

Question words as indefinite pronouns in Turkish

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Introduction

In many languages, there is a typological affinity between question words and indefinite pronouns. Thus, some indefinite pronouns are formally identical to question words or are derived from them. In some languages bare interrogatives – interrogatives without any marker – are used as indefinite pronouns (Haspelmath 1997: 170).

For example in Chinese *shuí* can mean both ‘who?’ and ‘someone’, and *shén me* both means ‘what?’ and ‘something, anything’ (Haspelmath 1997: 170). See the following examples.

<i>Shuí lái le?</i>	<i>Yǒu shuí zài qiāo mén.</i>
who come PAST	existing who be knock door
‘Who came?’	‘Someone is knocking the door.’
<i>Nǐ shén me shí jiān dào?</i>	<i>Nǐ shén me dōu bié shuō.</i>
you what time come	you what all not say
‘When will you come?’	‘You do not say anything.’

In Classical Greek, *tís*¹ is used in the meanings of ‘who?’ and ‘someone’. *Poū* has two senses such as ‘where?’ and ‘somewhere’ (Haspelmath 1997: 170).

<i>Tís érchetai?</i>	<i>Érchetai tis.</i>
‘Who is coming?’	‘Someone is coming.’
<i>Poū oikēi?</i>	<i>Oikēi pou.</i>
‘Where does he live?’	‘He lives somewhere.’

Turkish is one of the languages that use question words as indefinite pronouns mostly in combination with the hypothetical marker. In the following, I give examples of this widely used pattern.

Question words in hypothetical clauses

Hypothetical clauses are based on the hypothetical (also called conditional) form of a lexical verb or a copula. The hypothetical form of primary verbal stems is formed with the suffix *-sA*. The hypothetical form of the copula *ise* is attached to extended verbal stems.

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1 When the Greek pronouns are used as indefinite pronouns they are cliticized and become unaccented, i.e. *tis* and *pou*.

<i>gel-</i>	>	<i>gel-se</i> come-HYP3SG	
<i>geliyor</i>	>	<i>gel-iyor + ise</i>	= <i>gel-iyor-sa</i> come-PROG-COP.HYP3SG

Clauses based on a hypothetical marker may be used either as dependent or independent clauses. When a hypothetical clause is used as an independent clause, it expresses a wish. According to Brockelmann (1954: 378), *-sA* is the oldest Turkic modal form to express a wish. *-sA* was previously used as a volunative marker. The desiderative use is today infrequent (Johanson 2009: 491).

Sentences expressing a wish

Bu sabah güzel bir kahvaltı yap-sa-k.
this morning good a breakfast do-LV-HYP-1PL
'It would be nice to have a good breakfast this morning.'

Keşke zengin ol-sa-m!
if only rich be-HYP-1SG
'If only I were rich.'

Clauses based on a hypothetical marker can be used as questions. In this case, they express a deliberation about a possible action (Göksel & Kerslake 2005: 362). Such interrogative clauses are used when the speaker is uncertain concerning the choice. Thus, I prefer to call them consultative clauses. *Acaba* 'I wonder' may optionally be used in such clauses.

Consultative clauses

Bu akşam için ne pişir-se-k?
this evening for what cook-HYP-1PL
'I wonder what to cook tonight.'

Kim-e sor-sa-m acaba?
who-DAT ask-HYP-1SG I wonder
'I wonder whom I should ask.'

Consultative clauses can also be used as dependent conditional clauses.

Doğumgünü parti-n-e kim gel-se mutlu ol-ur-sun?
birthday party-POSS2SG-DAT who come-HYP3SG happy be-AOR-2SG
'Who should come to your birthday party so that you will be happy?'

Question words in dependent hypothetical clauses do not always convey an interrogative meaning. They can be used as indefinite pronouns meaning, e.g. 'whatever', 'whoever', 'whenever'. This usage is called a universal conditional clause by Göksel & Kerslake (2005: 505). This implies that there is no limit to the range of conditions. I prefer to call them hypothetical conditional clauses.

