
A Brief Description on Impersonal Constructions in Uyghur

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Abstract: Impersonal constructions have been a regular topic of investigation in various languages which belong to different language families across the world. Discussions over Impersonal constructions would constitute main contribution to the theoretical study. Although impersonal constructions are the main characteristics of Uyghur, but it's been hardly noticed by theoretical linguists. With this research, I would like to put forward the idea that Uyghur also have a wide variety of impersonal constructions, the analysis of which would bring an interesting contribution to the typology of impersonality. Scholars conceive impersonal constructions in different terms, some apply morphological methods, and others adopt syntactic approaches. Whichever methodology they apply, it is unarguable that impersonal constructions are agentless by nature, in which the sentences may not have an overt subject. They are many varieties of types, such as agentless gerunds, agentless passives, existential sentences etc. Since Uyghur is a pro-drop language, omitting the pronominal subject also helps to form impersonal constructions. This paper provides a brief description on the types of impersonal constructions, explicates several ways of forming agentless sentences, and introduces main types of impersonal sentences in Uyghur.

Keywords: Impersonal Constructions, Uyghur, Typology and Formation

1. Introduction

Impersonal constructions have been a regular topic of investigation in Indo-European studies, and similar constructions have been described in languages spoken in various areas of the world and belonging to different language families. It had been widely discussed in Anna Siewierska [1, 2], Andrej Malchukov and Anna Siewierska [3], Andrej Malchukov and Akio Ogawa [4] etc.

Modern Uyghur is a direct descendant of old Uighur, which is spoken in western China. Even though Impersonal constructions are one of the major sentence types, we can rarely see exclusive description on them in Uyghur grammars. Some important works such as *Hazirqi Zaman Uyghur Tili* 'Modern Uyghur Grammar' [5, 6] didn't even mention it. Since most Uyghur Grammarians mainly focused on morphology, detailed information on sentence structures are scarce. In spite of that, there are two well-discussed papers on this topic in Uyghur with Chinese translations. They explained the impersonal constructions from different perspectives. General description on impersonal constructions was published by several linguists. See Xaliq NIYAZ [7], Zäynäp NIYAZ [8],

Niyaz TURDI [9], Cheng et al. [10], Hämit TÖMÜR [11] and Litip TOHTI [12]. Xaliq NIYAZ [7] mainly discussed sentence types in modern Uyghur and classified them according to their properties. He called one of these sentence types as *Igisiz Jümlä* 'subjectless sentence'. Here, he mainly implied the grammatical subject. Hämit TÖMÜR [11] and Cheng et al. [10] provide general information on Uyghur grammar, only scattered discussions on impersonal constructions can be found in these works. Litip TOHTI [12] thoroughly discussed the syntactic structure of Altaic languages in the frame of Generative Syntax. Page 139-140 includes some discussions on impersonal constructions, where he called them 'agentless sentence'. Most of these works cover general discussion without details.

2. General Description

Impersonal construction mainly points to agentless construction in Uyghur grammar. The notion 'impersonal' in Uyghur grammar books is disparate because some scholars conceive it in morphological terms, while others adopt syntactic approaches. Most Uyghur grammarians adopt syntactic approach. Nevertheless, they have slightly different

understandings on the nature of impersonal constructions.

The syntactic characterization of impersonality involves subjecthood. Impersonal constructions are seen to either lack a grammatical subject altogether or alternatively feature only a pleonastic (semantically empty) subject, be it overt one or

Üç	oquyuçi	därs-kä
three	student	class-DAT

‘It seems that three students are late to the class.’

Impersonal constructions are identified as having a main verb, normally differentiated for person, which either lacks any person specification altogether or invariably is third person [1]. E.g.:

U-niñ-ğa	gäp	öt-mä-ydu.
He-GEN-DAT	word	pass-NEG- NPAST

‘He is not persuasive.’

Impersonal passives, in turn, may not lack a thematic

Bu	yär-dä	jiq
this	place-LOC	many

‘It is said that one can earn a lot of money here.’

covert on [1]. E.g.:

Zal-da	konsert	bol-iwat-idu.
hall-LOC	concert	be-CONT-NPAST

‘A concert is being held in the hall.’

keçik-kän-däk	tur-idu.
be late- PARTICPL-EQU	stand-NPAST

subject but also involve a non-specified human agent, as may also infinitivals and constructions with an invariant 3Sg form of the verb [1]. E.g.:

Xät	yez-il-di.
letter	write-PASS-PAST

‘The letter is written.’

