

THE FOUNDATIONS OF TURKISH WORD FORMATION: A SEMANTIC APPROACH

Ismoilova Charos Shuhrat kizi

*English teacher, Independent researcher,
University of Economics and Pedagogy, Samarkand kampus
Samarkand, Uzbekistan*

Abstract: This paper investigates the foundational principles of Turkish word formation through a semantic lens. Turkish, as an agglutinative language, employs a rich system of affixation to generate words and express grammatical relationships. This study explores how semantic relations govern the morphological processes involved in creating new lexical items, emphasizing the interplay between meaning and structure. By examining derivational and inflectional morphology, compounding, and the role of semantics in affix selection, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Turkish morphology. The analysis is based on descriptive data from standard Turkish and theoretical insights from semantic morphology and agglutinative language studies. The findings highlight the centrality of semantic coherence in affixation and word formation, contributing to broader linguistic theories on morphology and semantics.

Keywords: Semantic lens, affixation, inflectional/derivational morphology, compounding and semantic coherence.

Introduction. Word formation is a fundamental process in all languages, enabling speakers to expand their lexicon and communicate new ideas effectively. In agglutinative languages such as Turkish, word formation involves the systematic addition of affixes to roots, where each affix typically encodes a single grammatical or semantic function (Lewis, 2000). Unlike fusional languages, the semantic transparency in Turkish morphology offers a unique opportunity to study the relationship between form and meaning. This paper focuses on the semantic underpinnings of Turkish word formation. By adopting a semantic approach, it examines how meanings guide the selection and combination of morphological elements, shaping the structure of new words. The significance of this research lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of how meaning and morphology interact in agglutinative languages, which has implications for theoretical linguistics, language teaching, and natural language processing.

Turkish Morphology and Word Formation: Turkish is classified as an agglutinative language, characterized by the linear addition of affixes that each express a distinct grammatical or semantic meaning (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005). The morphological system divides into inflection, which marks grammatical categories like tense and case, and derivation, which creates new lexical items (Hawkins, 1991). Studies by Lewis (2000) and Kornfilt (1997) provide comprehensive descriptions of Turkish affixation, highlighting its productivity and regularity.

Semantic morphology studies the meaning of morphological processes and how semantics influences the formation and interpretation of words (Dressler, 1985; Booij, 2010). In Turkish, the semantic transparency of affixes means that word formation can be systematically analyzed based on semantic functions such as causation, agency, negation, and plurality (Aksu-Koç, 1988).

Semantic Approaches to Turkish Word Formation: Several scholars have emphasized the role of semantics in Turkish morphology. For example, Kerslake (1997) examines how semantic roles influence derivational suffixes, while Johanson (1998) discusses semantic constraints in compounding. Semantic approaches contribute to understanding not just the structural but also the functional motivations behind morphological patterns.

Methodology. This research employs a qualitative approach grounded in semantic and morphological analysis of Turkish word formation patterns. Data is drawn primarily from standard Turkish corpora, dictionaries, and descriptive grammars. Selected examples illustrate key processes including affixation, compounding, and conversion. The semantic functions of affixes are analyzed in terms of their contribution to word meaning and structure. Identifying common **Turkish affixes and their semantic functions.** Analyzing derivational and inflectional processes through semantic categories. Examining compounding patterns with a focus on semantic relations between constituents.

Results and Discussion. Turkish affixes are semantically motivated morphemes that modify the root's meaning or grammatical function. For instance, the causative suffix "-dir" adds a causative meaning ("to make/do something"), as in yat "to lie down" → yat-dir- "to make lie down" (Lewis, 2000). The semantic clarity of affixes facilitates compositional meaning, where the overall meaning of a word results predictably from the meanings of its parts (Aksu-Koç, 1988). This contrasts with fusional languages where morphemes often encode multiple semantic features simultaneously.

Derivational Morphology: Semantic Roles and Functions

Derivational affixes in Turkish denote semantic categories such as agency (-ci), instrumentality (-mak), negation (-me), and reciprocity (-ş). For example:

- yaz (write) + -cı = yazıcı (writer, agent)
- oku (read) + -ma = okuma (reading, nominalization)

Each affix introduces a clear semantic modification, illustrating the systematic nature of derivation.

Inflectional Morphology and Semantic Marking

Inflectional suffixes encode grammatical meanings such as tense, person, number, and case without altering the lexical category. The semantic roles of these suffixes are straightforward; e.g., the plural suffix "-ler" marks plurality semantically. Example: kitap (book) → kitaplar (books)

Semantic Relations in Turkish Compounding. Compounding in Turkish involves combining two or more roots or stems, often with semantic relations like possession, cause-effect, or instrument-agent (Johanson, 1998). For example:

- başbakan ("head minister") combines baş (head) + bakan (minister)
- el kitabı ("hand book" = manual)

The semantic relationship between components influences the interpretation and acceptability of compounds.

Semantic Constraints and Productivity. Semantic constraints influence which affixes or compounds are productive in Turkish. Some affixes apply only to verbs expressing change of state, while others require agentive or instrumentive roles (Kornfilt, 1997). These constraints ensure semantic coherence and prevent arbitrary word formation.

The Turkish case supports models of morphology that integrate semantics centrally, such as Distributed Morphology and Construction Morphology (Booij, 2010). The semantic transparency and regularity found in Turkish morphology provide empirical support for theories emphasizing the interface between meaning and form.

Conclusion. This study highlights that the foundations of Turkish word formation rest heavily on semantic principles. The agglutinative structure of Turkish allows for a clear mapping between morphological form and meaning, with affixes and compounds systematically encoding semantic roles and relations. Understanding this semantic basis enriches theoretical models of morphology and informs applied fields such as language pedagogy and computational linguistics.

Future research could explore cross-dialectal variation in Turkish morphology, psycholinguistic processing of Turkish affixes, and applications in natural language processing systems.

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