkish are passives, whereas Kurmanji Kurdish prefers nominalisation. The present study makes use of the parallel structure of the corpus in order to compare functional equivalents. The data are approached 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) Turkish

Çalışma-nın   üçüncü   ve   dördüncü   bölüm-ün-de,   bir   saha
study-GEN   third   and   fourth   chapter-PSS3-LOC   one   field

*çalışma-sı   ve   bunun   **değerlendir-il-me-si**   yer   al-mak-ta-dır.*
study-PSS3   and   this-GEN   evaluate-PAS-VN-PSS3   place   take-VN-LOC-COP

'In Chapters three and four of the study a field study and its evaluation take place'

(1b) Kurmanji Kurdish

Beş-ên   sêyem   û   çarem   ên   xebat-ê   hat-in-e
chapter-EZF.PL   third   and   fourth   EZF.PL   study-OBL.F   come.PST-PL-DIR

*terxankir-in   ji.bo   lêkol-în-eke   meydan-î   û   **nirxand-in-eke***
dedicate-VN   for   study-VN-EZF.IND.F   field-ADJ   and   evaluate-VN-EZF.IND.F

li.ser   vê   lêkol-în-ê.
about   this-OBL.F   research-VN-OBL.F

'The third and fourth chapters of the study have been dedicated to a field study and an evaluation of this research'

References

Akar, Didar (2011): Impersonalization and agency: The linguistic strategies of distancing the self from traumas. In: Erguvanlı Taylan, Eser/Rona, Bengisu (eds.): Puzzles of Language. Essays in Honour of Karl Zimmer. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (Turcologica 86), pp. 187-200.

Blevins , James P. (2003): Passives and impersonals. In: Journal of Linguistics 39, pp. 473-520.

Hohenstein, Christiane (2012): 'Vergegenständlichung im Wissen': Ein Typ unpersönlicher Konstruktionen im Japanischen. In: Redder, Angelika/Ogawa, Akio/Kameyama, Shinichi (eds.): "Unpersönliche Konstruktionen": Prädikatsformen funktional und sprachübergreifend betrachtet. München: Judicum, pp. 11–31.

Jahani, Carina/Viberg, Åke (eds.) (2010): Impersonal constructions. Special Issue, Orientalia Suecana LIX (University of Uppsala).

Johanson, Lars (1990): Subjektlose Sätze im Türkischen. In: Brendemoen, Bernt (ed.): Altaica Olsoensia. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, pp. 199–218.

Johanson, Lars (2006): Two approaches to specificity. In: Kulikov, Leonid/Malchukov, Andrej/de Swart, Peter (eds.): Case, valency and transitivity. Amsterdam: Benjamnis (Studies in Language Companion 77), pp. 225–247.

Kameyama, Shinichi (2012): "Unpersönliche Konstruktionen" in deutschen und japanischen populärwissenschaftlichen Zeitungstexten. In: Redder, Angelika/Ogawa, Akio/Kameyama, Shinichi (eds.): "Unpersönliche Konstruktionen": Prädikatsformen funktional und sprachübergreifend betrachtet. München: Judicum, pp. 64–78.

Malchukov, Andrej L./Ogawa, Akio (2011): Towards a typology of impersonal constructions: A semantic approach. In: Siewierska, Anna/Malchukov, Andrej (eds.): Impersonal constructions: a cross-linguistic perspective. Amsterdam: Benjamins (Studies in Language Companion 124), pp. 19–56.

Siewierska, Anna (2008a): Introduction: Impersonalization from a subject-centred vs. agent-centred perspective. In: Transactions of the Philological Society 106(2), pp. 1–23.

Siewierska, Anna (2008b): Ways of impersonalizing: Pronominal vs. verbal strategies. In: De Los Ángeles Gómez Gonzáles, María/Mackenzie, J. Lachlan/Gonzáles Álvarez, Elsa M. (eds.): Current trends in contrastive linguistics: Functional and cognitive perspectives. Amsterdam: Benjamins (Studies in Functional and Structural Linguistics 60), pp. 3–26.

Contact information

Annette Herkenrath

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

annher3@amu.edu.pl