The impersonal use of the 3PL seems to occur only with speech act verbs, particularly in reporting rumors:

pul	tap-qili	bol-ar-miš.
money	earn- CONV	be-AOR-EVID

3. The Ways of Forming Agentless Constructions

Xaliq NIYAZ [7] suggested several fundamental ways of forming agentless constructions. It can be generalized as below:

1) Verbal noun (dative) + bol-. E.g:

Bundaq	ähwal-lar-ni	yänä	uçrit-iş-qa	bol-idu
such	situation-PL-ACC	again	encounter-VN-DAT	be-NPAST

‘This kind of situation can be seen again.’

Bu	yär-dä	tamaka	ček-iş-kä	bol-ma-ydu
this	place-LOC	cigarette	smoke-VN-DAT	be-NEG-NPAST

‘It is forbidden to smoke cigarette here.’

2) Verbal noun (dative) + toyra käl-. E.g:

Bu	mäsili-ni	tez	häl	qil-iş-qa	toyra kel-idu.
this	problem-ACC	quick	deal with	AUX-VN-DAT	must-NPAST

‘This problem should be dealt with quickly.’

3) Intensive adverbials+bol-. E.g:

Bundaq	yeñiliq-lar-ni	hämmä	yär-dä	kör-gili	bol-idu
such	new phenomenon-PL-ACC	all	place-LOC	see-CONV	be-NPAST

‘These new phenomenon can be seen everywhere.’

1) intensive adverbials+time adverbs+bol-. e.g:

Biz	käl-gili	ikki	yil	bol-di.
we	come-CONV	two	year	be-PAST

‘It has been two years since we have come.’

Hämit TÖMÜR [11] discussed several types of gerundive impersonals, whose predicates are expressed by the modal adjectives *şärt* ‘necessary’, *lazim* ‘should’, *keräk* ‘must’ or *mümkün* ‘possible, maybe’. E.g:

Waqit-qa	ri’ayä	qil-iş	keräk.
time-DAT	obey	AUX-VN	must

‘One must obey the time (one must be punctual).’

Ular-niñ	kel-iş-i	zörür.
they-GEN	come-VN-POSS.3sg	essential

‘It is essential for them to come.’

Biz	u	yär-gä	bar-mas-liq-imiz	mümkin.
we	that	place-DAT	go-NEG-NOML-POSS.1pl	may

‘We may not go there.’

When the gerund is in the dative case and combined with the construction *toyra käl-* ‘have to’, it produces subjectless sentence which indicate the need for the action to be carried out.

Bu	iş-ni	bügün	tügüt-iş-kä	toyra kel-idu.
this	work-ACC	today	finish-VN-DAT	have to-NPAST

‘This work must be completed today.’

When linked with the verb *bol-* ‘to be’, it indicates the possibility that the action expressed by the adverbial will be carried out. Such sentences are without subject.

Bu	iş-ni	ikki	kün-dä	tügät-kili	bol-idu.
this	work-ACC	two	day-LOC	finish-CONV	be-NPAST

‘It is possible to finish this job within two days.’

4. Main Types of Impersonal Sentences

There are several types of impersonal sentences: agentless sentences, incomplete sentences, existential/ dependent construction, modal sentences etc.

1) agentless sentences

The agent of these sentences are hardly identifiable, it only includes a core sentence which equals to predicate. e.g:

Qiyinçiliq	ald-i-da	arqı-ya	çekin-mä-s-lik	lazim.
difficulty	front-POSS.3sg--LOC	back-DAT	retreat-NEG-AOR-NOML	must

‘One must not retreat in front of the difficulty.’

Ay-ni	etäk	bilän	yep-ip	bol-ma-s.
moon-ACC	elbow	with	cover-CONV	be-NEG-AOR

‘It is impossible to cover the moon with the elbow. (One couldn’t hide the crystal-clear truth.)’

As Janet R. Aiken [13] pointed out, constructions lacking subject or verb or both are of a great variety of types, from the imperatives such as COME HERE and the omitted first person types WENT DOWN TOWN TODAY where it is difficult or impossible to construct a full sentence convincingly.

Such imperative sentence can also be impersonal in Uyghur. It is difficult to construct the agent of the sentence, since it does not agree with the agent-predicate agreement principle. E.g.:

Silär-niñ	yardim-iñlar-ya	köp	rähmät.
You.pl-GEN	help-POSS.2pl-DAT	many	thank

‘Many thanks to your help’

Heyt-iñiz-ya	mubaräk bol-sun.
Eid-POSS.2sg-DAT	happy to be-IMP.3sg

‘Happy ramazan festival!’

2) Incomplete sentence

Bu	taş-ni	bir	adäm	yalyuz	kötär-gili	bol-ma-ydu.
this	stone-ACC	one	man	alone	lift-CONV	be-NEG-NPAST

‘It is impossible for one man alone to lift this stone.’

