

INFORMATION STRUCTURE

by Seda Sürel

INTRODUCTION

1. Function

Information structure shows **how information is organized** in a sentence.
In Turkish, sentences are built around two main informational zones:

- **Topic (Theme / Known Information)**
 - What the sentence is about.
 - Usually known, shared, or already mentioned.
- **Focus (New or Emphasized Information)**
 - What is new, contrasted, corrected, or emphasized.
 - It appears immediately before the verb.

The event itself does not change.
Only what the speaker highlights changes.

2. Forms

Information structure is not expressed by suffixes.

It is expressed through:

- word order
- position relative to the verb
- focus particles (sadece, yalnızca, -de/-da)

No new morphology is introduced.

3. Morphology

There is no dedicated morpheme for **Topic** or **Focus**.

All grammatical markers remain the same:

- tense
- person
- case

Only linear position changes meaning.

4. Structural Guide

Core rule (non-negotiable):

- ➡ The focused element is the element immediately before the verb.
- ➡ The verb itself is not focus by default.
- ➡ The verb marks the end of the focus domain.

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Basic pattern:

Topic → (Other elements) → Focus → Verb

Sentence-initial position typically hosts Topic.

Sentence-medial position before the verb hosts Focus.

5. Usage

A) Topic (Known Information)

Topic refers to information assumed to be known or already active.

It often appears:

- at the beginning of the sentence
- without special emphasis

B) Focus (New / Emphasized Information)

Focus refers to:

- new information
- corrected information
- contrasted information

It appears immediately before the verb and must be visible.

C) Limitation (Sadece / Yalnızca)

Limiting particles force focus onto the element they modify.

They restrict the scope of the action.

D) Contrastive Topic (–de / –da)

The particle –de / –da marks contrast or addition.

It signals “also / too” and creates comparison with alternatives.

Examples

Neutral (no special focus)

Ali dün kitabı aldı.

— Ali bought the book yesterday.

Focus on the object

Ali dün kitabı aldı.

— It was the book that Ali bought.

Focus on time

Kitabı Ali dün aldı.

— It was yesterday that Ali bought the book.

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Focus on subject

Kitabı dün Ali aldı.

— It was Ali who bought the book.

Correction (contrastive focus)

A: Ali defteri aldı.

B: Hayır, kitabı aldı.

— Correction through focused object.

Limitation (sadece / yalnızca)

Sadece Ali geldi.

— Only Ali came.

Ali sadece geldi.

— Ali only came (and did nothing else).

Yalnızca kitabı okudu.

— He read only the book.

Contrastive Topic (–de / –da)

Ali kitabı aldı, Ayşe de aldı.

— Ali bought the book; Ayşe did too.

Kitabı Ali aldı, defteri de aldı.

— He bought the book and the notebook as well.

Topic vs Focus contrast

Kitabı Ali aldı.

— The book is topic; Ali is focused.

Ali kitabı aldı.

— Ali is topic; the book is focused.

Notes

- Focus always appears immediately before the verb.
- The verb itself is not focus unless marked by special constructions.
- Topic often appears sentence-initial but does not carry emphasis.
- Limiting particles (sadece, yalnızca) and –de/-da actively shape focus.
- Turkish relies on word order, not intonation alone, to manage information.