

Cases in the Turkish Language

Grammar – Cases

Turkish is a gender-neutral language. Unlike romantic languages, grammatical gender doesn't exist in the Turkish Language. The sex of a person can't be understood unless it is indicated. For example, specific words exist to indicate the gender of a person or animal.

Because of the formality in the work environment, “Bay” and “Bayan” must be used to indicate gender. They are the equivalents for “Erkek” and “Kadın”, respectively.

By adding “ler” or “lar” to singular words, you create plural words.

e.g. Bay (singular), Baylar (plural), Baylar, Bayanlar, Beyler.

Nouns in Turkish follows a grammatical case system. Languages such as Latin, Ancient Greek, German, Finnish, Russian and Turkish have their own grammatical cases whereas some of the languages spoken worldwide have lost this feature. Six different cases exist in Turkish. (However, this number can rise to about fifteen in Finnish and Hungarian). Most of the languages that have a grammatical case do not need a fixed word order because of these cases.

We have investigated grammatical cases on a word ending with a consonant so far. As long as the absolute form of the noun ends with a consonant, the same rules are applied. In other words, to form a case, the suffix of the case is simply attached to the ending. However, some words end with a vowel and make this process a little bit harder.

To form the case, a “buffer-letter” must be attached before the case suffix. This “buffer-letter” is “y” for genitive; “n” for dative and accusative. The function of this buffer-letter is to prevent the word from containing two subsequent vowels. Recall that words in Turkish never contain two vowels next to each other unless it is a loanword.

Uses of the Cases: The terminology might seem intimidating. However, these examples demonstrate the functions of the cases in an easy way.

Fusional languages such as Latin has also a case system also but it’s a little bit different than Turkish. Turkish cases are more similar to the English preposition in this sense.

The absolute form corresponds to the nominative, vocative, and indefinite accusative cases.

1. Nominative case: If a noun is the subject of the verb ‘to be’, then the absolute form of that noun is used.
2. Vocative case: Even though some experts don’t consider vocative case as a case, we assume that it exists and is a case.
3. Indefinite accusative case: We mentioned in the previous lesson that Turkish does not use the definite article. Instead, the accusative case

suffix is used to indicate whether the noun is definite or not. If the noun is indefinite, the absolute form is used.

The accusative case.

1. There are three demonstrative adjectives in Turkish whereas there are two in English; Bu, Şu, O. When the object is defined by one of them in a sentence, the accusative form must be used.

NOT: to define objects near to you, “Bu” is used. (eng. This)

To define objects far from you, “O” is used. (eng. That)

“Şu”, is used to define objects that are neither far nor near, but just between.

The dative form of these adjectives are: Burada, şurada, orada. The same sorting also exists in Spanish Language.

2. If a person, name of a place or demonstrative pronoun is the object in the sentence, the accusative form is used. (For the large majority).

The genitive case

The suffix of the genitive case indicates a possession relationship.

The dative case

1. Indirect objects (tr. dolaylı nesne) take the suffix of dative case.

< Indirect object: the noun phrase that is affected by the reflexive verb. >

Oyuncak (eng. toy) is a direct object whereas Mehmet, in the sentence, is the indirect object.

2. The suffix of the dative case gives places the meaning of “whither”.

(whither: to what place)

3. Verbs taking the dative case suffix indicates a purpose.
4. To describe actions you are using, the dative case suffix must be attached to gerundial.

This list can get longer because so many verbs in Turkish require the dative form. Some of them are: to mention (değinmek), to continue (devam etmek), to promise (söz vermek), to swear (yemin etmek) etc.

The locative case

1. Locative case suffix indicates location.
2. Locative case suffix can be attached to a long/short period of time.

The ablative case

According to OED, the word “ablative” comes from middle French < Latin “ablativus” from ablatus “taken away,” past participle of auferre “carrying away,” from ab- “away”

1. The suffix of ablative case indicates the point of departure.
2. “Through” in English.
Example: Boğaz köprüsün-den mi geldiğiniz? (eng. Did you come through Bosphorus bridge?)
3. When comparing two things, the ablative case suffix is attached to the point of reference. (den, -dan)

4. When indicating a cause. < “Because of (that)” in English >
5. To indicate the partialness, the ablative case is used.
6. When describing an object, the suffix case is attached to the material from which the object is made.

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