Also a conditional sentence:

Sän	därhal	mañ-sa-ñ	bol-idu.
you	immediatly	go-COND-2SG	be-NPAST

These sentences are incomplete by nature, so it can be said non-sentence [13] since it is completely impracticable to supply the missing elements to make complete sentences.

This type exists in many languages, since short sentences agree with the economy principle. Main part of these sentences is indicated by nominative phrase, or it can be a short clause. e.g.:

Gugum	waqt-i
evening	time-POSS

‘at the nightfall’

Örkäşli-gän	äzim	därya.
surge-PARTCPL	big	sea

‘A surging river’

3) Existential sentence

In the agentless constructions he discussed, Litip TOHTI [12] pointed out that no human activity involves in these types of sentences, e.g.:

‘It is ok that you can go immediately.’

These sentences indicate appearing or existence of something. Only place adverbs appear in the beginning of the sentence.

E.g:

Öy-dä	adäm	bar/yoq.
house-LOC	human	have/haven't

‘there is/isn't anyone in the house.’

Bazar-da	adäm	köp-tur.
street-LOC	people	many-COP

‘There are lot of people on the street.’

Existence or appearing is the main information in these sentences. Therefore the place of existence must be spoken out first, otherwise it will become non-existential sentence.

4) Modal sentence

English modal verbs correspond to Uyghur modal adjectives. In these types, agent part is gerunds, predicate part is modal adjectives such as *mümkün* ‘possible’, *keräk-lazim* ‘must, should, have to’, *şärt* ‘should’.e.g.:

Öy-dä	adäm	yoq	bol-iş-i	mümkün.
house-LOC	man	no	be-VN- POSS.3sg	possible

‘May be there is no one in the house.’

In this type of sentences, the modal adjectives and gerunds constitute a strict agent-predicate construction, which loosens the relationship between possessor and dependant. As a result, the genitive case drops.

a.	Silär-niñ	ätä	kel-iş-iñlar- //	keräk
	You.pl-GEN	tomorrow	come-VB- 2pl.POSS	must

b. Silär- // ätä kelişñlar keräk

‘You must come tomorrow.’

5) impersonal passives

Langacker and Munro [14] argue persuasively that passive constructions are basically agentless, and that agentive phrases are derived from external sources. In this view, corresponding passive and active sentences are related semantically, but do not have a common conceptual (i.e. underlying) structure. They give evidence from a number of Uto-Aztecan languages and from Mojave, a Yuman language, to show that passives are basically impersonal constructions, derived 'from structures in which a clause with unspecified subject is embedded as subject complement to the predicate *BE*.

Explicit agents do occur with impersonal passives. Furthermore, when agents are not explicitly expressed, they are predictable from the context in a number of cases. Generally, agentless passives are derived in all cases by a transformation of indefinite agent deletion.

Passive constructions in Uyghur are produced by attaching the suffix *-n (-n/-in)* or *-l (-l/-i/-ul/-ül)*. Passive voice indicates that the grammatical subject of the sentence is actually the logical object of the original action.

Oyun	başla-n-di.
play	start-PASS-PAST

‘The play was begun.’

Xät	yez-il-di.
letter	write-PASS-PAST

Paşa išan	täripidin	orunla-n-ğan	naxşa	alqiş-qa	eriş-ti.
Pasha Ishan	by	play-PASS- PARTICPL	song	applause-DAT	obtain-PAST

‘The song performed by Pasha Ishan was applauded.’

‘The letter is written.’

The passive voice is used in situations:

i. It is difficult to point out the logical subject of the action.

Bu	maqalä	nahayiti	yaxşi	yez-il-iptu.
this	article	very	good	write-PASS-EVID

‘This article has been written extremely well.’

ii. It is unnecessary to point out the logical subject of the action:

Mämät	wäkil-lik-kä	sayla-n-di.
Mämät	representative-NOML-DAT	elect-PASS-PAST

‘Mämät has been elected as a representative.’

iii. It is necessary to especially accentuate the logical object.

Düşmän-lär	yoqit-il-di.
enemy-PL	exterminate-PASS-PST

‘The enemies were exterminated.’

iv. In some situations it is necessary to point out the logical subject at the same time as accentuating the logical object. In such cases, if the logical object is a person, people in general, or some organization, the noun which indicates that logical subject is combined the the proposition *täripidin* ‘by’ to form an adverbial modifier.

v. If the logical subject was something else, the role of the logical subject is indicated in different ways.

