

Forms of Predication in Two Turkic Languages:
Will the True Lexical Predicates Please Stand Up?

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There have been debates in the recent literature concerning which lexical categories are intrinsically predicates in which languages. For example, a long-standing tradition in both syntax and semantics claims that *all* lexical categories—verbs, nouns, and adjectives—can be predicates in themselves. Chierchia (1998) says that nouns are predicates in some languages but not others. In contrast to both of these, Baker (2003) claims that only verbs are intrinsically predicates in natural languages; nouns and adjectives can function as predicates only by combining with a predicative functional category, which I call Pred. My view provides a firm syntactic/semantic basis for the fundamental lexical category distinctions, and also fits well with the fact that copular verbs and particles must be used with predicate nominals and adjectives but not with verbs in English and many other languages (*Chris *(is) a linguist*, *Chris *(is) tall*, but *Chris works*).

But the distribution of copular elements is complex and highly variable across languages, and this can be used to challenge my view and support alternatives. For example, (some) tense and subject agreement markers attach directly to predicates of all categories in Turkish, potentially supporting the traditional view that all categories are predicative, at least in that language. Even more interesting, the Turkic language Sakha has a set of environments in which a copular verb must be used with a predicative nominal, but not with a predicative adjective or a verb. This is the case in embedded clausal complements, in past tense sentences, and in relative clauses (shown in (1)).

- (1) a. Sargy-ga kömölöh-ör kyys ‘the girl who helps Sargy’
Sargy-DAT help-AOR girl (verbal predicate)
- b. Sargy-ga interiehinej kyys ‘the girl who is interesting to Sargy’
Sargy-DAT interesting girl (adjectival predicate)
- c. Sargy-ga sirdjit *(boul-ar) kyys ‘the girl who is a guide for Sargy’
Sargy-DAT guide be-AOR girl (nominal predicate) (p. 258)

Vinokurova (2005) concludes from this that adjectives are one-place predicates, verbs are two (or more) place predicates, and only nouns are intrinsically nonpredicative.

In this paper, I argue that only verbs are intrinsic predicates in Turkish and Sakha, as in other languages, and that the variable distribution of the copula is due to other syntactic factors. In particular, the unusual distribution of the copula in Sakha can be attributed to Norvin Richards’s Distinctness Condition, which says that there cannot be two syntactic items of the same category in the same spell-out domain, because PF could not distinguish them for purposes of linearization. This is an issue for predicate nominal clauses in Sakha because Sakha has neither an overt Pred head nor an overt subordinating complementizer. Hence, when a nominal predication merges with a nominal head (as in relative clauses) or a nominalizing particle (as in complement clauses), a copular verb

must be included to avoid a violation of Distinctness. In contrast, Turkish has an overt C-like subordinating morpheme in complement clauses and relative clauses, thereby avoiding distinctness violations. Whether a copula is needed thus depends only on the affixation properties of the C-like morphemes, so no adjective-noun contrast is observed in Turkish. This account correctly predicts that a copula is needed even with adjectival predications in Sakha in the special case when the adjectival predication functions as the complement of an adjective, because the Distinctness Condition also applies to this configuration.

I conclude that English, Turkish, and Sakha do not differ in which lexical categories are inherently predicative and which are not: in all three languages, only verbs are predicates in their own right. However, this category difference is only one of several factors that determines the distribution of copular items on the surface; the distribution is also affected by the affixal requirements of particular morphemes (Turkish) and by Richards's Distinctness Condition (Sakha).