

# OBJECT POSITION & FOCUS WORD ORDER

by Seda Sürel

## INTRODUCTION

Turkish word order is guided by pragmatic structure. The canonical ordering is SOV, but focus, contrast, and topicalization may shift constituents. The verb in finite clauses remains clause-final.

### 1. Neutral Word Order (SOV)

The unmarked pattern places the object immediately before the verb.

**Subject – Object – Verb**

**Examples:**

- Ali kitabı okuyor. (Ali is reading the book.)
- Biz filmi izledik. (We watched the film.)

### 2. Object Position in Neutral Clauses

In non-focused contexts, the direct object occupies the preverbal position.

**Examples:**

- Ayşe mektubu yazdı. (Ayşe wrote the letter.)
- Çocuklar ödevi yapıyor. (The children are doing the homework.)

### 3. Focus in Turkish

Focus marks new, contrastive, or emphasized information.

The focus position is immediately before the verb.

#### 3.1. Focus on Object

Placing the object in the preverbal focus slot assigns it emphasis.

Correct focus-marked example:

- Ali KİTABI okudu. (It was the book that Ali read.)

#### 3.2. Focus on Subject

The subject may occupy the focus slot when contrastive.

**Examples:**

- BEN geldim. (It was I who came.)
- ONLAR konuşuyor. (It is they who are speaking.)

#### 3.3. Focus on Adverbials

Other constituents may also occupy the focus slot.

**Examples:**

- Bugün geliyorum. (It is today that I am coming.)
- Burada bekliyorum. (It is here that I am waiting.)

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## 4. Topicalization and Fronting

Turkish allows constituents to move to the sentence-initial position for topicalization.

### 4.1. Topicalization (Sentence-initial Topic)

A topic refers to given or established information.

#### Example:

- Kitabı Ali okudu.
- (As for the book, Ali read it.)

Topic–Focus structure:

**[Topic] — [Focus] — [Verb]**

Here: Kitabı (topic), Ali (focus), okudu (verb).

### 4.2. Contrastive Fronting

Fronting may contrast two objects.

#### Example:

- Bu filmi beğendim, ama diğerini beğenmedim. (This film I liked, but not the other.)

## 5. Indefinite vs. Definite Objects

### 5.1. Indefinite Objects (no accusative)

Indefinite objects must appear immediately before the verb and cannot occupy the focus slot.

#### Examples:

- Ali kitap okuyor. (Ali is reading a book.)
- Biz çorba içtik. (We drank soup.)

These objects are part of the verb phrase and cannot be fronted or focused.

### 5.2. Definite Objects (accusative)

Definite objects take the accusative suffix and may freely participate in focus and topic structures.

#### Examples:

- Ali kitabı okuyor.
- Kitabı Ali okudu.

## 6. Negation and Object Placement

In neutral negative clauses, the object precedes negation.

#### Examples:

- Ali kitabı okumadı. (Ali did not read the book.)
- Biz filmi izlemedik. (We did not watch the film.)

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When the object is focused, it occupies the preverbal focus slot:

- KİTABI okumadı. (It was the book that he did not read.)

## 7. Wh-Focus and Questions

Wh-words inherently carry focus and appear in the preverbal focus position.

### Examples:

- Ali ne aldı? (What did Ali buy?)
- Sen kimi gördün? (Whom did you see?)

### Examples

- Ali kitabı okudu. (Neutral.)
- Ali KİTABI okudu. (Object focus.)
- Kitabı Ali okudu. (Topicalized object + subject focus.)
- Biz seni bekliyoruz. (Object focus possible.)
- Ben geldim. (Subject focus.)
- Bugün geliyorum. (Adverbial focus.)
- Filmi izlemedik. (Neutral negation.)
- KİTABI okumadım. (Focused object in negation.)
- (It was the book that I did not read.)

### Notes

- The verb is clause-final in finite clauses.
- The focus position is the immediately preverbal slot.
- Indefinite objects must remain in the preverbal VP-internal position.
- Definite objects may be fronted, focused, or topicalized.
- Topic and focus may co-occur (Topic–Focus–Verb).