Dārizi-niñ	äynik-i	şamal-da	çeq-il-ip	kät-ti.
window-GEN	glass-POSS.3sg	wind-LOC	break-PASS-CONV	AUX-PAST

‘The window pane broke in the wind.’

5. Some Arguments over the Nature of Impersonal Construction

Most scholars agree on the nature of impersonal constructions. However, two authors put forward slightly different opinions.

According to the characteristics of some agentless constructions whether it can be converted into agentive ones, Niyaz TURDI [9] asserted that impersonal constructions can

Qiyinçiliq	ald-i-da	täwrä-n-mäs-lik	keräk	(impersonal)
difficulty	front-POSS.3sg-LOC	shake-PASS-NEG-NOML	must	

‘One must be unshakeable in front of difficulty.’

Qiyinçiliq	ald-i-da	täwrä-n-mäs-lik-imiz	keräk.	(personal)
difficulty	front-POSS.3sg-LOC	shake-PASS-NEG-NOML-POSS.1pl	must	

‘We must be unshakeable in front of difficulty.’

The personal marker *-imiz* which added to the gerund is the key factor that converts impersonal construction into personal construction.

b) If the first part of a sentence, whose predicates is *bol-* ‘to be’, *toyra käl-* ‘have to’, is gerund, it will form an impersonal construction. If the gerund part has person marker, it forms a covert personal construction. E.g.:

U-niñ	öz-i	bilän	kör-üş-üş-kä	toyra kel-idu.	(impersonal)
He-GEN	self-POSS.3sg	with	see-REC-VN-DAT	have to-NPAST	

‘It is necessary to meet his own self.’

U-niñ	öz-i	bilän	kör-üş-üş-imiz-gä	toyra kel-idu.	(personal)
He-GEN	self-POSS.3sg	with	see-REC-VN-POSS.1pl-DAT	have to-NPAST	

‘We have to meet his own self.’

c) When the head of the sentence is dative or genitive noun phrase, and after that appears the combination of gerund and *toyra käl-* ‘have to’, if the case marker drops off, the gerund also loses its possessive marker. As a result, the sentence becomes an agentive construction.e.g.

Mämät-kä	qayt-ip	ket-iş-kä	toyra käl-di.	(impersonal)
Mämät -DAT	go back-CONV	AUX-VN-DAT	have to-AUX-PAST	

‘For Mämät, it is compulsory to go back.’

Mämät	qayt-ip	ket-iş-ke	toyra käl-di.	(personal)
Mämät	go back-CONV	AUX-VN-DAT	have to-AUX-PST	

‘Mämät have to go back’

2) Absolute impersonal construction

a) A sentences with third person passive predicate can be considered as absolute impersonal construction. E.g.:

Öginiş	waqt-i-din	toluq	paydilin-il-sun.
study	time-POSS.3sg-ABL	complete	use-PASS-IMP.3sg

‘Please make complete use of studying time!’

Xizmät	usul-i-ya	diqqät	qil-in-sun
work	method-POSS.3sg-DAT	attention	do-PASS-IMP.3sg

‘Please pay attention to the work method.’

b) The combination of genitive pronouns and auxiliary verbs such as *kör-* ‘to see’, *käl-* ‘to come’, *qal-* ‘to leave, to remean’, or existential adjectives such as *bar* ‘to exist’, *yoq* ‘doesn't exist’ etc. e.g.:

be divided into two types: absolute impersonal construction and relative impersonal construction.

1) Relative impersonal constructions

a) The predicate part of relative impersonal construction is the combination of non-personal gerunds and modal adjectives, such as *lazim* ‘should’, *keräk* ‘must’ etc. By adding person marker to the gerund, the sentence can be converted into covert subject sentence. E.g.:

U-niñ He-GEN	bu this	yär-dä place-LOC	qal-γu-si stay-GU.VN-POSS.3sg	bar. has
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‘He has a wish to stay here.’

Men-iñ I-GEN	bu this	yär-dä place-LOC	tur-γu-m stand- GU.VN- POSS.3sg	yoq. hasn’t
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‘I don’t have any wish to stay here.’

Men-iñ I-GEN	öy-üm-ni house-POSS.1sg-ACC	kör-gü-m see-GU.VN- POSS.1sg	käl-di. come-PAST
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‘I have a wish to see my home.’

3) The combination of intensive adverbial and *bol-* ‘to be’:

Yultuz-lar-ni Star-PL-ACC	sana-p count-CONV	tügät-kili finish-GILI.CONV	bol-ma-ydu. be-NEG-NPAST
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‘It is impossible to completely count up the stars.’

