

A FUNCTIONAL  
APPROACH TO TURKISH  
GRAMMAR:  
MEANING,  
USAGE, AND STRUCTURE

**Author**

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2025, Girne



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## PREFACE

In the field of Teaching Turkish as a Foreign or Second Language (TFSL), the development of grammatical knowledge in learners occupies a central role. In the early stages of the discipline, instructional practices were predominantly grammar-focused, based on the assumption that Turkish could be effectively taught through explicit grammar instruction alone. However, subsequent research has demonstrated that a solely grammar-oriented approach is insufficient for achieving successful learning outcomes (Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). It has become evident that an effective TFSL approach must incorporate the communicative development of comprehension (receptive) and production (productive) skills (Hymes, 1972; Nunan, 1991, 2004). Without integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, the acquisition of the target language remains unattainable. Accordingly, instructional materials—including textbooks, workbooks, teacher’s guides, and supplementary reading and listening texts—must aim to foster these communicative competencies in learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Today, Turkish, as an agglutinative language, is in high demand among learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, particularly from Asia, Africa, the Balkans, and Russia. Modern Anatolian Turkish exhibits substantial phonological and structural similarities with the native languages of learners from Turkic republics. These languages often share syntactic patterns, lexical items, and word group structures, and their phonetic systems closely resemble that of Modern Anatolian Turkish. However, these features are not typically found in the native languages of learners from non-Turkic language backgrounds. For such learners, particularly those whose first languages differ markedly from Turkish in both origin and structure, phonetic distinctions present considerable challenges at the initial stages of learning. In these cases, it becomes imperative to incorporate grammar-focused activities into instructional materials designed for learners from non-Turkic linguistic backgrounds. Effective instruction for such learners must begin with the elimination of phonetic difficulties, necessitating the inclusion of alphabet instruction at the elementary level. This approach enables resolution of phonological challenges—especially with vowels

such as “ı, ö, ü”—frequently encountered by learners from linguistic communities such as Persian, Korean, and Arabic. Following this initial phase, subsequent grammar topics should be addressed in a systematic and progressive manner.

Explanations and analyses of linguistic components are traditionally found within grammar-focused studies. Classical grammar resources typically present grammatical topics in a structurally logical order; however, this sequencing often overlooks pedagogical concerns such as teachability or learner accessibility (Ellis, 2006; Thornbury, 1999). Instead, such arrangements reflect a formal linguistic progression rooted in descriptive or theoretical linguistics, which can hinder learners’ ability to benefit from these resources effectively (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Nunan, 1991). For example, a learner encountering a structure such as “-mAsI için” may struggle to locate and comprehend its function within traditional grammar books. Furthermore, learners may be exposed to a variety of grammatical constructions that are not immediately relevant to their current proficiency level, thereby increasing cognitive load and causing confusion. In contemporary foreign and second language pedagogy, there is an increasing demand for instructional approaches that emphasize functional sequencing of grammar topics over traditional structural or formal ordering (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Halliday, 1994; VanPatten, 2002). Both learners and instructors require accessible and pedagogically grounded resources that respond to practical learning needs. In particular, questions regarding the appropriate sequence of suffix instruction—such as which possessive or case markers should be introduced first, or whether the structure “ – Dan sonra” should precede “-DiktAn sonra”—necessitate the development of such functionally-oriented materials.

Functional grammar examines the connections between the elements of a language from the perspective of their communicative functions. While evaluating structures in terms of meaning and use, functional grammar seeks to explain how grammatical choices are motivated by context, what functions they serve within discourse, and why certain forms are preferred in specific textual environments (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013; Lock, 1996; Thompson, 2014). In this study, structures evaluated from the traditional perspective of Turkish grammar have not been addressed, nor have the classifications and definitions related to the features of Turkish grammar been included. Instead, the features of Turkish grammar have been evaluated according to their functional sequence in TFSL and have been exemplified functionally. Furthermore, all subtopics of Turkish grammar have been approached with this functional perspective.

The challenges encountered in learning and TFSL have been widely acknowledged, particularly regarding its agglutinative structure, vowel harmony, and flexible word order (Kerslake & Göksel, 2014; Kornfilt, 1997). In response, the classification and sequencing of topics in this book are aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to ensure standardization and pedagogical coherence (Council of Europe, 2001; Demirel, 2013; North, Ortega, & Sheehan, 2010 ). For example, while some topics are addressed under different headings in traditional grammar studies, they constitute a new topic heading in this study. In traditional grammar studies, the topic of tenses is examined under the heading of five basic tenses (aspect) and auxiliary moods, while in this study, it has been evaluated under the heading of day/week/month/season. Similarly, the topic of time expressions, such as hours, is often not included in traditional grammar studies. Although the subject of time, which can be analyzed in two groups as “now” and “past and future,” may not be considered difficult for native Turkish speakers, it can be a highly challenging topic for non-native learners if not approached functionally. This topic has been evaluated in this context in our study and explained with examples.

This study has been prepared in response to the need for pedagogically sound and level-appropriate materials in TFSL. It offers a comprehensive treatment of grammatical topics corresponding to the CEFR levels A1, A2, B1, and B2, following the principle of progression from simple to complex and grounded in the structural characteristics of Turkish. By addressing these topics functionally and considering the vocabulary specific to each level, the study aims to support both instructors and learners in achieving effective and meaningful language learning.

Although the book includes 212 consecutively numbered entries, these are not organized as conventional textbook “units.” Each number corresponds to a functional grammar topic that is selected and sequenced based on its communicative value and relevance for learners, rather than formal grammatical taxonomy. These topics are designed to be used flexibly, allowing both instructors and learners to navigate the material based on instructional priorities or learning goals. Numbering is retained solely for ease of reference throughout the book and should not be interpreted as a fixed instructional sequence.

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