Hypothetical conditional clauses

Nere-ye git-se-m peş-im-den gel-ir.
 where-DAT go-HYP-1SG back-POSS1SG-ABL come-AOR3SG
 'Wherever I go, (s)he follows me.'

Ne iste-r-se yap-ar-ım.
 what want-AOR-COP.HYP3SG do-AOR-1SG
 'I do whatever (s)he wants.'

Ne zaman o-nu hatırla-sa-m mutlu ol-ur-um.
 when (s)he-ACC remember-HYP-1SG happy be-AOR-1SG
 'Whenever I remember her/him, I will be happy.'

Question words may be used in idiomaticalized phrases such as *ne-yse ne* [what-COP.HYP what] 'whatever, I do not mind', *kim-se kim* [who-COP.HYP who] 'whoever, I do not mind', *kaç-sa kaç* [how many-COP.HYP how many] 'how many, I do not mind', *nasıl-sa nasıl* [how-COP.HYP how] 'however, I do not mind'.

Idiomatic usage

Dalgaların getirdiği bu ışık yatak odamızın ışığı mı?

Ne-yse ne, de-di-m kendi kendi-m-e.
 what-COP.HYP what say-PAST-1SG own self-POSS1SG-DAT

'Is this light, which the waves bring, the light of our bedroom? "Whatever it is, I do not mind", I said to myself.' (Edgü 1996: 32)

"Buyurun, siz yazıverin lütfen, bir yanlışlık olmasın" – dedi. Müşteri velinimetti...

Bu adam kim-se kim-di.
 this man who-COP.HYP who-COP.PAST3SG

'"Here you are, please write yourself, I do not want there to be any mistake" – he said. The customer was the benefactor. Whoever he might be.' (Eray 1991: 34)

Question words also may be used in other kind of idiomaticalized phrases, for instance, *hangi-si ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [which-POSS3SG be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'no matter which', *kim ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [who be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'whoever', *nasıl ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [how be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'however', *ne ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [what be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'whatever happens', *nere ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [where be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'anywhere', *nere-de ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [where-LOC be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'anywhere', *nere-ye ol-ur-sa ol-sun* [where-DAT be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL] 'anywhere'.

Biri ol-sun da kim ol-ur-sa ol-sun.
 someone be-VOL also who be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL
 'There should be one, whoever (s)he is.'

Nasıl ol-ur-sa ol-sun üstesinden gel-ecek-tir.
 how be-AOR-COP.HYP3SG be-VOL handle-FUT-COP.PRES3SG
 'However it is, (s)he can handle it.'

Some analogue forms in other Turkic languages

In Eastern Old Turkic, interrogative pronouns can be used as indefinite pronouns meaning ‘anyone’, ‘anything’, ‘anywhere’, and ‘any’ (Erdal 2004: 210). They can also be used together with hypothetical markers. Erdal also mentions that question words in hypothetical conditional clauses have an indefinite meaning. See Erdal’s example, in which *kayuda* ‘where’ and *kaçan* ‘when’ are used in the senses ‘anywhere’ and ‘any time’ respectively (Erdal 2004: 218).

birök kayuda kaçan yalañok aźunınta tugmakı bolsar ymä...
 ‘even if, however, he should anywhere at any time be born in a human birth form ... (U II 29, 11–12).’ (Erdal 2004: 218)

Bulut also observes that hypothetical markers are used in generalizing clauses, a borderline structure in Old Eastern Turkic that displays features of both relativization and conditional construction.

Old Eastern Turkic
Kim qorq-sar yorı-nglar!
 who afraid-HYP3SG leave-IMP3PL
 ‘Those of you who are afraid may leave. / If some of you are afraid, they shall leave.’ (Bulut 2009: 36)

As in many other Turkic languages, in Karaim and Kazakh, question words can be used as indefinite pronouns.