Zäynäp NIYAZ [8] argued that the sentences which had been previously defined as subjectless sentences by other grammarians were not subjectless in fact. E.g.:

Mundaq such	roh-iñiz-din spirit-POSS.2sg-ABL	ögin-iş learn-VN	keräk should
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‘One should learn such a spirit of you.’

Häm-mi-miz-niñ All-POSS.1pl-GEN	kel-iş-imiz come-VN-POSS.1pl	zörür. necessary
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‘It is necessary for all of us to come.’

She argued that they are all agentive sentences. In these sentences, the *-ş* gerunds as *mundaq rohiñizdin öginiş, hämmimizniñ kelişimiz* play the role of the subject, and *keräk, lazim, zörür* can play the role of predicates. She also argued that these sentences [the combination of gerunds+mümkün] as below were also mistakenly taken as subjectless:

Bu this	kitab-din book-ABL	paydilin-iş use-VN	mümkün. possible
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‘It is possible to make use of this book.’

Biz-niñ we-GEN	u that	yär-gä place-DAT	bar-mas-liq-imiz go-NEG-NOML-POSS.1pl	mümkün. possible
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‘It is likely that we go there.’

In these sentences, *bu kitabdin, bizning u yärgä barmasliqimiz* are nominative gerunds which play the role of agents. And *mümkün* is a predicate whose copula *-dur* is omitted.

Thirdly, these sentences also belong to such mistakes:

Bügün today	men-iñ I-GEN	kino-γa movie-DAT	bar-γu-m go-GU.VN-POSS.1sg	bar. has
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‘Today I want to go to the movie.’

Bu this	iş-ni work-ACC	men-iñ I-GEN	qil-γu-m do-GU.VN- POSS.1sg	yoq. hasn’t
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‘I don’t have any intention to do this work.’

In these sentences, she argued, *bügün meniñ kinoγa barγum, bu işni meniñ qilγum* can play the role agents, *bar* and *yoq* are predicates.

Then, what are subjectless sentences? According to her: ‘*grammatikiliq igisini tapqili bolmaydiyan yaki eniqlaşqa mümkün bolmaydiyan jümlilär igisiz jümlä däp atilidu*’ (sentences which lack grammatical agents or sentences, whose agent is impossible to define are called agentless sentences.).e.g.:

Bu this	iş-ni work-ACC	bir one	kün-dä day-LOC	tügät-kili finish-GILI.CONV	bol-ma-ydu be-NEG-NPAST
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‘It is impossible to finish this work within one day.’

U-niŋ He-GEN	gep-i-gä word-POSS.3sg-DAT	čüşän-gili understand-GILI.CONV	bol-ma-ydu. be-NEG-NPAST
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‘It is difficult to understand his words.’

Since incomplete sentence (non-sentence) lack grammatical agent, she agreed that they can also be considered as subjectless sentences.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, Zäynäp NIYAZ [8] and Niyaz TURDI [9] put forward different opinions on the nature of impersonal constructions and narrowed the scope. They thought that such sentences as *hämmimizniŋ kelišimiz zörür* were in fact subjective sentences, and treated *hämmimizniŋ kelišimiz* as a subject. But from the point of subject predicate agreement rule in Uyghur, in which the predicate must agree with the subject in person, for instance in *män kälдим* ‘I have come’, the person marker *-m* in predicate agrees with the subject *män*, we have to deny their suggestions. In *män kälдим* ‘I have come’, by omitting the subject *män*, a syntactic pleonasm will be formed. E.g.:

män kälдим ‘I has come’
kälдим ‘I has come’

In this case, the pronoun *män* ‘I’ is grammatically optional, both sentences mean ‘I has come’. But in the case of Zäynäp NIYAZ [8] and Niyaz TURDI [9], the covert pronoun *biz* ‘we’ doesn’t agree with the predicate *zörür* in person.

Another sentence type, whose agent is difficult to define, is pro-drop ambiguity sentence. E.g.:

Tülkä	käl-gän	täräp-kä	qari-di
fox	come-PARTCPL	direction-DAT	look-PAST

‘The fox looks at the direction from where it (the fox itself) comes.’

‘The fox looks at the direction from where he (human) comes.’

‘He (human) looks at the direction from where the fox comes.’

The position of covert subject is the main reason of ambiguity in this sentence. It was extensively discussed by Muzappar ABDURUSUL [14]. Here I shall limit my discussion to conventional impersonal constructions.

To sum up, impersonal constructions are one of the main sentence types of Uyghur language. It not only displays universal features, but also shows language-specific characteristics. In this preliminary study, the author has discussed the types of impersonal constructions and their formation in Uyghur. Thus, this paper will pave a way for further studies of impersonal constructions and provides important languages facts for future cross-linguistic study.

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Biography



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