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Autor: Csató, Éva Á.

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Kontakt/Contact

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SUB Göttingen
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✉ info@digizeitschriften.de

Workshop “Optative in Turkic” at the 17th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics

Éva Á. Csató

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This report reviews the presentations held at a workshop on the optative mood in Turkic languages organized by Irina Nevskaya and Lars Johanson at the 17th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics, September 3–5, 2014, in Rouen, France.

Éva Á. Csató, *Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, Box 635, SE-751 26 Uppsala. E-mail: eva.csato@gmail.com.*

The topic of the workshop organized by Irina Nevskaya and Lars Johanson at the *17th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics*, September 3–5, 2014, in Rouen, France, was the Turkic optative mood, which expresses wish or hope.¹

The organizers motivated their choice of topic by the interest in the optative mood within typological linguistics (Bybee et al. 1994, van der Auwera & Schalley 2004, Dobrušina 2001, 2007). The optative is a type of volitional mood, which also includes imprecative, desiderative, voluntative, (co)hortative, imperative, jussive and other forms. Modal categories are generally less studied in Turkic languages. Lars Johanson has devoted several papers to the description of Turkic moods; see, for instance, the overview in Johanson (2009). He has also presented a new framework for describing Turkic volitional moods (Johanson 2014b), which was recently applied by Aynur Abish in a comprehensive monograph on modality in Kazakh (Abish 2016).

The optative mood deserves special interest as it has undergone noteworthy developments in Turkic languages. On the one hand, as described by Johanson (2014a), the optative has declined in certain Oghuz varieties. On the other hand, in some languages it has gained a special syntactic function as a kind of “subjunctive”, a development induced by the influence of non-Turkic contact languages (Johanson 2011, 2013, 2014a).

The aim of the workshop in Rouen was to explore the optative category in several Turkic languages, to describe language-specific meanings, to trace the paths of the historical development of the marker {-GAy}, and to inspire linguists to study the optative mood in their data.

1 See also Akıncı (2015), a report on the *17th International Conference on Turkish Linguistics*, September 3–5, 2014, Rouen, France.

In his introductory talk, *Lars Johanson* pointed out that one needs to be very careful when speaking of “optatives”. Certain typologists try to establish a cross-linguistic modal category called “Optative”, a volitional super-mood expressing wish and hope. A category of this kind is a construct of typologists and should not be confused with any existing language-specific mood. One problem is that the semantics of the super-mood is not sufficiently defined. It is the result of a top-down deductive approach, which first defines a superordinate category and then breaks it down into subcategories. More precise definitions and descriptions are needed. We must be explicit about whether we are speaking of an “Optative” supercategory or a language-specific or family-specific category.

Turkic linguistics needs a bottom-up approach that pieces together superordinate categories from a diversity of empirical data. Kazakh possesses a morphological mood expressed by a marker {-GAy}, e.g. *Kör-gey-min* {see-OPT-1SG}. It may be called an optative because its central function is the expression of wish or hope. A comparison with sister languages reveals similar morphological moods with similar semantic profiles. For instance, one may find that the Kazakh mood expressed by {-GAy} has a close equivalent in the Azeri marker {-(y)A}, e.g. *Gör-ä-m* ‘I will see’. One can now go back in history up to the earliest documented stages of Turkic, where the same formal and semantic similarities can be observed. The formal differences can be explained as resulting from regular diachronic phonetic shifts. In this way, a Proto-Turkic optative can be established. The optative becomes a family-specific volitional mood, a genealogically inherited category going back to a formal and semantic prototype, which has developed in various ways in different Turkic languages. The optative in this sense is represented by morphemes whose forms can be explained by regular sound changes. If we have enough historical data, we can follow its formal and semantic development over time.

The linguist may, however, find that voluntative markers such as Kirghiz and Kazakh {-(A)yIn} or Turkish {-(y)AyIm} express wish and hope as well, e.g. Kirghiz *Kör-öyün* ‘I will see’, and Turkish *Gör-eyim* ‘I will/shall see’, ‘Let me see’. Some modern grammarians feel free to set up “optative” paradigms consisting of both optative and voluntative forms. This approach may be licensed by certain descriptive principles, though it is historically incorrect.

Marcel Erdal in his presentation outlined the historical development of the marker {-GAy}, which appears with modal content in most modern North-Western, North-Eastern, and South-Eastern Turkic languages, and described its use in various Oghuz dialects. He argued that {-GAy} denotes a pure future in Old Uyghur, whereas its use in a few runiform sources is less clear. The marker has the variant {-GA} in Karakhanid and some Middle Turkic sources. As to the Oghuz varieties, {-GA} survives in Khorasan Turkic, spoken in Eastern Iran. As expected, {-GA} changes to {-(y)A} in West Oghuz.

Monika Rind-Pawłowski dealt with the optative category in Northern Azeri. She described various patterns for expressing optative semantics and mentioned contact phenomena that may have triggered the development of some syntactic patterns. In

Northern Azeri, in contrast to Turkish, the optative is still highly productive, even though it has undergone a functional shift towards a subjunctive, according to the Persian pattern *be-* + present stem (Lazard 1992). The Azeri optative is mainly used to form complement clauses to certain predicates expressing will, possibility, or necessity. In Southern (Iranian) Azeri, this strategy of subordinate clause construction has already replaced the use of infinitives or verbal nouns (cf. Kiral 2001: 81 ff.). In Northern Azeri, there is still a choice between verbal nouns and optatives, e.g. between a left-branching *Gəlmək istəyirəm* 'I want to come' and a right-branching *Istəyirəm gələm* 'I want to come' modal clauses.

Saule Tazhibaeva presented a paper co-authored with *Irina Nevskaya*, describing optative forms in Kazakh and comparing them to corresponding forms in Central Asian and Siberian Turkic languages. Kazakh has a complicated system of forms expressing volition. The optative mood in {-GAY} is dedicated to expressing the speaker's wishes. Unlike many other Turkic languages, Siberian Turkic has preserved the optative in {-GAY}. However, it functions as a permissive in Shor (Nasilov et al. 2001), a future in Tuvan, a potential in Yakut, etc.

Amine Memtimin focused on the semantic and formal aspects of Modern Uyghur volitional constructions. She presented examples of volition expressed by conditional verb forms, to which the particle *kän* < *ikän* or the past copula *idi* can be added. She also dealt with expressions based on {-GAN} *bolsa* + *ču* and described the use of the optative in {-GAY} plus the copula *idi*, contracted to forms such as *git(t)i*, which express wishes combined with worry.

Zinaida Waibel, who could not attend the conference, had prepared a paper on the marker {-GAY} and its semantics in Khakas.

The presentations will be published in *Turkic Languages*.

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