Karaim
Kim men-i süb-sä da qutchar-ir-min a-ni
 who I-ACC love-HYP3SG and rescue-AOR-1SG (s)he-ACC
da kiplä-r-min a-ni kim bil-sä
 and strengthen-AOR-1SG (s)he-ACC who know-HYP3SG
šem-im-ni.
 name-POSS1SG-ACC
 ‘Whoever loves me, I will rescue her/him and whoever knows my name, I will strengthen her/him.’ (Csató 2011: 175)

Kazakh
Ol qašan kel-se de bol-a ber-e-di.
 (s)he when come-HYP3SG also be-CONV AUX-PRES-3SG
 ‘Whenever (s)he comes, it is possible.’ (Zhang 2004: 230)

In Kashkay, however, question words are not used as indefinite pronouns. Instead, the form *her*+noun expresses the meaning ‘whatever, whoever, etc’.

Här yer-ä ged-ir-äm qulunj-um-nän gäl-ir.
 all place-DAT go-PRES-1SG shoulder-POSS1SG-ABL come-PRES3SG
 ‘Wherever I go, (s)he follows me.’

Lexicalized forms

Kimse

The indefinite pronoun *kimse* ‘someone, somebody, anyone, anybody, no one, nobody’ is based on the question word *kim* ‘who’ and the hypothetical form of the copula *ise*.

<i>kim ise</i>	>	<i>kimse</i>
who-COP.HYP		INDEF.PRON

Kimse is a pronoun, that can take nominal suffixes.

<i>Kimse-yi</i>	<i>gör-dü-n</i>	<i>mü?</i>
anyone-ACC	see-PAST-2SG	QP
‘Have you seen anybody?’		

With negation, *kimse* is interpreted as ‘no one’. The negation can be marked by *mA*, *değil* or *yok*.

<i>Kimse-yi</i>	<i>gör-me-di-m.</i>	<i>Kimse</i>	<i>hasta</i>	<i>değil.</i>
anyone-ACC	see-NEG-PAST-1SG	anyone	sick	not
‘I did not see anyone.’		‘No one is sick.’		

<i>Burada</i>	<i>kimse</i>	<i>yok.</i>
here	anyone	not
‘No one is here.’		

The negation of *kimse* may be reinforced with *hiç* or *hiçbir kimse*.

<i>Hiç(bir)kimse</i>	<i>ben-i</i>	<i>ziyaret-e</i>	<i>gel-me-di.</i>
no anyone	I-ACC	visit-DAT	come-NEG-PAST3SG
‘Absolutely no one visited me.’			

Adverbs based on question words

Some question words combined with the copula particle *ise* are lexicalized as adverbs, for instance, *nasıl-sa* [how-COP.HYP] ‘in any case, whether you want it or not, like it or not’, *neden-se* [why-COP.HYP] ‘for some reason or other’, *nere-de-yse* [where-LOC-COP.HYP] ‘almost, nearly, pretty soon, any moment’, and *ne-yse* [what-COP.HYP] ‘in any case, at any rate, anyway/never mind!’. See the following examples.

<i>Yarın</i>	<i>nasıl-sa</i>	<i>okul-a</i>	<i>git-me-yeceğ-im.</i>
tomorrow	how-COP.HYP	school-DAT	go-NEG-FUT-1SG
‘Whatever happens/in any case, I will not go to school tomorrow.’			

<i>Neden-se</i>	<i>kapı-yı</i>	<i>hız-la</i>	<i>çarp-ıp</i>	<i>çık-tı.</i>
why-COP.HYP	door-ACC	quick-WITH	slam-CONV	leave-PAST3SG
‘For some reason (s)he slammed the door and left.’				

Kuş nerede-yse don-uyor-du.
 bird where-COP.HYP freeze-PROG-COP.PAST3SG
 'The bird was almost frozen.'

Ne-yse, bu iş de bit-ti.
 what-COP.HYP this job also end-PAST3SG
 'Anyway, this job is done.'

Kimi

Some Turkish indefinite pronouns such as *çoğ-u* [many-POSS3SG] 'most of' and *bir-i* [one-POSS3SG] 'somebody, someone' are formed with the third-person possessive suffix (s). *Kim-i* [who-POSS3SG] 'some' is a neologism formed by analogy with these pronouns. It was created as a substitute for *bazı* 'some'. *Kimi* is used attributively in the sense 'some'.

Kimi insan-lar dedikodu yap-ma-yı sev-er.
 some person-PL gossip do-INF-ACC like-AOR3SG
 'Some people like to gossip.'

Kimi şarkı-lar unut-ul-maz.
 some song-PL forget-PASS-NEG.AOR3SG
 'Some songs are unforgettable.'

The doubled form *kimi ... kimi ...* is used in the contrastive meaning 'some ... (where-as) others ...'.

Kimi kitap oku-yor, kimi müzik dinli-yor.
 some book read-PRES3SG some music listen-PRES3SG
 'Some are reading books, some are listening to music.'

Kimi ... kimi ... can also be used in the meaning 'sometimes'.

Sabır bir başarı-ysa, kimi başar-ıyor-um,
 patience a success-COP.HYP3SG sometimes success-PRES-1SG
kimi başar-a-mı-yor-um.
 sometimes success-PSB.NEG-PRES-1SG
 'If patience is a form of success, sometimes I succeed, sometimes I do not.' (Uygur 1999: 148)

The forms based on *kimi* and a possessive marker, for instance, *kimi-si* [some-POSS3SG] 'some of them' and *kimi-miz* [some-POSS1PL] 'some of us' are used as non-attributive pronouns.

Kimi-miz çay iç-me-yi sev-mez.
 some-POSS1PL tea drink-INF-ACC like-NEG.AOR3SG
 'Some of us do not like to drink tea.'

Other indefinite pronouns based on question words

The question word *kaç* combined with *bir* functions as an indefinite pronoun: *birkaç* ‘few, some, several’. With the third-person possessive marker, *birkaç-ı* [some-POSS3SG], it means ‘a few of, some of, several of’.

Birkaç yıl önce bu kitab-ı oku-du-m.
 some year ago this book-ACC read-PAST-1SG
 ‘Some years ago, I read this book.’

Öğretmen öğrenci-ler-in birkaç-ı-nı çağır-dı.
 teacher student-PL-GEN some-POSS3SG-ACC call-PAST3SG
 ‘The teacher called some of students.’

Another lexicalized question word, *herhangi*, carries the meaning ‘whichever, whatever’ attributively. The form *herhangi* can not be used without *bir* or *biri*. The new forms *herhangi bir*, which means ‘any’, and *herhangi bir-i* [any-POSS3SG], which means ‘any of, anyone’, express indefiniteness.

Yol-dan geç-en herhangi biri-ne sor-abil-ir-sin.
 way-ABL pass-PART anyone-DAT ask-PSB-AOR-2SG
 ‘You can ask anyone who passes through the street.’

It is also used with the third-person singular possessive marker such as *herhangi bir-i-si* [any-POSS3SG-POSS3SG] ‘anybody else’.

O artık ben-im için herhangi biri-si.
 (s)he any more I-GEN for anyone-POSS3SG
 ‘(S)he is, to me, now like anybody else.’

Conclusion

In Turkish, like in many other languages, some items based on question words are used as indefinite pronouns. In Turkish, most of these indefinites are related to their use in hypothetical constructions. Question words in independent so-called consultative clauses based on hypothetical markers have question meanings. Question words in dependent hypothetical conditional clauses can either have question meanings or be used as indefinite pronouns. Some question words are lexicalized as indefinite pronouns such as *kimse*, *kimi*, *herhangi* and *birkaçı*. Other question words with a hypothetical marker are used in idiomatic phrases such as *kimse kim*, *neyse ne*, *kaçsa kaç*.

Abbreviations

ABL	Ablative case	LOC	Locative case
ACC	Accusative case	LV	Light verb
AOR	Aorist	NEG	Negation
AUX	Auxiliary verb	PART	Participle
CONV	Converb marker	PASS	Passive
COP.HYP	Hypothetical of the copula	PAST	Past
COP.PAST	Copula past	PL	Plural
COP.PRES	Copula present	POSS	Possessive
DAT	Dative case	PRES	Present
FUT	Future	PROG	Progressive
GEN	Genitive case	PSB	Possibility
HYP	Hypothetical	QP	Question particle
IMP	Imperative	SG	Singular
INF	Infinitive	VOL	Voluntative
INDEF.PRON	Indefinite pronoun		

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